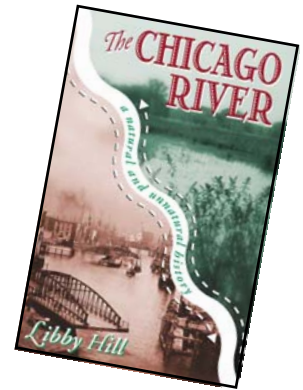


# THE CHICAGO RIVER

## A Natural and Unnatural History

By Libby Hill



## Reviews and Endorsements

**“An . . . essential book . . . for anyone who wants to truly understand Chicago.”**

—Selected for “A Chicago Birthday Book Bag” by a panel of experts on WBEZ-FM, “Eight Forty-eight,” March 4, 2004

**“. . . an impressively thorough, unexpectedly engaging** account of the lazy stream that is Chicago’s raison d’être.”

—Deanna Isaacs, *Chicago Reader*, “In Print: diving deep into the Chicago River,” August 25, 2000

**“. . . In her research for this book, Hill poured over mountains of historic and technical documents leading her to a set of original hypotheses that she subjected to both a peer and an expert review.** This book is technical, but highly readable and received awards from both the Midwest Independent Publishers Association and Midwest American Regional History Publishing . . .”

—*Conscious Choice*, “Book News,” January, 2003

**“Libby Hill writes with feeling born of careful research and her own close friendship with the Chicago River.** Anyone whose life has been touched by any part of this waterway will find her account enjoyable, enlightening, and life enriching.”

—William Howenstine, professor, Geography and Environmental Studies, Northeastern Illinois University

**“There is a new book on the Chicago River that you must have.** For six years Libby Hill researched and then wrote a fascinating book—*The Chicago River: A Natural and Unnatural History*. From geology to the human dramas and epic engineering that brought us today’s river system, it is all here. **Hill is a river enthusiast and a meticulous detective.** The book has an abundance of maps and intriguing photographs, and when documents were contradictory or nonexistent, Hill and her husband went into the field to track down evidence. . . .”

—*The River Reporter*, Friends of the Chicago River newsletter, “New River Book,” Summer, 2001

**“Well researched and rich in detail, this can be an eye-opening read for local residents as well as river lovers everywhere.”**

—A.T. Tattata, *The Bloomsbury Review*, July/August 2001

**“. . . A fascinating book . . . a remarkable document . . . a great enjoyment . . .** not as ballyhooed as the new *Harry Potter*, but it should be . . . There’s a million things in this book that surprised me . . . the research involved in this book was pleasantly stunning . . . **the bibliography astonishing . . . .** Start ordering it now.”

—Rick Kogan, WGN Radio, “The Sunday Papers,” July 2, 2000

“It is **beautifully written and contains a wealth of information which is new to us**. It’s a valuable addition to our collection.”

—Beverly Dawson, Glenview Historical Society

“ . . . a **great guide to the geologic origins of modern Chicago**. . . a **fine guide to the making of Chicago**.”

—Dolores and Roger Flaherty, *Chicago Sun-Times*, “Book Week,” Sunday, August 20, 2000

“Libby Hill’s *The Chicago River* is the result of years of painstaking research and presents **an outstanding historical survey of the Chicago River** from its creation by pre-glacial forces, to the days of the French explorers using it to access the Mississippi, to its contemporary presence in one of the most densely populated urban areas in the Midwest. *The Chicago River* is **an in-depth, comprehensive work that reveals the never ending struggle between humans and nature over the centuries**, as well as the commercial, recreational, and ecological projects currently underway on and in the river. *The Chicago River* is highly recommended, rewarding reader for those with an interest in Chicago, natural history, environmental issues, and Midwestern history.”

—*Midwest Book Review*, August, 2000

“Imagine reading a biography of your spouse or best friend, and being surprised and delighted at the biographer’s fresh take on somebody you *thought* you knew pretty well. Libby Hill has done that with this book, reintroducing me to a body of water I thought I knew, surprising me with new facts, and delighting me with new ways of thinking about the facts I *thought* I had mastered.”

—David Jones, Community Planner, Friends of the Chicago River

“Libby Hill’s book is a valuable resource for students and history buffs. It is a **‘must read’** for anyone who wants to know how or why the course of the Chicago River was reversed. I highly recommend it.”

