

*The* GOLD COAST  
AND THE SLUM

A SOCIOLOGICAL STUDY *of* CHICAGO'S  
NEAR NORTH SIDE

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WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY  
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cars in the evening are filled with pictures of the inhabitants of the Gold Coast, and with accounts of their comings and goings. It all enlists the imagination. Consequently the people from "back west" enormously idealize the Gold Coast's life. They imitate its styles and manners. The imagination of the shop girl, of the immigrant, of the hobo plays with these externals of its life. In the movie they see realistic pictures of "high society." These they take to be the inner, intimate life of which they see the externals along the Lake Shore Drive. As a result the social distance from Death Corner to the Drake Hotel is no less than the distance from the Casino Club to Bughouse Square.

The isolation of the populations crowded together within these few hundred blocks, the superficiality and externality of their contacts, the social distances that separate them, their absorption in the affairs of their own little worlds—these, and not mere size and numbers, constitute the social problem of the inner city. The community, represented by the town or peasant village where everyone knows everyone else clear down to the ground, is gone. Over large areas of the city "community" is little more than a geographical expression. Yet the old tradition of control persists despite changed conditions of life. The inevitable result is cultural disorganization.

## CHAPTER II

### AN AREA IN TRANSITION

This teeming, shifting area, with its striking high-lights and deep shadows—the Near North Side of today—is to be understood only in its past relation to the growth of the greater city. Its early history, consecutive movements of population, the encroachment of commerce and industry as the city crossed the river and sprawled northward, have all left their impress and have contributed to the establishment of these social distances within this "community" in the inner city.

Within the memory of men still living on the North Side, Indians camped along the river where now great factories smoke and thousands of vehicles clamor at the bridges. Indeed, it is only a little over a hundred years ago, as tradition has it, since a black man from San Domingo, bearing the ornate name of Jean Baptiste Point de Saible, built the first log cabin of what was to be early Chicago, on the north bank of the river, at a spot long marked by the abutments of the old Rush street bridge. This cabin was later acquired by John Kinzie, the first American and the first real settler, who brought his family on in 1804. Kinzie's cabin became the center of a little settlement near the stockade of the long-vanished Fort Dearborn.

After the War of 1812 a village grew up between the northern and southern branches of the river and the lake. With the dredging of the harbor, in 1833, the village became a town. Wharves were built along both banks of the river. Chicago's first packing house was built at this time. Im-

migrants from the East came crowding in, and by 1837, the year in which Chicago was incorporated as a city, it had become a community of several thousand, and had pushed northward to North Avenue and Lincoln Park. It was expected that Kinzie Street would be *the* business street of the new city, and Chicago's first railroad, the Galena & Chicago Union Railroad, was brought down the center of Kinzie Street in 1847. The lumber business was then locating along the river, and things were in a state of boom.

But Chicago was still a frontier town. In 1845 there were but 5,000 persons between Chicago and the Pacific.

On the northwest corner of Michigan Avenue and Lake Street was a very large, vacant field, which was usually filled with camping parties; whole communities migrating from the East to the West. It was a common sight to see a long line of prairie-schooners drive into this field, with cows tied behind the wagons. There they would unload for the night. There was always mystery and charm about their evening campfires. . . .

The greatest excitement was the arrival of the weekly boat from Buffalo. . . . These boats brought many supplies, and our only news from the outside world. In those days the great West Side, as we know it now, did not exist; and even the North Side seemed like a separate town because there were only one or two bridges connecting the two sides of the town. . . .<sup>1</sup>

THE SIXTIES

In the decade and a half previous to the Civil War the city grew rapidly, and by 1860 there were 29,922 persons living north of the river. During the years between 1850 and 1860 nearly half of Chicago's increase in population was by foreign immigration; as it was, also, between 1860 and 1870. And while previous to 1860 the population of the North Side was mainly native American, the first statistics avail-

<sup>1</sup> C. Kirkland, *Chicago Yesterdays*, pp. 42-43.

able on the national composition of Chicago's population by wards, those for 1866, show that there were then a considerable number of Irish and Germans living in the North Division.<sup>1</sup> The Irish, the first of five waves of immigration that were to sweep over the Near North Side, began coming in during the late fifties, a part of the great immigration from Ireland in 1848; and the Germans began coming in soon after the Irish.

The commercial importance of the North Branch continued to grow. The tanning and meat-packing industries were locating along it; the lumber business was rapidly increasing; warehouses were building; and in 1857 Chicago's first iron industry, the North Chicago Rolling Mills, located on its banks. Later, as railroads came into the city, a number of machine shops were built on Clark, Wells, State, Erie, Kinzie, and Division streets, and on Chicago and North avenues, thus binding the North Side more closely to the activities of the city as a whole.<sup>2</sup> And between 1859 and 1864 horse-drawn trams began to run out Clark, Wells, and Larrabee streets, and across Chicago Avenue and Division

<sup>1</sup> See *Smoke Abatement and Electrification of Railway Terminals in Chicago* (Report of the Chicago Association of Commerce Commissioners, Chicago, 1913); and *Chicago: Historical and Statistical Sketch of the Garden City* (Chicago, 1868), p. 16, according to which the composition of the population of the North Division was, in 1866:

Ward	American	German	Irish	Swedish	Other Nation- alities
14	6,107	6,568	831	208	271
15	10,011	4,222	2,084	1,020	1,200
16	9,004	2,281	2,052	916	1,964
Total	25,107	13,073	6,467	3,134	3,435

<sup>2</sup> Andreas, *History of Chicago*, II, 60-61.

Street. Meanwhile some little retail business was springing up on the streets near the river.

The tendency to the segregation of population on the basis of race, nationality, and economic status, which is an inevitable accompaniment of the growth of the city, was becoming evident at this early date. The more well-to-do and fashionable native element, and the Irish and German immigrant elements, as well as the laboring population and a small element of riff-raff and transients, were beginning to live in groups to themselves and to characterize certain streets and sections of the North Side.

