

## Edgewater Community

# Lakeshore Drive - Built to Be Beautiful

by Sue Burke

In the early 1950s, Lake Shore Drive and Lincoln Park were extended from Foster Avenue to Bryn Mawr and Hollywood—the section behind our building. How this happened is interesting, but why it happened tells us about Chicago's unique lakefront parklands. The most important question is this: Is it beautiful?

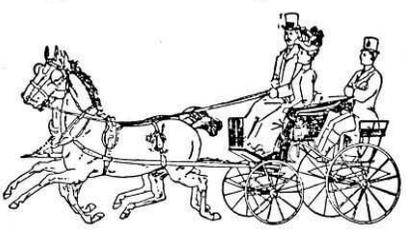
### The Early Years

The story actually starts in 1835 when the citizens of the Village of Chicago, which had been incorporated only two years earlier, established a park at the lakefront that eventually became **Grant Park**. From the beginning, the lakefront was treated as a public treasure.

In 1860, the city acquired more lakefront land just north of downtown, and it became the start of **Lincoln Park**. Over the years, bit by bit, north and south of the harbor, the lakeshore parkland grew, and Chicago was proud of it.

The city kept growing, with Edgewater founded in 1880. Seven years later, a real estate developer named John Lewis Cochran began selling houses and mansions in the area bounded by Foster and Bryn Mawr Avenues, Broadway and Sheridan Road. At the time, the lakeshore came up to roughly where the back fence of Park Tower is now.

**A Delightful Drive Through Lincoln Park**



**TO EDGEWATER** On the Lake Shore.

**\$5,100**  
TO  
**\$10,500**

New modern detached houses, on lots 50x 150 feet.  
One to four blocks from Lake Michigan.  
A strictly residence suburb with high-class improvements.  
Absolutely the most desirable and cheapest residence property in Chicago.  
Terms to suit you.  
Splendid building lots, \$40 to \$80 per foot.

42 daily trains and 7-cent fare by the C., M. & St. P. R.R. The Chicago and Edgewater Electric Car Line will be running June 1.  
Salesmen leaving city office every day at 9, 9:30, 10:45, and 12 a.m., or 2:30 and 8:30 p.m., will take you free of expense to inspect the property.  
For terms, plans of houses, etc., apply to

**J. L. COCHRAN, 722 Chicago Opera House.**  
A RESIDENT AGENT AT EDGEWATER.

In 1898, the **Cycle and Saddle Club** opened its facilities on Foster Avenue, where it remains today but without its original beach access. By 1908, the Red Line of the 'L' reached all the way to Howard Street. With good transportation and a lovely lakefront, Edgewater became a thriving, high-class area.

Meanwhile, the city's influential Commercial Club had asked an architect named Daniel H. Burnham to create a plan to direct Chicago's growth. Burnham thought big. His architectural firm gained fame in 1881 for erecting such a tall building in downtown Chicago that a new word was coined to describe it: "skyscraper." It rose an astonishing 10 stories tall.

### The Burnham Plan

In 1909, Burnham, working with other civic-minded individuals, finished **The Plan of Chicago**. It was published as a lavishly illustrated 280-page book full of ambitious proposals for public buildings, highways, railroads, industry, and parkland. Number One on the list: "The improvement of the lakefront."

The plan envisioned parkland from Winnetka to the Indiana state line, with a road on breakwaters at the lakefront side of the park, passing over bridges between newly-made islands. And behind the road, pleasant, placid lagoons.



**Early plan for Lake Shore Drive at Bryn Mawr Avenue**

"The lakefront by right belongs to the people," the plan said. "Everything possible should be done to develop its natural beauties, thus fitting it for the part it has to play in the life of the whole city. It should be made so alluring that it will become the fixed habit of the people to seek its restful presence at every opportunity."



As Burnham told the Chicago Record-Herald newspaper in 1910, "Make no little plans; they have no magic to stir men's blood.... Remember that our sons and our grandsons are going

to do things that would stagger us. Let your watchword be order and your beacon beauty."

Creating this new parkland wouldn't be difficult, according to the plan. At the time, the city was dumping its refuse out in the lake. If it dumped that refuse at the shore, the city could build up new land and breakwaters "in the course of another generation." Thus Chicago's trash became the groundwork for its increasing treasure.

"Imagine this supremely beautiful parkway," the plan said, and 10 years later, the City Council approved it as the blueprint to create a lakefront park from one end of the city to the other. The city already had the right to claim any land it created in the lake by landfill.