—Peggy Bradley, Public Information Coordinator, Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago

“It may not be much of a river, as rivers go, but what a history! From prehistoric glaciers to contemporary Deep Tunnel, Libby tells the whole fascinating story of the Chicago River with great enthusiasm, eloquence, and factual accuracy. Anyone who reads this book will never again take our hometown stream for granted. It’s **a must read for all Chicago buffs**.”

—Bill Hinchliff, veteran docent for the Chicago Architecture Foundation

“Hill tells this complex story in human terms, such as the ‘kidnapping’ of dredging equipment from Wisconsin and secretly opening the Sanitary and Ship Canal in order to forestall a lawsuit from Joliet. . . . [She] makes the story even more graphic by frequently pointing out specific locations to show the effects of glaciers, floods, droughts, and erosion in shaping an area where more than six million people live. If you are among them, **after reading a few chapters, you may begin to feel that the land around you is very special indeed**.”

—Wayne Klatt, *Journal of Illinois History*, “Book Reviews,” Summer, 2001

“*The Chicago River* is a good read. But it is also **an important book for it is the first to present, as Hill says in her subtitle, both the river’s ‘natural’ and its ‘unnatural history.’** The book illumines the river’s ancient history as well as its key role in the birth and growth of Chicago.”

—Nancy Freehafer, *Chicago Wilderness*, Winter, 2001

“. . . [A] thorough account of the natural and unnatural (affected by humans) history of the Chicago River. **Although the title is apt, it understates the breadth of fascinating material in the book.** The ‘natural history’ covers every facet of the river and its environs and provides a good primer about nature in general and the effect that people can have on it. Through the ‘unnatural history’ we learn about the growth of Chicago and its suburbs as well as the Midwest and the United States, with the unifying theme of the river holding everything together. . . . I wish this book existed when I lived in Chicago. I would have had a much greater appreciation of what was around me.”

—Amazon.com reader review, “The Chicago River and more,” 5 of 5 stars, January 14, 2002

**“Chicago, Wisconsin?!?!?”** This is one of the strange and interesting facts found in this book. The author spent six years meticulously researching and writing this book about ‘the historic creek that Chicago built.’ The book does many things for Chicago’s history: it gives a great perspective of the political realities of managing one of the main forms of transportation in the city’s early growth; it describes the economics of developing the land along the river (and its many courses); and it shows the part the river played in the lives of everyone along its banks. The drawings and maps in the book are carefully chosen to give the reader an accurate visual picture of the times. My favorite is the one on pg. 96 where men are lifting an entire hotel to accommodate the installation of sewers in the city. I also loved the story about the ‘kidnapped dredge!’ The last third of the book is very pertinent to the people in the area who truly love the outdoors. It describes the development of the Skokie Lagoons and the Chicago Botanic Garden where many of us bird and the start of the natural areas restoration for which Chicago has become so well known along the banks of the North Branch. For folks who grew up in or near the city, the neighborhood references are sure to bring back fond memories but, even for those of us who did not grow up in this area, there is much to learn. This book would be a great addition to a reference library or a wonderful gift for someone interested in Chicago and its varied history. Looking for the answer to the question that began this review? Well, **you’ll have to read the book to see how a stroke of luck—or a pen!—made us the ‘City of Big Shoulders’ rather than the ‘City of the Northwoods!’**

—Amazon.com reader review, “Chicago, Wisconsin?!?!?”, 5 of 5 stars, September 17, 2000

## More Press Attention

- *Brush Piles*, North Branch Restoration Project newsletter, “Natural history of the river is topic for new book,” Summer, 2000
- *Chicago Tribune*, Books, “New in Paperback,” August 20, 2000
- *Chicago Tribune Magazine*, Sidewalks, “Dream Rivers,” November 12, 2000
- *Choice*, Vol. 38 No. 4, Social & Behavioral Sciences: History, Geography, & Area Studies, Book summary, December, 2000
- *Evanston Round Table*, “The Chicago River, a Natural and Unnatural History,” May 9, 2001
- *Historic Illinois*, “Book Reviews,” December, 2000
- *Inside*, Chicago, “Looking at the River,” September 13, 2000
- *Near North News*, Chicago, “Fascinating story of river reversal,” November 11, 2000
- Lerner newspapers, Chicago and suburbs, “The history of Chicago flows from the river,” September 6, 2000
- Pioneer Press newspapers, suburban Chicago, “New Titles” and “Libby Hill: River Wonk,” December 21, 2000
- *Chicago Wilderness*, “Great Books of the Chicago Wilderness,” Winter 2006
- *The New York Times*, *Chicago Life Magazine*, “Where the River Meets the Lake,” December 2005