

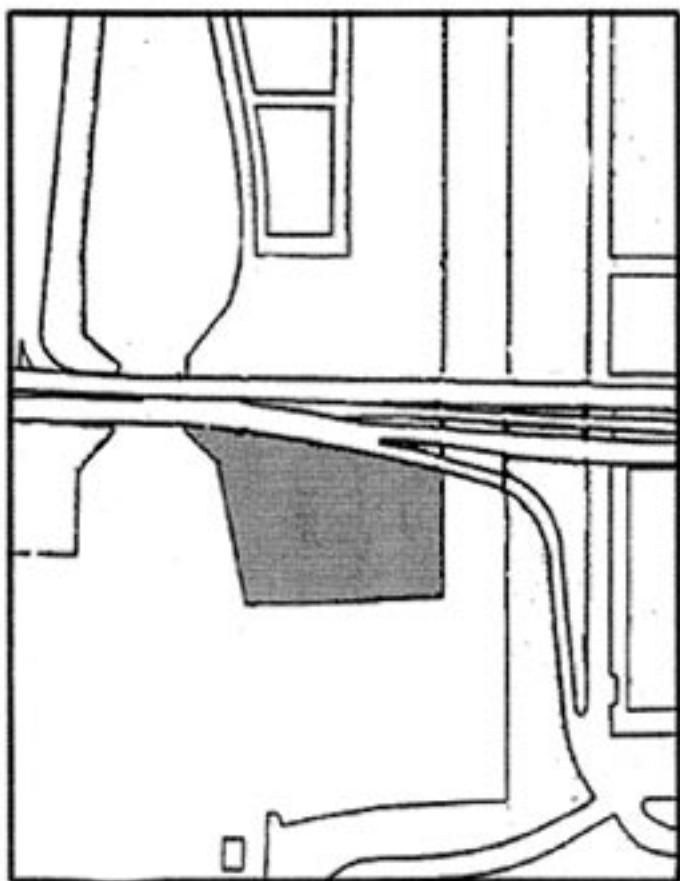
3 ACRES ON THE LAKE



succession

the order or conditions under which one person after another succeeds to a property, dignity, title, or throne

one-directional change in the composition of an ecosystem as the competing organisms (esp the plants) respond to and modify the environment



From the sidewalk bike route on the lower level of Lake Shore Drive just before it crosses the river, you can look over the railing and down on a meadow. The meadow extends into Lake Michigan from underneath the bridge. It is the dead end of a short peninsula dividing the Chicago River from Ogden slip, a quarter-mile inlet for docking boats. The meadow is shaped as a half-hill, its high side backed up to the highway and its slope rolling down towards the water. When you stop at the sidewalk railing, you are close enough to identify the flowers and grasses growing on the back of the meadow-hill (Queen Anne's lace, dogbane, black-eyed susan, goldenrod, sumac, bouncing bet...), and if you throw a stone, to hear it hit (if not for the trucks shifting gears behind you). But you can't get to the meadow, unless you were to lower yourself by rope. The enclosed stairwell down from the bridge operator's office is padlocked. Access inland, where the peninsula attaches to land at McClurg and North Water, is blocked by construction fences surrounding a new condo complex. You can look down on the meadow, or across water at it from the pristine parks to north and south, but you can't get there.

In late summer, the meadow seethes with grasses, weedflowers, yellow butterflies, and brown songbirds that nest in the grasses and light on the low bushes on the crest of the hill. I know of only one other hill in Chicago, and its closely mowed turf is trampled bald by runners and dogs. The meadow seems cut out from somewhere else—somewhere bucolic, slow, and unpressured by finance—an import unplugged from the flows all around it. Cars, boats, bikes, skaters and streams of pedestrians thread through arched underpasses, exits and



on-ramps, linked walk- and waterways, circulating in a lubricated network of multi-levelled recreational opportunities. The meadow, however, is a dead end. Not only an end, but virtually an island; surrounded by water on three sides and on the fourth by the highway's thundering shadow.

