A WALKING GUIDE to the History & Features of Burnham Park

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS
“Make no little plans that have no magic to stir men’s blood and probably themselves will not be realized. Make big plans, aim high in hope and work, remembering that a noble logical diagram once recorded will never die, but long after we are gone will be a living thing, asserting itself with ever growing insistency. ... Let your watchword be order, and your beacon beauty.”

—Daniel Burnham (1846–1912)
Chicago is rare among U.S. cities in its long-standing commitment to creating open space along its shoreline, preserving and improving this green space, and making the lakefront accessible to the public. Today Chicago’s lakefront includes more than 2,000 acres of green space, which accounts for more than a fourth of the city’s parkland.

In the early to mid-1830s, Chicago was largely wild, inhospitable, and unhealthy. Yet land speculators were rushing to the area in great numbers just ahead of the start of the Illinois and Michigan Canal construction. With the canal, the marshy and muddy passage from Lake Michigan to the Mississippi River was soon to become a major trade route and a catalyst for the city’s growth.

Three civic leaders, charged with subdividing and selling public land to generate revenue for the proposed canal, managed to save a 20-acre parcel along the shoreline. This stretch of land, later to become Grant Park, was designated “Public Ground—forever to remain vacant of buildings.” Thus began the city’s multi-century commitment to parkland along its lakefront.
A few years later, in another visionary move, the city adopted as its motto the Latin phrase *Urbs in Horto*, or “City in a Garden.” Much of the city, however, was nothing like a garden. In the 1860s, for example, citizens demanded that the city remove a North Side lakefront cemetery that posed a dangerous threat to the drinking supply because of the thousands of victims of smallpox, cholera, and other diseases who had been buried there in shallow sandy graves. The closure brought public attention to the need for a substantial park system that would serve as the “lungs of the city.”

As a result, in 1869, the State of Illinois established three separate commissions, each responsible for creating a portion of a continuous and unified park and boulevard system. This was the first such plan in the nation. The original east side included the existing Lakefront Park, later renamed Grant Park, as well as Lincoln Park to the north and Jackson Park several miles to the south.

The green space that today is Burnham Park and adjacent Northerly Island covers 675 acres stretched along 5 miles of Lake Michigan shoreline just east of downtown. Chicago’s famous architect and planner Daniel H. Burnham provided the outline for both areas in his visionary 1909 *Plan of Chicago*, coauthored by Edward H. Bennett and sponsored by the Commercial Club of Chicago. The park was created entirely from landfill between 1920 and the 1930s. Today’s world-class urban shoreline is an achievement in coastal geoengineering, landscape design, and urban aesthetics.
Burnham Park and Northerly Island offer many pleasures: the stunning view of the Chicago skyline and Lake Michigan is just the first impression. Among the cultural, natural, and recreational resources are nearby shops and businesses, the Museum Campus, Soldier Field, Charter One Pavilion, the lake and harbor, multi-use paths, beaches, fishing piers, playgrounds, and natural areas. Special events, family programs, and other activities attract visitors year-round.

The “natural” open parkland that today defines Chicago’s shoreline has, in fact, been created through urban planning, geological engineering, lake fill, and reconstruction.

Initially Chicago was not a natural place for a settlement, and no natural harbor existed there to support commerce. The area’s Native American inhabitants avoided the poor drainage and periodic flooding of the marshy lake plain.

Yet it was the geology of this natural setting, and its ability to support human modification, that has allowed the growth and development of this vast metropolis and the creation of its shoreline parks. Geological engineering was an essential part of the transformation from marsh to urban business and parkland areas:

- The Chicago River mouth was straightened and maintained.
- Canals and tunnels were built.
- Land was excavated, filled, and graded.
- The land of the central business district was raised as much as 8 feet.
- The Chicago Sanitary and Ship Canal was constructed.
- The direction of Chicago River flow was reversed.
- Lakeshore Drive was relocated to create the 57-acre Museum Campus.
- Modern revetments were constructed along the lakeshore to protect Chicago’s shoreline.

In 1833, when Chicago was first incorporated as a town, just a few hundred people lived along the banks of the Chicago River. By 1890, the city’s population exceeded one million! In a short time, Chicago had the busiest inland port in the world and soon thereafter the nation’s busiest railroad center.
Imagine for a moment the forward momentum at the turn of the twentieth century: politics, technology, literature, the arts—all moving with one impulse, “progress!”

