

ESSENTIAL PARTS OF CHICAGO'S REGIONAL INFRASTRUCTURE APPEARED in 1848: the completion of the Illinois and Michigan Canal, the inception of the city's first railroad, the first telegraph connection, the founding of the Chicago Board of Trade. With approximately 20,000 people Chicago had not yet reached regional dominance, but these developments contributed to its future as a major world city and the leading metropolis of the Midwest.

The canal opened in April, after twelve years of intermittent construction, placing Chicago in the midst of a water route connecting the Gulf of Mexico and the Mississippi River to the Great Lakes and North Atlantic Ocean. Like the Erie Canal, and unlike other canal projects, it was a tremendous success,

and remained so for several critical decades of Chicago's swift growth.

In January a telegraph line connected Chicago to Milwaukee, and by the end of the year Chicago was part of a network linking all the major Eastern cities. Business leaders welcomed the speed with which news from Eastern markets now reached them.

Overland transportation progressed more slowly. New wooden plank roads helped farmers bring their harvest to the city, but the roads were difficult to maintain. By the end of 1848 the Galena & Chicago Union Railroad track extended just 10 miles west. Within three years, however, Eastern rail lines arrived, and planning for the Illinois Central and other lines was underway.

1848

January: Discovery of gold in California

February: U.S.-Mexico Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo; Revolution in France; republic proclaimed

March: Chicago Board of Trade founded

a Chicago in 1848 was still a relatively small, raw, muddy city, growing at a pace that residents recognized would not always be graceful. On April 25, the *Chicago Daily Journal* published an engraving of improvements on the public square, showing the courthouse (1), with the Sherman House hotel looming behind it, the watch house (2), and jail buildings (3). The engraving was prepared from a daguerreotype, an early photographic process, and the *Daily Journal* editor, tongue planted firmly in cheek, noted: "It is proper to state, to prevent an erroneous impression, that 16 cows and calves, 10 horses and colts, and 30 or 40 dogs were driven out, and the gate-ways kept guarded, during the time the original picture was being taken. They were permitted to return, however, as soon as the artist left the ground."

b The 1850 manuscript census included several sheets for residents of canal boats. The boat captained by D. E. Oakley is typical in many respects. Most boat hands were men in their 20s and 30s from northeastern states; captains were sometimes older. Women often worked on the boats as cooks. Some of the larger boats included families with young children.

c Illinois and Michigan Canal administrators readily appreciated the speed of telegraphic communications as they sought to maintain the canal. In early December it was urgent for boats to exit the canal so that it could be drained before freezing weather arrived.

d *Background:* Chicago's first railroad depot, the Galena & Chicago Union, stood on Kinzie Street just north of the Chicago River. The telegraph poles suggest that this photo was taken several years after 1848. By the early 1850s the railroads had drawn nearly all passenger traffic away from the canal. Freight traffic by both canal and rail provided a significant boost to Chicago as an agricultural entrepôt, and the rapid development of the railroad network and of midwestern farms in the 1850s enabled Chicago's commodities market to grow to unprecedented levels of activity. The Board of Trade, little more than a club for businessmen in its first few years, began regulating the grading of grain by the end of the 1850s. Twenty years later its innovative futures market would begin to transform the economics of agricultural production and distribution.



33	Whitman	21	"	"	Unit		
33	Frank	23	"	"	France		
34	5/15/1848 D. E. Oakley	25	"	Canal Capt	\$4000	O.	
35	John Buck	18	"	Boatman		NY	
36	Jack	25	"	"		Penn.	
37	John	30	"	"		"	
38	Olive Powers	28	F	Cook		NY	
39	5/15/1848 John Vanderwater	37	M	Boatman			
40	D. E. Oakley	25	[M]	[W]	Canal Capt.	\$4000	O.
41	John Buck	18	"	"	Boatman		NY
42	Jack	25	"	"	"		Penn.
43	John	30	"	"	"		"
44	Olive Powers	28	F	"	Cook		NY



Within a decade Chicago would be the rail hub of the United States.

Transportation and economic developments fueled population growth. The Protestant Yankees who had predominated after displacing Indians in the early 1830s were joined by Irish, German, and other European immigrants, who would soon play a significant role in Chicago politics and culture. Religious, racial, and ethnic diversity have characterized Chicago since the 1840s; symbolic turning points include the establishment of Chicago's Roman Catholic diocese in 1843, the founding of Quinn Chapel, Chicago's oldest black church, in 1847, and the founding of Kehilath Anshe Mayriv, Chicago's first Jewish congregation, also in 1847.

While most enterprises were partnerships or family businesses, after 1848 the scale of industry and commerce began to change dramatically, and with it the city's class structure. Cyrus McCormick moved his reaper manufacturing business to Chicago from Virginia in 1847 and sought capital for expansion. With 33 hands in 1848, the McCormick firm was already one of the largest employers; two years later it employed 150, with continued growth. The later development of Chicago's vast stockyards and meatpacking plants, its lumber yards, its steel mills, its neighborhoods, its industrial workers and labor conflicts: all can be seen in retrospect as emerging from Chicago's turning point in 1848.

Douglas Knox and Michael Conzen

April: Official opening of the I&M Canal

May: Wisconsin statehood

July: Women's rights convention at Seneca Falls, N.Y.

October: Chicago's first locomotive (Pioneer) hauls materials to extend track