I have thought about this meadow's odd abandonment in the midst of downtown while riding by on my bike for at least seven years. Every time I rode past, I thought to, but didn't, swerve off-course, and the continual act of riding over this

untested possibility became a grooved denial, a pleasure-in-reserve. The pleasure wasn't about going there, but about there being somewhere to go; a pleasure delayed and therefore preserved, intact and unpunctured; a symptom of nostalgia. I grew up somewhere else, among hills, and with a meadow in back of our house that we didn't own but that I regularly trespassed on. The meadow was a refuge, and a source of industrious production: every June, it produced quarts of pixel-sized strawberries that we boiled into jam. The Chicago



fantasy is two-pronged: to roll down the hill in late summer under a hot sun, disappearing in the tall grasses, and letting bugs crawl onto my face among hay smells and water sounds; and to harvest those flowers, Queen Anne's lace and golden-rod, to boil into bright yellow dye. The two prongs are in conflict, one would puncture the other—and they are in conflict with the idea of public space. Public access and all that goes with it—safety, maintenance, functional design—would destroy exactly what attracts me to the meadow: its isolation, neglect, and accidental abundance.

At this point you have a choice:

You can follow this digressive narrative, built on fantasy and misinformation, or you can turn to page 13 and read the facts. "Facts" came to focus through a circuitous story—but if you want to skip the story, turn to: Park vs. Parking Lot: Brief History and Current Status of DuSable Park.



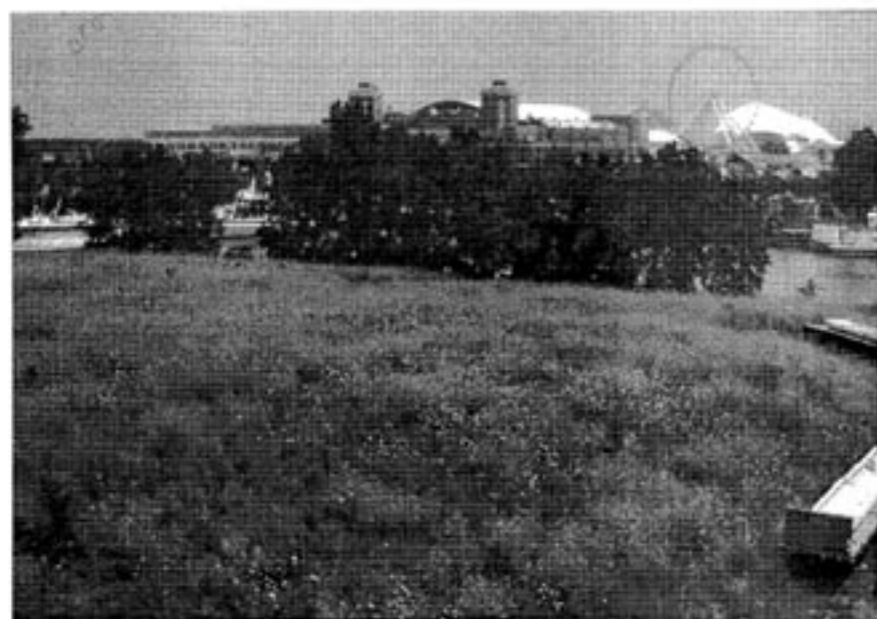
Jean Baptiste Point DuSable (imaginative rendering)
from: A.T. Andreas "History of Chicago from the Earliest Period to the
Present Time" Chicago, 1884

On the bike path, even when you aren't in a hurry to get to work, it's very difficult to stop. Momentum, or inertia, or the design of the paths, or the competitive pull of all the other bikers keeps things moving in a logical direction. This is true for the structure of an efficient working life as well, you get on a course and you follow it. Turning off onto one that is less defined, or that has fences thrown up in front that you have to climb over—this kind of detour requires a shock to provoke. Following can be pleasurable, confirming, even meditative; something has to intrude on the path you are following, strong enough to make you want to swerve off.

This summer I met an architect living in Lake Point Towers, the luxury hi-rise immediately north of the meadow hill. From his perspective on the twentieth floor, drinking cocktails, the meadow flattened into a plane of abstract green, ripe for landscape design. I thought about how our different perspectives led to different conclusions. And I realized with a shock just how visible and vulnerable my meadow was. With all these hi-rise apartments looking down on it, a convergence of attention was most likely swelling up. The next day I visited the Recorder of Deeds in City Hall to find who owned title to the land.

