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Unauthorized Chicago  
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A crash course

August 23, 2002

Chicago, of course, is a Native American word for "stinky onion," or so Mrs. O'Leary used to tell the cow that provided the milk that suckled the infant Al Capone, who took crime to Cicero and made the city safe for the Daley Dynasties, which are not to be confused with the Bulls Dynasties, which were founded by Michael Jordan, who reversed the course of the river but couldn't do a thing about the Cubs.

Or something like that.

It is easy, when you first come to a place like Chicago, to be overwhelmed by it. You know there's a lot going on out there, a lot to take in, a lot that's already happened, but what, exactly? It is easy, even when you have lived in a place such as Chicago for decades, to take it for granted.

And if you live in the suburbs, well, we all know the tragic stories about people who spend entire lives out there without once venturing into the metropolis proper because, don't you know, there's crime there -- never mind the hundreds of thousands of people who work in the Loop daily without be-ing bullet-riddled.

With all these clientele in mind, we offer up this inessential, highly selective, unapologetically biased, sort of snooty, but potentially useful crash course on Chicago. The goal on this and the following two pages is to offer enough history and lore to allow newcomers to fake it and enough arcana to enlighten even old-tim-ers. We can't guarantee how much will stick, but we do know that by the end, you will at least understand that the Bears play, in ordinary years, in Soldier Field, not Soldier's Field.

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How to speak Chicago

Sammich. Chicagoese for sandwich. When made with sausage, it's a sausage sammich; with shredded beef, it's an Italian beef sammich, a local delicacy consisting of piles of spicy meat in a perilously soggy bun.

Duh. The definite article is a key part of Chicago speech, as in "duh tree bears" or "duh Mare" -- the latter denoting, for as long as he wants it to, Richard M. Daley, or Richie, as he's often known.

Duh Jewels. Not family heirlooms or a tender body region, but a popular appellation for one of the region's two dominant grocery chains, to wit, "I'm goin' to duh Jewels to pick up some sausage." As in most Chicago pluralizations, the "S" is pronounced with a hissing sound, rather than the usual "Z" sound of American pluralization.

O'Hara. Not a marcher in the Beverly neighborhood's St. Patrick's Day Parade, but a local rendering of the name of the nation's busiest airport. The late Mayor Richard J. Daley preferred this name to the actual "O'Hare International Airport," which honors Chicago-born World War II flying ace Edward "Butch" O'Hare. The place used to be called Orchard Field, which explains why the ticket on your luggage says "ORD."

Tree. The number between two and four.

Prairie. A vacant lot, especially one on which weeds are growing.

Over by dere. i.e. "over by there," a prolix way of emphasizing a site presumed familiar to the listener. As in, "I got the sausage at duh Jewels down on Kedzie, over by dere.'

GOATH-ie. What would Goethe, the German poet, novelist and epigram coiner ("he who does not think too much of himself is much more esteemed than he imagines") make of his name enshrined on a Gold Coast street but commonly mangled this way instead of given the proper pronunciation of "GAIR-tuh"? Perhaps this: "Everything has been thought of before, but the problem is to think of it again."

Kaminski Park. Perhaps the high concentration of ethnic Poles makes people want the White Sox to be playing in this mythical ballpark, rather than in their true home, Comiskey Park.

Soldier's Field. Much of Chicago, led by the current Mayor Daley, seems to labor under the impression that the Bears, during non-construction years, play in a stadium belonging to one particular military man. It is a veterans memorial of sorts, with a title formally dedicated during a 1926 Army-Navy game, but the name is Soldier Field.

Duh Loop. Downtown, a region whose bound-aries expand or contract depending on the whim of real-estate agents.

Two-flat. Refers not to the region's topography, but to a ubiquitous housing style and key means of blue-collar upward mobility. You live in the upstairs apartment of these brick two-stories and pay the mortgage off by renting out the downstairs one.

Streets and San. The city department that will pick up your garbage on days the alderman doesn't need any work done at his house.

Funchroom. It's not the "parlor." It's not the "living room." In the land of the bungalow, it's the "funchroom," a name derived, linguists believe, from "front room."

### Myths & misconceptions

The Windy City. Chicago may be the Windy City, but it is not a windy city. According to WGN-TV's Tom Skilling, the average wind speed in Chicago is 10.4 miles an hour, less than that of Boston (12.9), Buffalo (11.9), Milwaukee (11.5), Kansas City (10.8), Dallas (10.7) or Minneapolis (10.5). The Windy City nickname came from New York Sun editor Charles Dana, who was tired of hearing Chicagoans boast (or blow hot air) about the World's Columbian Exposition of 1893.

It's too damn hot/It's too damn cold. And speaking of weather, it's not as hot or as cold as whining locals will have visitors believe. The average summer high temperature is 81.7, cooler than Philadelphia (84.3) or Kansas City (86.1). The average winter high temperature is 32.2, considerably warmer than places such as Winnipeg (13.5) or Caribou, Me. (22.1). As for snowfall, Chicago's winter average of 38 inches is less than Buffalo gets in a bad day.