The Near North Side has always been a more or less fashionable residence district, though it was not until 1900 that the Lake Shore Drive became *the* place to live. In the sixties the fashionable and aristocratic residence section of Chicago on the North Side was in the district from Chicago Avenue south to Michigan Street, and from Clark Street east to Cass Street. Residences on Ohio, Ontario, Erie, Superior, Rush, Cass, Pine, Dearborn, and North State streets appear frequently in the "society column" of the sixties. It was on these streets that the leading families of the early settlers and the early aristocracy lived. And they, with South Michigan Avenue, were the "modish" streets of the day. One of this early aristocracy writes:

The North Side was "home," and a lovely, homelike place it was. The large grounds and beautiful shade-trees about so many residences gave a sense of space, rest, flowers, sunshine and shadows, that hardly belongs nowadays to the idea of a city. There was great friendliness, and much simple, charming living.

Over between Clark, Illinois, Dearborn, and Indiana streets stood the old North Side Market, where the men of the families often took

*Ibid.*, II, 119-21.

their market-baskets in the morning, while the "virtuous woman" stayed at home "and looked well to the ways of her household."

Another institution of our day was the custom of sitting on the front steps, though even then there were those who rather scorned that democratic meeting place. But for those of us who did not rejoice in porches and large grounds, they had their joys. . . . In fact, it was even possible for unconventional people like ourselves to carry out chairs and sit on the board platforms built across the ditches that ran along each side of the street, and on which carriages drove up to the sidewalks.

Of course there were "high teas," when our mothers and fathers were regaled with "pound to a pound" preserves, chicken salad, escalloped oysters, pound-cake, fruit-cake, and all other cakes known to womankind; and where they played old-fashioned whist and chess. . . . Parties usually began about half-past seven or eight o'clock, and "the ball broke" generally about eleven or twelve o'clock; where there was no dancing it ended at ten or eleven o'clock.

Of course there was no "organized charity," as we know it nowadays, but there was much of that now despised "basket charity," when friendships were formed between rich and poor.\*

Between Clark Street and Wells Street, south of Chicago Avenue, was a neighborhood of storekeepers and merchants; while west of Wells lived the laboring people. In this area there were a number of laborers' boarding-houses and cheap saloons. At this time there was nothing but a sandy waste between Cass Street and the lake.† And there was an unsavory population on the sand flats at the mouth of the river and immediately along its banks, known as "Shantytown," and ruled over by the "Queen of the Sands." A memorable event of the decade was the raid on the "Sands" led by "Long John" Wentworth, then mayor, when the

\* C. Kirland, *Chicago Yesterdays*, pp. 122, 124, 139, 140-41, 60-61.

† Document 1, interview with Robert Fergus, editor of the "Fergus Historical Series."

police razed its brothels amid the mingled cheers and hisses of the populace.<sup>1</sup>

The Irish had settled along the river, to the south and west. The settlement extended as far east as State, immediately along the river, but the most of the Irish lived between Kinzie and Erie, in the vicinity of old Market Street. This river settlement along the North Branch was known as "Kilgubbin," or oftener, perhaps, as "the Patch", and any woman who seemed a little loud was at once put down as "comin' from the Patch." The Irish were then mostly laborers, not having been in America long enough to have exploited their flare for politics. They were already displaying their love of a fight, however, and a solidly Irish regiment was recruited from Kilgubbin during the Civil War.<sup>2</sup>

Kilgubbin was in reality a squatters' village, and contained within it a lawless element. In an article printed in the *Chicago Times*, in August, 1865, some account is given of Kilgubbin and its population:

At the head of the list of the squatter villages of Chicago stands "Kilgubbin," the largest settlement within its limits. It has a varied history, having been the terror of constables, sheriffs and policemen. . . . It numbered several years ago many thousand inhabitants, of all ages and habits, besides large droves of geese, goslings, pigs, and rats. It was a safe retreat for criminals, policemen not venturing to invade its precincts, or even cross the border, without having a strong reserve force.<sup>3</sup>

The Germans, on the other hand, were truck gardeners rather than laborers. Very few went into business, though there were three breweries owned by Germans where the

<sup>1</sup> H. C. Chatfield-Taylor, *Chicago*, p. 103.

<sup>2</sup> Document I.

<sup>3</sup> Quoted by J. S. Currey, *Chicago: Its History and Its Builders*, p. 177.

pumping station now stands. But the majority of the Germans lived north of Chicago Avenue and east of Clark Street, in cottages on small farms or gardens, and did truck farming. There were German families scattered along Clark, La Salle, and Wells streets, however. And the German element for a time found the center of its social activities in the vicinity of the German Theater, at the corner of Wells and Indiana streets. This theater, supported by a German musical society, offered "the first purely musical entertainment ever presented in Chicago," and for years continued to present dramatic sketches in the German language.

The city limits extended at this time, 1860-70, to North Avenue. But until after the fire the area north of Division Street, and even north of Chicago Avenue to the west, was practically "country."

#### FROM FIRE TO FAIR

The great conflagration of 1871, which marked a crisis in the history of the city, completely wiped out the North Side. Shortly before the fire the iron and packing industries had begun to remove from the North Branch south and west to the outskirts of the city. The other industries were destroyed by the fire. Of the total area burned, by far the greater portion lay north of the river; and the district immediately along its banks suffered the greatest loss, the great lumber yards serving to accelerate the spread of the fire. The residential areas suffered as severely as did the river district. Most of the residences and many of the business structures were of wood, and were reduced to ashes. Indeed, only two dwellings were saved: the home of Mahlon F. Ogen, and the house of an Irish policeman whose cider

barrels provided a fire extinguisher. The water tower is the only monument of the fire today. Because of the conflagration the only "sights" connected with early Chicago are the sites—all the rest has been obliterated. And in 1871 the entire North Side lay in heaps of smoldering ash, or blackened Gothic-like ruins, church after church standing gutted and grim.

The first reconstruction took place in the center of the city, and all efforts were bended toward rebuilding the business district. "For over a year after the fire, the North Side gave no evidence of recuperation; but the building 'boom' finally crossed the river, and business blocks took the place of vacant lots along North Clark Street, and fine residences began to spring up on La Salle, Dearborn, and cross streets." Indeed, when rebuilding did start on the North Side it progressed rapidly. There was a great growth in business, and by 1881 business property was worth five hundred to six hundred dollars a front foot. Old hotels, theaters, and schools were rebuilt, as well as new ones built. And the old wooden residences were replaced by more substantial and pretentious ones of brick and stone.

