

In the 20th century, Chicago became recognized around the world as a leading center of graphic design. While primarily known for its corporate style, the diversity of Chicago graphic design has grown in recent years to include work that is both extremely personal and experimental. This book will examine the historical forces which led to Chicago's status as a design center, explore the current work of 30 of Chicago's leading design offices, and consider how Chicago is continuing to shape the future of visual communications.

Chicago's place at the center of the nation forged it into a world center of commerce and culture. Its energy and vitality has been tempered over time, however, by traditional Midwestern pragmatism and rationality. Similarly, graphic design in Chicago has historically been informed by both the practical needs of business and the provocative ideas of design theorists who made the city their home.

Chicago has had a significant and disproportionate impact on the visual culture of our society. This power as a center of architecture, advertising, printing and publishing is directly attributable to its place at the center of the nation's water and rail systems in the late 19th century.

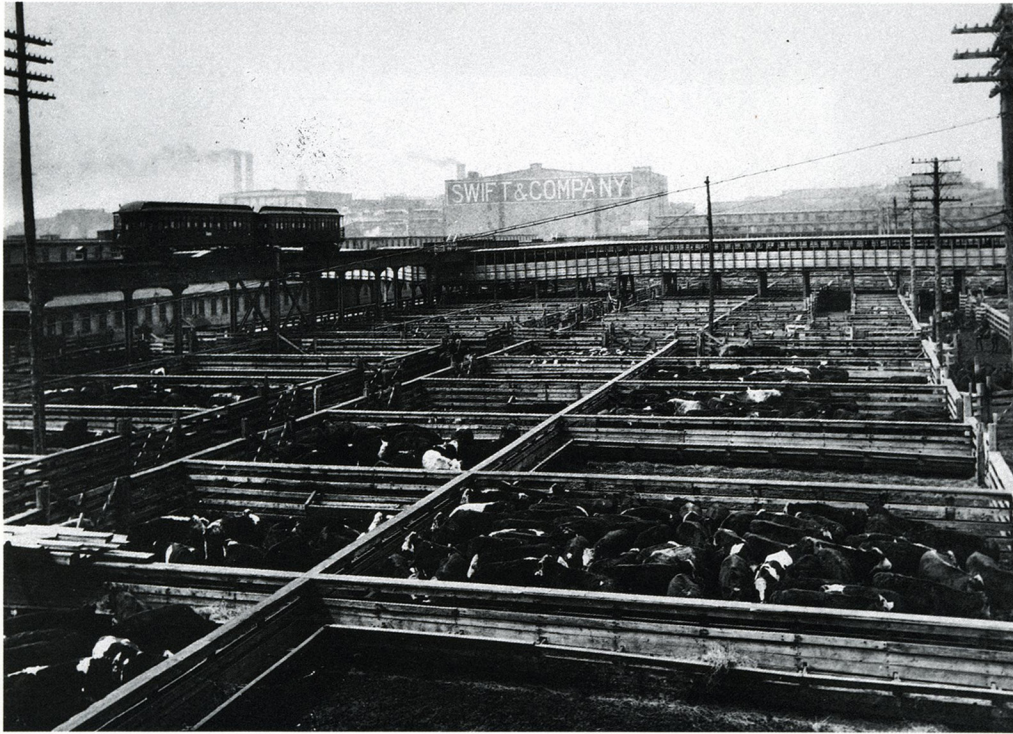
The completion of the Illinois and Michigan Canal in 1848 connected the Mississippi River and the bounty of the American West to the Great Lakes and the cities of the East. Railroads operating south of the Great Lakes made their western terminals in Chicago, while the various western railroads made their eastern terminals there. By 1869, with the linkup of the transcontinental railroad, the city had rail connections extending all the way to the Pacific Ocean.

Chicago became the clearinghouse for much of the nation's commodities and natural resources including grain, lumber and livestock. By the late 1860s, for example, over 50 million bushels of grain came in and out of Chicago each year. In 1872 alone, more than 9,000 vessels carrying lumber arrived in Chicago. The Union Stockyards, located several miles southwest of the city's center, were the largest in the world.

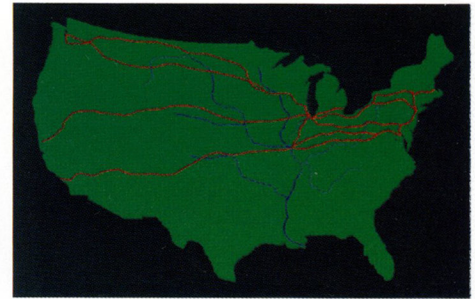


**Chicago Exchanges**

- Chicago Board of Trade . . . . . corn, oats, other grains
- Chicago Board Options Exchange . . . . . stock options
- Chicago Mercantile Exchange . . . . . meat, livestock
- International Money Market . . . . . treasury bonds and notes,  
currencies, precious metals
- Chicago Rice and Cotton Exchange . . . . . rice, cotton
- MidAmerica Commodity Exchange . . . . . financial futures



