

New neighborhood sits on Old Lake Michigan

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The piece of the "New East Side" where **Lakeshore East** has staked its claim was once part of the "Old Lake Michigan."

In the early 1850s, the fledgling Illinois Central Railroad purchased a parcel of land just north of Randolph Street from the federal government and began filling in the lakefront.

Until then, most of the area east of Michigan Avenue was still the lake and a small patch of shore. The IC had been relegated to a long wooden trestle on a narrow strip of land stretching down the lake from Randolph to 22nd Street. In exchange for a railroad in the city's front yard, the IC agreed to build a breakwater to protect the downtown shoreline from erosion.

The landfill continued northward toward the Chicago River, where the IC eventually built rail yards and boat slips for cargo ships. This juncture connected the busy Lake Michigan boat traffic with the IC's rail freight business.

The Great Chicago Fire of 1871 devastated the city, producing mountains of debris, which the city used as further landfill to build the lakefront. The area was then established as the northern terminus of the tracks for the Illinois Central Railroad, which stretched all the way south to New Orleans.

Some of the fire debris was dumped in what is now Grant Park and more was used to the south where the Central Station mixed-use development is now. Filling in continued along the lakefront through the early 1900s. In 1901, the Grant Park fill project began using dredgings from the river harbor and the Chicago Drainage Canal project, later called the Chicago Sanitary and Ship Canal.

The IC's Central Station passenger terminal opened at Michigan and 12th Street in 1893 to accommodate visitors to the Columbian Exposition. The terminal closed in 1972 because of declining passenger traffic.

By the early 1900s, transshipments from the lake to the railroad had diminished and the area became less important to commerce. By the 1920s, transshipments ceased. The area was used as a freight yard and for passenger rail car storage into the 1950s. In the early 1960s, plans were developed for office buildings and hotels, some of which were built into the 1980s, filling up some of the land.

The remaining 28 acres were kept intact despite efforts to build more office buildings, a land-based gambling casino or a new stadium for the Chicago Bears. In the interim, it was used as an ice skating rink for the Outer Drive East, now the 400 East Randolph. More recently it was a par 3, 9-hole golf course.