In 1871 the population of the North Division was 77,758 and its area 2,533 acres. By 1884, when we find the next statistics on the national composition of the population by wards, the population of the North Division had increased to 128,490.<sup>2</sup> The German element had by this time greatly increased; there continued to be a fair proportion of the Irish; and the Swedish, who had begun to come in just previous to the fire, had become a considerable factor in the

<sup>1</sup> Andreas, *History of Chicago*, III, 448.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 702. *Chicago Daily News Almanac and Yearbook* (1920), p. 918.

life of the Near North Side.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, the Germans were the dominant nationality in the Eighteenth Ward; while the Swedish were the largest national group in the Seventeenth Ward, where the Irish were a close second. The southern European groups had not yet begun to come into the city in any considerable numbers, and there were few on the Near North Side. Yet the North Side had begun to share with the city as a whole a quite cosmopolitan character.

Industries continued to multiply along the river. By 1884 the North Branch was already being invaded by the retail trade. At that time there were about five hundred steamers and sailing vessels employed in the lumber traffic in Chicago, a large number of them plying the waters of the North Branch. Shortly before the Fair there was an incoming of light industries along the river, and the Northwestern Railroad laid its tracks along the North Branch. Because of the smoke from the railroad and factories the region in the vicinity of the river was known as Smoky Hollow, and already was becoming the barrier that was to play an important part in the history of the Near North Side. Meantime, additional street railroad lines had been built along State, Division, and Wells. Lower Wells, Clark, and State in 1884:

<sup>1</sup> The national composition of the population of the North Division was,

	*Ward 16	Ward 17	Ward 18
American	4,082	1,092	11,823
Danish	407	672	7,536
German	21,808	6,035	4,184
Irish	1,007	8,582	4,184
Italian	54	481	222
Norwegian	34	10,712	1,237
Swedish	1,017	2,112	1,788
Other nationalities	1,009		

\* From the *Special Census of the City of Chicago, 1884*. Wards 16, 17, and 18 then comprised the area which in 1920 comprised the southern half of Wards 21 and 22.

streets, and transfer points, were showing a considerable growth in business.

By the time of the eighties the groups that characterized various areas on the Near North Side had become more clearly defined than they had been in the sixties. For a decade and more after the fire, Lower Michigan Avenue, Prairie Avenue, and Ashland Avenue shared with the North Side the character of fashionable residential districts. But the area along the lake shore between the Virginia Hotel and Lincoln Park was already becoming the center of the city's social life. La Salle Street and North Dearborn Parkway were preferred streets in the eighties. A few residences were being built on Pine Street, now North Michigan Avenue, and many on North State Street. What is now the Lake Shore Drive, however, was still a barren, wind-swept waste.

In the late eighties the Near North Side began to be characterized, too, by what were at the time beautiful and fashionable family hotels. We read in a contemporary guide to the sights of Chicago: "The residence part of the city, particularly on the North and South sides, is thickly dotted with first-class family hotels. . . . The two most magnificent are the Virginia, 78 Rush Street, and the Metropole, at Michigan Avenue and Twenty-third Street. These two houses cannot be surpassed for style and elegance, and are patronized exclusively by people of means."<sup>1</sup> The Revere and the Clarendon were also popular as family hotels on the North Side. The Revere was "the largest, finest, and best equipped hotel in the North Division," and the Clarendon "the permanent home of a number of prominent families."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Chicago by Day and by Night*, p. 33.

<sup>2</sup> Andreas, *History of Chicago*, III, 359-60.

The Regis, and a little later the Walton, the Newberry, and the Plaza were other "family hotels" the names of whose guests appeared in the *Blue Book of the Day*.<sup>1</sup>

The social life of the eighties remained simple, as compared with that of today. But already there were making their appearance trends which were prophetic of a new social world:

About this time there crept in a hitherto unknown factor in interior furnishings—a terrible something called "art." The Centennial Exposition at Philadelphia, in 1876, gave this a fatal impetus. "East-lake," with its abnized, flimsy furniture, its fragile gilt chairs, became the fad. A little later William Morris darkened and blighted our homes by inspiring brown and green wall-papers, adorned with geometric figures, and put on, in fearsome, longitudinal sections called dados, picture-screens and friezes. Also there were diseased moments in the search for the new and original when gilt milking-tools and chopping-bowls adorned drawing-rooms; when bunches of dried cat-tails stood in up-ended sewer-tappings in the most elegant houses; when chair-legs were gartered with big ribbon bows; when cheese-cloth was considered chic stuff for drawing-room curtains; when not to have a spinning-wheel by the fire-place was to proclaim yourself a *partennu*.

At the same time, however, society was really taking form and shape. Ladies' luncheons and formal dinner parties (at which the hour was set as late as seven o'clock) became popular forms of entertainment. The "hired girl" became the "maid." She was induced to wear long white aprons, white collars and cuffs, and to permit a filled cap to be perched upon her head. A few people even had butlers, though I think these were usually drawn from the colored race. I remember however, that Mrs. W. W. K. Nixon, then living at No. 156 Rush Street, had a white butler, one Edward, who was the pride of the neighborhood.<sup>2</sup>

The moral distance between today and yesterday may be judged from the remark of a society matron of the eighties, who, when asked whether she was going to see

<sup>1</sup> Document 1, Interview with Robert Ferguson.

<sup>2</sup> C. Kirkland, *Chicago Yesterday*, pp. 258-59.



Bernhardt, replied, "I do not consider that anyone who would go to see Bernhardt play would be a fit guest at my dinner table!" And by the shocked indignation of certain sanctimonious citizens at the sight of the "fast young men" of the day driving trotting horses with flowing manes along the shady streets to "sulkies" and "sidebat" buggies.

The vicinity of North Clark Street, even in the late eighties and early nineties, was declining as a residential district and was becoming the region of bright lights and night life which was later to earn it the sobriquet of the "Little White Way." The Clark Street Theater and the Windsor Theater affected a sensational type of play, specimens of the wild and woolly border drama being usually presented for the edification of their mercurial patrons.<sup>1</sup> And along the street were numerous saloons, dance and music halls, dime museums, and the like.