All of this “progress” had a cost. Noise, squalor, disease, poor air quality, and a lack of sanitation were everywhere. The city center, although prosperous, was not a pleasant or orderly place to work or live—or even visit. Eventually, Chicago’s leaders began to work to improve the city’s quality of life. The World’s Columbian Exposition in 1893, in large part designed by architect and planner Daniel Burnham and landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted, captured the imagination of the world. Importantly, the exposition helped inspire Chicagoans to believe a degree of order and beauty could be achieved in the city.

Burnham Park’s namesake, Daniel H. Burnham, and his associate Edward H. Bennett provided the first coherent plan for a better urban environment in which to work, play, and live. Their 1909 *Plan of Chicago* featured a public recreational area of open meadows, play fields, man-made islands, beaches, and lagoons along the Lake Michigan shore. Although the vision for the lakefront was extensively modified over time, it provided the groundwork for many of the parks you see today, including Burnham Park and Northerly Island.

The gleaming “Court of Honor” was the architectural showpiece of the World’s Columbian Exposition of 1893, which came to be known as the “White City.” The exposition site was Jackson Park, on the city’s south lakefront.
Although the Burnham Park area shoreline was still a sandy beach during European settlement in the early 1800s, wave erosion has removed most of those deposits. Human engineering efforts near the Chicago River mouth and Illinois Central Railroad tracks hastened that erosion.

The made land that is now Burnham Park and Northerly Island lies within the geographic region called the Chicago Lake Plain. Till—glacially deposited, unsorted rock, sand, and clay debris—is the main type of sediment lying above the bedrock throughout most of the Chicago region. However, the most recent natural deposits near the park are lake, lagoon, or wave-transported sediments.

Near the close of the Ice Age in Illinois, about 14,000 years ago, the Chicago Lake Plain was the floor of glacial Lake Chicago. At this time, the margin of a large continental glacier was within the Lake Michigan basin. As the glacier melted back, it disgorged enough water to raise the lake to levels almost 60 feet higher than today. Vast areas of the lake plain were submerged.

The water level remained high for a long time because drainage was blocked by ice on the northeast and by arc-shaped hills, known as moraines, ringing the southern margin of the glacial lake. The moraines are massive deposits of unsorted sediments and rocks dumped during glacier pauses. These pauses sometimes lasted for hundreds of years and occurred when the rates of ice advance and melting were in equilibrium. At times, the high lake water was able to move through breaches in the moraines or find other outlets, eroding breaches downward, lowering the lake level, and opening new outlet sites. From about 10,000 to 5,800 years ago, lake levels were as much as 250 feet lower than today.
Three buried prehistoric river channels, or paleochannels, have been identified within the park boundaries at Burnham Harbor, 24th Street, and 31st Street. The paleochannels recorded the eastward drainage of the lake plain during low lake levels. The Burnham Harbor paleochannel is 40 to 50 feet at its deepest, which indicates the channel once held great stream flow. Both the Burnham Harbor and 31st Street paleochannels are thought to have originated from an eastward-flowing ancestral Des Plaines River.
Coastal geology and coastal processes have played major roles in how the Chicago lakeshore was developed and engineered. The shallow sloping lake bottom, thick glacial till lying above bedrock, and vast stores of sand from the Indiana dunes and lake floor—all supported shoreline transformation.

Erosion and sand accumulation have been major issues since Chicago’s earliest settlement. Lake Michigan wave action moves sand primarily southward along the shore. This process, called littoral transport, historically resulted in sandbars that repeatedly blocked the Chicago River mouth.

Efforts to dig a channel to remove the sandbars that blocked the Chicago River mouth began as early as 1828. After jetties were constructed to straighten the river’s mouth in the 1830s and 1840s, sand starvation and shore erosion became a serious problem south of the river, eventually as far as the southernmost limit of what is now Burnham Park. Efforts to defend the coastline and stabilize the shoreline set the stage for the later development of Grant and Burnham Parks.

