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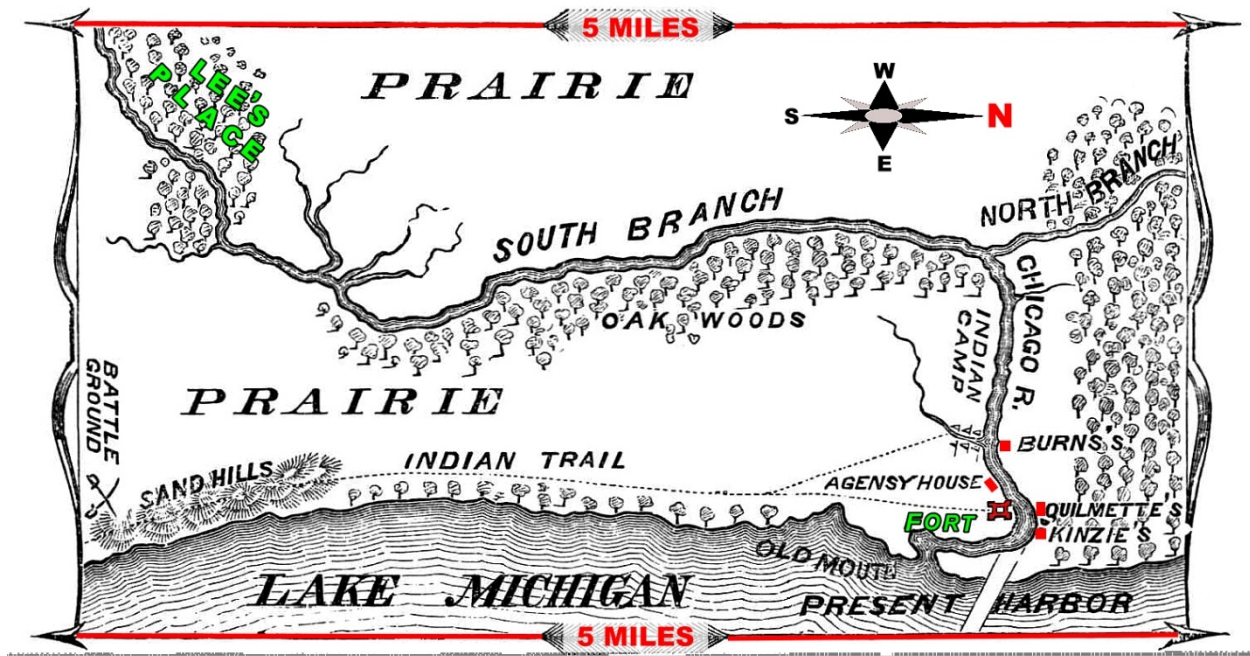
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Lee's Place / Hardscrabble, Illinois

The Bridgeport Neighborhood of Chicago

A settler, Charles Lee, had come to the Chicago area about 1804 with his family, and had preempted a large tract at what afterwards became Bridgeport. Charles Lee owned a farm on the South Branch about four miles from its mouth; his house stood on the northwest side of the river in a grove and was first called "Lee's Place," and later "Hardscrabble." Lee and his family built a residence near Fort Dearborn (the fort was built during the summer and fall of 1803) and were thus residents of Chicago very early. Farm products such as livestock and hay were known to be produced here.



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At the time of the massacre of 1812 the families of Lee, Burns, Kinzie and [Ouilmette](#), lived close to the fort. The Lee house at "Hardscrabble" was occupied by Lee's employees or tenants; Liberty White, a Frenchman named Debou, a discharged soldier named John Kelso (or Kelson), and a boy.



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The massacre of 1812 was due the attack of the Indians at Lee's Place. On April 6, 1812, a party of ten or twelve Winnebagoes, dressed and painted, arrived at the house, and, according to the custom among savages, entered and seated themselves without ceremony.

Something in their appearance and manner excited the suspicions of Debou, who remarked, "I do not like the appearance of these Indians - they are none of our folks. I know by their dress and paint that they are not Pottowattamies."

Kelso then said to the boy who was present, "If that is the case, we had better get away from them if we can. Say nothing; but do as you see me do."

As the afternoon was far advanced, Kelso walked leisurely towards the canoes, of which there were two tied near the bank. Some of the Indians inquired where he was going. He pointed to the cattle which were standing among the haystacks on the opposite [right/south] bank, and made signs that they must go and fodder them, and then they should return and get their supper.

Kelso got into one canoe, and the boy into the other. The stream was narrow, and they were soon across. When they had gained the opposite side, they pulled some hay for the cattle - made a show of collecting them - and when they had gradually made a circuit, so that their movements were concealed by the haystacks, they took to the woods, which were close at hand, and made for the fort.

They had run about a quarter of a mile, when they heard the discharge of two guns successively, which they supposed to have been levelled at White and Debou that they had left behind. On their way to the fort they notified the family of Burns, living on the river at what is now North State Street, of their danger, and a squad of soldiers was sent to escort them to the fort.