The Union Stockyards, c. 1910



Late 19th Century U.S. Rail Lines and Waterways

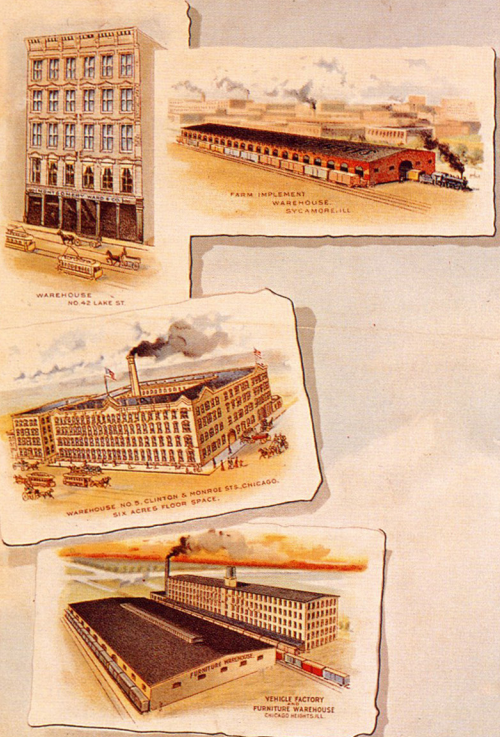
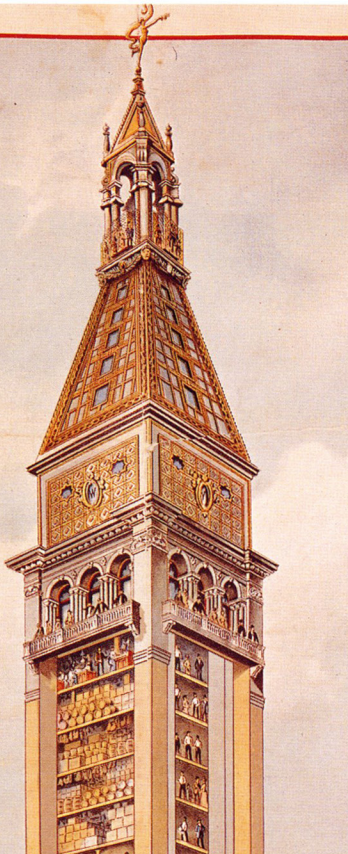
The need to somehow manage the vast amount of buying and selling resulted in systems of grading the quality of commodities like grain and lumber. In a short time, the Chicago grading systems proliferated throughout the region, creating speculative markets, futures contracts, and eventually full-scale futures markets. Today, Chicago is home to several of the world's leading financial exchanges.

The combination of large-scale economic activity and massive transportation and distribution networks helped Chicago become a national center of the printing, publishing and advertising industries. Design scholar and historian Victor Margolin of the University of Illinois at Chicago details in his essay the development of graphic design in Chicago in this context.

Chicago was also the home of the country's largest merchandising companies of the period, Sears, Roebuck and Co. and Montgomery Ward. Sears' first general merchandise catalogue, published in 1896, featured 532 pages of goods. By 1945, Sears' annual sales exceeded \$1 billion; sales grew to \$1 billion per month by 1967. These awesome economic forces helped Chicago become a leader in scholarship and research as well. The University of Chicago, for example, has produced more than 60 Nobel Prize winners in the past century. A number of other outstanding universities including Northwestern, Roosevelt, DePaul and Loyola have contributed to the city's reputation as a world center for ideas. Chicago's economic and cultural richness was enhanced by the birth of such institutions as the Art Institute of Chicago and the Chicago Symphony Orchestra in the 1890s.



The Chicago Board of Trade



"GREAT OAKS FROM LITTLE ACORNS GROW" \*\*\*\*\*

In 1873, the birth-year of this business, one small room, one man and a boy constituted its home and working force.

They are the oldest and largest General Merchandise House in the world receiving orders entirely through the mails, having originated this method of doing business in 1873.

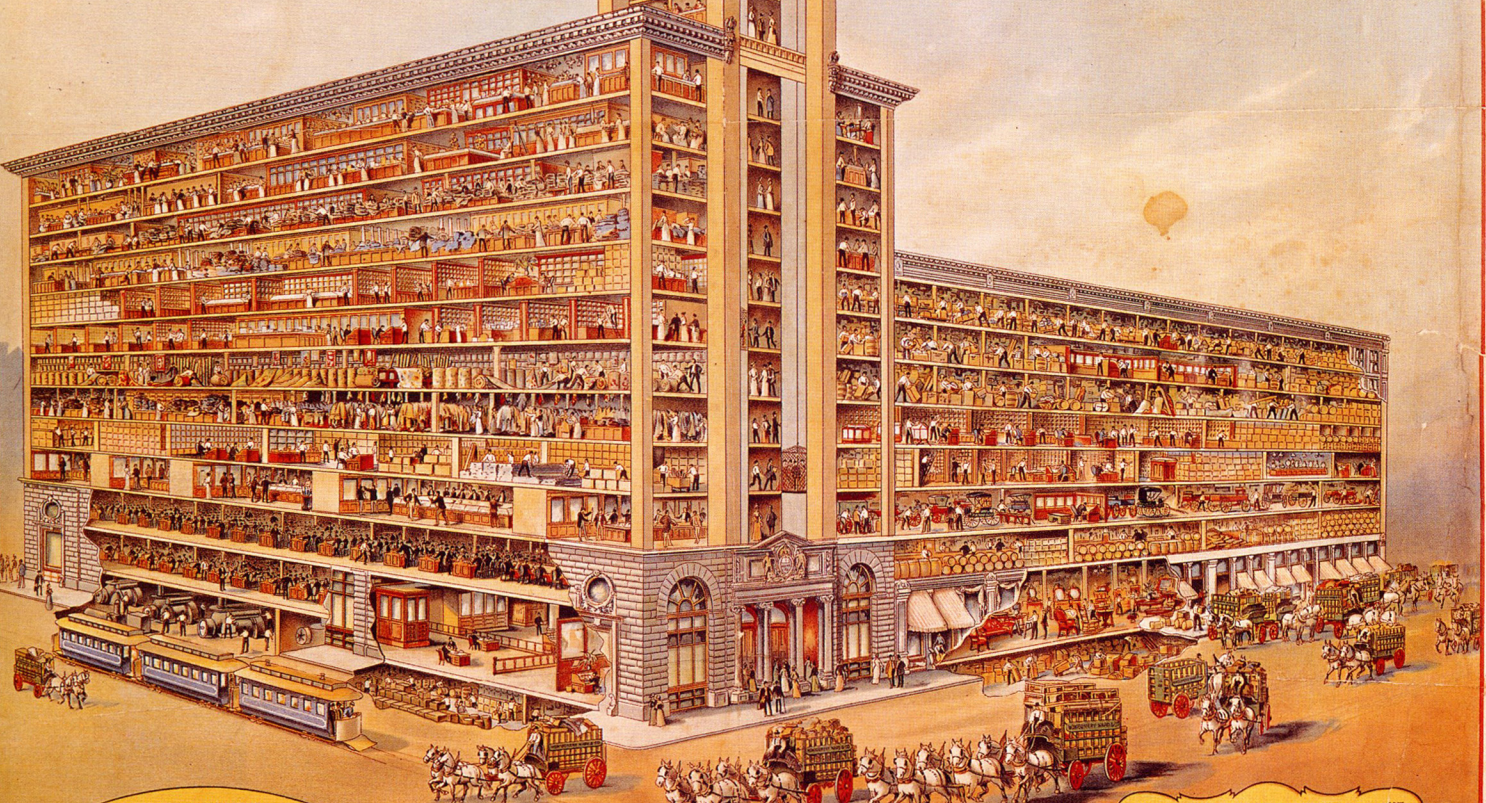
More than 4,000,000 customers send their orders each year and always find it pleasant and profitable to deal with a honest, reliable house.