In order to find a title, you need an exact street address. The meadow has no address. The Recorder of Deeds sent me to the 8th floor, to "Maps." The Department of Buildings is also located on the 8th floor just as you get off the elevators. Because of the city's residential building boom (jacking up the cost of remaining rental units), the lobby was frenzied with contractors, architects, and developers wielding calculators and plans. Blueprint tubes were propped against walls and rolling across the floor under the feet of civil servants playing

ping pong. The Maps department, down a long hallway to the left, was strangely empty—a large open space arrayed with about twenty desks piled in papers. Finally a guy arrived from a door somewhere in the back. He seemed exasperated. He told me the person I needed to talk to was Barbara, and he pointed to an empty chair. Barbara never materialized. Eventually the clerk got me a map. The meadow was represented as a blank spot—no signs, numbers, names, nothing, unlike all the other properties around it. The clerk smiled for the first time. He said this is unusual, it appears that no one owns that land. It must be landfill. He chuckled.



This week, someone was evicted two doors down from my building. At noon on a Monday, I returned home to get a phone number and a police car was parked facing the wrong way on our one-way street. Two big men were carrying the last pieces of furniture onto the sidewalk. The rest of a life already sat out there—stacks of LPs, loose clothes, plates, shampoo, rugs, pots, curtains, a broom, framed pictures, belts and

neck ties, a geranium, lamps, quilts, a mattress, winter coats, high-heeled shoes, photographs, waste baskets, magazines, more furniture—a rocking chair, drawers spilling underwear, a glass-topped coffee table. A group of men had gathered across the street, watching. We agreed that something should be done to notify the tenant. The landlord who was standing on the steps overseeing the removal said the tenants were not to be found. A police officer came out carrying a small white dog that he put in the backseat of the squad car. By two o'clock, five or six people were tentatively circling around the stuff; by four there was a frenzied crowd of twenty or thirty moving quickly, and another crowd watching them, and by dark nothing was left of that household but a lone sock, some broken chair legs, and a scattering of glittery aluminum staples.

Our building and that one are the only remaining rental properties on the block. It is the same story in every city: in three years I have watched the rest of the block switch

from rental to condo; and in three months all the remaining community gardens get bulldozed; the lots filled immediately with FMR ("fair market rate" - not "rent") developments.



How do you make something from nothing?

STATS

In Chicago, a worker earning the Minimum Wage (\$5.15 per hour) has to work 118 hours per week in order to afford a two-bedroom unit at the area's Fair Market rent.

In Chicago, Fair Market Rent (FMR) for a two-bedroom unit is \$788.

An extremely low income household (earning 30% of the Area Median Income (AMI) of \$72,263) can afford monthly rent of no more than \$542.

A minimum wage earner (earning \$5.15 per hour) can afford monthly rent of no more than \$268.

An SSI recipient (receiving \$378 monthly) can afford monthly rent of no more than \$113.

40% of renters in Chicago are unable to afford Fair Market Rent for a two-bedroom unit.

The Housing Wage in Chicago is \$15.15. This is the amount a worker would have to earn per hour in order to be able to work 40 hours per week and afford a two-bedroom unit. This is 294% of the present Minimum wage (\$5.15 per hour).

(A unit is considered affordable if it costs no more than 30% of the renter's income.)

released by
the National Low Income Housing Coalition, 2000
<http://www.nlihc.org/>

"I ran past the first watchman. Then I was horrified, ran back again and said to the watchman: 'I ran through here while you were looking the other way.' The watchman gazed ahead of him and said nothing. 'I suppose I really oughtn't to have done it.' I said. The watchman still said nothing 'Does your silence indicate permission to pass?'" (Franz Kafka)