From the middle to late 1800s, the Illinois Central Railroad right-of-way stretched along the lakeshore south of the Chicago central business district from what is now Roosevelt Road south to near 47th Street. Erosion threatened the tracks lying very close to the shoreline. And, although the railroad constructed the most extensive groin field ever built for shore protection, its groins weren’t very successful in trapping sand because lakeshore modifications near the Chicago River mouth were an ever greater barrier that trapped sand traveling south.
The groin field, designed to protect Illinois Central Railroad property, could not function as intended because of the lack of sand transport along the shore. By the late 1890s, Daniel Burnham proposed a plan to the South Park Commission to use fill to create new land along this shore east of the railroad. Today the railroad right-of-way forms the western margin of Burnham Park.
Burnham Park extends about 5 miles along the lakeshore from Roosevelt Road and the Museum Campus on the north to 56th Street and Promontory Point on the south. The park is nestled between Grant Park on the north and Jackson Park on the south.

Burnham Park’s construction was hindered by years of legal issues that had to be resolved. Various property owners filed lawsuits, including the Pottawatomie tribe that had once occupied this shore area. Burnham Park’s creation was also affected by lawsuits pertaining to a proposal to locate the Field Museum in Grant Park. Due to existing restrictions against building in that park, mail order magnate A. Montgomery Ward filed suits to prohibit construction in Grant Park.

After Ward won his final lawsuit, the South Park Commissioners decided to build the museum in the lakefront park they envisioned farther south. To begin the lakefill, however, they had to secure the riparian rights from the Illinois Central Railroad Company. In 1911, the railroad agreed to surrender those rights in exchange for permission to expand its right-of-way between 12th Street and Jackson Park.
Finally, every level of government had to approve the project, including the Secretary of War, because Lake Michigan is a navigable body of water. Eventually these issues were resolved, and the voters approved a $20 million bond issue for park development in April 1920. The park was named in honor of Daniel Burnham that same year. The first major phase of construction was completed in 1927. Promontory Point, a peninsula along the south end of the park, was completed by the late 1930s.

Making land for the park was complicated. The first step was to build the edge, or wall, for the fill in the open lake. This edge held the fill behind it and served as the revetment to protect the filled land from wave erosion. Parallel rows of timber pilings were driven into the thick till of the lake bottom to form a crib. The crib was filled with 1- to 50-pound rock and then capped with 4- to 8-ton quarry blocks. Stone was also placed on the lake bottom at the toe of the structure to prevent erosion of the lake bottom from the downward energy of waves impacting the structure.

Once the rock-filled timber cribs were in place, fill was added between the cribs and the shoreline. Sand fill was transported from the lake bottom and dunes of southern Lake Michigan. Clay fill came from lake-bottom dredging east of the timber cribs, forming lake-bottom depressions.
Burnham’s grand dream and design for the park included islands and lagoons that were meant to take advantage of and modify the local geology. The bedrock just below Burnham Park is dolomite, formed from sediments deposited in reefs in shallow interior seas during the Silurian Period (about 440 to 410 million years ago). This rock, quarried in the Chicago area, is an important source of construction materials.

Just offshore of Burnham Park, waves break across Morgan Shoal. This shoal is one of a series of Silurian bedrock knobs that rise above the surrounding lake bottom. Morgan Shoal is the closest to shore and at average lake level is only about two feet below the waves at the shoal’s highest point.

Burnham and Bennett’s 1909 Plan of Chicago intended to use these shoals as the foundation for seven constructed islands, and taking advantage of the bedrock highs would have lessened the amount of fill needed for island construction. However, the shoals were never used in this way. The South Park Commissioners redesigned the entire plan. Although they embraced the idea of a lagoon, they wanted a wider lagoon, and, instead of a continuous landform, they wanted to build inlets, resulting in five long narrow islands.

The 1909 and 1923 plans for a long central canal-like lagoon through Burnham Park were never fully realized.
As a first step in implementing the South Park Commissioners' plan, sand and clay were excavated from the lake bottom along the route of the proposed lagoon to acquire fill. These depressions still exist today because the lack of sand moving along this shore prevented them from filling in. Located a few hundred feet offshore, the depressions are about 10 to 15 feet deeper than the surrounding lake bottom.

Neither the 1909 nor the 1923 plan was realized. Only one of the proposed islands, Northerly Island, was ever built. In 1938, the Chicago Park District removed the bridge leading to Northerly Island and built a causeway connecting the island to Burnham Park. However, the natural platform that is Morgan Shoal may yet provide a unique opportunity to create additional parkland and beaches in the future.
Constructions at Burnham Park during the 1920s and 1930s produced a shoreline edged almost entirely of stepped-stone revetment. The constructed shore was to be the west boundary of a lagoon separating it from a series of planned offshore islands. Bridges were then to be built across the lagoon to connect the islands to the shore. One of those bridges was to be at 31st Street.

