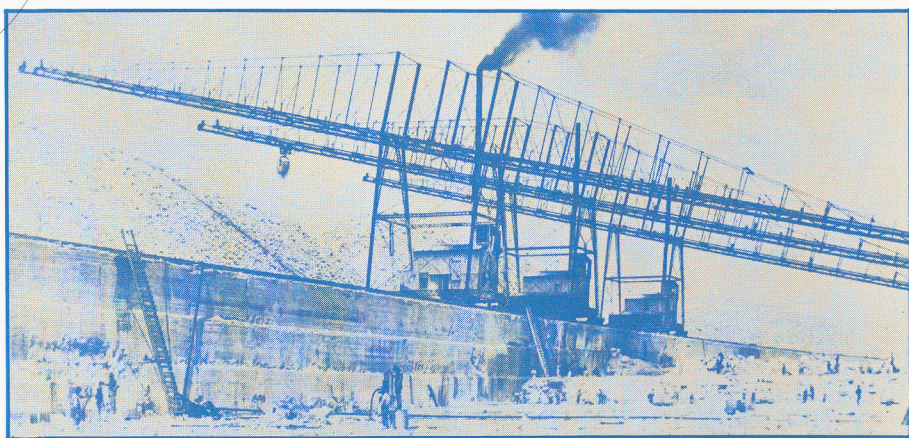


CHAPTER VI

The Sanitary and Ship Canal, The Illinois Waterway and the Highways

A major engineering achievement in the Corridor in the late 19th century was the construction of the Chicago Sanitary and Ship Canal. This

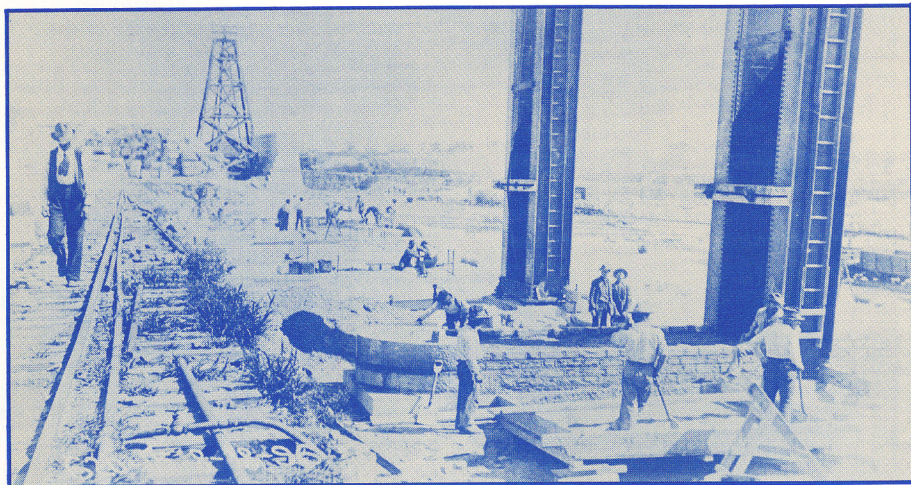
water from Lake Michigan, its bottom was 24 feet below the surface of the lake. The water was to be used to treat Chicago's sewage by dilution and move it



canal was dug from Chicago to Lockport from 1890 to 1900. It was 25 feet deep and 160 feet wide at its narrowest section, making it larger than the Suez Canal. Designed primarily to drain

downstream to the Mississippi River. This would carry it away from the lake, Chicago's source of drinking water. Consequently, the Chicago Ship and Sanitary Canal initially shipped sewage. ⁽¹⁷⁾

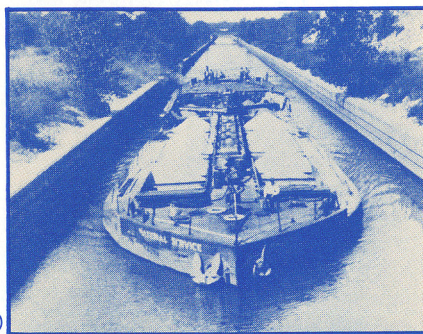
The canal opened in 1900. It began at Lake Michigan and ended at Lockport, where a series of engineering devices controlled the water flow into the DesPlaines River flood plain. By 1906, however, this canal was extended about a mile south. A lock was added to the canal at this time making it navigable. A hydroelectric power station was also added. The unique variety of water controlling devices, located at the end of the canal, included a butterfly dam



designed to check the water. These devices were needed to alleviate fears of Joliet residents. The town at 40 feet below the canal, would be flooded out if the water flow was not controlled. The bottom of the Sanitary Canal is at the same level as Niagara River's floor in New York. If things were not controlled, Niagara Falls would have dried up and central Illinois would have turned into a lake. The control was not at the mouth of the Chicago River but at the terminus of the canal at Lockport. Aside from the butterfly dam, a bear trap dam, or a variable level dam, a series of huge waste gates and a hydroelectric power station were also constructed. With no intermediary control, these structures confined water all the way from Niagara Falls.