All of the families gathered in the fort and the Indians left the neighborhood. Later, news reached the fort about White and Debou being stabbed, scalped, shot and mutilated.



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This was the precursor to the Fort Dearborn Massacre later that summer. The Lee farm was abandoned following the Fort Dearborn massacre in August of 1812. While fur traders were thought to have still traversed the area, American activity did not resume until after federal troops returned (July 4, 1816) to rebuild Fort Dearborn.

1816 was also a new beginning for Lee's Place, though the name would be changed to Hardscrabble. Until roughly the Black Hawk War of 1832, Hardscrabble served as a fur trading outpost consisting of several cabins, a trading post, and a lodging house.

Mack & Conant, extensive merchants at Detroit, in the Indian trade, became the owners of this property about the year 1816. They sent Mr. John Craft with a large supply of Indian goods to take possession of it, and establish a branch of their house there, the principle object being to sell goods to such traders as they could residing throughout this country, without interfering with the interests of those traders who purchased goods from him.

Mr. Craft repaired the dilapidated building, adding thereto, and erecting others necessary for the convenience of business. He named it 'Hardscrabble;' whether he or someone else, it bore that name in 1818.

Chief Alexander Robinson owned a cabin at Hardscrabble, and several members of the La Framboise family, who were French-Indian, lived there. Robinson had put up the Galloway family at his cabin when they were coldly received by agents of the American Fur Company at Chicago in 1826. One of the girls of the family later became the wife of Archibald Clyborne. She recalled five or six cabins of the several persons living nearby.

Another early settler was Russell Heacock. He took up land on the South Fork of the South Branch of the Chicago River near what is today Thirty-Fifth Street. Heacock was staunchly independent, which is probably the reason he had moved to the Hardscrabble area in the first place. He found it necessary to move closer to Chicago so that his children could attend school, himself becoming one of Chicago's early school teachers. In spite of moving to Chicago, he retained his property on the South Fork. Heacock is notable for two other reasons. First, he was the sole dissenter when a vote was called to incorporate the Town of Chicago (1832). The second thing he was noted for was his promotion of the Illinois and Michigan Canal. Because funds to build the canal were



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scarce, a plan was devised to make it less expensive by reducing the intended depth of the canal. Russell Heacock was perhaps the most vocal proponent of the plan - which earned him the nickname of Shallow-Cut. Maybe he hated the nick name, but the shallow cut plan was ultimately successful.

Even before the canal construction was begun, Hardscrabble became the site of a quarry, which was opened in 1833 in order to cut stone needed to improve Chicago harbor. And because of the relentless pounding of Lake Michigan waters, the harbor improvement project dragged on for many years. Later the stone quarry became known as Stearns' Quarry. The opening of the quarry and the construction of the canal mark the transition from the frontier outpost of Hardscrabble to the Bridgeport that we know today.

What came to be known as the town of Bridgeport was platted by the canal commissioners in 1836; although it was not yet going by the name of Bridgeport. Canalport or (Canal Port) was platted by private interests in 1835 in one of the even-numbered sections not controlled by the canal commissioners. The beginnings of the settlement are somewhat obscure, since it is so old and because many of the records pertaining to that period, such as those kept by the county, burned in the Chicago Fire of 1871. The origin of the name Bridgeport is shrouded in myth, purportedly owing to a low bridge spanning one of the waterways which forced a transfer of cargo from larger to smaller vessels. Some sources say this bridge was "at Ashland avenue," others say "near Ashland avenue." It should be noted that here was no bridge at Ashland avenue, nor was there an 'Ashland avenue' per se.

The nearby named Canalport would also indicate that the site was foreseen as a cargo transfer point. The forks had already been marked as the 'Head of Navigation' in the 1821 survey. The bridge in question was presumably the bridge at the lock, located just to the east of future Ashland Avenue (also known early as Lisle or Reuben street north of the river). Aside from the bridge altogether, the narrow width of the canal lock made cargo transfer necessary. A very low bridge would have at the most compounded this fact, and if it were built low enough to impede traffic, the canal commissioners probably did so by design. The reason is simple; being that the commissioners held the land in the odd-numbered sections (here Section Twenty-nine), they naturally would prefer that the highest valued lots fall on canal lands rather than to those (like Canalport in Section



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Thirty) promoted by private speculators. According to Michael Conzen, this is what the commissioners were doing in places like Lockport (vying with Joliet) and La Salle (in competition with Peru). The naming of Bridgeport probably had as much to do with the commissioners' efforts to distinguish their platting from Canalport as it had with any physical bridge. Moreover, 1840 federal census information in A. T. Andreas' History of Cook County (1884) mentions the Bridgeport precinct of Cook County. There was no water in the canal at the time. In any event, whoever named it, Bridgeport became the real town, while Canalport remained a paper dream. A street by the name of Canalport Avenue is the only remnant left of the "town."