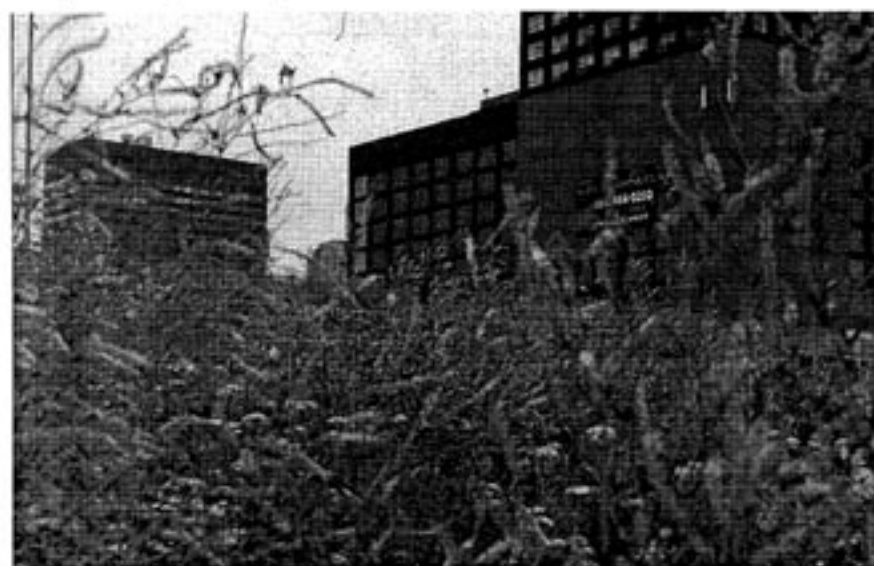
On the way home from City Hall, I rode inland to North Water Street, where Riverview Towers had recently risen from piles of sand. It was noon. The workers had spilled out from the building and collected around the lunch trucks, and all one hundred of them, on break with nothing better to do, turned and looked at me. Instinctively, I braked and reversed, assuming that I wasn't supposed to enter.



The bridge operator's office, which controls the raising and lowering of Lake Shore Drive to accomodate tall ships, is a small concrete room on top of the highway. This is accessed at the level of the bike trail, by an enclosed concrete stairway going up. Another concrete stairway mirrors this one, going down, to the meadow, but that one is padlocked. That noon I watched a worker enter the iron gate by just pulling it open. He turned and gave me a sharp look as he closed it behind him, feigning a click by knocking his steel-toed boot against the metal. I waited a few minutes, then locked my bike to the railing, and followed him down. The interior of the stairway was voraciously graffiti-ed: the word "JUGS", and lots of spiral forms; two guys sat on the bottom steps smoking dope.

The meadow grass was much higher than I thought—about eight feet. It wasn't familiar, a flowering stalk with perpendicular branches, tiny white flowers on all its radiating tips. Sweet-smelling but impenetrable. When I tried to walk into it, its multiple branchings tied slip knots around my legs and arms. After only a few steps I could no longer move forward, but was held in a kind of suspension. I imagined all those condo eyes looking down on me stuck in a thicket. All I could do was back up and de-knot. Someone else had stamped down a sort of path. It didn't lead up the slope where I wanted to go, but quickly down to the rocky bank of the lake, and to a pile of empty beer cans. I found a flattened area, and stood around for a while, not wanting to sit, much less lie down or roll. When I finally removed myself from the branching grass, and climbed back up the concrete stairs, the dope-smokers were gone and the gate had been padlocked from the outside, locking me in.

The creation of "enclosures" starting in England around the 14th century marked a significant step towards the institution of private property. Land that had been open to public use was enclosed within fences, ditches, or hedges for the private use of landlords, for recreation or capital accumulation (agriculture, grazing). Tenants were expelled, and had nowhere to make a home, nor means of feeding themselves, resulting in "hardship, increased vagrancy, and social unrest." If caught trespassing or poaching, they were unreasonably punished (imprisoned, often put to death).



Locked inside the meadow, I felt less like a poacher and more complicit with the private interests responsible for installing locks and gates. After all, I had wanted the meadow to myself—for fantasy purposes, but none-the-less as a kind of private property. Getting what you want is often disappointing and sometimes claustrophobic. The outside becomes the inside; there is no longer a somewhere else. As it turned out, none of the workers paid any attention at all when I walked under the highway and out through the chainlink fence.