One of the famous resorts of the day, on the west side of Clark Street, a few doors north of Division, was Engel's Music Hall Café.

Enter Engel's at any time between eight and nine in the evening, after having paid the modest admission fee of ten cents, and you will find the large hall, with its imposing array of polished tables and rows of seats, rather sparsely filled. By ten o'clock, however, there is a perceptible increase in the attendance, and the white-aproned waiters are kept busy hurrying to and fro.

The curtain rises and a pert soubrette with a very gaudy complexion and abbreviated skirts trips to the footlights and sings a song of true love, or something equally interesting. Meanwhile more drinks are ordered by everybody, and general hilarity prevails.

The last hour is usually devoted to an opera in one act, a burlesque of the follies of the day, or anything else that will give an opportunity for the singing of "catchy" songs, the execution of intricate dances, and, above and beyond all, the lavish display of feminine charms.

<sup>1</sup> *Chicago by Day and by Night*, pp. 39-40.

It is a pleasant custom of the place for young men of means, possessed of more money than sense, to purchase bouquets, which are carried up and down aisles on trays by attractive flower-girls, and cast the same upon the stage at their especial favorites. When a more than usually attractive damsel sings an unusually taking song, the boards upon which she treads are often fairly deluged with flowers, and the degree of grace with which she stoops to pick them up enhances in just that ratio the warmth of the applause.

Another feature of Engel's, and many find it an agreeable one, is the stage boxes. These boxes are located above the stage and behind the curtain, being arranged in such a way that persons seated therein may view all that is going on forward on the stage itself and still remain invisible to the audience. With prominent citizens, or other people who like to keep their attendance at the music hall a secret, this is an advantage not to be denied.

And the after-the-show revels in the café, to the tune of the gay if shrill laughter of "Papa" Engel's coryphées and the popping of corks of champagne bottles, were the talk of the town.

North Clark Street had its more exclusive entertainments. "The halls along North Clark Street, notably North Side Turner Hall, advertise masquerades and plain dances the year around, some of which are very select. The finest masquerades of all, however, are given at the Germania Club, on North Clark Street, near Division. Admission is solely by invitation, and one must possess an acquaintance with some member of the club in order to secure entrance, and even then it is very difficult."

The district from Wells to the river was already assuming the character of the slum. And it was into a slum area that

<sup>1</sup> *Chicago by Day and by Night*, p. 55. The saloon which until a few years ago occupied the southwest corner of Clark and Division streets was a favorite dropping-off place, of nights, of homeward bound "Gold Coasters," and was known on the Gold Coast as "the North Side branch of the Chicago Club."

the Swedes, the third great foreign group to sweep over the Near North Side, had come. The first Swedish immigrants to Chicago had come in 1846. The Swedish immigrants were exceedingly poor. In 1855 Swedish and Norwegian paupers cost the city \$6,000, and over one hundred of them were buried at public expense. The Swedes settled first in the area bounded by Indiana, Erie, Orleans, and the river. This district was locally known on the North Side as Swede Town. Later they moved northward along the north and south streets west of Wells—principally along Market, Sedgwick, Townsend, Bremer, and Wesson streets—mingling with the Irish. Chicago Avenue became the "Swede Broadway." The Swedish colony was hard hit by the fire. Of the 50,000 destitute, 10,000 were Swedish. But the Swedish district soon rebuilt, expanding northward as it did so. In the eighties there were over a hundred Swedish lodges, benevolent societies, singing societies, theaters, and similar organizations in Chicago. There were also eight large Swedish daily or weekly papers. Most of these were located in or near the North Side colony, which contained three-quarters of the city's total Swedish population.<sup>1</sup>

The district west along the river continued to be an Irish settlement. The fire had practically wiped out the original Irish settlement. As the houses were largely uninsured, and the new fire regulations called for more expensive structures, many of the Irish were unable to rebuild in the old district, and moved north of Chicago Avenue into "Forty Acres," then a prairie without streets, in the vicinity of the old "Gas House," and built cheap two- and three-room shacks, spreading along the river to North Avenue. The main body of the Irish still lived below Chicago Avenue,

<sup>1</sup> F. W. Alison, *History of the Swedes in Illinois*, I, 301-11.

however, and the area bounded by Wells and the river was largely Irish despite a large admixture of Swedish. The name "Kilgubbin" had passed, to be replaced by that of "Little Hell."

The Irish were the dominant political power in the old Seventeenth Ward, as they were indeed in the entire North Side, and elections were exciting affairs. Little Hell was the scene of a battle every election day, and more than one of these battles ended fatally for some unfortunate politician or gangster. The following story from the *Chicago Tribune*, on the occasion of the death of "Sinator Moike," gives a picturesque sketch of the politics of the day:

Mike gravitated naturally into politics the hour he shifted short "pants" for long ones; and he was busy with politics, more or less, until the day he died. What Mike did not know about the ins and outs of ward politics in the days of rough and tumble work in the old Seventeenth Ward, the bosses of which fathered the activities of the notorious "Market Street Gang," could not be taught.

If ever a man had intimate association with the wild and woolly crew of ward heelers of the old school, it was "th' Sinator." It was his great glory to get into a muss with an east wind Democrat, and in those days, when the town was wide open, Democrats in the ward were as clouds of locusts, compared with the Republican handful. He had a masterful bunch to fight, and when the opposing gangs came together a Donnybrook fair was a crossroads prayer-meeting compared with it.

Old Market Street and other thoroughfares, parallel and crosswise, had many saloons, and each saloon had its water trough in front; when bands of political opponents clashed or luckless voters did not cast their pasted ballots right, these troughs were filled with the offenders, or such of them as were not beaten up, to show them the error of their ways.

Then there was great glorification in the district, which included a section of the city stretching from Davidson's stone-yard at the river and Market Street—now Orleans—to Goose Island, that delightful tract known as "Little Hell" in the good old days of no gas, no

water, no police, and the king of which was a take and dare old hand buccaneer named Jimmy O'Neil, whose habit it was to trail his coat behind him and invite the denizens of the place to tread on it.