Who controls Buckingham Fountain? Chicagoans who think they're hip will tell you that the fountain is controlled by a computer in Atlanta. An apocryphal version says control shifted out of town because someone from the Chicago Park District lost at poker. Although from the late 1970s to 1994 the fountain was indeed run out of Atlanta, the computer was moved to a pump house next to the fountain during 1994's renovation.

The Chicago Fire. Yeah, that Chicago Fire franchise in the old World Football League was pretty mythical, as is the current Major League Soccer team with the same name. But we're talking about the Great Chicago Fire of Oct. 8, 1871. And contrary to what many believe, it didn't wipe out the entire city. Only 10 percent of the city's area was destroyed, about 3 1/2 square miles. Still, some 250 people died and more than 17,000 buildings burned in the 27-hour blaze, which -- contrary to another myth -- wasn't started by Mrs. O'Leary's cow. One needs only to check the Tribune of Oct. 8, 1997, which reported that Chicago City Council had approved a resolution which absolved the cow of all blame. Serious politicians, on the other hand, remain a myth.

Polish power. Chicago has long claimed to have more Poles than any city outside Warsaw, with more than a million residents of Polish heritage. But that number has fallen to 735,000, according to the Polish consulate in Chicago. Fewer people are declaring their Polish ancestry, and cities in Poland are growing, putting Chicago behind places

such as Krakow and Lodz. But Chicago still has the largest Polish population of any city outside Poland.

### Chicago do's and don't's

#### Don't . . .

- Be afraid to take a CTA train between the city and O'Hare or Midway airports unless you have a ton of luggage. It's the cheapest, quickest way to get back and forth (\$1.50 versus up to \$30).
- Wait in long lines at Uno or Due for the city's best Chicago-style pizza. Walk past the rubes, buy a frozen pie and heat and eat at home. Tastes just as good.
- Stop short on the teeming lakefront bicycle path when jogging or biking. Mayhem ensues. And do think about using a running track (like the outdoor one at Chicago Avenue and Lake Shore Drive) or the many great bike paths elsewhere in the city.
- Feel self-conscious taking one of those horse-drawn carriage rides, but get a price quote before taking it.
- Visit Oak Street Beach if you're offended by acres of firm young bodies in skimpy bathing attire.
- Use parking garages next to major performance venues. When the show lets out, gridlock begins. Park a few blocks away and cab it. You'll save aggravation -- and possibly money.
- Ask for directions to Michael Jordan's restaurant. It, like him, is long gone.
- Visit the John Hancock Observatory. Go instead to the Signature Lounge on the 96th floor. Same views, but it's a lounge, so you can relax with a drink and maybe spend less than the Observatory's \$9.50 admission.
- Buy mayonnaise-slathered ears of corn from pushcart vendors. Just don't.
- Ever park your car, even for a minute, in a downtown tow zone or the drop-off lane at O'Hare.
- Waste time/money at national chains like Hard Rock Cafe, Cheesecake Factory, House of Blues, etc. Try unique Chicago places instead, such as the Berghoff, Zephyr Ice Cream parlor, or Manny's Deli (this sentence as published has been corrected in this text).

#### Do . . .

- Plan your Art Institute visit for Tuesday night. Even most Chicagoans don't know that the world-class but crowded art museum is free on Tuesdays and stays open that day till 8 p.m.
- Use any chance to play the quintessential Chicago game, 16-inch softball, unless you're a musician or brain surgeon ... who needs their fingers.

- Visit the following: a sidewalk cafe, but make sure your table is not next to a bus stop or you'll be asphyxiated by fumes; any and all Frank Lloyd Wright buildings; the U-505 and coal mine exhibits at the Museum of Science & Industry; the Jazz Record Mart (no place like it); the Music Box Theatre (art films in a kitschy old movie palace); Brookfield and/or Lincoln Park Zoo; Powell's Used Book Stores or Bookman's Alley in Evanston; the Vienna Hot Dog factory at Damen and Fullerton Avenues; Al's Italian Beef on Taylor Street or Mr. Beef on Orleans Street; a Lincoln Park lagoon; Southport Lanes (bowling with pin boys); the Chicago Cultural Center just to gape at the ornamentation inside.

- Use the free trolley service to visit Chinatown and Pilsen, two excellent stop-offs if you want to sample neighborhood diversity.

- Be alert to the reopening of lower Wacker Drive, which is slated for November. City cognoscenti use the lower-level roadway to avoid surface traffic jams. And if you ever have to travel to the Southwest Side, take another little time saver, the diagonal Archer Avenue.

- Visit Second City, Chicago's gift to the world of improv. And take advantage of the reduced prices on Monday nights.