PARK (*parc* fr. enclosure)

an enclosed piece of ground stocked with game and held by royal prescription or grant

a tract of land that often includes lawns, wood, and pasture attached to a country house and used as a game preserve and for recreation

a piece of ground in or near a city or town kept for ornament and recreation

an area maintained in its natural state as a public property

an open space, esp. a grassland that is all or partly surrounded by woodland and is suitable for cultivation or grazing

a space occupied by military animals or vehicles

an area designed for a specified commercial or residential use (amusement --, industrial--, mobile home--)

a parking lot

parklike

PARK (*parc* fr. enclosure)

to bring to a stop and keep standing at the edge of a public way

to land and leave

to establish in orbit

to set and leave temporarily (hat on chair)

to place, settle, or establish for a considerable time (tent cities, sit-ins, blockades)

parker

Park vs. Parking Lot: Brief History and Current Status of DuSable Park

While working out-of-state this summer, I received an urgent email from a friend. She told me that a public meeting would be held to discuss the future of DuSable Park, which is the name, though I didn't know it, of the three-acre meadow I had been locked into. The convergence I had imagined was happening in fact. Though unidentified in the Maps Department at City Hall, ownership of the land passed in 1997 from Chicago Dock and Canal Trust to a developer, Don MacLean, who gave it to the Chicago Park District (CPD). It is public land, but you have to trespass to get there. Though plans to build a park have been in the works since the Washington administration dedicated it to DuSable in the late 80s, the Park District claims it doesn't have sufficient funds to go ahead. Estimates for the total cost of infrastructure repair, including water, sewer, electricity and shoring up of the breakwater wall range from \$700,000 to \$4.4 million. Priorities for funding, says CPD, are parks in areas of the city that have no green at all, and the downtown lakefront has plenty. As an intervening measure, and to generate funds for construction, CPD revealed their plans in July 2000 to lease the land to a private developer who would pave it over as a temporary parking lot.

Rant:

What needs could best be served by public land in this city now? Some might say places to raise chickens. Or wild spots intentionally neglected and inaccessible. Or plots of manicured green to look down on. Or low-income housing. Homeless shelters. Community gardens. A year-round urban farm, providing jobs. What ideas might the existence of this land inspire while still in its neglected, undeveloped state, before those powers responsible for the "public trust" usurp and flatten its potential?

After the lighthouse jetty was constructed in the early 1800s, land now east of Michigan Ave. built itself "naturally" as lake currents shifted course. Mayor Ogden, who founded Chicago Dock and Canal Trust, "acquired" 40 acres of previously non-existent land at the mouth of the river in 1857. In 1964, the Trust leased some to developers to build Lake Point Towers (LPT). They sold land south of LPT to another developer, Centex, with an option to build two more towers on what is now DuSable Park. However, Mayor Daley #1 passed the Lake Shore Protection Ordinance in 1972 prohibiting private development east of Lake Shore Drive. Centex sued and won, forcing the city to buy the land, but Chicago Dock and Canal kept DuSable Park, conceding not to build there, so long as they could build what they wanted elsewhere. In the late 80's, the Trust dedicated the land to CPD, and in 1997, when Don MacLean "absorbed" the Trust, he absorbed this obligation.