In 1927, to provide construction access to the future island, a rock-filled timber crib was built at 31st Street. The clay and sand placed on the north (updrift) side of the groin created a temporary beach.

The beach was immediately popular. After plans to create the islands were abandoned, the beach remained. For decades, this beach was the only sand beach along Burnham Park south of Northerly Island, but it received only minimal maintenance and improvements over time.

During the late 1990s, the 31st Street Beach was re-engineered and included a pocket beach. The original groin was extended and reoriented, a companion groin was built, and a submerged breakwater was built between the two groins.

The 41st Street Beach, completed in 2009, is Chicago’s newest bathing beach. The beach is the result of Chicago Park District and city planning that began during the late 1990s and involved many individuals and community organizations. Original plans called for new revetments and
a new beach just north of Oakwood Boulevard, but 41st Street offered the potential for a much larger beach.

The Army Corps of Engineers built piers and a submerged stone breakwater to protect the beach from erosion. The new beach, constructed with sand from a Wisconsin pit, stretches 1,300 feet (about seven acres) along Lake Michigan. Environmentally sustainable components include a bioretention area to treat parking lot runoff and keep it from the lake and storm sewer.

The 41st Street Beach House features an innovative water harvesting system that uses rainwater to supply the toilets. Designed by Muller and Muller architects, the 2010 building has Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) certification. The building received the 2010 ACEC-Illinois Special Achievement Award (along with the Osterman Beach House in Lincoln Park) and Mayor Daley’s 2010 Chicago Greenworks Award.

The 31st Street Harbor development project, designed to maximize sustainability features, is scheduled for completion in 2012. A 1,200-foot-long breakwater now protects the harbor, and terraced steps expand Burnham Park into Lake Michigan by three-fourths acre. The 1,000-boat slip marina area includes a fishing pier, public boat launch, and many other amenities. Nearby are a new playground, trail underpass, bike racks, and hundreds of new parking spaces.
Just outside Burnham Park lie two sites with links to wars fought on U.S. soil: the Battle of Fort Dearborn during the War of 1812 and the Civil War’s Camp Douglas.

During late summer in 1812, shortly after the war broke out, the British captured the U.S. garrison at Mackinac. Captain Nathan Heald was ordered to evacuate Fort Dearborn in anticipation of an attack on the fort. Fort Dearborn, located at the juncture of Lake Michigan and the Chicago River, was difficult to fortify. As Heald prepared to abandon the fort, about 500 Pottawatomie allies of the British assembled nearby.

On August 15, 1812, Heald set out from the fort with soldiers, militia, Miami allies, and settlers. About a mile-and-a-half south of the fort (now 18th and Prairie Avenue), Native Americans attacked the group and brutally killed more than 50 soldiers and settlers. A few survivors were taken as prisoners, but some died after capture. The rest were released to the British, who released them. The Pottawatomie burned down the fort, which was rebuilt in 1816. During the next few decades, however, the U.S. Government began forcibly removing Native Americans from the region and relocating them to west of the Mississippi River.

Public artwork commemorates the battle, which has commonly been known as the Fort Dearborn Massacre. One prominent example is Henry Hering’s sculptural bas-relief on the Michigan Avenue Bridge tower, known as Defense. In 2005, the Chicago Park District received a small park at the site of the historic battle at 18th Street and Calumet Avenue from the developers of Central Station. In response to community groups, the Chicago Park District Board of Commissioners officially named the site the Battle of Fort Dearborn Park in 2009.

The Confederate memorial at Oakwood Cemetery in Chicago, known as “Confederate Mound”, marks the largest known mass grave in the western hemisphere. Many of the Confederate POWs who died at Camp Douglas and were buried elsewhere were reinterred here in 1867.
Almost 50 years after the Battle of Fort Dearborn, Camp Douglas was constructed in the area bounded by 31st and 33rd Place and Cottage Grove Avenue and Martin Luther King Drive. Camp Douglas quickly became known for its wretched conditions. The site, chosen for its proximity to Chicago and its easy access to Lake Michigan and the Illinois Central Railroad transportation routes, was unfit for human habitation. Its swampy location flooded frequently, was without sewers, and could not absorb the waste from thousands of humans and horses.

