CHICAGO

Metropolis of the Mid-Continent

Third Edition

Irving Cutler

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METROPOLIS OF THE MID-CONTINENT

THIRD EDITION

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Urban Geography
Urban Communities (coauthor)
Ethnic Chicago (contributor)

Front Cover: Aerial view of the central area of Chicago looking northward from approximately Taylor Street (1000 S), 1980. The tallest buildings in the background from the river on the west to the lake on the east are Sears Tower (110 stories), First National Bank Building (60 stories), John Hancock Center (100 stories), Water Tower Place (74 stories), and Standard Oil Building (80 stories). The red high-rise is the 45-story CNA Plaza Building. (Photograph by Airpix)

Inside Front Cover: Aerial view of the central area of Chicago looking northwest, 1981. In the foreground is Grant Park and from left to right at the bottom is Soldier Field, Field Museum of Natural History, and Shedd Aquarium. Toward the center in the park fronting Michigan Avenue is the Art Institute. To the lower left, part of the land of the underutilized railroad facilities south of the Loop is now being redeveloped. On the right, north of the park, from Randolph Street to the Chicago River, are the new high-rise buildings of the Illinois Center development. The tallest buildings in the photo, from left to right, are Sears Tower (110 stories), First National Bank Building (60 stories), Standard Oil Building (80 stories), John Hancock Center (100 stories), and Water Tower Place (74 stories). (Photograph by Airpix)

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Foreword

For the first edition of *Chicago: Metropolis of the Mid-Continent,* Herbert H. Gross, then president of the Geographic Society of Chicago, wrote the following Foreword:

> *Chicago: Metropolis of the Mid-Continent* is a dream of the Board of Directors of the Geographic Society of Chicago converted into reality by Irving Cutler, Professor of Geography, Chicago State University.
>
> Accelerating change demands that the story of a dynamic and influential city must be told and retold, each time with a modified or new perspective. Chicago is no longer the "hog butcher" of the world, but is truly the "Metropolis of the Mid-Continent." The diversity of its spatial relationships has regional, national, and international impacts and implications. Chicago interacts with a myriad of people and places. Its role in a world of increasingly dynamic cultures places on it the responsibility for dealing constructively with the complexities and challenges of change. How this is being accomplished provides the basic theme of this book.
>
> Throughout its history, the Geographic Society of Chicago has remained sensitive to the responsibility it must assume as a contributive agency. A primary concern has been the dissemination of the type of scholarly information about Chicago and its environs that is relevant to the needs of its members in particular and of society in general. Man's patterns of urban occupancy are growing increasingly complex; his understanding of these complexities is being made difficult by vocational specialization associated with a vibrant technology; the demands for responsive, intelligent citizenship are constantly expanding. These three related forces have pointed out the imperative need for improving the quality of citizenship in our city. May *Chicago: Metropolis of the Mid-Continent* enlarge and refine the perspective of those who commune with its contents.

That statement written in 1973 continued to be true for the second edition (1976), and now for this, the third edition. Three editions in less than ten years is indicative of the "accelerating changes" taking place in Metropolitan Chicago and the concern of the Geographic Society of Chicago that people be kept informed of these changes and their significance to the "Metropolis of the Mid-Continent, a dynamic and influential city." Our continuing appreciation goes to the author, Irving Cutler, for keeping us up-to-date.

Elizabeth Eiselen, President
The Geographic Society of Chicago

Preface

The first edition of this book was published in 1973 on the occasion of the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Geographic Society of Chicago. It was distributed primarily to the Society's thousands of members and to school libraries in the Chicago area. When it became evident that there also was a large demand for such a book from educational institutions and from the general public, the Society brought out a second edition, and now this up-dated and enlarged third edition. This broader treatment of the Chicago area should be of value to students and others, both within the city and its suburbs, who often know too little about the growth, characteristics, problems, and plans of their remarkable and changing Metropolis of the Mid-Continent.

In this third edition, the original single chapter on people and settlement patterns has been enlarged and divided into two chapters. These deal with the various ethnic and racial groups in Metropolitan Chicago in much greater detail than in earlier editions. All other chapters have been enlarged. There are new maps and photographs, as well as greatly increased supplementary material in the appendix. Population data from the 1980 U.S. census is used throughout the book, except where not yet available.

