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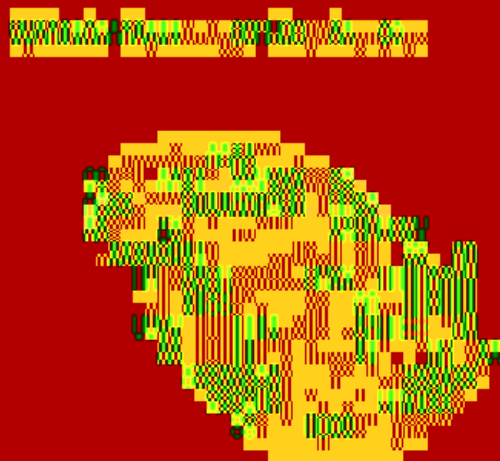






# THE ILLINOIS, JOIS AND MICHIGAN CANAL

*A Study in  
Economic History*



CHICAGO  
HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
1911







have been. The officials and attendants at the several libraries were uniformly courteous and obliging as were also those at the canal office. The transportation men and shippers likewise rendered substantial aid in the acquisition of facts which would otherwise have been inaccessible. But these acknowledgments would not be complete without mention of the helpful suggestions of Professor Richard T. Ely during the progress of the work and of the reading and criticism of the manuscript by my friend and former colleague, Professor Murray Shipley Wildman. Miss Caroline M. McIlvaine of the Chicago Historical Society rendered invaluable assistance during the investigation and while the volume was passing through the press.

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This map shows the ancient outlet of "Lake Chicago," the course followed by the Illinois [river](#)  Michigan Canal, to be the most feasible route between the Great Lakes and the great river systems.

























lands; secondly, the donation to the state of the sections of public lands through which the canal would pass; and, thirdly, the diversion of the two per cent road fund reserved from the proceeds of the sale of public lands in the state, to the financing of the canal construction.<sup>1</sup>

At the meeting of the first session of the Seventeenth Congress, Daniel P. Cook in the House of Representatives and Jesse B. Thomas in the Senate, took up the task of securing the compliance of Congress with the request of the General Assembly of Illinois.<sup>2</sup> Their earnest and persistent efforts resulted in the grant of authority asked, but not in the financial assistance desired. The act of March 30, 1822, restricted the land grant to the strip on which the canal should stand and ninety feet on each side of it, reserved from sale the sections of public land through which the canal would pass, and authorized the state to use in the construction of the canal any materials on the adjacent public lands.<sup>3</sup>

Thus authorized to construct a canal through the public domain, but with the financial problem still unsolved, the General Assembly of Illinois, by the Act of February 14, 1823, appointed a board of commissioners to determine upon the most available route for the canal and to estimate

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<sup>1</sup> *Illinois Senate Journal*, 2d General Assembly, pp. 103, 106.

<sup>2</sup> *Annals of Congress*, 17th Cong., 1st Sess., I, pp. 32, 153, 160, 194, 309, 311, 525-526, 709; II, pp. 1324, 1349.

<sup>3</sup> *United States Statutes at Large*, III, pp. 659-660.











































































































































































































































Shipping crowded at the mouth of the Chicago River by the flood in the Des Plaines March 12, 1849. This is probably the earliest camera view of the river in existence, the original being a daguerrotype by [John C. Smith](#).

[View original image.](#)















In the end, the railroad secured most of this traffic also, but only after its service and its charges had been greatly affected by the struggle. Both by its traffic and by the effect of its actual or potential competition on railroad rates, the canal has continued to influence the development of the region in which it is located though with diminishing effect. Naturally the high class freights were the first to seek the more rapid means of transportation. Lumber, grain, coal and stone continued to be transported on the canal in large quantities for several years after the higher class freight had chiefly gone to the railroad. For the commercial year, from April 1, 1866, to March 31, 1867, 33-929,632 bushels of corn were received at Chicago, of which 9,575,569 bushels were carried on the canal and 4,279,190 bushels on the Chicago and Rock Island Railroad.<sup>1</sup> Of the 10,713,981 bushels of oats received during the same period, 1,417,436 bushels came by the canal and 982,761 bushels by the competing railroad.<sup>2</sup> This, in spite of the fact that the railroad operated 407 miles of line and

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<sup>1</sup>Wright, *Chicago*, p. 154.

<sup>2</sup>The railroad carried 1,420,163 bushels of wheat and 179,316 barrels of flour as against 83,834 bushels of wheat and 45,317 barrels of flour carried by the canal. It should be remembered, however, that at this time the railroad was completed and open for traffic, almost to Des Moines, Iowa, and drew much of its grain traffic from non-competitive territory. There are no statistics which show what proportion of the wheat and flour produced in the canal region was carried by each of the competitors.

































its projection and construction. But the great services of the canal have been in the economic development of the middle West, particularly of the northern part of Illinois, and in its influence on railroad rates. For the performance of these services the canal has been worth all it has cost the state.





























































and the ocean commerce. To this series of efforts, the federal government, the state of Illinois, the municipality of Chicago, and the Chicago Sanitary District have contributed in a financial way. The interests of trade, of sanitation, of industrial development, and, perhaps of ambition, have furnished the incentive and the stimulus. The completion of the project of a deep waterway from the Lakes to the Gulf, adapted to the standards of the twentieth century, rests, at present, with the federal government. Despite the conflict over the project there is little doubt that the state of Illinois would readily develop the waterway down to Utica on as large a scale as the federal government would carry it on to the Gulf. Part of the indifference, if not of the active opposition, to the fourteen foot channel is due to a belief that its effects would be neutralized by the shallower channel below. There can be no doubt of the ultimate enlargement of the waterway at least down to Utica, but whether that enlargement shall take the form of the fourteen foot channel or one of less proportions only future developments can determine.













## APPENDICES

























































































