By the time of the Fair, Chicago was a large and a metropolitan city, with a population of 1,099,850.

The far North Side, the far South Side, and the "great West Side" were beginning to take shape. Already the Near North Side was becoming an area of the inner city; and in 1886 occurred the last of these romantic episodes in the history of the North Side which are more of the frontier than of the city. On a July afternoon, in a terrific storm on Lake Michigan, a little craft was driven ashore a short distance north of the Chicago River. And when the storm died down, the captain of the vessel, George Wellington Streeter, waded ashore and claimed the lake front by right of discovery. Streeter called his claimed land the "District of Lake Michigan," had it formally organized, with legal ceremony, and sold lots in it to such hardy characters as were willing to gamble on so dubious a title. Through years of litigation, dragging into this twentieth century, Captain Streeter defended his squatter sovereignty with a true rifle. "For several years, for the guerilla warfare was lengthy, the doctors were busy picking shot out of men engaged in the Streeter War." At last Streeter killed a man, and was sentenced to the penitentiary. The war was over. The city engulfed the last squatter domain, and Streeterville became a district of fashionable apartments. The Near North Side, with the greater city, had reached maturity.

#### THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

The late nineties and the early nineteen hundreds witnessed several movements that were greatly to alter the

Near North Side, to alter both its physical appearance and the nature of its social life. These movements were the expansion of business and industry across the river and up the streets of the Near North Side; the coming of the immigrant from Southern and Eastern Europe; the deterioration of the old residential area and the incoming of a transient population, accompanied by various pathological social phenomena; and the development of the fashionable shopping, apartment, and residential district along North Michigan Avenue and the Lake Shore Drive.

From the rebuilding of the North Side after the fire until the late nineties the Near North Side came increasingly to be considered as a desirable residential area. But we have already noted the incoming of industry, beginning just before the Fair, which gave the southwest portion of the Near North Side the name "Smoky Hollow." The wholesale and terminal business along the river and the streets immediately north also grew rapidly. Its extent is attested by the fact that "the seven east-and-west streets immediately north and south of the Rush Street bridge carried 38 per cent more traffic across Michigan Avenue, to and from the railway freight terminals on the lake-front and the warehouses on the west point, than enters London at its seven principal points of entrance"; and that "Rush Street bridge was one of the most crowded in the world," carrying "16 per cent more traffic than London Bridge."

This growth of industry along the river, and the flow of east-and-west traffic involved in the terminal business, plus the fact of inadequate transportation served as a great barrier which for years influenced the nature of the growth

<sup>1</sup> Chicago: *The Great Central Market*, p. 148.

of the Near North Side.<sup>1</sup> It slowed the march of the central business district, allowing the Gold Coast to become firmly entrenched along the lake, limiting the commercial development of the central streets of the Near North Side to business of a local nature, and isolating the slum district along the river, allowing it to stagnate for years.

Into this slum district along the river, and in the vicinity of this industrial area, which had been first Irish and then Swedish, had been known as Kilgubbin, as Little Hell, and lastly as Smoky Hollow, began to come, in the late nineties, the Italian—the Italian from the southern island of Sicily. He came in small numbers at first. But with the opening years of the twentieth century came a Sicilian wave, part of the great Italian immigration of 1903-4, and the Sicilian began to take possession of the Irish and Swedish community between Sedgwick Street and the industrial belt along the river. This wave reached its crest about 1906.

While the Irish and Swedish had gotten on well as neighbors, neither could or would live peaceably with the Sicilian. There was considerable friction, especially among the children of the two races. The play parks were the scenes of many a "battle" when the Irish boys would attempt to run out the Italian, and alley garbage cans were stripped of their covers which served as shields in these encounters. As the Italians continued to penetrate the neighborhood, how-

<sup>1</sup>The Michigan Boulevard link bridge was not erected until 1918, and it was only shortly before that the Franklin-Orleans bridge was built. "The Rush Street bridge carried 77 per cent of all the commercial vehicles entering the Loop district from the North side of the city. The four other bridges—the farthest being only four blocks distant—carried the remainder. This enormous traffic, aggravated in summer by the opening of the bridges to pass deep-draft lake vessels, supplemented by the heavy cross traffic caused a confusion that beggared description" (*Chicago: The Great Central Market*, p. 148).

ever, by the very force of their numbers, the Swedish and Irish, many of them of the second generation and fairly prosperous, began to move away. The Swedish moved slowly north, until they now center about Belmont Avenue and along North Clark Street to Diversey; and the Irish moved first to the vicinity of Webster, and then, as the Italians followed, they went along Center to Devon, and are now scattered about Sheffield, Edgewater, and Rogers Park; so that today the few Swedish and Irish who remain on the Near North Side are those who were too poor to take part in this exodus, or who have clung to their old homes for sentimental reasons. The southern European immigration has engulfed the west district, turning it into a strangely hybrid bit of America and Sicily, and is now pushing north into the German district along North Avenue.

Meantime business was slowly moving out the central streets of the Near North Side, from State to Wells, with Clark Street as its axis. The business on these streets consisted of small retail stores of various sorts, catering to the local population—to the more well-to-do families to the east, and to the slum families to the west. Clark Street itself was fast becoming a street of cheap hotels, second-hand stores, restaurants, and theaters.

With the incoming of business and industry, and with the penetration of the southern European, with his "outlandish" ways, his strange tongue, and his lower standard of living, the Near North Side became progressively less desirable as a residential district. The encroachment of business was a greater factor than the Italian immigration. But both contributed to lower the desirability and prestige of the old fashionable residential area north of the Virginia Hotel, and one by one the residences in the vicinity of Chicago Avenue,

and north along State, Dearborn, and La Salle, were deserted as families moved east into the neighborhood of "the drive," or north along Sheridan Road.