Numerous individuals and organizations facilitated the writing of this book, and their help is gratefully acknowledged. Edward B. Espenshade, Jr., as chairman of the Seventy-fifth Anniversary Publication Committee, skillfully organized and guided the original project. Herbert H. Gross of the Society supplied important material for the appendix. A very special acknowledgment must go to the representative of the Society for the project, Elizabeth Eiselen, for her wise counsel and perceptive editing of all three editions.

Many thanks are due Eugene Zucker for his critical reading of the manuscript and whose valuable advice was most helpful. Joseph Kubal rendered needed cartographic assistance by producing or modifying many of the maps. Sections of this latest edition on the various ethnic and racial groups were critically read by my colleagues Joseph Chada, John Hobgood, Walter Kelly, Albert Logan, Herbert Rau, Leonard Simutis, and Irwin Suloway, and also by Dominic Candeloro, Edwin Cudecki, Andrew Kopan, Carolyn Levy, Leonard Mishkin, and Henry Sokolow. I also express deepest appreciation to my wife, Marian, for her encouragement, discerning criticism, and untiring efforts in typing, retyping, and proofreading. My children, Dan and Susie, have also been helpful in numerous ways.

The photographs and maps in the book came from many sources, which are indicated in the captions. The largest number of illustrations are from the Chicago Historical Society.

Through the years I have had the opportunity to observe the city and its suburbs from diverse career vantage points, ranging from cab driver to employment in the area with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the U.S. Department of Labor, and the Office of Economic Opportunity. I also learned about the metropolitan area from the excellent writings and teachings of many scholars, and particularly from my former professor, Harold M. Mayer.

Finally, I am most grateful to the Geographic Society of Chicago for affording me this opportunity to write on a subject that has interested and fascinated me all my life—Chicago.