Trouble began soon after construction in 1861. The state militiamen who built the camp rioted when the State of Illinois tried to conscript them into the infantry there. By November 1861, however, more than 4,000 volunteer recruits occupied the camp. Just a few months later, by February 1862, 42 recruits were dead from disease. Eventually about 40,000 Union Army recruits received outfitting and training at the camp marked by overcrowding, lack of sanitation, and drunk and disorderly troops.

By February 1862, Confederate prisoners of war began to arrive at Camp Douglas, now the property of the federal government. More than 30,000 were incarcerated at the camp during the course of the war.

Disease and death continued as the lack of drainage and a sewer system took its toll. Cold, wet conditions harshly challenged the POWs, who generally arrived with minimal or lightweight clothing. Guards mistreated many. Smallpox first appeared in the camp during the winter of 1862–1863 and eventually claimed the lives of 4,000 men. Most were buried at Potter’s Field in the City Cemetery (now Lincoln Park), and some were interred at the nearby Douglas estate.

When the Confederacy surrendered in April 1865, the Camp Douglas population was just over 7,000. The last POW left the camp at the end of July 1865. By November 1865, the camp had been sold and razed.
Chicago’s Bronzeville neighborhood, lying to the west and south of Burnham Park, has a long and fascinating history. Ongoing community-driven efforts at revitalization by African Americans recognize the importance of the neighborhood and its historical and cultural landmarks. The area has been home to many famous African Americans: social activist Ida B. Wells, band leader and innovative jazz musician Louis Armstrong, author Richard Wright, poet Gwendolyn Brooks, and Dr. Daniel Hale Williams, who performed the first successful open heart surgery, to name a few.

Almost a century ago, Bronzeville bore the brunt of one of the nation’s worst race riots, which began in the area that is now Burnham Park. During the sweltering summer of 1919, people trying to escape the oppressive heat packed the beaches along Burnham Park. Although Illinois law prohibited segregation in public places, the 29th Street Beach was used exclusively by whites and the 22nd Street Beach by blacks.

On July 27, 1919, some African Americans wanting to enter the water at 29th Street were turned away, and teenagers swimming offshore who floated across the invisible color line were prevented from leaving the water. One teenager drowned, either from fatigue or because he had been hit by a rock thrown from shore. When no arrest followed, riots broke out for several days and quickly spread into the Bronzeville neighborhood. When the state militia finally restored order, 38 were dead and over 500 were injured—both black and white. One thousand black families were left homeless.
After the 1919 riot, one of many in the nation that year, the underlying racial issues did not disappear, but the riots captured the attention of President Woodrow Wilson and the U.S. Congress and resulted in legislation and volunteer organizations intending to promote better race relations. During the 1920s, economic conditions improved somewhat, at least temporarily, and the Bronzeville neighborhood developed as a center of black urban life in Chicago. African American leadership worked within the community to establish independent and thriving black institutions and businesses, a flourishing cultural presence, and a strong political identity. The *Chicago Defender* newspaper was one of its strongest voices.

Chicago’s first permanent resident, businessman, and Revolutionary War patriot, Jean Baptiste Pointe DuSable, honored on a 1987 U.S. Postal Service stamp.
Opening in 1933 on Northerly Island and Burnham Park, Chicago’s Second World’s Fair, A Century of Progress, celebrated the centennial of Chicago’s founding and the city’s many achievements during its first 100 years. Held at the height of the Great Depression, with a theme of science and technological innovation, the international exposition looked to the future. The fair’s success became a symbol of hope during a time of economic, social, and political crisis and, thus, assumed national importance. Planned for one year, the fair’s success propelled promoters to open for a second season in order to earn enough income to retire its bonds.

A Century of Progress was a success in another way: Its initial construction costs were financed entirely by private donations. The newly constructed Adler Planetarium opened on Northerly Island and fit well with the fair’s emphasis on science and technology. Prominent architects showcased modern buildings in a rainbow of colors. The major corporations sponsoring exhibits included Goodyear, RCA, and Havoline Oil. The General Motors exhibit included a working assembly line model. The House of Tomorrow showcased modern conveniences and building materials.