Practically all the old residences that remain in this neighborhood have been turned into rooming-houses, men's hotels, restaurants, beauty parlors, shops, and the like; and many have been torn down to make way for modern stores and wholesale houses. Others, however, have been converted into studios. It is in this vicinity that Towertown, Chicago's bohemia, has grown up, seeking the anonymity afforded by the physical change taking place in the neighborhood. State Street north to Goethe, and Division, Dearborn, La Salle, and Wells streets, have suffered a like fate. While there are still 'marble-fronts' and brick mansions with mansard roofs to recall that these were favorite residential streets until the decade of the Fair, and while a few old families still cling to them, the little black and white card "Rooms for Rent" on the door or in the window of house after house bears mute testimony to the changed status of this area.

The change in character of the population, which began on the western side of the district, progressed eastward. The rooming-house brought in a population of lower economic status, with a large transient element and including many foreign groups.<sup>1</sup> And by the close of the first decade of the twentieth century the area south of Oak Street and west of State Street had greatly deteriorated. With this deterioration had come a vast amount of disorganization.

The report of the Chicago Vice Commission tells the story of this deterioration and disorganization in vivid

<sup>1</sup> In 1910 the total population of the Twenty-first and Twenty-second wards was 96,930. Of this total, 22,586 were native white, born of native

fashion. The whole of the once fashionable residential district had become honeycombed with houses of prostitution, saloons, dance halls, cabarets, call flats, massage parlors, and all kinds of dives. The old hotels had gone down with the surrounding neighborhood: the Revere had become a theatrical hangout of questionable reputation, and the Clarendon, the Regis, and others had long since all but forfeited the last vestige of respectability.

Clark Street was the center of this disorganization, with its bright lights, backroom saloons, and hotels. Among its notorious dives was McGovern's old "Liberty," which has recently reopened as "Spark Plug Inn." Along lower La Salle and Wells were cheaper houses, with brightly lighted red windows, in which the girls wore the loudest of colored kimonos and negligees, and affected the vilest of perfumes. East of Clark Street were places more pretentious. On the north side of West Erie, just off State Street, was a big house that boasted of its high-class trade, and in front of which used to be parked every night big limousines from out along the North Shore and Eyanston. Solicita-

parents; 28,878 were foreign-born white; 1,235 were Negro; and 44,231 were native white, of foreign parents.

The principal foreign-born groups were:

	Ward 21	Ward 22
Canadian.....	1,264	249
English.....	1,083	229
German.....	3,692	5,201
Greek.....	575	169
Hungarian.....	311	1,283
Irish.....	2,331	1,128
Italian.....	461	8,216
Persian.....	122	37
Polish.....	304	579
Swedish.....	2,130	3,086

The Poles are included, though few, to call attention to the fact that the Polish wave that swept over the northwest side never crossed the river onto the Lower North Side, being effectively cut off by the barrier of river and industry; and the Persians are included to point out that the Persian immigration had not yet begun in any considerable number (*United States Census, 1910*).

tion was common on all these streets. A man walking north on Rush at night would be approached a dozen times between the river and Division. The Near North Side was not one of the so-called "restricted" districts. But it had a large population of prostitutes, criminals, dope-fends, pan-handlers, and riff-raff of all sorts, and just before the war had become a favorite stamping ground for the street meetings of the Midnight Mission.<sup>1</sup>

Into the Near North Side, just after the war, came two more racial groups, the Negro and the Persian. Both had been coming in in a straggling fashion since 1900, but it was not until after the war that either group came in in any considerable numbers.

The Negro, part of the post-war migration from the South, an unskilled group of the lowest economic status, naturally crowded into the slum, along Franklin, Orleans, Townsend, and certain blocks on Wells Street. As the Irish, Swedish, and Germans had left the west district when the Sicilian came in, so now the Sicilian is beginning to give before the pressure of the Negro invasion, and is moving out, chiefly west, along Grand and Chicago avenues, though in small numbers south into Englewood.

The Persian, in contrast with the Negro, was an immigrant of a higher economic status, thrifty and intelligent, often with considerable education and a trade, and occasionally with a profession. A few Persians came to Chicago in the early 1900's, and the oldest child in the colony is now fifteen. But the real immigration began after the war, under pressure of religious persecution in Asia Minor. Most of them live in the vicinity from Oak Street south to Chicago Avenue and Huron, and between La Salle and Rush streets. The colony now numbers perhaps 4,000 persons.

<sup>1</sup> Document 2.

This encroachment of business, this invasion by foreign groups and by a transient population with its accompaniments of vice and crime, has but accelerated the exodus of the *beau monde* from the old residential district which began with the dawn of the twentieth century. As we have noted, this exodus was in two directions: east to Lake Shore Drive, and north along Sheridan Road.

In the days before the fire, Chicago had been socially a united city. But between fire and fair, West Washington Street and Ashland Avenue, Prairie Avenue and the shady boulevards of the South Side, passed as fashionable residential districts, and the social world turned north as the families from these old streets "migrated" one by one to the region lying between the Virginia Hotel and Lincoln Park, this portion of the North Side being now the abode of most of the families which were eminent in the days before the fire, as well as of those whose wealth is surpassing.<sup>1</sup>

Until the Fair, Dearborn, La Salle, and Wells streets were favorable residential streets in this North Side world of fashion and wealth. But in the decade after the Fair the tide of fashion turned eastward; and shortly after 1900 the newly completed Lake Shore Drive became *the* street of the *beau monde*. As the city pressed into the old residential streets, family after family deserted their ancestral homes to build new ones, either on "the drive" itself, or on the side streets running off it between Bellevue Place and Lincoln Park. "The Lake Shore Drive and its adjoining streets have now become our Mayfair." Perhaps no other city in the world has witnessed the concentration of its fashionable world in so restricted an area. As family after family has built its palatial home in this district, or has moved into its

<sup>1</sup> H. C. Chatfield-Taylor, *Chicago*, pp. 97-98.

magnificent apartments, as its clubs and hotels and shops have become the center about which revolves the entire city's social life, as the Lake Shore Drive has come to represent more wealth than any other street in the world save Fifth Avenue, this district has come to be known as the Gold Coast.