Irving Cutler
January 1982

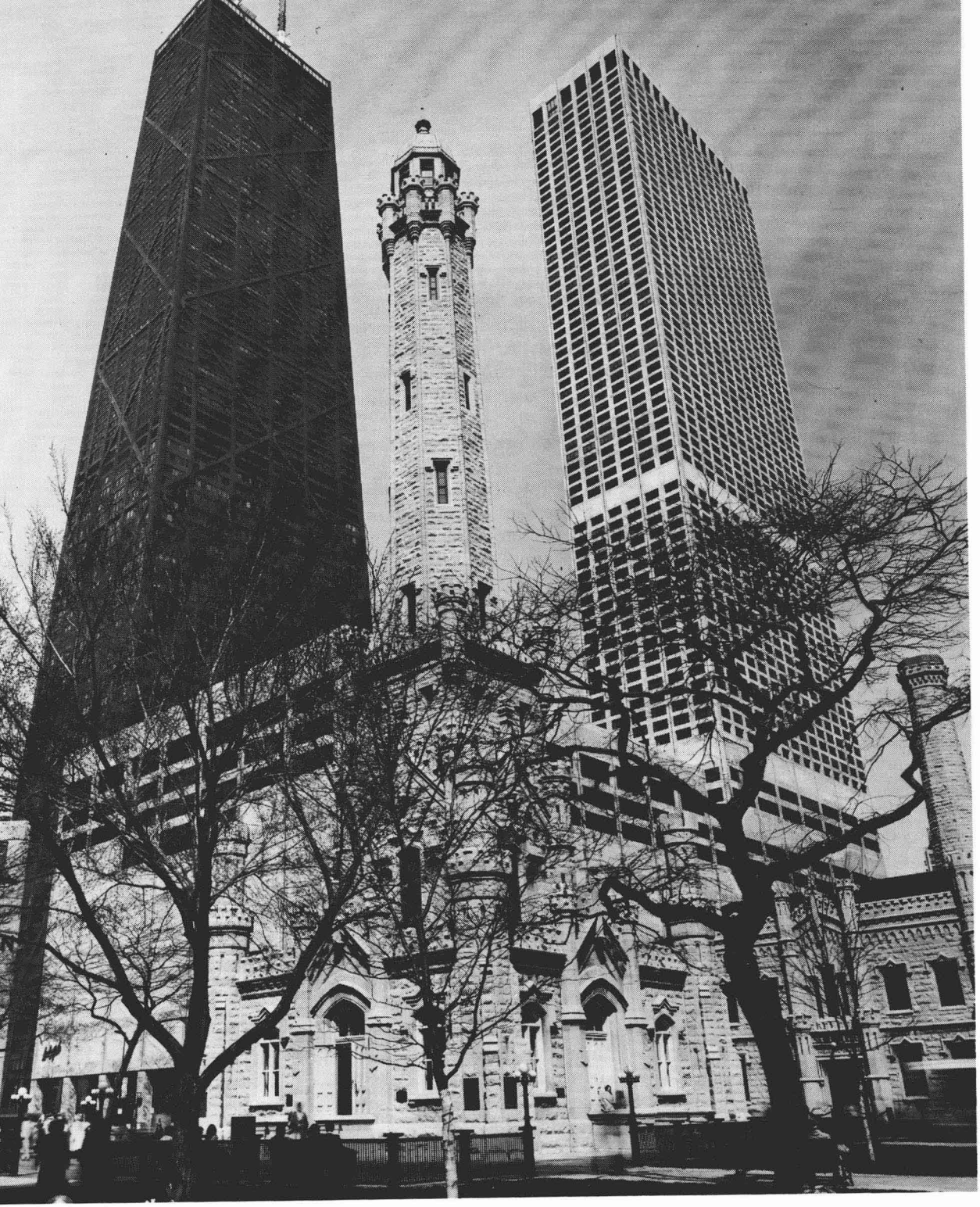

Figure 1.1. The Chicago Water Tower, one of the few structures to survive the disastrous Chicago fire of 1871. To the left, combining residential, retail, and office functions, is 100-story John Hancock Center, completed in 1970. To the right is 74-story Water Tower Place, opened in 1975, which contains an urban high-rise shopping center with many small shops and two major department stores, the 450-room Ritz-Carlton Hotel, and luxury condominiums. (Photograph by Mati Maldre, 1981.)

Contents

Chapter One

INTRODUCTION

Yesterday and Today

Stand on the busy Michigan Avenue Bridge over the Chicago River, in the locale where Chicago began, and look about you in any direction. At once you are aware of the vigorous growth and development of a great city.

From the north end of the bridge, where once the old Green Bay Road originated and the Du Sable cabin stood alone in a wilderness, now stretches the Magnificent Mile crowned by the John Hancock Center. This soaring skyscraper overshadows the Water Tower, the last landmark of the great fire that decimated the city more than a century ago.

To the south, where once Fort Dearborn stood and where the river arched southward sharply and the lake washed Michigan Avenue, now stand a park built on the debris of the Chicago Fire, railroad yards, and skyscrapers symbolic of Chicago's commerical growth.

Westward, along the Chicago River, where less than a century ago produce terminals, warehouses, and hundreds of ships and barges lined the channel, and where the tragic capsizing of the steamer *Eastland* occurred, there are now the Merchandise Mart, Marina Towers, and the Burnham Plan's double-deck Wacker Drive.

And to the east, on the former sites of grain elevators and the large McCormick Works, is a growing array of skyscrapers; farther on is the Outer Drive Bridge with its endless procession of vehicles; beyond is the lock which helps to reverse the flow of the river; and finally, Lake Michigan, Chicago's water gateway to the world.

Chicago's Geographic Attributes

Chicago's growth and change have been both swift and dramatic. It is the youngest of the world's largest cities, and, with a 1980 population of 3,005,072, it ranked second in the nation. The number of inhabitants in its burgeoning suburban area is now even greater than that of the city proper, resulting in a metropolitan area population of almost 8 million people—the tenth largest urban area in the world.

This remarkable population growth, greater than that attained by Paris in twenty centuries, was achieved in the last century and a half, although the area was first visited by Europeans three centuries ago. A bronze tablet on the Michigan Avenue Bridge commemorating the event bears this inscription:

> In honor of Louis Jolliet and Pere Jacques Marquette, the first white men to pass through the Chicago River, September, 1673.

The Canadian explorer and the French missionary were returning to Canada after exploring the Mississippi Valley for France. The Chicago region they passed through was essentially a flat, poorly drained wilderness blanketed with prairie grass, wild onion, clusters of trees, and foul-smelling marshes. Indians often would pass through in pursuit of game.