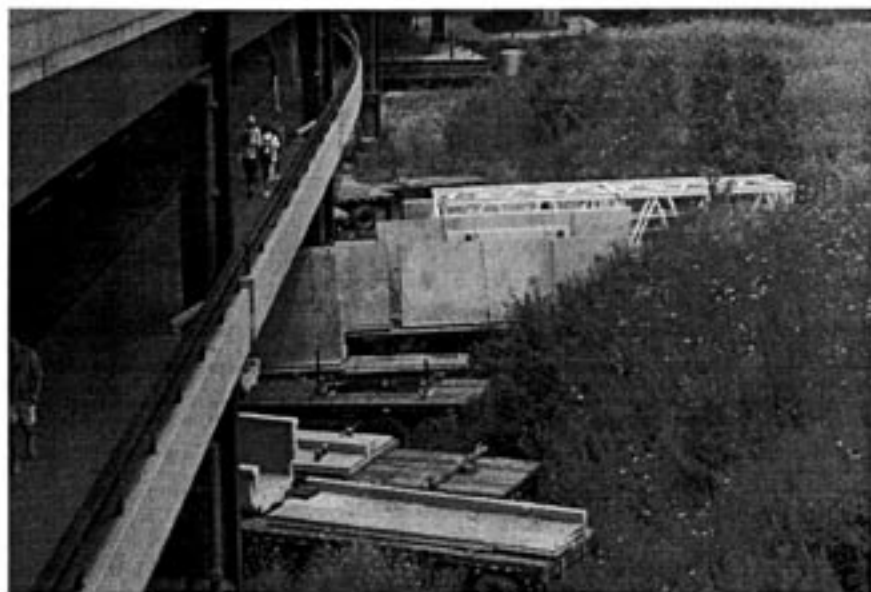
The park vs. parking lot debate drew energetic resistance from downtown residents, many of whom were involved in the Grant Park Advisory Council. GPAC joined with other groups including Friends of DuSable Park and the Sierra Club to hold CPD responsible to the 1972 protection ordinance. CPD claims it could get special dispensation for a lot if it's "temporary." But the downtown locals wielded lots of clout. The parking lot plan was put on indefinite hold, as of September. One intermediate proposal was to "level the mound on Dusable now and seed the flattened land so that we would be looking down at natural grassland..." ("natural"?)





An important player in these discussions is an organization on the South Side called the DuSable League. This group has been fighting since 1928 for a monument officially recognizing Jean Baptiste Point DuSable, the Haitian-French trader who created the first non-native settlement in Chicago. When the meadow was named DuSable Park in the 1980s during the Harold Washington administration (by Michael Scott, then President of the Chicago Park District), the DuSable League decided it would be a good place to erect a statue. They had wanted 401 N. Michigan, because it is closer to DuSable's actual home, but the only marker they have been able to obtain from the city for that site is a small bronze text that some say can be confused with a trash receptacle. The B.F. Ferguson Fund of the Art Institute of Chicago has agreed to commission a sculpture to commemorate DuSable once the park is built. However, they already chose the artist, a well-recognized African American sculptor originally from Chicago named Martin Puryear. Puryear makes non-representational works, using wood, metal, and stone. The DuSable League want an image of DuSable that will be recognizable as a Black man. They didn't put up a basketball to represent Michael Jordan, as one of the League members pointed out to me. The DuSable League see the delays in developing this park as a version of racism continuous with "the unacceptable deletion of history concerning DuSable."

How will people get to this park? The hill, it turns out, consists of dirt excavated from all the other nearby sites owned by Chicago Dock and Canal. It was dumped in such a way in anticipation of an eventual connection with the middle level (bike route) of Lake Shore Drive. But the current plan is to flatten this mound. Planned walkways will provide access from under the drive. Will DuSable become a private park in effect, used primarily by residents of the new Riverview Towers and the townhomes bordering Ogden Slip, in the tradition of enclosures connected to wealthy estates?



I know it is too much to ask to reserve a space in a city frenzied with real estate fevers for the slow privilege of watching weeds grow. I also know that there is nothing inherently natural about neglect. Heavy metals rain down on this peninsular tip from highway traffic. The hill is not a glacial deposit but a mound of debris. And the plants, having entered by grassroots opportunism through a temporary window in a mysteriously delayed development agenda, have followed their own system of ecological succession on the model of development.



Call for proposals

DuSable Park sits between the mouth of the Chicago River and Ogden Slip. Owned by the Chicago Park District, this land will eventually be developed as a park honoring Jean Baptiste Point DuSable. In the meantime...

DuSable Park Proposal Project

is collecting visionary ideas for how this public land might be used. We are looking for proposals that express the diversity of interests, backgrounds, philosophies, creativity, and concerns of Chicago residents. This project is intended to provide a forum for the ideas and opinions of those who are rarely asked about the use of public land.

For more information:

www.artic.edu/~apalme

apalme@artic.edu

Or send proposals directly to:

DuSable Park Proposal Project

P.O. Box 6137, Chicago, IL 60680