The *Tribune* acclaimed the opening of the Drake Hotel, at Oak Street and "the drive," as

.... a social event in the better sense, a landmark in the life of the community. Its location fixes a new social focus, around which will grow a small new city of theatres, clubs and fashionable shops. It will be, in fact, the center of the new age of fashion, and the *belles* and *beaux* of a generation will pass in review before its mirrors. Many of the social events which men and women look back upon will be held here—great balls and the endless procession of dances, teas, wedding receptions, and coming-out parties. . . .

Celebrities of all high varieties will pass in and out its doors—statesmen and famous soldiers, captains of finance and industry, poets who flutter and dovescotes of culture, novelists and preachers at whose feet sit the breathless aspiring, ladies of fashion and actresses adored, princes viewing mankind and diplomats grave and debonaire. In a word, the Drake should be a mirror of the time as great hostilities have been in every age and land and climate; as the Grand Pacific, to speak only of our own brief past, mirrored the Chicago of the 70's and 80's, and the Auditorium of the 90's.

The loop will remain the core, the towering central range of our business structure. But the great avenue will be the parade where such ceremonial life as our democracy indulges in will chiefly center, where the peacock, Fashion, preens in the sun of his own esteem, where pleasure is pursued and sometimes caught, where what glitter and gay gesture our hard working society of the mid-continent may indulge in may be shared and seen.<sup>1</sup>

The indications are, however, that within a decade even the Lake Shore Drive will have altered in character, "a generation being the longest period throughout which a Chicago

<sup>1</sup> *Chicago Daily Tribune*, November 30, 1920.

street has been able to maintain its supremacy. Already a small colony of fashionables has been established north of Lincoln Park," and "it seems likely that the exclusive quarter of the next generation will be this newly made portion of the lake shore" along Sheridan Road.<sup>1</sup>

Before 1916 the Lake Shore Drive had been isolated from the northward push of the city. But with the completion of the Michigan Boulevard link bridge the city surged north along North Michigan Avenue. A romance in land values followed, and stimulated by this development and the opening of the Franklin-Orleans bridge, the march of business out the central streets of the Near North Side and along the river in the west district was quickened.

North Michigan Avenue itself is developing into a fashionable shopping street, with tall office buildings near the river, and with clubs, smart restaurants, and hotels. East of Michigan Avenue is developing, south of Chicago Avenue, a district of wholesaling. A number of large advertising firms have also erected buildings here. And north of Chicago Avenue is Streeterville, a restricted area of fashionable apartments and hotels. The Michigan Avenue development is clearly a part of the expansion of the central business district and is backed by a strong businessmen's association definitely linking it with the Loop. Already it has pushed north to Oak Street, where the Drake Hotel marks its outpost. Only a zoning ordinance has checked it here. Meanwhile business pushing out State Street, and the rooming-house area creeping east from Clark Street, hold the Gold Coast in siege. It would seem that the city but awaits the expiration of the restriction clause in the zoning ordinance to sweep on and engulf the Gold Coast.

A development of a different nature is taking place along

<sup>1</sup> H. C. Chatfield-Taylor, *Chicago*, p. 106.

the central streets of the Near North Side, about Clark Street. These streets saw the first business development on the North Side, but have been overshadowed by the recent Michigan Avenue boom. The business along these streets is of such a nature as caters to the slum and transient populations: cheap hotels and theaters, pawnshops and second-hand stores, innumerable white-tile restaurants, barber shops, grocery stores, meat markets, and the like, with occasional office buildings south of Chicago Avenue. Into the cheap hotels, lodging-houses, and furnished rooms of the area about Chicago Avenue have come a large group of transients, and several small foreign groups, including the Greek and the Persian. Practically the whole area about Clark Street, from Rush and State streets to Wells Street, and east even of Michigan Avenue to the south, has been entirely taken over by rooming-houses. Real estate men of this district prophesy that because it has the electric transportation Clark Street will eventually surpass North Michigan Avenue. But this is unlikely, as the street connecting the fashionable residence district with the central business district has in every city more than held its own.<sup>1</sup> There is no doubt, however, that business will eventually succeed the rooming-house and the slum in this central district of the Near North Side.

Still different in character is the development taking place in the southwest district, in the vicinity of the north bend of the river. It comprises light manufacturing plants and wholesaling houses. Since the trackage in this district is limited, its development will be chiefly of such business as

<sup>1</sup> Witness Fifth Avenue, like North Michigan Avenue, with only motor bus transportation. See McMichael and Bingham, *City Growth and Land Values*, p. 92.

does not require trackage, such as printing plants. There is already a movement of printing plants in this direction, and many small manufacturing plants and large storage houses and garages have recently been built in this district. Until now industry has taken over the slum as far north as Chicago Avenue, and is yearly pushing eastward into the slum from the river. The Sicilian population is slowly giving ground, and the old buildings in the district are rapidly deteriorating. Into this situation the Negroes are coming in ever increasing numbers.<sup>1</sup>

One element runs through practically the whole of the Near North Side of today: it is the element of change and flow. The life of the Near North Side is all flux and movement. Its population has a large "fly-by-night" group, and a great proportion of it is constantly shifting. Moreover, the Near North Side is the thoroughfare for the hundreds of thousands living on the far north and the northwest sides. Approximately 200,000,000 people pass along North Michigan Avenue in a year. The traffic at North Michigan Avenue and the link bridge exceeds that at Fifth Avenue and Forty-second Street, reaching a maximum of 4,360 vehicles during the rush hour.<sup>2</sup> And North Clark Street, with State and Wells streets, is the center of street railroad traffic between

<sup>1</sup> The population of the Near North Side, excepting Streeterville and the Gold Coast, decreased 20-35 per cent between 1910 and 1920, as business took over old residential streets—and this in spite of the local increase in the rooming area.

<sup>2</sup> *Chicago Tribune*, August 12, 1923. The hourly traffic at North Michigan and the bridge, averaged for the period from 7 A.M. until midnight, is 3,118 vehicles, as against an hourly average of 2,300 vehicles at Fifth Avenue and Forty-second Street. An average of 53,914 vehicles cross the boulevard bridge a day, as against 18,387 vehicles crossing London Bridge, and a against 27,131 vehicles crossing Brooklyn Bridge (*Chicago: The Great Central Market*, p. 149).



the Loop and the far North Side. The Clark Street line carries, itself, thousands of people daily, and many of these transfer at points on the Near North Side. Perhaps the best index of the reality of this mobility is the ever present taxi stand and the United Cigar store on corner after corner.<sup>1</sup> Meanwhile there is constant agitation for the widening of La Salle Street, Clark Street, and the Lake Shore Drive, that this traffic may be increased. This traffic has an obvious correlation with the encroachment of business upon the residential areas of the Near North Side, and it has social consequences which will become evident as we analyze in more detail the life of various groups living on the Near North Side.