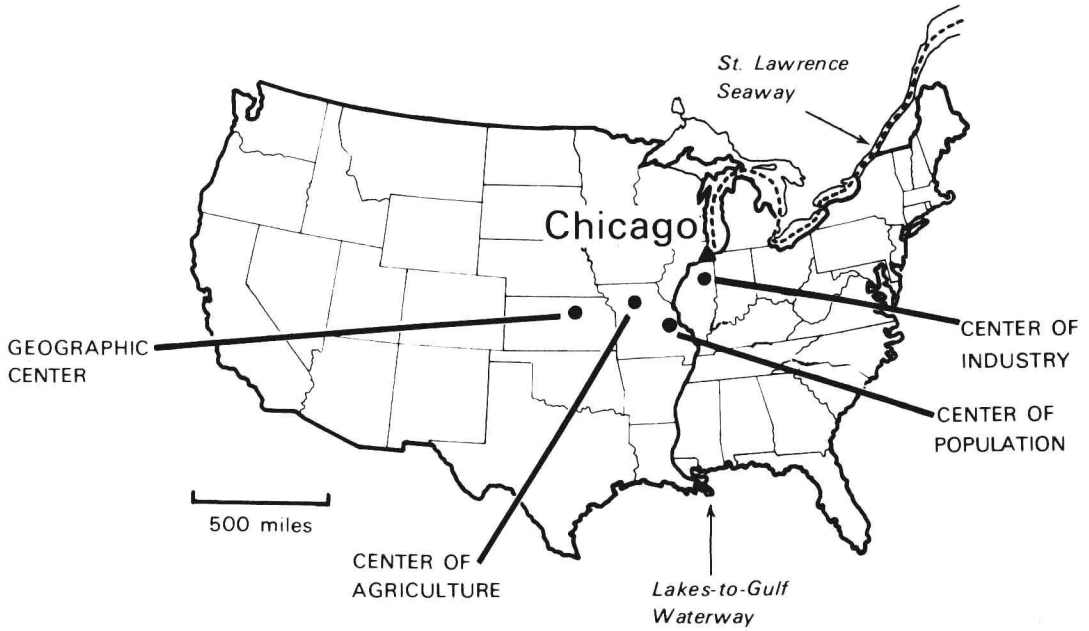

Figure 1.2. A major asset of Chicago is its excellent location. (Based on map from Chicago Association of Commerce and Industry.)

Despite the area's inauspicious setting, the essentials for its rapid growth were present when the first settlers arrived. These essentials included:

1. Location near the geographic center of the vast, flat, and fertile plains between the Appalachian Mountains to the east and the Rocky Mountains to the west. Chicago's situation enabled it to become the center of the most productive agricultural hinterland in the world. The flat terrain permitted easy access to this rich tributary empire by all modes of transportation. For Chicago, it offered no barriers for the laying out of streets in any direction and for the unimpeded expansion of urbanization.
2. Conveniently located and economically accessible important natural resources—the forests of the north, iron ore of Minnesota and Wisconsin, the coal of Illinois and nearby states, and an unlimited supply of fresh lake water.
3. Location at the southwestern tip of the world's greatest lake system. This made possible exceptionally low transportation costs and a great range of domestic and overseas connections. In addition, Chicago's location is at a natural point of convergence for land traffic between the east and northwest that had to find its way around the southern tip of Lake Michigan. Long before the coming of the white man, numerous Indian trails joined at Chicago.
4. The short natural waterways of Chicago eventually were modified and extended to provide the only all-water connecting link between the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence

Seaway and the rich Mississippi Valley. Louis Jolliet noted this important possibility when he portaged through the Chicago region in 1673. He wrote in his journal that "it would only be necessary to make a canal by cutting through but half a league of prairies to pass" from Lake Michigan to the Illinois River and on to the Mississippi River and the Gulf of Mexico.

Figure 2.1. The limestone bedrock underlying Chicago is revealed at the more-than-century-old Stearns Quarry at 28th and Halsted streets. Since 1971 the quarry has been used by the city as a dumping site for the residue of its incinerator operations. (Photograph courtesy Material Service Corporation, Chicago.)

Chapter Two

THE PHYSICAL SETTING

In the Beginning

The natural landscape of the Chicago region as viewed by Jolliet and Marquette, and by the Indians before them, was the result of millions of years of geologic action—for although the chronicle of man in Chicago is brief, the story of the land on which Metropolitan Chicago spreads began eons ago.

Many millions of years ago the first living creatures appeared in the ancient tropical sea that covered the mid-continent. Through the millennia of geologic eras the limy skeletons and the shells of countless sea creatures settled over the ocean bottom where, eventually, they formed the rock known as limestone. In time the ocean receded, but the limestone remained to form the bedrock upon which rest Chicago's skyscrapers.

