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land, \$1.25 an acre. The State Canal Commissioners decided to try to increase land values by c

stone. Considering the importance of the position Chicago is destined to become a great city. They are already making a canal to give the lake communication with the Mississippi; a work that would be gigantic in a peopled and organized country and which becomes truly fabulous in a region like this which is still, so to say in a savage condition.”⁹

When land sales were held in the heady mid 1830s, the bidding was indeed savage. Land speculation intensified because of the promised completion of the canal. On June 20, 1836, at the auction of the lots still owned by the state in the original town of Chicago, the sale price was usually over the appraised value. The highest price bid for a town lot was \$21,400. The total sales for lots in the original town was \$1,181,475.¹⁰ In addition to the original town, the resident canal engineer, Talcott, laid out an addition which would give the town frontage on Lake Michigan. The plot for this addition as filed in the courthouse, reserved the lakefront from development.¹¹ Lots in this addition realized \$321,070 at the 1836 auction.

After 1837 the state was faced with the problems of the economic depression and the financial difficulties that this entailed. In the matter of town lot sales the strategy was changed. The legislature in 1837 told the Canal Commissioners to sell sufficient town lots in Chicago and elsewhere to raise the sum of \$1 million dollars. However, that was not really possible, no more strategic sales were planned in light of the depressed conditions and the continuing influx of settlers. As the 1838 Board of Canal Commissioners Report to the Governor notes:

“Under this authority, and since the last session of the legislature a few alternative lots in Lockport, in Ottawa and in La Salle have been sold, but

in the five miles that separates them. This is the largest drop on the canal and thus seemingly promised ample water power at Lockport. So the town was made the canal headquarters, much to the consternation of near neighbors. The town was laid out so that the canal would be the focus of business activity. The two locks in the town were designed so that their bypasses could be used to drive machinery.¹⁴ In addition, a hydraulic basin was constructed that could take the considerable fall between the canal and the nearby Des Plaines River, thus allowing income from lot sales and water leases.¹⁵ Besides these amenities, a public landing was established along the canal in the center of town where farmers could load and unload their boat shipments. Manufacturers were allowed to build on the canal bank and were given title to this part of the ninety-foot reserve strip. The Commissioners in 1837 built a road from Chicago to Lockport, one of the earliest roads radiating from Chicago. In the same year they built a frame headquarters building, a stone warehouse, and two large houses for the canal commissioners. This served to show potential settlers that Lockport was a thriving center, where in 1836 only a few rude long cabins were located.¹⁶

The great hopes for Lockport were not fully realized, basically because until 1871 there was not sufficient water in the canal to provide both for navigation and the almost unlimited water power needed to drive the industries as had been originally hoped.

Water power was a major concern of the Canal Commissioners. The Chief Engineer, William Gooding, always looked to all possible ways of obtaining hydraulic power on the flat Illinois prairie. He sought to increase the value of state town lots in towns already established such as Joliet and Ottawa. Here it was felt that the erection of dams and a lateral canal would mean increased value for the adjoining state land. As a result the increased cost would be amply returned to the state.

In laying out new towns, water power was a prime consideration. At the junction of the Du Page River and the canal west of Joliet, the town of Du Page was created to take advantage of the water power there. Du Page did not flourish. Right next to it the town of Channahon did develop, but little use was made of the water power.

There were other efforts at townsite development. One that was a major bust was Kankakee. This town was developed in the 1830s at that point where the Kankakee River and the Des Plaines River came together to form the Illinois River. Naturally it was felt that this would be an important townsite. In 1836 a traveler reported on the town:

“We forded the river which is very wide and about two feet deep, pursuing our course over a level country about two miles. We arrived at the great city of Kankakee which consists of one log house, one store, one frame house some ten or twelve feet square, one barn frame, which comprised the entire city of Kankakee. This log house being a tavern, we soon had our trunk carried in and were provided with a comfortable supper.”¹⁷

This town was assiduously promoted by private land owners. A map and prospectus was circulated in the east in 1836. But the town had reached its maximum development in 1836 as described by the traveler. It was too unhealthy because it was low lying and afflicted with malaria or ‘ague’ as it was called, and it was also subject to flooding. The town disappeared in 1848.

Des Plaines represents another aborted attempt at town development. About twenty miles south west from Chicago, it was determined that the route of the canal could be shortened if the Des Plaines River was shifted out of its bed. About three or four hundred acres would be drained as a result. This newly reclaimed land was felt to be a choice area, and it was laid out as the town of Des Plaines. It was also anticipated that

19. John D. Haeger, "The Abandoned Townsite on the Midwestern Frontier," paper given at 1982 Illinois History Symposium.
20. John Lamb, "The Politics of Transportation" 1980, Selected Papers in Illinois History, Illinois Historical Society, Springfield, 1982, p. 21.
21. Report of the Board of Trustees of the Illinois and Michigan Canal for the Year ending Nov. 30, 1851, Springfield, 1852, p. 98.
22. Krenkel, John H., Illinois Internal Improvements 1818-1890, Cedar Rapids, Iowa, 1958, pp. 56-58.
23. Op. cit., Report of Canal Commissioners, pp. 265-266.