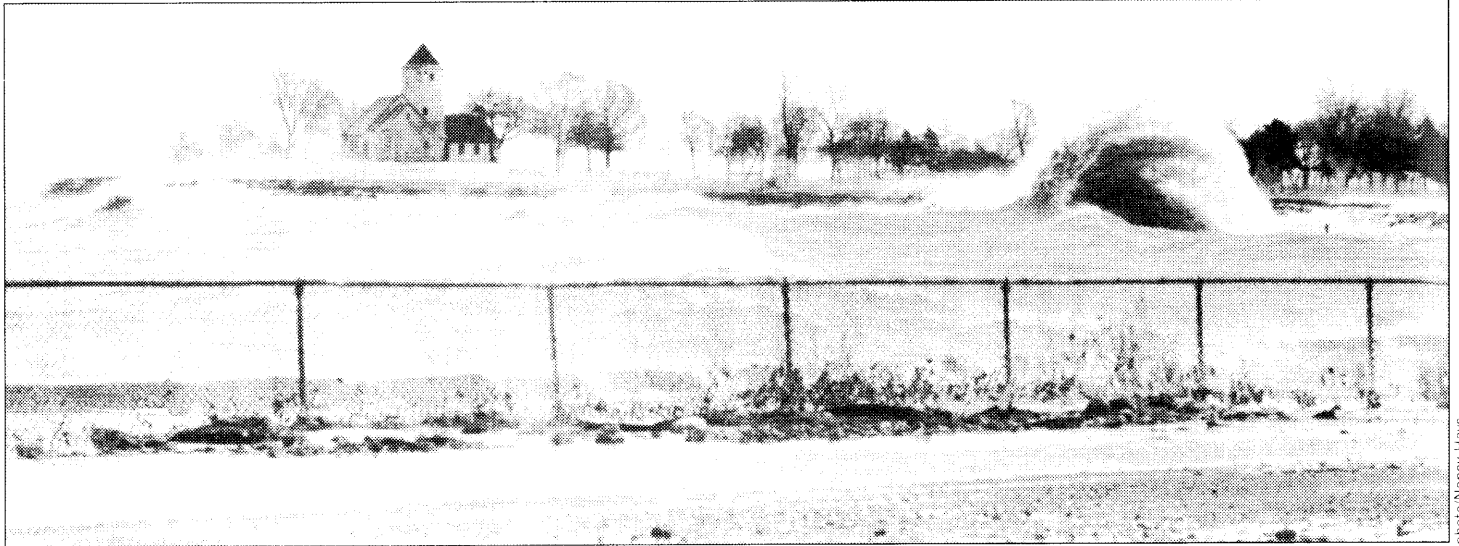


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photo/Nancy Hays

SURF AT THE POINT IN WINTER

In 1987, to mark the 50th anniversary of Promontory Point, the Hyde Park Historical Society and Friends of the Parks produced a brief history of that landmark landscape. Today, when interest in the Point is so high, we think it timely to reproduce that document for your information...

Promontory Point 1937-1987

By John McDermott, Jr.
Edited by Victoria Post Ranney

Promontory Point, at 55th Street and Lake Michigan, is an historic landscape and the focal point of Chicago's Burnham Park. Conceived as part of Daniel Burnham's Plan of Chicago, in 1909, "the Point" was created by landfill in the 1920s and landscaped in 1937 by Alfred Caldwell in the Prairie School tradition. To Caldwell, the Promontory represented the meeting place of the vast prairie and the Great Lakes, and thus symbolized all that was unique about the landscape of Chicago. Today, Caldwell's design can still be recognized, and its spirit

makes Promontory Point a favorite retreat for Chicagoans from all walks of life.

An early Chicagoan walking east on 55th Street would have met the lake just east of Everett Avenue. Burnham called for a promontory to be built in the lake near 52nd Street, along with a series of islands and lagoons stretching from 12th Street to Jackson Park. In 1919, the City Council approved a plan to fill in the south lakeshore according to Burnham's plan.

The Commissioners of the South Park District hired the Construction Materials Corporation to construct a breakwater and fill the area inside it with sand. The filling operation, which began at 12th Street and progressed toward the south, reached 55th Street by 1924. There, and not at 52nd Street, it created a promontory.

By 1926, the 55th Street Promontory, as it came to be called, had been largely filled with sand and garbage. The latter component upset the Hyde Park Herald which complained not only that the rubbish was unsightly, but also that the wind blew sand and foul odors into the new apartment buildings nearby.

In 1917, there had been only one such building near 55th and the lake, the ten-story apartment house at 5490 South Shore Drive. But in the mid-1920's, the residential area to the west developed rapidly. The ▶❶