Entertainments were many and various. A reproduction of Fort Dearborn was built near 24th Street. The Hall of Science held simulated volcanoes, gold and coal mines, underground torrents, and shifting sand bars among its exhibits. Advances in transportation, from stagecoach to airplanes, were highlighted. The brief flyover of the German airship Graf Zeppelin in 1933 was a reminder of Hitler’s rise to power. The Union Pacific Railroad and the Burlington Route demonstrated the first streamlined, very fast trains. Double-decker rocket cars ran high above the fair along cables between two giant towers. International village exhibits offered visitors an idealized version of the Streets of Paris, Black Forest Village, and the Streets of Shanghai. One of the most popular Midway attractions was the risqué fan dancer, Sally Rand.

Some of the fair’s exhibits shock modern sensibilities. These included freak shows in the Odditorium, a midget city, an exhibition of incubators containing real babies, and offensive portrayals of African Americans. Women were largely ignored apart from the Midway.
For all of the fair’s problems, over 39 million visitors mostly enjoyed its spectacles, attractions, exhibits, and rides for an admission fee of 50 cents. The fair was such a financial success that $160,000 from proceeds was later donated to various museums, and a Recreation Commission was formed to investigate the possibility of creating a permanent fair in Burnham Park.

A few remnants of A Century of Progress remain today. Adler Planetarium was the only permanent building constructed for the fair. The Balbo Column, located east of East Museum Campus Drive and south of East McFetridge Drive along the Lakefront Trail, was installed on Italian Day in 1934. Some elements of the Japanese Garden remain as part of the Osaka Garden in Jackson Park today.
Beginning in 1954, during the Cold War, several Chicago lakefront parks were part of the Nike missile national defense system. Nike Missile Base C-40 was located within Burnham Park south of McCormick Place at the lakefront between 26th Street and 29th Street. The radar portion of Nike Missile Base C-41, situated in Jackson Park, was located on Promontory Point at the south end of Burnham Park.

The unmanned missiles, developed by Bell Telephone Laboratories, were guided to the target by computer-controlled ground-based radar. The initial Nike Ajax missiles had a range of 25 miles, but were soon replaced by Nike Hercules missiles, which had a range of 90 miles and could reach altitudes of more than 100,000 feet.

The Nike missile defense system consisted of a series of bases surrounding major urban and industrial areas, Strategic Air Command bases, and other sensitive installations. One ring surrounded the Chicago-Gary industrial area with a partial ring from Fort Sheridan on the
north around the west side of Chicago through the Chicago collar counties to the lakefront east of Ogden Dunes in Porter County, Indiana. Because of Lake Michigan, the eastern arc of this circle had to be built on the lakeshore in various public parks. The U.S. Army leased more than seven acres on Burnham Park’s Promontory Point and just over seven acres at 26th Street. The sites contained the Nike missiles, radar installations, and barracks.

The bases consisted of two areas. An integrated fire control area housed the ground-based radar and computer systems, administrative offices, and berthing and dining areas. The launch area contained the facilities to assemble, fuel, and arm missiles and to store the missiles underground.

The Soviet Union, fearing its manned aircraft were vulnerable to attack, soon developed a system of intercontinental ballistic missiles that made the Nike missiles obsolete. The Nike sites were decommissioned beginning in the 1960s. The Promontory Point site was closed in 1971, and, by 1974, all U.S. sites had been decommissioned.
Northerly Island, first envisioned as the northernmost island in a 5-mile string of man-made islands offshore of Burnham Park, became the only one of those islands ever completed.

Northerly Island and the nearby lakeshore were constructed of sand mined from the Indiana lake bottom and then transported by ship to Chicago. The fill also contained clay dredged from the lake bottom near the island; those areas remain today as several long, thin depressions. Because of deep water next to the 12th Street Beach, a submerged breakwater was built to hold the beach in place.

Northerly Island was completed in 1925, and Adler Planetarium was built there a few years later. Both were an essential part of A Century of Progress, which celebrated the centennial of Chicago’s founding and the city’s many achievements. After A Century of Progress, no major improvements were made to Northerly Island for many years. In 1938, the Chicago Park District removed the bridge connecting Northerly Island to Burnham Park and replaced it with a causeway, transforming the island into a 91-acre peninsula that held paths, trees and grass, and the 12th Street Beach. In 1945, the site was briefly considered as the potential home of the United Nations.