The total yearly Postal money-order business of MONTGOMERY WARD & CO. exceeds the entire similar business of such large cities as Cleveland, Cincinnati, Detroit, New Orleans, San Francisco, Denver, etc.

They operate their own lighting plant, twin engines of 500 horse power furnishing the current for about 300 arc and 7,500 incandescent lamps.

The top of the tower is the highest point in Chicago. Visitors are admitted free, and can obtain a fine view of Chicago and Lake Michigan.

Every shipment is guaranteed to reach its destination safely and to give entire satisfaction, or it can be returned at the expense of the firm and all money will be cheerfully refunded.



INDEX TO BUILDING - MADISON ST. FRONT. 1st Floor - Advertising Division, Museum, Paper Division, etc.

INDEX TO BUILDING - MICHIGAN AVE. FRONT. 1st Floor - Heavy and Light Clothing, Importing and Packing Division, etc.

"A BUSY BEE-HIVE." SECTIONAL VIEW OF THE ENORMOUS ESTABLISHMENT OF MONTGOMERY WARD & CO. MICHIGAN AVENUE, MADISON AND WASHINGTON STREETS, CHICAGO.

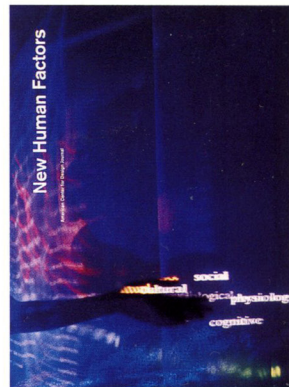
"A Busy Bee-Hive," color lithograph, 1900



View westward, The Great Basin, World's Columbian Exposition, 1893

**Congresses Held in Conjunction with  
the World's Columbian Exposition of 1893**

World's Parliament of Religions  
 International Congress of Education  
 Congress of Authors  
 Congress of Architects  
 Philosophy Congress  
 Labor Congress  
 World's Congress of Representative Women  
 Congress of Evolution



*American Center for Design  
 Journal, vol. 7, no. 1, 1993,  
 Bridge Group*

Chicago was also home of the World's Columbian Exposition of 1893, perhaps the most influential event of its type ever held. Nearly 28 million people – roughly 45% of the nation's population in 1893 – visited the fair during its six-month run. On a single day, October 9, more than 760,000 visitors jammed the grounds to mark the anniversary of the Great Chicago Fire. In addition to its appeal as unprecedented entertainment, the fair also made significant cultural and social contributions. A quarter million exhibits were brought to Chicago from over 60 nations. A series of congresses brought together 700,000 of the world's greatest minds. A number of reform movements, including those on behalf of women and labor, received significant attention at the fair.

The city's economic and cultural vitality became a beacon to scholars, writers, artists and designers in the early part of the 20th century, particularly in the 1930s, when the dark cloud of fascism was casting its shadow over Europe. It was during this period that the New Bauhaus was established in Chicago under the leadership of László Maholy-Nagy. Chicago design and architecture flourished in the middle part of this century.

Thanks largely to the influence of the New Bauhaus and the work of such individuals and firms as Richard Latham, Jay Doblin, Unimark and the Center for Advanced Research in Design (CARD) at Container Corporation of America, Chicago emerged as a global center for design theory and ideas. Institutions such as the

Institute of Design and American Center for Design – and journals such as *Design Issues*, published by the University of Illinois at Chicago, and the *American Center for Design Journal* – continue this rich tradition. Patrick Whitney, director of the Institute of Design, shares in his essay a number of current and recent projects undertaken by I.D. students and alumni which give us a glimpse of the future of visual communications.

The portfolios of work by Chicago design offices which make up the heart of this volume provide clear evidence that today's graphic designers are applying the best of historical and current design thinking to work for an immense range of clients. Between their energy and the city's vital design and cultural institutions, Chicago's influence on our visual culture will continue in its scope and impact for many years to come.