The I & M Canal was closed between Chicago and Joliet because the newly built Calumet-Sag Canal cut it in half. This prompted some shipping down the Sanitary Canal after 1906. The Calumet-Sag Canal was also a sanitary canal designed to pull water out of the lake through the Little Calumet and the Calumet Rivers. The Cal-Sag would then feed the water and its sewage into the Sanitary Canal just above Lemont. Despite the demise of the I & M Canal in

this area, it was evident that both the Sanitary and the Cal-Sag Canals created excellent water carriers. This was emphasized by their use in the 1920s with enterprising and growing companies as the Material Service Corporation.



For years there had been a demand for a deep waterway to connect the Great Lakes to the Mississippi. These two canals, although designed for sewage treatment, were a big step toward building the waterway. In the 1920s, Illinois began building a deep waterway between the lakes and the Mississippi. It was finished in 1933 by the Federal Government and was named the Illinois Waterway. The Illinois Waterway was a deepened and dammed river with a nine foot depth. Five of its locks lay in the

Corridor. Although the Illinois Waterway had an important impact on the economy of the Corridor, its impact was considerably less important than that of the old I & M Canal. Both the waterway and the Sanitary Canal were greater projects and changed the landscape they passed through more



dramatically than the Illinois and Michigan Canal. However, they were the culmination of a development that began more than one hundred years earlier.

Within the Corridor, economic and population growth undermined the importance of the Corridor to its inhabitants. These inhabitants were dominated by larger developments and they no longer needed the unique geographic features that were so important between the prehistoric times and the 20th century. By 1933, however, those factors were subverted by other forces, such as integrated, heavy, industrial development, suburbanization and agricultural specialization. The history of Blue Island shows this development.

Blue Island, a town in southwestern Cook County on the old Vincennes Trail, was originally established as Portland, where the feeder canal from the Little Calumet River to the I & M Canal began. Although the anticipated development on the feeder canal in the 1850s did not occur, Blue Island developed as a trading center. In 1854, when the Rock Island Railroad surfaced, the town's nature as a regional marketing village with a growing population did not change. When the Rock Island

established a large repair yard in the town, Blue Island began to lose its independence. By 1890, both the Rock Island and the Illinois Central Railroads had suburban lines to Blue Island. Neighboring communities, such as Morgan Park, were developed as bedroom communities and would be absorbed into Chicago by the 20th century. Blue Island resisted incorporation though Chicago city limits are adjacent to it. Blue Island was a satellite community and although the Cal-Sag travels through the town, it has meant little to the community. When the canal was enlarged in the 1950s, it destroyed the continuity of the town's main street, Western Avenue. There was little local concern.

The same suburbanization occurred in communities farther away from Chicago than Blue Island. Joliet, Lockport and Lemont all had a large number of trains running almost hourly into the city. Not only was this true of the older lines, such as the Rock Island and the Chicago and Alton, but also of the newest passenger line, the Santa Fe Railroad, which passed through the Corridor.

Another competing factor in land transportation was the interurban electric railroads. These were designed primarily for passenger travel. After 1900, the rapid expansion of electric railroads served the growing needs of metropolitan commuters. By this time, the five day work week was well established, increasing leisure time available to workers. These lines encouraged more frequent travel, particularly on weekends, by establishing a number of amusement parks outside the Chicago city limits.



These parks were Dellwood, outside of Lockport, Rock Run outside Joliet and the Calumet Amusement Park, outside Blue Island. Other parks were built to entertain suburban residents. The railroads, both steam and interurban, provided special rates to the parks which had rides and picnic facilities. Rock Run, located between the I & M Canal and the Rock Island, was served by trains as well as excursion boats from Joliet.



By 1920, the automobile was the growing form of land transportation, largely popularized because of its leisure use. By the mid 1920s, it was rapidly undermining interurban lines and amusement parks, which went out of business in the 1930s. As early as 1901, however, a member of the Lockport Woman's Club proposed that the I & M

Canal, between Chicago (or Bridgeport) and Lockport, be converted to a highway. In the 1950s, this proposal was partly fulfilled as the old canal bed was filled in and I-55, the Stevenson Expressway, was constructed over it from Bridgeport to Summit.

Lockport was economically devastated by the failure of the Norton Company in 1896, but the automobile was its key to survival. This survival hinged on refining gasoline for the automobile industry. In 1911, the Texaco Company located its first refinery outside of Texas, just north of the town, straddling the I & M Canal. This location was designed to use the two rail lines on either side of the property to supply the growing Chicago gasoline market. In 1926, the Texaco Company began using crude oil from Texas shipped by way of a pipeline. The pipeline from the southwest would stimulate other refining in the area, making it a petrochemical center. Although the Texaco refinery closed down, two major refineries and a large petrochemical plant have been established within the Corridor since the mid 1960s.

As highway routes became more sophisticated in the 1920s, many roads ran parallel to the Corridor. Among the most important to the Corridor were U.S. 6, or the Grand Army of the Republic Highway, following the Corridor to La Salle-Peru and U.S. 66 following the Corridor from Chicago to Joliet. In the 1950s and '60s, interstate highways I-55, I-80 and I-57 surrounded the Corridor. These developments destroyed the unique character of the Corridor, merging it into a larger world where its once unique and valuable characteristics were of little importance.