- Be aware that there are 24-hour restaurants (e.g. Clark's on Belmont Avenue,) a 24-hour laundromat (Riverpoint Coin Laundry, 1730 W. Fullerton Ave.), and an all-night pet hospital (Chicago Veterinary Emergency Services, 3123 N. Clybourn Ave.).

- Attend a Chicago City Council meeting. The sessions are open to the public -- and zany.

- Make time for the Chicago Architecture Foundation's Chicago River tour, combining awesome scenery, essential culture and a nice boat ride. If there is a can't-miss tourist attraction in this city where hundreds vie for the title, this is it.

Chicago eats: Beyond hot dogs and thick pizza

## Brains

What it is: Duh, you dunderhead -- it's the organ (the plump and pale-colored matter) inside the skull of various critters. Cooks use beef, lamb, goat and pork brains.

Tastes like: When cooks get their hands on 'em, they can be creamy and flavorful.

How to eat it: Tossed with scrambled eggs, with brown butter and capers (as a French cook might do), in tortillas (for tacos de sesos) or, as they do in some south Asian countries, as brains masala.

Where to find it: Head to Devon Avenue's eateries -- but call ahead since they are often offered as specials. Try Usmania South Asian Cuisine (2253 W. Devon Ave.) where the lamb and goat brain combo is seasoned with garam masala, chiles, onions and cilantro. At Shan Restaurant and Grocers (5060-A N. Sheridan Rd.), it's cow brains with chiles and cilantro.

## Huitlacoche

What it is: Corn smut -- or, somewhat more delicately, corn fungus that sprouts in bulbous blobs on corn during the rainy season, especially in Mexico.

Tastes like: Chopped up mushrooms with an earthy flavor echoed in its inky black color that is almost sweet, once it is sauteed with onions, epazote and garlic.

How to eat it: With melted cheese inside a tortilla, with mushrooms in crepes, atop a sope or inside an empanada -- salsa optional.

Where to find it: The open-air New Maxwell Street Market that sprouts along Canal Street south of Roosevelt Road at the crack of dawn on Sunday mornings. El Colonial Restaurant (2400 S. Pulaski Rd.) does them up as quesadillas and gorditas.

## Kabanos

What it is: Dozens of kielbasa (Polish sausages) hang behind deli counters in Chicago, but this super-sized Slim Jim look-alike -- at 16-or-so inches -- stands out.

Tastes like: Spicy, dried, smoky sausage.

How to eat it: Munched on the run or with a beer.

Where to find it: Anywhere a Polish sausagemaker rules, including Andy's Deli & Bakery (3055 N. Milwaukee Ave.) and Joe & Frank's (3334 N. Milwaukee Ave.).

## Smelt

What it is: A small, silvery fish that enjoys legendary status, particularly in April when the cry goes up along the lakefront: "The smelt are running." (This should not to be confused with the yell "the jocks are running" that rises from the city during autumn's Chicago Marathon). The cry kicks off the annual smelt fishing season when hundreds of Chicagoans gather along Lake Michigan's shoreline to catch, clean, fry and eat the spiny little creatures.

Tastes like: A deep-fried, batter-dressed over-grown guppie.

How to eat it: Tail and all, sometimes with lemon, sometimes with tartar sauce, sometimes with secret, carefully concocted recipes.

Where to find it: Freshly fried by fishermen along Chicago's coastline in April and in eateries around town. In Mexican restaurants, they're called charales. They are regularly on the menu at Boston Blackie's (164 E. Grand Ave.) and at the Parthenon (314 S. Halsted St.).

Free shows: Corruption, vice, patent infringement

While a cynic might argue that most of the meaningful justice in Chicago occurs behind closed doors, when defendants cut deals to plead guilty, it is the proceedings in open court that provide some of the city's most interesting entertainment.

Where else can you get a seat only scant feet away from a luminary like Betty Loren-Maltese, the embattled Cicero town president charged, along with seven others, with looting the town's coffers of millions of dollars in the mid-1990s.

Want to watch the Cubs or Sox? Turn on the television. Want to see a trial in Illinois? You've got to physically go to the courthouse. Unlike other states such as Florida, California (remember O.J.?) and Wisconsin, trials are not televised here.

But, hey, forget the double-digit cost of attending professional sports events: Court viewing is free.

There are two main venues: The U.S. District Courts, housed in the Dirksen Federal Building at 219 S. Dearborn St., and the Cook County Criminal Courts, located at 2600 S. California Ave.

With nearly 40 judges and magistrates, the federal courts provide a variety of viewing choices. This is where you find trials for alleged political corruption, major drug violations, anti-trust violations, white-collar fraud and for the really esoteric, patent infringement (though watching paint dry may be more entertaining -- unless it's a fight over the design of a paper diaper, which really happened).

If it's mayhem and murder you want, take a trip to the Criminal Courts building, commonly referred to as "26th and Cal." It has some 30 courtrooms, where you will find trials featuring murders, robberies, rapes, drug deals and an assortment of other evils. Beware; it often takes a strong stomach.