#### Architects Associated with Chicago

Daniel H. Burnham  
Louis Sullivan  
Bertrand Goldberg  
Mies van der Rohe  
Frank Lloyd Wright  
Walter Netsch  
Harry Weese  
Thomas Beeby  
Stanley Tigerman  
Helmut Jahn

#### Notable University of Chicago Nobel Prize Winners

Gary Becker, economics, 1992	Milton Friedman, economics, 1976
Leon Lederman, physics, 1988	James Dewey Watson, medicine, 1962
Herbert A. Simon, economics, 1978	Enrico Fermi, physics, 1938
Saul Bellow, literature, 1976	James Franck, physics, 1925

Logo for Chicago 93, the centennial celebration of the World's Columbian Exposition, Silvio Design

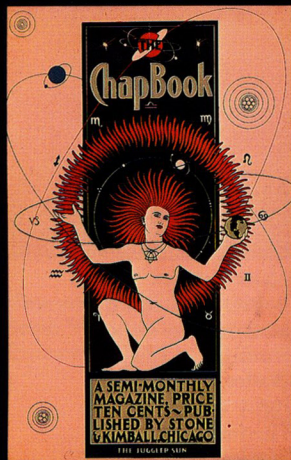
# Chicago<sup>3</sup>

# Chicago Graphic Design: A Brief History



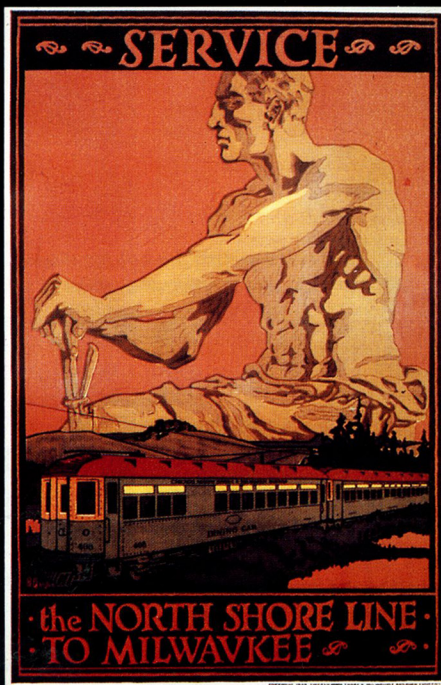
Will Denslow, poster for L. Frank Baum's "The Wonderful Wizard of Oz," 1890s. Above

Will Bradley, poster for the Stone & Kimball novel "When Hearts Are Trumps," 1894. Right



Claude Fayette Bragdon, poster for The Chap Book, c. 1897. Above

Oscar Hanson, poster for the North Shore Line, 1920s. Right



Commerce, always central to Chicago, has been a major factor in the development of the city's graphic design tradition. Essential to the rise of Chicago's commercial and typographic arts were its communication needs – represented by the newspapers, magazines, railroad timetables and promotional materials that had to appear regularly – and the exceptional growth of the printing industry which spawned a number of related enterprises such as publishing and advertising. Beginning in the late 19th century, these enterprises provided considerable work for commercial artists and layout men whose use of decorative alphabets and tightly-spaced layouts typified the job printing of the period.

In the 1890s, Chicago's burgeoning book publishing industry produced everything from textbooks to best sellers. The book publishers, as well as those who published magazines and newspapers, attracted commercial artists and typographers who began to specialize in publication design and illustration. One Chicago firm of the period, George M. Hill, published a best seller by a local writer, L. Frank Baum, who penned "The Wonderful Wizard of Oz." Illustrations for the book were drawn by Will Denslow, a Chicago newspaper artist, although subsequent volumes in the Oz series were, for the most part, illustrated by John R. Neill.

The most prominent Chicago literary publisher of the 1890s was Stone & Kimball, a firm that was started in Cambridge by two Harvard undergraduates. In 1894 Herbert Stone and Hannibal Ingalls Kimball moved their company to Chicago where Stone grew up and his father Melville had founded the Chicago Daily News in 1875. Shortly before leaving Cambridge, Stone & Kimball began to publish *The Chap Book*, which became the leading "little magazine" of the 1890s. It appeared twice a month and was a bargain at five cents an issue. Some of the finest American and European writers of the day wrote for the publication.

**A B C D E F G H I J K L**  
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Oswald Cooper, Cooper Black Condensed, 1920s. Far Left

Otis Shepard, Wrigley's Gum billboard, 1940s. Above

Container Corporation of America truck with logotype by Egbert Jacobson, 1936. Left



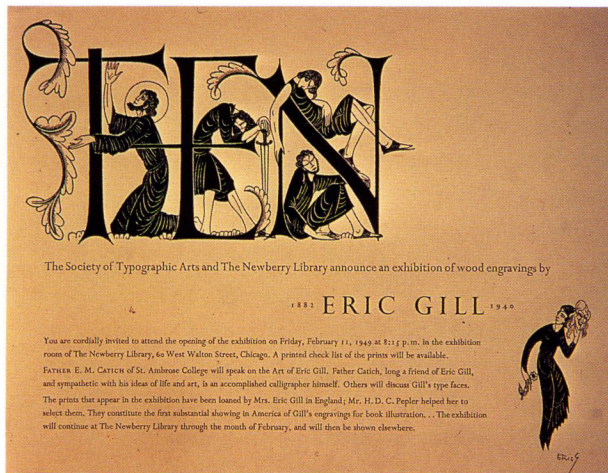
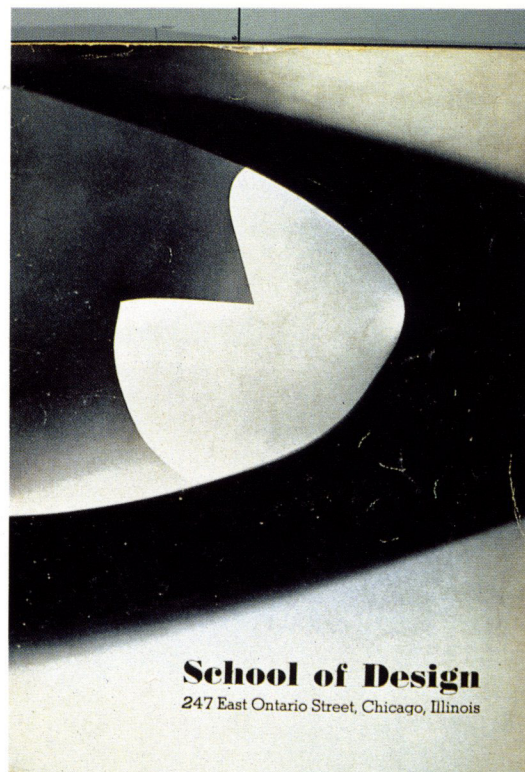
After *The Chap Book* moved to Chicago, its multicolored lithographic posters by Will Bradley, Frank Hazenplug, E.B. Bird, Claude Fayette Bragdon and J.C. Leyendecker set high standards for the artistic placards of the day. Of all the artists who worked for *The Chap Book*, Bradley was the most distinctive. A talented typographer as well as an illustrator, his posters always displayed a sensitive balance of type and image and showed a keen awareness of Art Nouveau and Arts and Crafts styles.

