

Manufactural Geography of LaPorte, Indiana¹

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LaPorte, a city of 22,000, is one of many industrial cities scattered throughout the northeast United States. Located on the eastern threshold of the Calumet industrial complex (Fig. 1), LaPorte reveals its kinship to the Calumet region in terms of manufactured goods, transportation, markets and raw materials. Approximately forty diversified industries employ about 11,000 workers at an annual industrial pay roll of \$30,000,000. The greatest emphasis is upon the 10 machinery and 11 metal products plants (Fig. 2), as about 80% of total employment is in these various metal-related industries.

One and a half to two years ago LaPorte was a critical labor and housing area. The Chamber of Commerce and local industries stated then that no new industry was wanted, since additional plants would only aggravate the labor and housing situation. Because of the lack of sufficient male labor, labor demand was met through greater use of female help. In June, 1953, female help comprised 39.64% of total employment, an unusually high percentage.² This was wartime prosperity, however, since so much of local economic activity was based upon government contracts related largely to the Korean emergency. The industrial boom was, therefore, temporary and not indicative of what might be termed the normal industrial situation in LaPorte.

Manufactural LaPorte is currently experiencing a sharp readjustment. The data on employment trends graphically portray the decrease in area employment (Fig. 3). This decrease in industrial activity is due in large part to a return to peacetime conditions. The two war order plants in the vicinity, Whirlpool Corporation and Kingsbury Corporation, have reduced employment from 7,600 in June, 1953, to 2,760 at present. Yet another contributing factor to lessened industrial activity is the curtailment of government contract work to established local industry.

Historical Geography Perspective

Occupying a favorable topographic site and regional situation, the LaPorte locale was settled from early times by Indians, and subsequently by white settlers in the early 1830's. Bounded on either side by forests and prairies, LaPorte benefited by a diverse resource base. Hardwood and coniferous forests on the Valparaiso moraine to the north provided timber

1. This study is based on a field survey conducted by means of a questionnaire, personal interviews and local field observations.

2. *Area Labor Market Letter*, January, 1953, Indiana Employment Security Division, LaPorte, Indiana.

Fig. 1—LaPorte may well be considered today the eastern "doorway" to the heavily industrialized Calumet region. Situated on the boundary of the Valparaiso Moraine and the Kankakee Outwash Plain, its early industries, sawmilling and flour milling, benefited from the timber on the moraine and the grain produced on the outwash plain.