Remember you will have to pass through a metal detector to get into either venue, so leave knives and other weapons at home (you would be surprised at what people try to bring in). No recording devices are allowed, either.

How does one know where to go? Start by looking at the newspapers for stories about the big cases of the day. Almost always the judges are identified and you can simply go to their courtroom. The federal courts also provide a handy electronic daily schedule at [www.ilnd.uscourts.gov](http://www.ilnd.uscourts.gov).

But don't be afraid to just walk the halls and peek inside. If you spot a jury in the box, walk in and take a seat. It's justice in action.

10 night spots tourists -- except maybe German tourists -- dare not go

Lee's Unleaded Blues, 7401 South Chicago Ave., 773-493-3477. German tourists can indeed be found at the terrific Checkerboard Lounge on 43rd Street, but they're harder to spot at this South Side blues institution. The room's a narrow, weird L shape, the stage is shoe box-size, but it's nearly impossible to find a more authentic, more richly entertaining place in the whole city.

Marylup Polonaise, 3792 N. Milwaukee Ave., 773-545-4152. Schizoid Polish/Latino club that looks like a big ol' banquet hall. Lots of neighborhood folks, Polish and mostly Mexican menu. An absolutely delightful cultural exchange.

Batey Urbano, 2647 W. Division St., [www.bateyurbano.com](http://www.bateyurbano.com) (no phone). All-ages, no-alcohol club put together by the Puerto Rican Cultural Center and others, featuring theater, poetry and lots of terrific live music. This is in swinging West Town, so soon more than German tourists may be showing up.

Hollywood East, 5650 N. Broadway, 773-338-7200. The best Caribbean bar in town, with a mostly Caribbean clientele: Jamaican, Cuban, Haitian, West Indian. It's a slow, sexy groove kinda place. Live music played with unbridled joy.

Club Intimus, 312 W. Randolph St., 312-901-1703. West Randolph has been the historic locus for discreet black sapphos since the 1970s. This Saturday night-only club for African-American women is the latest incarnation.

Lakeview Lounge, 5110 N. Broadway, 773-769-0994. Funky, mostly white working-class fun with Nightwatch, the band that knows all tunes at all hours no matter how much alcohol has been consumed.

White Palace, 1159 S. Canal St., 312-939-7167. The guys at this diner keep it open 24/7 to make sure no matter when the partying stops there's a place to pig out afterward. Daily specials but the Philly cheesesteak is tops.

Black Market Chicago, 2418 W. North Ave., 773-278-6780. Wild fetish store, open till midnight on weekends. No porn, no videos, no hooking -- just toys and lots of attitude.

Gato Negro, 1461 W. Irving Park Rd., 773-472-9353. Latino working-class gay bar in ethnically mixed gentrifying neighborhood, low-to-the-ground atmosphere. Queens, butches, nerds, bears, flames, closet cases -- the works. Has been around forever.

Club Saga, 6255 N. McCormick Rd., 773-368-5267. Asian nightclub, sans karaoke. Strange mix of poppy and deep hip-hop.

What they don't tell you at Ticketmaster

Don't use the phone. Tickets to live entertainment are best bought at the venue. That's the only way to avoid all the convenience fees -- and the hold time. Many people also swear they get the best seats by going directly to the box office.

Many of the best Chicago theaters don't use Ticketmaster anyway. Chicago theater is famous for its tiny youthful companies whose marketing savvy extends no farther than an answering machine in someone's apartment. Buying a ticket can be wearisome -- especially if you're leery about leaving your credit card number for someone's landlord to overhear -- but this is where the most rewarding shows are to be found.

A show on Hot Tix doesn't mean it's a flop show. In New York, the availability of half-price tickets means the stigma of a show with weak returns. But in Chicago, the League of Chicago Theatres expects all its members to regularly offer tickets to its Hot Tix program, where several Web sites offer half-price seats. Ergo, the selection here is better than you think.

Parking can spoil your night. The cost of leaving a car near many venues can easily break the bank. If drive you must, consider the following: You can park for free at Steppenwolf if you leave your car on Halsted Street south of North Avenue; you can park for free at Second City if you park on North Avenue, about 500 yards west of the theater and beyond; free nighttime parking in the Loop is easier than you think -- if you hit it right at 6 p.m., when daytime parking restrictions end (park and then go for dinner). Best bet is Monroe Street, between Wacker Drive and Dearborn Street.

Previews are a better deal. Many of the larger Chicago theaters reduce their prices for performances before reviews come out. These performances are often the ones where the stakes are highest and the performers the most engaged. Here's the best bet of all: Look for the final low-price preview. That may well be the press opening, when (in theory, at least) things should be firing on all cylinders.