Another Chicago literary magazine, *The Echo*, was started in the 1890s by Percival Pollard, a local journalist and poster aficionado. Following *The Chap Book's* lead, he commissioned posters from Will Bradley and John Sloan, among others. Pollard was the author of "Posters in Miniature," perhaps the first book to reproduce the American art posters of the 1890s; and he also wrote a poster column for *The Inland Printer* in which he brought to the attention of the magazine's readers the poster work being done in Europe by Jules Chéret, Toulouse-Lautrec, Alfonse Mucha and others.

Though not a literary magazine, *The Inland Printer* hired Bradley to do a series of covers and those he produced combined varied mastheads with a group of splendid drawings. The American Type Founders purchased the rights to Bradley's lettering for one of the covers and then cast the letters as a type which they christened with his name. However Bradley, who was probably America's outstanding commercial artist in the 1890s, left Chicago in late 1894 and settled in Springfield, Mass. where he continued to do free-lance work before establishing his own press.

There was strong interest among Chicago bibliophiles of the 1890s in the books of the English private presses, particularly the heavily ornamented volumes of William Morris's Kelmscott Press. These books could be seen and purchased at McClurg's bookstore shortly after their publication. Among those who had a particular interest in them was Frederic Goudy, who subsequently became one of America's most eminent typographers. Goudy began his career in Chicago by doing lettering for advertising layouts. In 1903, he and his wife Bertha started the Village Press with the assistance of Will Ransom, who arrived in Chicago from Seattle to study art and later became a well-known book designer. The first publication of the Village Press, which moved with the Goudys to Massachusetts in 1904, was William Morris's and Emory Walker's "Essay on Printing," a book that paid homage to the English private press movement.

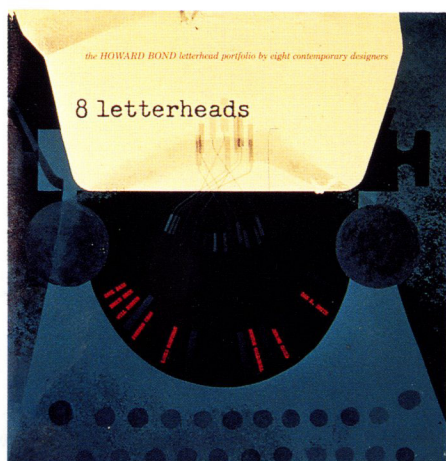
Concomitant with the growth of the publishing industry was another enterprise that became a source of work for commercial artists – advertising. In the late 19th century, most American agencies were in New York but a few in Chicago began to make their mark, particularly Lord & Thomas. In 1898 this agency hired Albert Lasker who, with copywriters Claude Hopkins and John E. Kennedy, introduced many new ideas into the advertising business, particularly the concept of "reason why" copy which told consumers why they should buy a product.



László Moholy-Nagy, catalog cover for School of Design, c. 1943. *Top*

Robert Hunter Middleton, exhibition announcement for the STA, 1950. *Above*

Bruce Beck, promotional portfolio, 1952. *Below*



When the automobile became widespread, the billboard emerged as a major outdoor advertising vehicle. Chicago was the home of the Poster Advertising Association, the national organization for the billboard industry, which published an excellent monthly magazine, *The Poster*, that promoted the spread of billboard advertising in the United States.

Advertising created a need for lettering and layouts which produced a distinct type of commercial artist, the lettering man. Foremost among the lettering men in Chicago was Oswald Cooper who was extremely knowledgeable about advertising and printing. Besides using available display types in his ads, he did much display lettering himself and wrote copy as well. As with Bradley, type foundries were interested in casting some of his lettering faces. His best-known face is Cooper Black, which he completed in the early 1920s and which was widely used in advertising layouts.

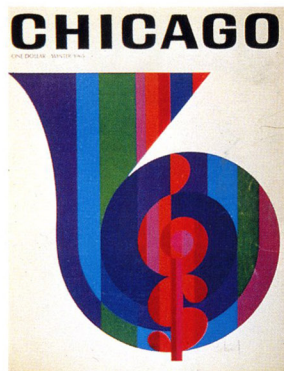
Cooper learned his trade at Frank Holme's School of Illustration where Frederic Goudy taught briefly. But that was not the only place to study commercial art in Chicago. The School of the Art Institute also offered courses in poster and advertising design and a number of Chicago commercial artists and illustrators were students there.

Perhaps the classiest Chicago advertising campaign of the 1920s was mounted by the Chicago Rapid Transit Lines and the Chicago North Shore and Milwaukee Railroad. Each month for three or four years a new poster advertising the Elevated Lines, Rapid Transit, or South Shore Lines appeared on the train platforms. The posters were created by local illustrators including Willard Elmes, Rocco Navigato and Oscar Hanson. The flat colors, strong tones and hand lettering were reminiscent of the modern posters one might have seen in the German poster magazine *Das Plakat*.

In 1921 the School of the Art Institute established a Department of Printing Arts under Ernst Detterer. The curriculum included "printing, typesetting, design in relation to printed pages, lettering, composition, life and [the] story of processes of reproduction." This course, in which students engaged in such rarefied practices as laying gold leaf on a page, was an alternative to entering commercial art through a print shop or printing plant.