GEOGRAPHIC REGIONAL RELATIONSHIPS OF LAPORTE, INDIANA

-  LAKE CHICAGO PLAIN
-  VALPARAISO MORAINE
-  KANKAKEE OUTWASH PLAIN
-  BOUNDARY OF CHICAGO-CALUMET CONURBAN AREA

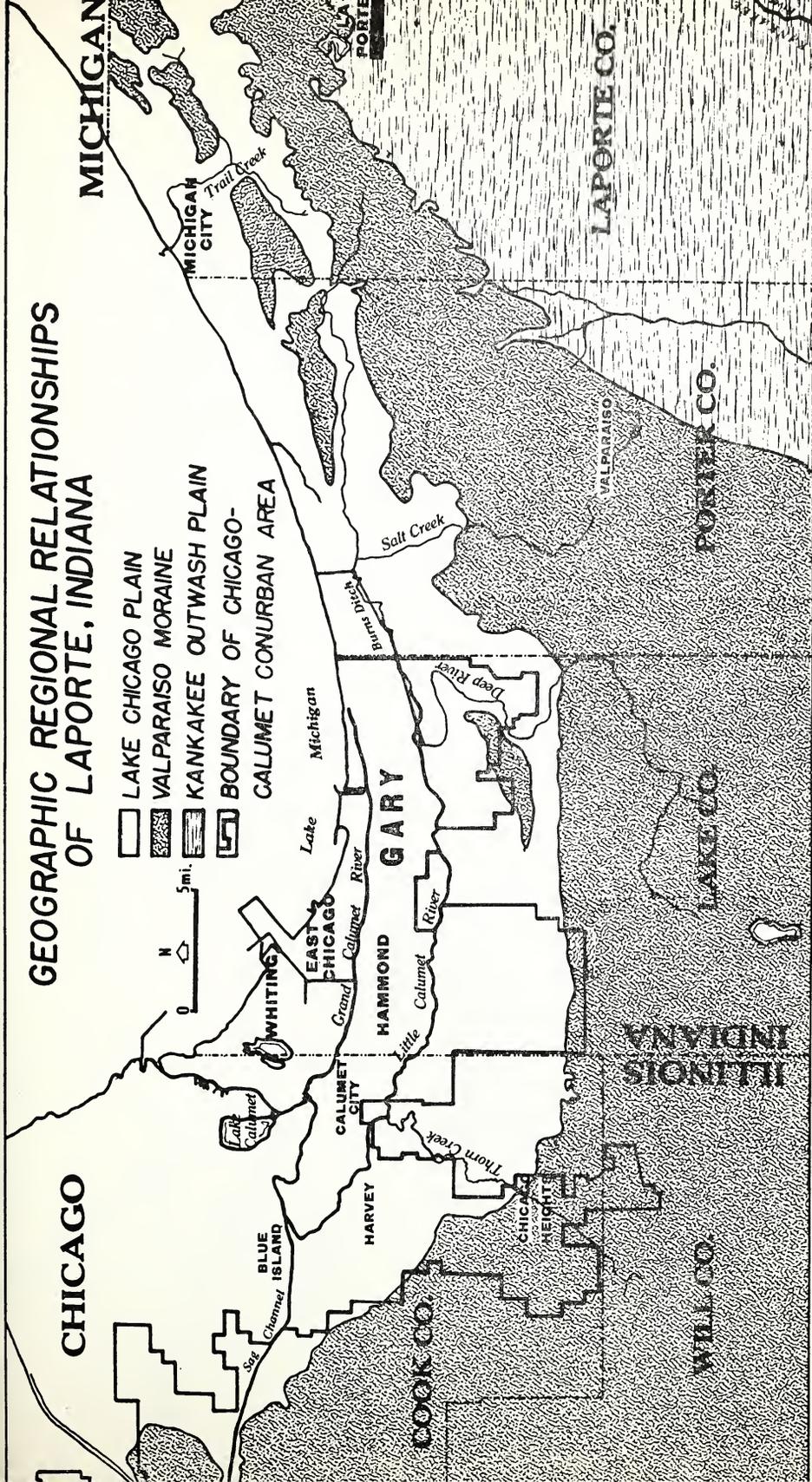
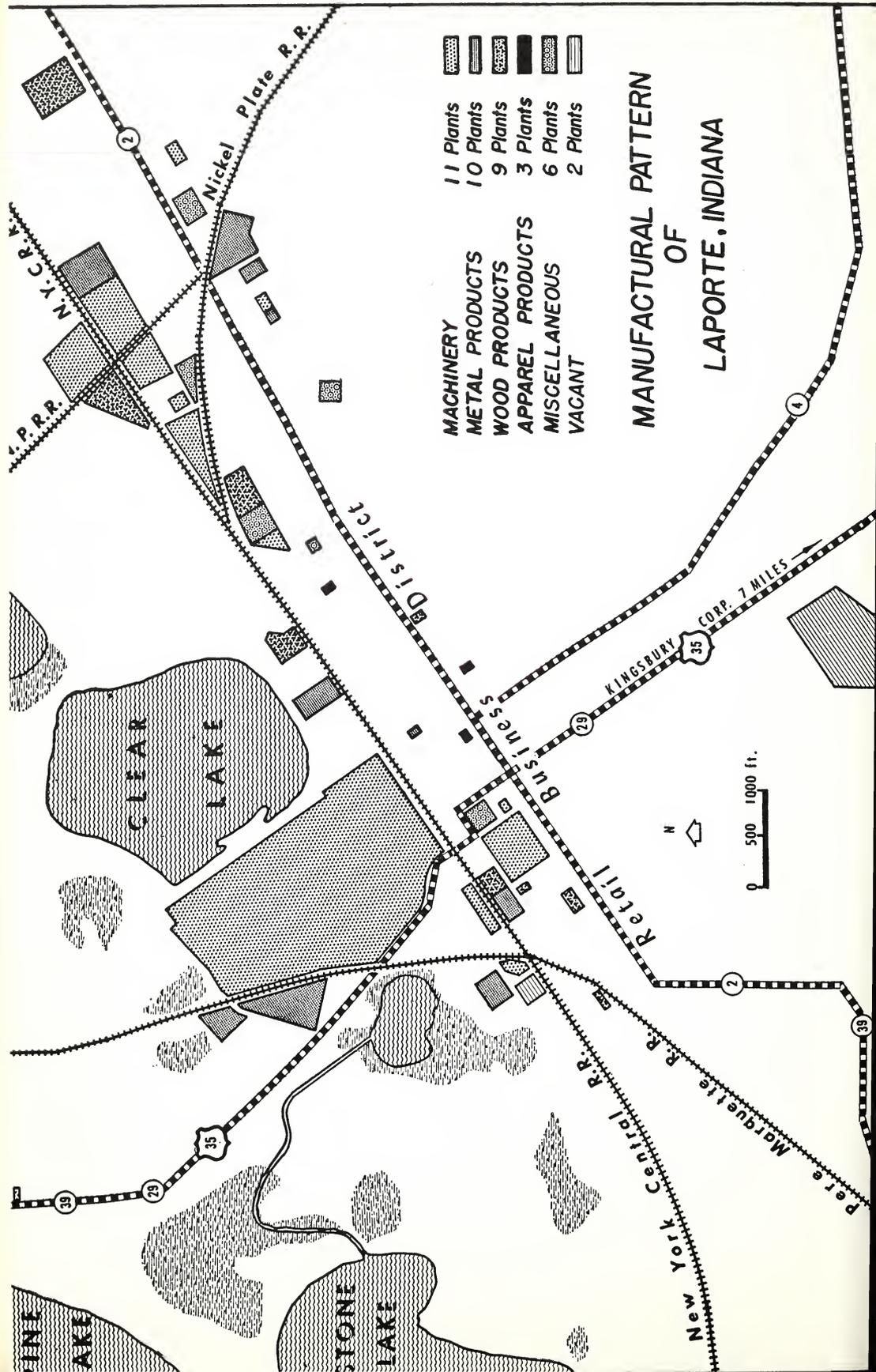