Stops they don't make on the architectural tour

The Balbo Column, east of Soldier Field at about 1600 S. Lake Shore Drive. Mounted on a base of travertine marble, this ancient Roman artifact offers a bizarre tribute to the late Italian dictator Benito Mussolini and fascism. The column commemorates the flight of a squadron led by Mussolini's air marshal, Italo Balbo, to the 1933 Century of Progress world's fair in Chicago (Balbo Drive, which runs through Grant Park, is also named for Balbo). Originally displayed in front of the Italian pavilion at the fair, the column now stands in isolation along the lakefront bike trail. If you stop to read the chiseled inscription on the base, you can still make out words like "BENITO MUSSOLINI" and "IN THE ELEVENTH YEAR OF THE FASCIST ERA."

The south facade of the Rookery Building, 209 S. LaSalle Street. Notice we didn't say the whole Rookery, that muscular 1888 LaSalle Street landmark by Daniel Burnham and John Wellborn Root. We're just talking about a small part that helped pave the way for the modern skyscraper. The LaSalle and Adams Street facades, with their turrets and dark

masonry, have load-bearing walls. That's how office buildings were built before internal metal frames made possible skyscrapers whose outside walls were little more than curtains of glass. Which is where the south facade comes in. Step into the alley-like street just south of the Rookery and you're looking at a proto-curtain wall on the building's lower floors. The interior is held up by a combination of cast-iron columns and wrought-iron beams. Few note this little feature, but if the likes of Burnham and Root hadn't tried it, who's to say where the art of the tall building would be today?

Comiskey Park, 35th Street, just west of the Dan Ryan Expressway. No, not the soulless new one. We're talking about the ghost of the old Comiskey Park that once stood on the north side of 35th Street across from the present park. Built in 1910, it was razed in April 1991. Nothing is left, except acres of parking lot -- and a diagram of the old playing field, set amid all that asphalt. There are the dearly departed park's foul lines, painted on the black surface of the lots and ending in circles that indicate the locations of the two foul poles. Those lines start from a marble replica of home plate, embedded in a large circle of tan concrete at the exact spot where the plate was in the old park. And, on either side of the plate, there are the two batter's boxes, outlined in white concrete.

The Raber House (also known as the Fishbowl House), 5760 S. Lafayette Ave. Built in 1870, this South Side home, with its distinctive cupola atop a Victorian base, closely resembles the "Addam's Family" home. But now it also has a wonderful touch of whimsy that would even make Lurch laugh. Originally a freestanding country home with a fishpond and garden, it became surrounded by other houses as Chicago grew. Now, as the city is cleared of old structures that are crumbling or harboring gangs, the Raber House is again isolated -- and boarded up. But wait. Not long ago, neighbors decided to beautify it by restoring the fish pond . . . in a way. What they did was paint fish on the nailed-up boards. Morticia would be proud.

Andreas von Zirngibl's grave. Amid the debris and rusting metal of the Cozzi Iron & Metal scrap yard at 9331 S. Ewing Ave., lies the grave of Andreas von Zirngibl, who was born in Russia in 1797, and was a soldier in the army that fought Napoleon at Waterloo in 1815. He eventually settled in Chicago, where he had a farm and where he died in 1855. In his will, he asked that he be buried on his homestead and that his grave be kept up, no matter what happened to the land. And he rests -- perhaps not in peace -- there to this day. The Cozzi folks don't give tours, but visitors can drop by and pay their respects.

The bitter truths about our tortured sports

\* The following are sacred local sports icons: ex-Bull Michael Jordan; ex-Bear Mike Ditka; ex-Cub Ernie Banks; ex-Bear Dick Butkus; ex-Sox owner Bill Veeck; ex-DePaul coach Ray Meyer; and ex-Cub Ron Santo. The following are local sports icons who never will be beloved: White Sox-Bulls owner Jerry Reinsdorf; Bulls general manager Jerry Krause; ex-Bear president Michael McCaskey; and Blackhawk owner Bill Wirtz. FYI: Krause did not draft Jordan.

\* Native Chicagoans do not root for both local baseball teams. The Cubs are favored by North Siders and also tend to be the team of choice of newcomers and yuppies, probably because of the cachet of Wrigleyville. The White Sox are the darlings of the South Side, selected suburbs and people from Indiana.

\* The Bears were 1985-'86 Super Bowl champions, but the following year they could not even win a playoff game. What many regarded as the finest football team ever was allowed to degenerate by the front office.

\* The United Center, whose primary tenants are the Bulls, is named for United Airlines and, coincidentally, the fortunes of both the airline and the basketball team have pretty much gone in the dumpster since they became partners.

\* DePaul is the best-known college basketball team in Chicago, but Loyola is the only collegiate team in Illinois to ever win the NCAA Division I men's title, which it did in 1963. DePaul's last Final Four appearance was in 1979, when Magic Johnson's Michigan State team beat Larry Bird's Indiana State team for the title.

\* No professional sports team in America has waited longer to win a championship than the Cubs. In 2008, they will celebrate the 100th anniversary of their last World Series title. The situation is so desperate that statues are erected of their announcers instead of their players.