Detterer's department functioned for ten years during which time a number of graduates became outstanding local designers. Among them was Robert Hunter Middleton who went to work for the Ludlow Typograph Company in 1923 and became the company's Director of Typeface Design 10 years later. During his long





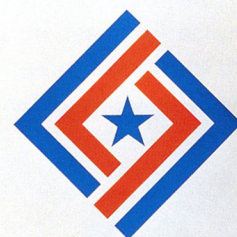
Art Paul, layout for Playboy, 1963. *Left*

Carl Regehr, cover of Chicago Magazine, 1965. *Above*

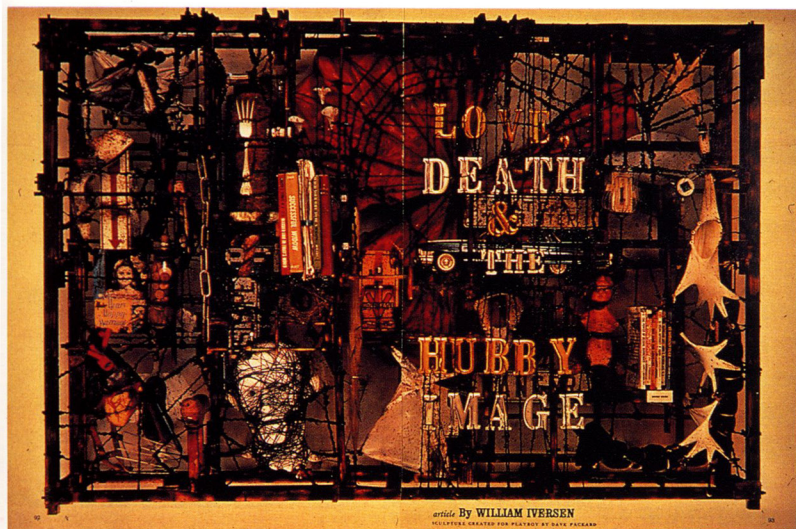
John Massey, art director (CARD), Graphic Standards Manual for Department of Labor, c. 1968. *Right*

Norman Perman, booklets for Continental Bank, 1966. *Below Left*

Massimo Vignelli, cover of Unimark's magazine Dot Zero, 1967. *Below Right*



U.S. Department of Labor  
Graphic Communication Standards Manual

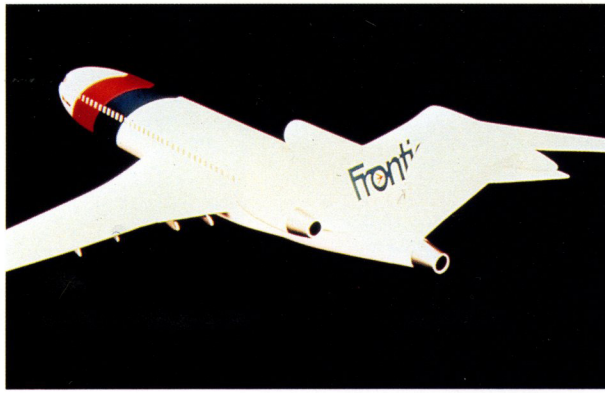


tenure at Ludlow, Middleton designed almost 100 typefaces. In 1945 he established his own printing and publishing venture, the Cherryburn Press, where one of his major projects, undertaken for the Newberry Library, was to print a collection of blocks by the British wood engraver Thomas Bewick.

Middleton was among the founding members of the Society of Typographic Arts (STA) in 1927. Some designers in this group had belonged to the American Institute of Graphic Arts in New York but split off from that organization because they felt it was too strongly oriented toward its local members. The aim of the STA was to establish high standards in typography and elevate public taste in design matters. The organization's early members, besides Middleton, included Ray DaBoll, William Kittridge (whose Lakeside Press was the source of many finely produced and designed books), and Douglas McMurtrie, the printing scholar. McMurtrie's book "Modern Typography and Layout," published in 1929, explored the relation of abstract art to graphic design and argued anew for a modern typography in America that drew from the European avant-garde but was not completely influenced by it. By 1934, after Hitler came to power in Germany,

some European designers began to emigrate to the United States. That year the Austrian designer and illustrator Joseph Binder was invited by the Art Directors Club of Chicago to teach his now-famous course on graphic stylization and simplicity. Binder's most notable influence was on Otis Shepard, the art director of the Wrigley Company who adopted Binder's style for Wrigley billboards and car cards.

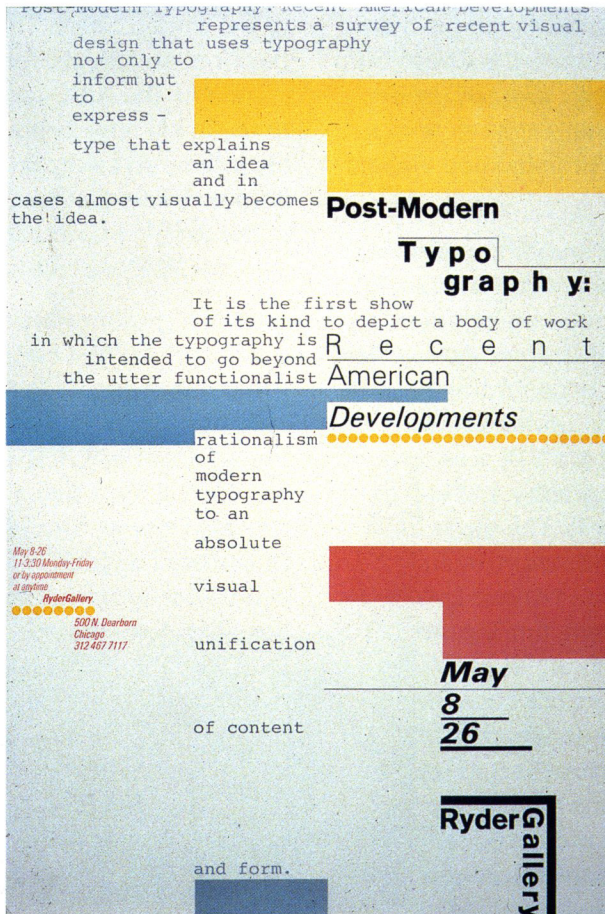
In 1936 a group called 27 Chicago Designers published the first book of work by its members. Among those included in the group's early volumes were John Averill, Rodney Chirpe, Egbert Jacobson, Robert Hunter Middleton, Ray DaBoll, Bert Ray, Paul Ressinger and Oswald Cooper. Since its beginning, 27 Chicago Designers has tried to publish a new volume every year, although this has not always been possible. Nonetheless the work of the group's changing membership continues to be a good reflection of significant trends in Chicago's graphic design practice.