A portion of the road we now call Lake Shore Drive already existed. Back in 1875, the first mile was created as an extension of Michigan Avenue. It was an elegant carriage-way in front of lakefront mansions, and it stretched from the harbor to the south end of Lincoln Park.

By 1910, Lake Shore Drive, then known as Outer Drive, had reached two miles farther north to Belmont Avenue, and it resembled Burnham's plan. The road had been built through Lincoln Park on an embankment and breakwater constructed at the lakeshore, with lagoons, a zoo, and parkland on the other side.

The plan also called for landfill to create large islands farther out in the lake to provide shelter for yachts during storms. Eventually that part of the plan was forgotten, along with the creation of multiple lagoons behind Lake Shore Drive, but the desire and need for the road remained, and it would keep growing north and south during the coming decades.



**Burnham's lakefront plan with large offshore islands from Lincoln Park to Evanston. Arrow points to Bryn Mawr Avenue**

In the early 1900s, Edgewater was enjoying a building boom, and some of its finest apartment buildings and churches were built. In 1916, the Edgewater Beach Hotel opened where The Breakers is located now. The hotel was one of the nation's leading resorts, with 1,000 rooms in two adjoining buildings. Over the years, its guests included Babe Ruth, Groucho Marx, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Marilyn Monroe, Mahatma Ghandi, and Martin Luther King Jr.

**Lake Shore Drive extended to Foster Avenue**



**Arrows in this and next photo point to Edgewater Beach Apartments, north of Park Tower**

Work began in 1929 to extend Lake Shore Drive to Foster Avenue. When the Great Depression hit, the federal government provided funding as part of Roosevelt's New Deal. The nation's first cloverleaf ramps were built (and replaced in the 1960s) at Montrose, Wilson, and Lawrence. Lake Shore Drive had been envisioned as a pleasure parkway for horse-drawn carriages, but it became the nation's first limited access highway.

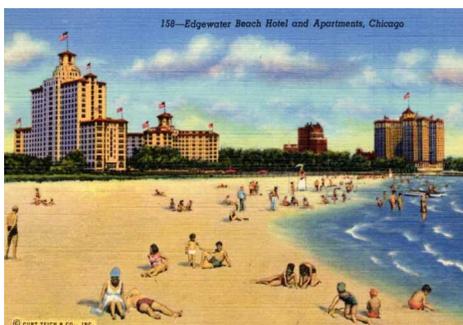
**And beyond, to Hollywood**



By 1950, when the road ended at Foster Avenue, traffic was funneled onto Foster and Sheridan Road and had congested the neighborhood. Something needed to be done, so work began to extend Lake Shore Drive to Bryn Mawr and Hollywood Avenues. The idea was that Bryn Mawr's commercial district could use the traffic, and Sheridan north of Hollywood had little development so additional cars heading toward Evanston wouldn't cause problems.

Rubble from the Eisenhower Expressway was trucked in to create new land where there had once been only sand. The extension officially opened on November 27, 1954. Chicago Mayor Martin H. Hennelly proclaimed the road "a monument to cooperative enterprise" as a hundred onlookers "shivered from a cold wet wind off the lake," according to a report in the Chicago Tribune.

**Edgewater Beach Hotel**



Opinions differ about why the Edgewater Beach Hotel closed in 1967. Perhaps, because the drive cut off its access to the beach, it became less of a vacation spot. But the hotel also faced increasing competition as a premier national resort, and a new owner neglected its upkeep. The buildings were razed in 1971, and Park Tower Condominium opened in 1973 on land that had been the hotel's parking lot. The Breakers was built in 1987.

**What might have been**

But Lake Shore Drive was originally envisioned to go even farther north. That was before high-rise apartments and little parks filled in the shoreline north of Hollywood. In 2004, activists gathered enough signatures to put a non-binding referendum on the November ballot asking neighborhood voters if Lake Shore Drive or "any other roadways, marinas, housing, or commercial structures" should be established as part of any lakefront expansion from Hollywood Avenue to Evanston.

Voters said no, by a decisive 88%. Even a project to extend the bike path in 2008 met with solid opposition. No one is interested in resurrecting any of those ideas now, according to Ald. Harry Osterman's office.

Right behind our building, Lake Shore Drive has reached its northern conclusion with both a road and a public park. Thanks to Burnham's big plans, we can stroll the seawall between Osterman and Foster Beaches and gaze at the horizon. "These views of a broad expanse," his plan said, "are helpful alike to mind and body. They beget calm thoughts and feelings, and afford an escape from the petty things in life."

Is it beautiful? According to the plan, good roads matter, but beauty makes a city great. **TTT**

*Sue is a resident of Park Tower and contributed this story at the invitation of the Newsletter Committee.*