\* Chicago sports fans dislike New York teams. Some feel this dates to the 1932 World Series, when Yankee slugger Babe Ruth supposedly predicted, by pointing to the bleachers, that he would hit a home run against the Cubs on the next pitch and then did. But more likely it's a holdover from the 1950s, when the Yankees dominated the American League and prevented good White Sox teams from winning a pennant until 1959. And, of course, there were the 1969 Mets.

\* Harvard-educated coffee tycoon Fred McLaughlin was granted the Blackhawks' franchise by the National Hockey League in 1926 for \$12,000. That's roughly the cost of a single season-ticket for the best seat in the house this season.

\* Notre Dame is considered Chicago's home college football team despite Northwestern's recent success. This is because there are so many Catholics living here.

\* Mayor Richard M. Daley, following in the footsteps of his late father Mayor Richard J. Daley, is a devout White Sox fan. Any chance he would warm up to the Cubs was spoiled in 1990, when he attended the All-Star Game at Wrigley Field and got a seat with an obstructed view. Cardinal Francis George favors the Cubs, however, and a couple of years ago led the crowd in singing "Take Me Out to the Ballgame" during the 7th-inning stretch -- and joked about how he had planned to sing it in Latin.

Shopping you won't find on Michigan Avenue

The House of Monsters, 1579 N. Milwaukee, gallery 218 (in the Flat Iron Building); 773-292-0980. Here you can find tons of classic monster memorabilia, props from horror movies and much more. Q101's Mancow Muller shops here, but don't let that discourage you. Not for the faint of heart.

The Occult Bookstore, 1579 N. Milwaukee, gallery 321; 773-292-0995. It's one of Chicago's oldest spiritual bookstores, celebrating 83 years in business. Contrary to what the name may imply, this is not a bookstore about Satan. They carry some 20,000 books on topics such as metaphysics, astrology, yoga, Buddhism, Hinduism, UFOs and tarot cards. They also have a resident psychic on staff.

Transformations by Rori, 146 N. Oak Park Ave., Oak Park; 708-383-8338. This is a cross-dresser's dream store! In addition to clothes, they sell body enhancers, specific makeup to cover up facial hair and accessories. (There is also a store in Arlington Heights.)

Jan's Antiques, 225 N. Racine; 312-563-0275. It's 18,000 square feet of architectural artifacts, furniture, really just about anything and everything. This warehouse is so jammed, there's barely room to walk. Despite having to literally dig through huge piles of stuff, you can actually find some pretty neat things.

Abraham Lincoln Book Shop, 357 W. Chicago Ave.; 312-944-3085. It looks like a museum from the outside. Inside, you'll find everything you ever wanted to know about our 16th president. Not all of the 8,500 titles are about Ol' Abe. The store specializes in the Civil War, biographies and militaria. They also have reproductions of Civil War paintings and hold round-table discussion on the Civil War.

Martha's Crib, Heritage Plaza, 4145 W. 183rd St., Country Club Hills; 708-957-2010. Mammy figurines, replicas of slave shackles and lawn jockeys are among the items found here. The African-American owner sells this controversial black memorabilia as a way to educate, not offend.

Deciphering the city's official map

It's like Eskimos and snow.

For Chicagoans, neighborhoods have always been important. And that's why we have so many names for where we live.

Chicago is one of the few cities in the world that has an official map of its neighborhoods -- and it has had one perhaps the longest. Originally drafted in the 1930s by Ernest Burgess and his colleagues at the University of Chicago, the map shows 77 neighborhoods, also called community areas.

This map has been in use for more than six decades by sociologists and city planners.

Sure, most Chicagoans know what you're talking about when you mention Hyde Park. But New City?

That was the name that Burgess gave to the community west of the Union Stockyards, better known as Back of the Yards. But that more familiar designation was freighted with negative connotations because of the neighborhood's depiction in "The Jungle" by Upton Sinclair. So Burgess sought to give the community a verbal facelift by re-naming it. The effort failed: The Stockyards are long gone, but the area is still Back of the Yards.

Each of Burgess' community areas encompasses a number of smaller neighborhoods.

Portions of the West Town community, for example, are known as East Ukrainian Village, Noble Square, Ukrainian Village and Wicker Park.

Neighborhoods have an emotional resonance. And people will call them what they want, regardless of officialdom.

They also have an economic resonance. One of the reasons that West Town has so many distinct communities is that it's one of the city's hottest real estate markets. And, as gentrification occurs, real estate agents and local activists tend to want to draw imaginary lines around particular groups of blocks to give them more of an allure.

Another method of neighborhood nomenclature in heavily Catholic Chicago has always been to refer to communities in terms of parishes. -- as in, "I live in St. Gertrude's, but he's from St. Ita's."

Ultimately, though, in a city dominated by a street grid of hard vertical and horizontal lines, intersections are the most quickly understood neighborhood designation.

It's easy, in a city of corners, to picture a particular one formed by two major streets -- and the neighborhood around it.