Unimark, visual identity for Frontier Airlines, c. 1970. *Top Right*

RVI Corporation, Fire Extinguishing Equipment Packaging 1972. *Above*

Bill Bonnell, poster for exhibition at Ryder Gallery, 1970s. *Below*



It was not until 1937, however, when László Moholy-Nagy came to Chicago to establish the New Bauhaus, that the advanced ideas in visual communication which had been developing in Europe since the end of World War I hit Chicago with full force and inaugurated a new, more sophisticated and international phase of the city's graphic design practice. Moholy-Nagy brought over Gyorgy Kepes, a fellow Hungarian who had studied at the Bauhaus-influenced design school in Budapest and then worked with him in Berlin and London. Kepes headed the Light Workshop at the School of Design, which Moholy-Nagy started after the New Bauhaus folded in 1938. This workshop included photography as well as typography, layout and serigraphy.

Many local designers were introduced to modern design ideas through a special course which Kepes gave in 1938 under the sponsorship of the Chicago Art Directors Club. He also influenced many students in his courses at the School of Design where he remained until 1943. Designers who took either day or night classes with Kepes or Moholy-Nagy included Mort and Millie Goldsholl, Elsa Kula, Bruce Beck and Herb Pinzke.

In 1944 Paul Theobald and Company, a Chicago publisher specializing in books on modern design and architecture, brought out Kepes's "Language of Vision," a book which extended his ideas to a wider audience. This volume provided a completely new approach to visual design, one based more on the principles of Gestalt psychology and the forms of modern art than on the traditional book and layout arts. In 1947 Paul Theobald published Moholy-Nagy's last book, "Vision in Motion," a summation of his philosophy of education and design, which he completed shortly before he died.

The initial step in Chicago's development as a major center of corporate design occurred in 1936 when Walter Paepcke, president of Container Corporation of America, hired Egbert Jacobson as the company's first design director. Jacobson was not only responsible for the company's logos, stationery, invoices, annual reports and advertising but also its offices, interiors, factories and trucks. One of his first projects was to develop a series of corporate advertisements and he turned over the assignment to Charles Coiner at the N.W. Ayer advertising agency in Philadelphia. Coiner hired

the French poster artist A.M. Cassandre to do a group of innovative newspaper ads; then, during the war, other well-known artists and designers including Herbert Bayer, Man Ray, Fernand Léger, Herbert Matter and Matthew Leibowitz produced advertisements for the company. Bayer later became a design consultant to Container Corporation.

In 1951 Paepcke supported the first International Design Conference at Aspen; several years later the Aspen meeting assumed its own administration, though Container Corporation continued to contribute financially. The initiative taken by the STA in organizing subsequent Aspen conferences was a fitting context for a number of important design firms that emerged in the 1950s.

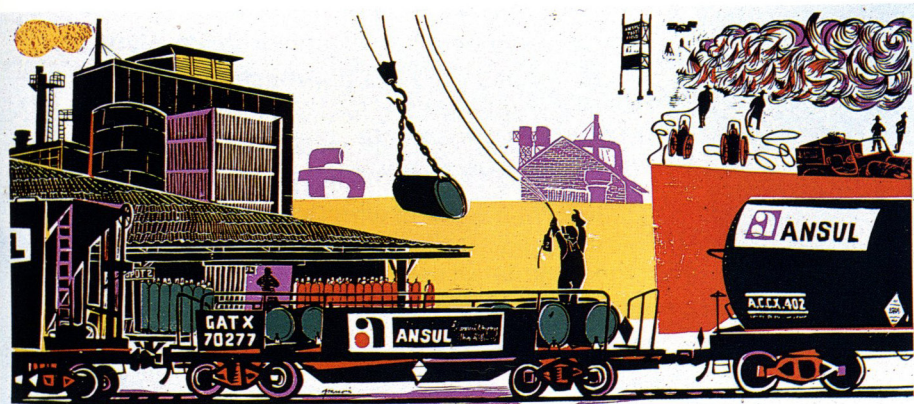
Bert Ray, who had been an art director at Abbott Laboratories, opened an office around 1950 and one thinks as well of firms such as Whitaker-Guernsey and Tempo. Other designers who became active at this time were Everett McNear, Norman Perman, Ed Bedno, Bruce Beck, Randall Roth, Ann Long, Rhodes Patterson, Susan Jackson Keig and Carl Regehr. In 1951 Phoebe Moore became the first woman elected to the 27 Chicago Designers to be followed not long after by Elsa Kula.

Another important event of the 1950s was the founding of Playboy in 1953 with Arthur Paul as art director. Paul hired some of the best artists and illustrators in the country to define Playboy's visual identity and created many exciting layouts himself. Following the founding of Esquire in 1933, Playboy became one of the few stylish magazines published in Chicago for a mass market.