The bedrock is visible in limestone quarries, some road cuts, and some waterway channels. The limestone from the numerous quarries in the area has provided a basic building material. In Chicago the limestone bedrock is visible at the more-than-century-old former Stearns quarry at 28th and Halsted (800 W) streets and also flanking the Kennedy Expressway around Addison Street (3600 N). Large limestone quarries were opened in Thornton, McCook, and other places throughout the area. Southwest of the city the bedrock is exposed along sizable segments of the Calumet Sag Channel and the Chicago Sanitary and Ship Canal.

In the mild and fertile swampy areas bordering the receding shallow inland seas, giant fern trees took hold, forming thick jungles of vegetation. As the plants and trees died, layer upon layer of dead vegetation, often buried by sediment, decomposed into peat. Millions of years later, the peat was compressed into the harder fuel, coal, which was eventually mined in the southwestern fringe of the Chicago region just beyond Joliet, at Coal City and Braidwood.

Effect of the Glaciers

Many thousands of years ago, changes in climate brought on the glacial period. At least four successive ice sheets crept down from Canada and covered much of the northern part of the United States, including most of Illinois. These glaciers, advancing and retreating, greatly altered the landscape.

The moving ice masses ground down elevations, polished rough surfaces, and gouged and deepened such areas as the basin of Lake Michigan. The glaciers left behind a covering of glacial drift—a jumble of clay, sand, gravel, and boulders over the limestone bedrock. In some places this drift reached a depth of more than 150 feet (45.7 m) with an average depth of between 50 and 60 feet (15.2-18.3 m). Later some of the drift was commercially quarried.

In the Chicago region, the last glacier receded about 13,500 years ago, having sculp-

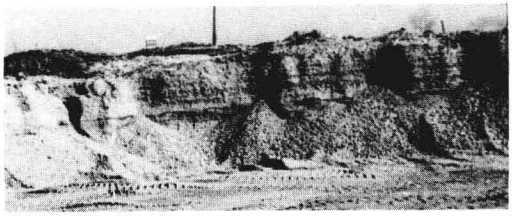

Figure 2.2. Gravel pit along U.S. 45 in Lake County, Illinois, showing glacial till of the Valparaiso Moraine. (Photograph by Irving Cutler.)

tured the basic landscape surface. Chicago now occupies a lake plain which is hemmed in by a series of concentric ridges of glacial drift, called moraines, which are aligned generally parallel to the lake. The largest and most significant, especially in regard to the drainage pattern, is the outer crescent-shaped ridge around the southern end of Lake Michigan, stretching from southeastern Wisconsin into southwestern Michigan. Its surface exhibits substantial diversity. It is known as the Valparaiso Moraine (fig. 2.3) and borders the southern and western part of the Lake Plain. Its inner edge is followed approximately by the Tri-State Tollway. It averages about 15 miles (24.1 km) wide and in general stands 12 (19.3 km) or so miles from Lake Michigan. The elevation of the moraine ranges from less than 100 feet (30.5 m) to over 500 feet (152.4 m) above the level of Lake Michigan. The steep front of the moraine is used for the toboggan slide in the Palos Hills Forest Preserve.

The northern part of the Valparaiso Moraine is rugged and irregular, exhibiting a surface characterized by rounded hills and undrained depressions. In Lake County, Illinois, and crossing into Wisconsin many of these depressions are occupied by about one hundred small lakes and ponds. This inland lake region has become an important recreational and residential area with sizable settlements developing around some of the larger lakes, such as Fox Lake, Pistakee Lake, Round Lake, Long Lake, Grays Lake, and Lake Zurich.

On the lake side of the northern part of the Valparaiso Moraine is the much smaller Lake Border Upland, an elongated belt of nearly north-south ridges with a width of 5 to 15 miles (8.0-24.1 km). The main segment extends northward from about Des Plaines and Winnetka, with a narrow extension south into the Lake Plain as far as Oak Park. Some ridges rise to about 200 feet (61 m) above the lake level and are interspersed by gentle sags occupied by several small streams and an occasional marsh, such as the Skokie Lagoons. Lakeward of the Valparaiso Moraine and the Lake Border Upland—except between Winnetka and Waukegan where the bluffs rise abruptly from Lake Michigan—spreads the flat Lake Plain on which Chicago is situated.