2 neighborhoods that feel like foreign lands

Especially on hot summer nights, we like to go to Mexico or the Indian subcontinent. It's easy; 26th Street for the former, Devon Avenue for the latter, places where the languages, smells, sounds, signs, shops, even the rhythms of life invoke a sense of being far from Chicago.

By the early 1970s, in the Pilsen neighborhood, Czech and Slovak immigrants who owned shops on 26th Street were starting to die off, while their children and grandchildren, educated and with well-paying jobs, were moving up and, therefore, out.

The same upward, outward motion was happening in Pilsen's long-time Mexican port-of-entry area. Many of its residents headed for Little Village around 26th Street, creating an

opportunity for Mexican merchants to take over vacated storefronts, fix them up, fill the windows with their wares.

Life returned to a two and a half-mile stretch of 26th Street starting at California and extending west to about Cicero Avenue. Now the businesses along that strip do a huge volume of sales, second only to Michigan Avenue.

On a weekend night, don't count on a speedy drive along 26th Street. You'll find a motorized version of the traditional Spanish paseo, an evening stroll. Though leisurely, this stroll moves to the thudding bass of Mexican music pouring from the oversized speakers in cars and pickups, music met by another wave of sound coming from stores selling compact discs.

Along with music shops, there are jewelry stores featuring images of Our Lady of Guadalupe, and law firms specializing in immigration problems. There are restaurants where you can enjoy chicken in mole sauce (mole, meaning concoction, may include peppers, spices, nuts, even chocolate) or a Vuelve a la Vida (literally, come back to life, a cold seafood cocktail). There are stores selling pinatas to fill with candies and break at a child's birthday party. And there are lots of street vendors.

Paleteros sell cold treats (try arroz con leche, sort of a frozen rice pudding on a stick). Other stands may have colorful fruit cups or elotes (corn).

It just might be Guadalajara on a Saturday night.

The pulse of Devon Avenue is different. While 26th Street is leisurely but throbbing, Devon Avenue between Ridge Boulevard to the east and California Avenue to the west is softly languid. Though the sidewalks can be crowded, people move with hot-climate slowness, stopping to look at the richly colored fabrics in the windows of sari shops (though you won't often see this traditional women's garment worn on the street).

Once monolithically Jewish, the street runs through one of the most diverse neighborhoods in Chicago, Rogers Park. Devon is a global village, but setting the tone are the nations of India and Pakistan. (Pakistan was created from parts of former British India.) Though the countries have different religions, different languages, different political stances and now are hostile to each other back home, here Indians and Pakistanis have learned to share the avenue.

For a tourist, the differences are outshone by the similarities. Though there'll be no pork in Muslim Pakistani restaurants nor beef in Hindu Indian restaurants, both feature marvelously subtle spices making even the many vegetarian dishes palatable to the cauliflower-phobic. Stop in one of the grocery stores -- they're open until late in the evening -- to see what's available and, especially, to sniff the fresh spices, scents that can carry you to Karachi or Bombay.

A people's history, in less than 560 words

Schoolmarm types like to say Chicago's history began in 1803 when the government built Ft. Dearborn, near the present Michigan Avenue bridge, spitting distance from John Baptiste Point Du Sable's trading post.

Actually, it began a long way from there: in the Old World, where aristocrats gobbled up the gravy while peasants got the short end of the stick.

So when poor folk heard there were no counts and no dukes on the American prairies, they flocked to Chicago. The city and the Industrial Revolution were born together, so its factory owners advertised Chicago throughout Eastern and Southern Europe as a place where anyone willing to work would never be out of a job.

First to come were the Irish, who dug the canal that linked Chicago's river with the Mississippi River system and made our city the nation's transportation hub.

Afterward, many settled in Bridgeport, giving the Irish something they'd lacked in their homeland, a royal borough -- the birthplace of mayors, including Daleys I and II.

Next came the Germans, then the Poles and Italians, Slovaks and Jews, Greeks and Southern Slavs, recruited as factory hands by entrepreneurs such as George Pullman and Cyrus McCormick, whose sleeping cars and plows revolutionized travel and farming. They came in such numbers that Chicago grew like no city before it, unstoppable, even after the Great Fire of 1871.

By 1900, it was a city of 1.7 million; by now, its suburbs have chewed up enough prairie to house 8 million Chicagoans. It grew so fast, you couldn't get a handle on it.

Good government was a pipe dream. We had government by colorful ward heelers, like Ald. "Bathhouse" John Coughlin, who borrowed an elephant from the Lincoln Park Zoo to adorn his Colorado summer home.

Chicago brought together so many blue-collar types that labor relations could hardly be civil. During an 1886 campaign for an eight-hour workday, a riot at Haymarket Square was heard around the world. Because it was preceded by a workers' march on May 1, May Day became labor's holiday, still celebrated widely, if not in the city of its birth.