Fig. 1



- 11 Plants
 - 10 Plants
 - 9 Plants
 - 3 Plants
 - 6 Plants
 - 2 Plants
- MACHINERY**
METAL PRODUCTS
WOOD PRODUCTS
APPAREL PRODUCTS
MISCELLANEOUS
VACANT

**MANUFACTURAL PATTERN
OF
LAPORTE, INDIANA**

0 500 1000 ft.



N.Y. C.R.R.

Nickel Plate R.R.

District

Business

Retail

New York Central R.R.

KINGSBURY CORP. 7 MILES

Pere Marquette R.R.

LINE LAKE

STONE LAKE

CLEAR LAKE

for local sawmills and at an early date many woodworking establishments were in operation. To the immediate south, Door Prairie, on the flat and fertile Kankakee outwash, grew much of the grain that was processed in LaPorte, a leading pioneer flour-milling center (Fig. 1). Several lakes in the vicinity provided water, fish and recreation. Development of rail transportation at mid-century gave LaPorte stronger extra-regional business connections. With the aid of skilled German immigrants, the Rumely brothers started the agricultural implement industry, an industry which today is locally maintained by Allis-Chalmers.

Industrial activity in the latter half of the nineteenth century featured production of agricultural machinery, furniture, carriages and woollens. The first quarter of the present century witnessed the rapid development of the automotive industry. Although this caused the carriage works to disappear, it gave rise to new industries, especially the various metal manufactures which impinge upon the automotive industry. The Second World War gave further impetus to industrial growth, most of which was in metal-working establishments. In 1951 Whirlpool Corporation located its war order plant in LaPorte. In that same year Kingsbury Corporation, which had employed 22,000 workers in World War II, reopened under new management. The presence of these two plants in the LaPorte vicinity for the past three years has greatly disturbed the industrial climate of the city.