One of the early Chicago firms to concentrate on corporate design was the RVI Corporation founded by Robert Vogele. Like Ralph Eckerstrom and John Massey, who followed Egbert Jacobson as successive design directors of Container Corporation, Vogele came from the art department of the University of Illinois Press in Champaign-Urbana where he had worked under Eckerstrom.

Eckerstrom, who arrived at Container Corporation in 1955, left there in 1964 to join a group of partners in founding Unimark, a graphic and product design office that was intended to operate on a worldwide scale. Others involved in the venture were Jim Fogelman, Massimo Vignelli, Larry Klein and Jay Doblin, who came to Chicago in 1955 from Raymond Loewy's New York office to serve as director of the Institute of Design.

After succeeding Eckerstrom as design director at Container Corporation, Massey started the Center for Advanced Research in Design (CARD), a studio within the company that was set up to work with outside clients. These included Atlantic Richfield, the U.S. Department of Labor and the Mayor's Committee on Economic and Cultural Development, located in Chicago's City Hall. For this committee, CARD designers created a set of banners and posters to brighten up the city center.



Robert Vogele, Ansul Chemical  
Company 1957 Annual Report



STA Design Journal cover,  
1985, Kovach Design.



Chris Garland, cover for Zoetrope, 1979. Above

Rick Valicenti and Michael Giammanco, poster for the Lyric Opera of Chicago, 1988. Below

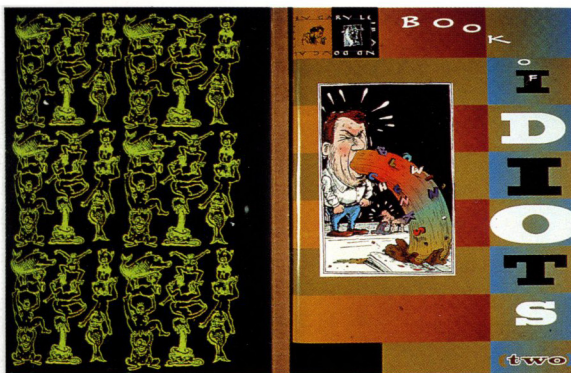


Another designer who worked for the Mayor's Committee was Carl Regehr, the first art director of Chicago Magazine, a publication that was intended to enhance Chicago's public image. Subsequently Regehr left Chicago for the University of Illinois in Champaign-Urbana where he became a key figure in the graphic design program there. Among the program's recognized graduates was Bill Bonnell, who first established a Chicago reputation at Container Corporation before moving on to New York to open his own office.

By the late 1960s, RVI Corporation, Unimark and CARD, as well as other firms such as Goldsholl Associates, Design Consultants Inc. and the Design Partnership, gave Chicago a national profile as a center of corporate design. But the city also had a graphic underground in the 1960s comparable to cities like Berkeley and New York. A notable figure in this movement was Skip Williamson whose free-lance work included covers for the Chicago Seed, an underground newspaper. Between 1968 and 1973, Williamson and some friends published Bijou, the only underground comic book to originate in Chicago.

By the time Unimark dissolved around 1979, it had become a training ground for many designers who continued to work in Chicago after they left the firm. Among these were John Greiner. Designers who had first trained at RVI Corporation before going out on their own included Wayne Webb, Jim Lienhart, Bill Cagney, Bill McDonald, Pat Whitney and Bart Crosby. During the 1960s and 1970s many other designers in the city were doing innovative work as well. One thinks, for example, of Norman Perman, Randall Roth, Ed and Jane Bedno, Michael Reid and David Burke.

In 1972 Doblin established his own firm where he developed a focus on corporate planning. He emphasized this approach in his work for major clients such as J.C. Penney and Xerox. After Doblin's death in 1989, the work of the firm continued under the leadership of Larry Keeley who had worked with Doblin to develop a multi-disciplinary focus for complex problem-solving.



Anthony Ma, comic book cover, 1991.



VSA Partners Inc., poster for a Harley-Davidson, Inc. MDA event, 1992.

The emphasis on corporate design and planning that developed in the 1960s and 1970s also helped broaden the orientation of STA. The STA in 1978 undertook the planning for the biennial international congress convened by the International Council of Graphic Design Associations (ICOGRADA). The ICOGRADA congress was organized around the theme of "Design That Works" and tried to give more emphasis to research and theory than previous congresses had. The same year Women in Design was founded in Chicago. This organization has sought more equitable working conditions and recognition for women designers and mounted a major exhibit on women graphic designers for its 10th anniversary.

STA's interest in research was pursued in a new publication, the *Design Journal*, which first appeared in the fall of 1979. STA was also one of the first design organizations to take an interest in design history. Supported by a National Endowment for the Humanities grant, it sponsored a conference in June 1981 on "The History of Graphic Design in Chicago." In 1989 it changed its name to American Center for Design (ACD) to reflect its broader outlook and include other design disciplines. In the meantime the American Institute for Graphic Arts became a national organization and a Chicago chapter was formed to complement the graphic design activities of the ACD.

Despite a thriving contemporary art scene that has drawn consistently on popular culture since the 1960s, very few of Chicago's graphic designers have made use of this source to the degree that the city's artists have. One of the first to do so was Chris Garland, whose studio Xeno introduced a new wave look from California in the early 1980s. Others who have at times practiced a freer, more experimental style as a counterpart to the predominance of corporate and business graphics in the city include Rick Valicenti's firm Thirst; Concrete, the office of Jilly Simons; Dana Arnett and Maria Grillo of VSA Partners, Inc.; Anthony Ma's firm, Tanagram; and Carlos Segura of Segura, Inc.

Although the national graphic design scene today is pluralistic and difficult to characterize, the corporate legacy of the 1960s still remains the strongest influence in Chicago even though a host of small experimental firms have gained wide reputations. Whether or not they will have a stronger presence in the future remains to be seen.