Constantly growing, Chicago had to be built and rebuilt. So it attracted talents such as Louis Sullivan, Frank Lloyd Wright and Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, whose innovations - - including the skyscraper -- made modern architecture synonymous with Chicago architecture.

Chicago's kaleidoscope of transplanted cultures attracted writers such as Theodore Dreiser, Upton Sinclair and Ben Hecht, leading H.L. Menken, no great giver of compliments, to hail Chicago's literature as America's literature.

Chicago's immigrant neighborhoods inspired the University of Chicago to establish the world's first department of sociology. Even newcomers who didn't find a promised land managed to transform the pain of disappointment into art. Jazz and urban blues -- America's musical gifts to the world -- were born in Chicago's African-American neighborhoods.

And you know the best thing about Chicago history? It's still on daily display. Go down to the Autobuses Latinos station on South California Avenue when the bus from Laredo arrives.

Watch as our latest newcomers, immigrants from Mexico, step off: You'll be seeing the city's past, its present, and -- the good Lord be willing -- its future.

10 political names, terms to drop into conversation

Daley. The Mayor (pronounced "Mare"). For 34 of the last 47 years, a Daley has been the mayor -- Richard J. Daley from 1955 until his death in 1976, and his son, Richard M., from 1989 until whenever.

Mayor for Life. A term used to describe the present Mayor Daley.

Republican. An endangered species in Chicago. Only one sits in the City Council -- and he toes the Democratic Party line more closely than some Democrats.

The Irish. The ethnic group that, although never a majority in the city, has ruled the Democratic political machine -- and Chicago -- since 1933.

Anton Cermak. The Bohemian-born mayor who created the Democratic machine. He was fatally shot by a bullet meant for President-elect Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1933, opening the way for the Irish takeover of the party.

Ward committeeman. The Democratic Party official you call when you need a stop sign, a tree trimmed or something -- pardon the \_expression -- fixed.

Precinct captain. A visitor from the ward committeeman around election time, wondering how you're going to vote.

Council Wars. The three years of vitriolic battles between the white majority in the City Council, led by Ald. Edward "Fast Eddie" Vrdolyak, and newly elected Mayor Harold Washington, the first African-American to hold the office. Washington eventually won -- but then died of a heart attack.

Beirut on the Lake. What the Wall Street Journal called Chicago during "Council Wars."

David Orr. Served as interim mayor following Washington's death in 1987. Known for his integrity, he had the shortest mayoral term in city history -- 6 days, 14 hours and 28 minutes.

Yes, Virginia, there was a Charles Wacker

Irving Park Road. Named for American author Washington Irving (1783-1859), not newspaper columnist Irving Kupcinet.

Wacker Drive. Charles Wacker was a Chicago brewer, director of the 1893 Columbian Exposition here, and later chairman of the city's plan commission.

Cook County. Named for Daniel P. Cook, a former Congressman in the 1840s who persuaded the federal government to help build the I&M canal connecting Chicago with the Mississippi River.

Dan Ryan Expressway. He was an insurance broker who was Cook County's board president from 1954-61.

Rush Street. Benjamin Rush, who never set foot in Chicago, was one of four physicians to sign the Declaration of Independence. Also named in his honor: Rush-Presbyterian Hospital and Rush Medical College.

Field Museum of Natural History. Named for pioneer Chicago businessman Marshall Field, an early supporter.

John G. Shedd Aquarium. Born on a New Hampshire farm, Shedd (1850-1926) moved to Chicago at a young age and became a successful businessman and president of Marshall Field & Co. from 1906-22.

Adler Planetarium. Named for Max Adler, a concert violinist who gave up music and became a vice president of Sears Roebuck & Co. after marrying into the family that controlled the company.

Richard B. Ogilvie Transportation Center. Ogilvie was a reform-minded Republican governor elected in 1968 and defeated in his re-election bid because he established the state's first income tax.

Streeterville. Capt. George Streeter (1837-1921) was an eccentric squatter who fought the city and federal government for rights to the land east of Michigan and north of Grand Avenues when it was not much more than a sandbar filled with other squatters.

Ogden Avenue. William B. Ogden, a wealthy real estate speculator, was Chicago's first mayor when the city was incorporated in 1837.

Pulaski Road. It took nearly 20 years of court battles before the street once known as Crawford Avenue was officially renamed, in 1952, to honor Casimir Pulaski, the American Revolutionary War hero from Poland.

Humboldt Park. Baron Friedrich Heinrich Alexander von Humboldt (1769-1859) was a German scientist famed for his five-volume work, "Cosmos: Draft of a Physical Description of The World."

Wentworth Avenue. Named for former Mayor John Wentworth, who told voters, "You damned fools. You can either vote for me for mayor or you can go to hell."

Bishop Ford Freeway. Formerly the Calumet Expressway, this South Side highway is named for Chicago African-American religious activist Louis H. Ford, presiding bishop of the 8.5 million-member Church of God in Christ when he died at age 81 in 1995.

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