There had been talk of building an airport on Northerly Island since 1911, but not until 1946 was the island leased from the Chicago Park District for use as Merrill C. Meigs Airfield. More lake-bottom fill was added to accommodate aircraft, and, by 1948, Meigs Airfield was open to corporate and private air traffic. Some loved the convenience of the downtown airport, but others objected to the noise, the potential for disaster, and security threats from the thousands of flights taking off and landing each year. The runway was extended in 1955, and a new terminal was dedicated in 1961. Additional runway expansion was proposed in 1962 but not undertaken.
The airport’s closure was proposed by some as early as the 1970s, and debate about the airport’s fate accelerated after its 50-year lease expired in 1996. Debate closed at midnight, March 30, 2003, when Mayor Richard M. Daley ordered the runways blocked and demolished.

Beginning in 2005, the Chicago Park District, the City of Chicago, and several civic organizations determined that the land should revert to parkland. Today Northerly Island is closer to the space envisioned by Daniel Burnham. The nature area again contains prairie grasses and flowers, strolling paths, play areas, superb fishing, and a spectacular view of the city.

The 7,500-seat Charter One Pavilion, built in 2005, is a state-of-the-art venue for concerts and family matinee events. The old airport terminal has been converted to the Northerly Island Visitor Center. In addition to providing discovery tour information and nature programming, the center houses Flint Creek Wildlife Rehabilitation, a facility that nurses wild birds back to health. Having bird rescue and rehabilitation efforts near downtown is especially important, because many birds become injured after they unwittingly fly into skyscrapers.
Adler Planetarium & Astronomy Museum

Mission: To inspire exploration and understanding of the universe.

When it opened in 1930, Adler Planetarium and Astronomy Museum was the only permanent building designed for the 1933–1934 A Century of Progress and the only planetarium in the western hemisphere. The planetarium was founded by Max Adler, Chicago business leader, who donated construction funds after he and architect Ernest Grunsfeld were impressed by a German device they saw that could produce the illusion of the night sky.

Today the museum contains three theaters, exhibitions, and the world’s most important antique astronomical instrument collections on display. The adjacent Doane Observatory houses the largest publically available aperture telescope in the Chicago area. Adler staff work to excite the imagination of a diverse audience and to educate the public about space science and exploration with exhibits, hands-on programs, immersive theater programs, family program, and special events, all drawn from scientific and educational research and well-managed collections.

Field Museum of Natural History

Mission: To provide collection-based research and learning for greater public understanding and appreciation of the world in which we live. Its collections, public learning programs, and research are inseparably linked to serve a diverse public of varied ages, backgrounds, and knowledge.

The Columbian Museum of Chicago opened in 1894 and became the Field Museum of Natural History in 1905, honoring Marshall Field, the museum’s first benefactor. In 1921, the museum was moved from Jackson Park to its present location. Renamed the Chicago Natural History Museum in 1943, the name Field Museum of Natural History was restored in 1966. The museum is one of the last major Chicago buildings designed by Daniel H. Burnham, and its neo-classical style is in keeping with his plan for the south lakefront.

Today the museum houses over 20 million items, including biological and geological specimens, cultural objects, and publications, photographs, data, and other materials. These collections are the basis of the exhibits, research, and public learning programs designed to enable greater public understanding and appreciation of the world.
John G. Shedd Aquarium

Mission: To connect people to the living world.

The aquarium was a result of the vision and generosity of its namesake, John Graves Shedd, millionaire philanthropist and former president of Marshall Fields and Company. Shedd donated $3 million to ensure the aquarium would be of the highest caliber. Architects Graham, Anderson, Probst, and White, who had worked for Daniel Burnham, designed the aquarium to complement the Field Museum. When Shedd opened in December 1929, the world-class aquarium was the largest on Earth. Beginning with freshwater species, Shedd soon became the first inland aquarium with a permanent saltwater collection, having received more than a million gallons of seawater shipped by rail from Florida.

Today Shedd is still the world’s largest indoor aquarium and home to more than 32,000 animals. The aquarium is a vital teaching and learning resource, conservation leader, neighborhood partner, and global collaborator. Exhibits contain plants and animals from rivers and reefs, lakes, and the ocean, including exhibits on a Caribbean reef, Amazon flooded forest, Pacific Northwest coast, an Indo-Pacific reef, and Arctic waters.

Soldier Field

Home of the Chicago Bears and host to a variety of sporting and other events.