The Industrial Pattern

The pattern of LaPorte industry is closely related to the pattern of the rail lines (Fig. 2). Early industry established itself along the New York Central main line. More recent industrial development has been made at each end of the old linear industrial core. The newer industries have located at or near the intersection of the two branch rail lines with the New York Central. The eastern industrial subdivision, where the New York Central and the Nickel Plate cross, has experienced most of the recent development. This district probably will undergo further growth since level, vacant land is yet available on the eastern periphery of the city.

The western concentration of plants clusters around the junction of the New York Central and the Pere Marquette. This western district has limited potential due to adverse topographic conditions and the lack of undeveloped land. The huge Allis-Chalmers plant is located in part on a partially filled-in marshy tract. Because of deposits of silt, muck and quicksand this company uses no greater than 1,000 pounds loading per square foot.

It can be seen, then, that the local pattern of industries is similar in shape to that of a dumbbell. The two distinct districts to the east and west are connected by a linear arrangement of non-contiguous industrial sites along and between the New York Central and State Highway 2. Certain

Fig. 2—On the basis of the code classification of Manufactures by the U. S. Department of Commerce, at least 35 different types are represented in the plant pattern here shown. For mapping purposes these have been reduced to five generalized classifications. Three industrial sections are recognizable: an eastern and a western compact area, each tied to two railway lines, and a central section of smaller, isolated plants.

smaller concerns are scattered throughout the commercial district and the neighboring residential areas. Kingsbury Corporation, using a LaPorte address, is located at the intersection of U. S. 6 and 35, seven miles south of LaPorte.

Manufactural Groups

Metals—As already noted, those varied industries which are based upon metals are predominant in LaPorte. The five largest local plants are all metal-working enterprises. Kingsbury Corporation produces many types of munitions, Allis-Chalmers manufactures farm machinery, Whirlpool makes washing machine parts, Bastian-Morley produces water heaters and boilers, and the U. S. Slicing Machine Company is the world's largest manufacturer of slicing machines. A further breakdown of this general group includes Modine Manufacturing Company which makes automotive radiators; the DeLuxe Products Corporation, producer of oil filters and pistons; the New York Blower Company, which manufactures unit heaters and ventilating systems; and the Coleman Company which makes water heaters. Besides these distinctive factories, there are four machine and tool shops, two foundries and seven fabricators of various metal products. When this general metal group is more specifically categorized, the machinery producing plants emerge as the single dominant type of manufacturing in LaPorte. A wide range of metal fabrications comprises the bulk of the remaining metal-related establishments. Rather than being concentrated anywhere within LaPorte, these plants are indiscriminately scattered throughout the city's industrial belt.

Woodworking—Illustrating historical continuity of an industrial tradition are a number of plants having wood as their chief raw material. None of these plants employs more than 250 persons, and the group utilizes only 8% of total LaPorte employment. Most of these present plants can be traced back to furniture factories and carriage works. Included in this list of woodworking industries are a sawmill, three furniture plants, two picture frame factories and a sash and door works. Although these plants have long since outgrown the local timber resource, some rough-cut timber is supplied by the local sawmill.

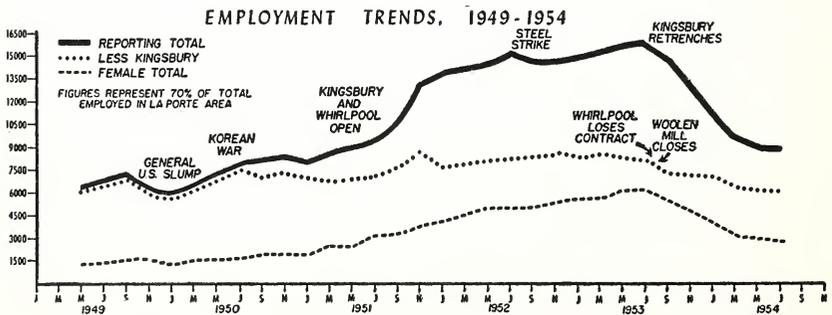


Fig. 3—The variable amount and kind of employment in LaPorte manufacturing industries, as here shown, are reflective largely of extra-regional influences. (Data supplied through courtesy of Gale K. Hess, Manager, Indiana Employment Security Division.)