The Near North Side is today, then, a teeming area in the heart of a great city of three million souls. Within this area, a mile and a half from south to north, and scarcely a mile wide, live ninety thousand people—a population as large as that of the state of Nevada.<sup>2</sup> Just outside the central business district it is being rapidly invaded by business and industry. Save for the Gold Coast clinging to the lake shore, it is a disorganized area, a slum area. North of the encroaching industry and commerce, and west from the Gold Coast to La Salle Street, is a vast area of furnished rooms, housing some 26,000 people. Through the center of this area runs Clark Street, a street of bright lights and vice, the Rialto of the half-world. About Clark Street and Chicago Avenue are colonies of Greeks and Persians, and a little east of them is "the village." In the vicinity of Wells Street is a cosmo-

<sup>1</sup> The United Cigar stores are located by the "clocking" of the pedestrian traffic.

<sup>2</sup> The 1920 census gave the population of the Near North Side (by census tracts) as 91,000.

politan area, an interpenetration of all manner of people from the Old World, especially of Poles and Hungarians. West again, from Sedgwick to the river, and north to Clybourn, is Little Sicily, pushing the rear guard of the old German population north across North Avenue. And into the heart of Little Sicily comes the Negro.

The population of the Near North Side today includes twenty-eight specified foreign nationalities, the Negro, and the category "all other countries," in addition to the native-born population. Fifty-five per cent of the Twenty-first Ward, and 81 per cent of the population of the Twenty-second Ward, is foreign.<sup>1</sup> The Near North Side is a cross-section of the larger Chicago of which Chatfield-Taylor wrote. Yet its streets, teeming with life, thronging with strange people, resounding with outlandish tongues, and the noises of industry and commerce, are pervaded with the glamor and romance of the forward march of the greater city. This glamor and romance, however, exists in the social distances that, while they make the city a mosaic of little cultural worlds intriguing to the journalist, the artist, and the adventurer, make it impossible for these same little worlds to comprehend one another, and so atomize the life of the city.

<sup>1</sup> In "foreign" are included foreign-born, or native-born of parents both of whom were foreign-born. An additional 8 per cent of the Twenty-first Ward and 9 per cent of the Twenty-second Ward are of mixed parentage.

The principal groups in the composition of the population of these wards are:

	Ward 21*	Ward 22*
American.....	37.85	11.98
German.....	11.15	7.42
Irish.....	6.88	18.95
Italian.....	6.30	17.00
Swedish.....	6.08	35.70
	6.08	35.70

\* From *Report of the Industrial Department of the Chicago Association of Commerce*, prepared in 1923, and based upon the United States Census for 1920.

The "Gold Coast," extending along the North Shore from East Chestnut Street to Lincoln Park, and west to North State Parkway, is the home of the leaders of Chicago's "Four Hundred."

The Four Hundred are those who have "arrived." They form a self-conscious group. They have mores of their own—"good form" and the amenities of life are of enormous importance in their lives. To violate the social code is a vastly greater sin than to violate the Ten Commandments. A gentleman may drink, he may gamble, but under no circumstances may he appear at an afternoon tea in a morning coat, or at dinner without an evening jacket. How elaborate is this social code is attested by the bulk of Emily Post's *Blue Book of Etiquette*, a codification for the yearning "common," for those not to the manner born. The Four Hundred have their own papers, *Club-fellow* and *Town Topics*; the daily newspapers devote columns to their comings and goings; they have their own clubs, such as the Orwentasia and the Casino; their own summer colonies at Lake Forest, Hubbard Woods, and half a dozen other places. They live in a totally different world from that of the rest of the great city of which they are a part. Within this world they lead a life of kaleidoscopic activity, centering about the fashionable hotels along the Drive, fashionable resorts, "pet charities," the golf club, and the bride path, to say nothing of the bridge and dinner table, with occasional trips to La Salle Street. And of the prerogatives of this world they are jealous.<sup>1</sup>

Such is "society" at a first superficial glimpse. Such is the Gold Coast. For in Chicago all that is aloof and exclusive, all that bears the mark of *l'haut société*, is crowded

<sup>1</sup> Document 3. The documents upon which this chapter is based were written, without exception, by residents along the Gold Coast. Consequently they represent friendly insights and half-amused self-analysis, rather than jealous intolerance. For sufficient reasons, the documents are anonymously presented here.

along the strip of "drive" between the Drake Hotel and Lincoln Park, or along the quiet, aristocratic streets immediately behind it. Here is the greatest concentration of wealth in Chicago. Here live a large number of those who have achieved distinction in industry, science, and the arts. Here are Chicago's most fashionable hotels and clubs. Here live two thousand of the six thousand persons whose names are in the social register of Chicago and its suburbs, and these two thousand include in their number those who are recognized as the leaders of "society."

But if we look more deeply into the life that goes on within these luxurious hostleries, these "exclusive" clubs, these stately and forbidding mansions, the picture is less clear. For what, after all, is "society"? At the question social leaders and society editors shake their heads, look bewildered, smile helplessly.

A generation ago the question would have been promptly answered: "Social position is a matter of family, breeding, aristocracy." The old "society" was a caste—very nearly, indeed, a clan. The old "assemblies" were almost a hereditary institution. The dowagers of the older families were the heads of the clan and the arbiters of social destiny. An invitation to the assemblies was a proved title of social rank. If one was received at the assemblies, one was received everywhere in "society."

But the growth of the city with its monetary standards and its economic organization, its startling mobility, and its very force of numbers was to change the nature of "society" just as it was to change every other phase of social life. The old "society," based on hereditary social position, has passed, to be replaced by a "society" of cliques and sets, of wealth and display, and, above all, of youth.