Dedicated to World War I soldiers in 1926, Soldier Field has been the city’s major multi-use stadium for more than 90 years. In 1968, it hosted the world’s first Special Olympics event and, in 1971, became home to the Chicago Bears football team. The stadium underwent major renovation in 2003. Today the facility is a popular location for festivals, concerts, and family events and can be rented for weddings, parties, and other special events. Soldier Field offers private behind-the-scenes tours to the public.

Soldier Field is a leader in efforts to reduce the environmental impact of its events through reuse and recycling of materials whenever possible.
Chicago Park District

Mission: To enhance the quality of life throughout Chicago by being a leading provider of recreation and leisure opportunities; to provide safe, inviting, and beautifully maintained parks and facilities; and to create a customer-focused and responsive park system.

The Chicago Park District annually hosts thousands of special events and programs and manages more than 580 parks and over 8,100 acres of park land, including these:

- 26 miles of lakefront
- 24 designated swimming beaches
- 16 accessible beach walks
- 9 harbors
- 375 gardens
- 60 community gardens
- 10 museums
- 2 world-class conservatories
- 17 historic lagoons
- 11 savannas/woodlands
- 5 wetlands
- 22 prairies/grasslands
- 1 nature center
- 1 urban farm
- 1 organic greenhouse
- 718 baseball fields
- 2 wheelchair softball/baseball fields
- 519 playgrounds
- 90 accessible playgrounds
- 239 field houses
- 86 pools
- 70 accessible pool features
- 71 fitness centers
- 21 dog-friendly areas
- 10 ice-skating rinks
- 6 skate parks
- 7 golf courses

541 North Fairbanks
Chicago, IL 60611
312.742.PLAY (7529)
TTY 312.747.2001
www.chicagoparkdistrict.com
Illinois State Geological Survey

Mission: To provide the citizens and institutions of Illinois with earth science research and information that are accurate, objective, and relevant to our state’s environmental quality, economic prosperity, and public safety.

Programs and activities:
- Geological mapping and groundwater geology
- Environmental and engineering geology
- Energy and earth resources
- Data resources and management
- Education and outreach

Chicago area projects:
- Erosion assessment and beach nourishment
- Flood control
- Groundwater quality
- Economic studies of water resources
- Mapping for urban planning
- Soil mechanics and foundation stability
- Wetland compensation, mitigation, and monitoring
- Environmental assessments
- Groundwater contamination potential assessment
- Mineral resources planning to obtain low-cost construction aggregates
- Fossils, paleoenvironment, and climate change studies
- Management of state’s geospatial, engineering boring, and well data
- Public field trips


NOAA (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration), 2006, Recreational Chart 14926, Chicago and South Shore of Lake Michigan, 8th ed., Silver Spring, Maryland, scales vary, 30 sheets.


South Park Commissioners, 1923, Preliminary Plan of Lake Shore Development, Chicago River to 67th Street, January 1923 (drawing): Chicago, Illinois, scale: 1" = 1,000 feet.


Contributors
Cheryl K. Nimz, Michael J. Chrzastowski, Cynthia A. Briedis, Julia S. Bachrach (Chicago Park District), and C. Brian Trask

Acknowledgments
This publication and map were funded in part by a 2010 Public Engagement Grant to the Illinois State Geological Survey from the Office of the Vice Chancellor for Public Engagement, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Thanks are expressed to the following individuals for their careful review of this work: Robert A. Bauer and Richard C. Berg, Illinois State Geological Survey; Julia S. Bachrach and Joseph Bornstein, Chicago Park District; Eleanor K. Roemer, Friends of the Parks; and Joy Monice Malnar, School of Architecture, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Gratitude is expressed to Joel M. Dexter, Illinois State Geological Survey, for all photographs not otherwise credited.

Appreciation is extended to Brian Fritz Photography and F. H. Paschen; Chicago History Museum; Chicago Park District and Chicago Park District Special Collections; Great Lakes Dredge and Dock Company; Hyde Park Historical Society; Nancy Hays; Robyn LaLonde; Edward H. Bennett Collection, Ryerson and Burnham Archives, The Art Institute of Chicago; and United Press International for the use of photographs and illustrations credited to them.

Illinois State Geological Survey
Prairie Research Institute
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
615 E. Peabody Drive
Champaign, IL 61820
217.333.4747
www.isgs.illinois.edu

©2012 University of Illinois Board of Trustees. All rights reserved.
For permission information, contact the Illinois State Geological Survey.

Printed in the United States of America.