The Lake Plain

As the last glacier retreated, water drainage to the north was blocked by the ice; consequently, the glacier meltwater filled the depression between the receding ice front and the Valparaiso Moraine. This created a lake, marginal to the ice, that at its highest elevation rose about 60 feet (18.3 m) above the present surface of Lake Michigan. This enlarged Lake Michigan, geologically known as Lake Chicago, covered all of the present city of Chicago as well as a portion beyond it. The boundary line of the lake reached from approximately what is now Winnetka through the present communities of Maywood, La Grange, and Homewood, crossing the state line at Dyer, and then continuing eastward beyond Chesterton, Indiana.

The accumulated water receded in stages, finding its way into the Illinois-Mississippi River drainage system by enlarging two outlets through the Valparaiso Moraine drainage divide. These outlets were later to become important transportation corridors. One of the outlets, which now holds the Calumet Sag Channel, was through the Sag Valley south and southwest of the city. The other outlet, to the southwest, sometimes known as the Chi-

Figure 2.3. Topography of Metropolitan Chicago. (Reproduced by permission from *Open Land in Urban Illinois* by Rutherford H. Platt, Northern Illinois University Press, 1971. Based on F. M. Fryxell, *The Physiography of the Region of Chicago.*)

cago Portage, contained first the Illinois-Michigan Canal and later the Chicago Sanitary and Ship Canal, as well as other important transportation arteries, including railways and highways.

The lake bottom of Lake Chicago left the Chicago area remarkably flat—a lake plain—except for a few small islands that had existed in the lake, such as Mount Forest Island, Blue Island, and Stony Island, and some spits, sand bars, and crescent-shaped beach ridges that emerged as the water receded in three different stages (fig. 2.4). These ridges stand about 60 feet (18.3 m), 40 feet (12.2 m), and 20 feet (6.1 m) higher than the present approximately 580-foot (176.8 m) height above sea level of Lake Michigan. Driving away from the lake on an east-west street, such as Devon Avenue (6400 N) or 111th Street, will take one over each of the three beach ridges of Lake Chicago within a distance of 10 to 15 miles (16.1-24.1 km).

Because they were often the best-drained ground in an otherwise marshy area, some of the sandy spits, bars, and beach ridges of the area became Indian trails, and some are now parts of modern roads such as Green Bay Road, Gross Point Road, Ridge Avenue, North Clark Street, Vincennes Avenue, U.S. routes 6, 20, 30, and Interstate 94. The good drainage also made these areas attractive locations for cemeteries and golf courses. Both Graceland and Rosehill spits bear the names of large cemeteries on them.

Three small lakes near the Chicago-Hammond state-line boundary are isolated remnants of the glacial Lake Chicago. In recent decades these lakes have declined in size because of marginal filling and drainage alterations. Lake George, on the Indiana side, has virtually disappeared; Wolf Lake is a recreational area; and Lake Calumet has been developed as the major port of Chicago. Beach ridges separate the three lakes from Lake Michigan. A series of such ridges has hampered drainage in the Calumet district.

After the Glaciers

The basic topography of the Chicago area that developed through these ecological epochs resulted from the superimposition on the limestone bedrock of an uneven layer of glacial drift and, later, of the deposits of Lake Chicago. Since the Ice Age, a number of limited topographic changes have occurred. Through weathering, wind and water deposition, and vegetative growth, the present soils have been formed on the surface of the deposits of the glacial period. The soils are generally of good quality, very productive agriculturally except where there are major drainage problems or where extensive sand deposits have accumulated, such as along the shore at the head of Lake Michigan, especially in parts of northwestern Indiana. A magnificent concentration of dunes has developed there due to the continued action of the lake current and winds sweeping sand southward.

A dune is formed when sand from the beach is blown inland until it strikes an obstruction, such as a bush or tree, and piles up on the windward side. In time the sand dune becomes higher, often burying the obstruction. The wind may blow sand from the windward slope of the dune over to the leeward side, creating a "moving dune" which migrates slowly inland. Small dunes are found several miles inland from Lake Michigan; the large ones are found very close to the lake, where some approach a height of almost 200 feet (61 m).

Another noteworthy postglacial change has been the result of shoreline erosion which created very scenic bluffs with deep ravines along the lake between Winnetka and Waukegan. Some of the bluffs are almost 100 feet (30.5 m) high, and many of the more than twenty major, deep, V-shaped ravines extend a mile (1.6 km) or so inland. The ravines have been eroded by the downward-cutting action of water runoff from the upland area as the water seeks to reach the lake below.