Apparel—The apparel industry is locally represented by three concerns of modest size. This is an established local industry, and A. B. Codrington Garment Company mentions as one locative factor the presence of a labor pool of skilled needle workers in LaPorte. Until last year, the textile industry was represented by the LaPorte-Bachman Woolen Mills. The closing of the mill in the third quarter of 1953 corresponded to the beginning of the present slump in local manufacturing (Fig. 3). As two-thirds of the mill's business was automotive upholstery, the general slowup in South Bend and other centers directly affected their textile output. The three apparel establishments, not needing bulk transportation, are located away from the railroads in the general downtown area.

Miscellaneous—The much diversified list of local industries is featured by such distinctive concerns as a rubber products plant, a plastics company, a bookbinding establishment and a manufacturer of florists' supplies. The Ove Gnatt Company, the producer of florists' supplies, is one of the three or four of such plants in the United States. It occupies an old three-storied building which it took over in 1918 from a carriage works. In this connection it is interesting to note that LaPorte was a center of carriage and wagon production. The several shops included one owned by the Studebaker Brothers of South Bend.

Related Elements

Labor—At present 10,000 to 11,000 persons find employment in LaPorte's industry. This is a large number for a city of 22,000 people. Many of the total employed come from the surrounding area, since LaPorte is the job center for the greater part of two counties, Porter and LaPorte, plus portions of other adjacent counties. This tributary area is mostly farm land containing a few small towns and villages. The extensive labor source area extends 70 miles south to Monon, eastward to South Bend, northward into southern Michigan and westward to Gary-Hammond.

South of the Valparaiso Moraine, on whose southern margin LaPorte is located, there is an east-west belt of small communities partially inhabited by immigrants from Kentucky and Tennessee. These people moved into this area during the Second World War, attracted by high-paying jobs in northern industrial cities. The slowdown in local industry, especially at Whirlpool and Kingsbury, since mid-1953 has left many of these people unemployed. Being semi-transient, some have filtered back to their home states.

Female help which comprised almost two-fifths of those employed in the first half of 1953 was utilized to a great extent during the period of critical labor and housing. This subsequent slack period has witnessed a reduction in the percentage of women employed in local industry. Kingsbury and Whirlpool employ a high percentage of female help. Although Kingsbury is seven miles south of LaPorte, approximately 20% of the labor force resides in LaPorte.

LaPorte has for long had a tradition of skilled labor, especially in the metal-working industries. A number of industries interviewed reported that skilled labor has been one of the more important attractions to industry.

Transportation—LaPorte has excellent transportational facilities that allow for fast, convenient local, regional and extra-regional connections. From early times people passed through this locale; first the Indian on the famous Sauk Trail, then the white settler on wagon trail and railroad. During the rapid railroad development around mid-century, several rail lines went through and near LaPorte. The Michigan Central Railroad was completed in 1850, the Lake Shore and Michigan Southern in 1852, the Louisville, New Albany and Chicago Road in 1853 and the Nickel Plate in 1854. Three rail lines serve LaPorte today: the New York Central, the Nickel Plate and the Pere Marquette. Several other major rail lines are within close proximity.

The excellence of the highway net facilitates movement to and from LaPorte. Entering the city, itself, are State Roads 2, 4, 29 and 39, and U. S. 35. Within a short distance of the city these routes connect with such major routes as U. S. 6, 12, 20 and 30. Serving industry on these various roads are seven local trucking firms. Overnight service is provided to the large cities of this midwestern area.

One of the most promising factors for LaPorte's future industrial welfare is the close proximity of a proposed toll road. Only one and a half miles northwest of the city's limits, the toll road will allow 24-hour trucking service between LaPorte and New York City.

Raw Materials—LaPorte, with diversified industry, has a diversified material source area. The variety of materials comes from a variety of geographic sources, mostly from the United States, but some from offshore. LaPorte's dependence upon the Calumet region is manifest in the high percentage of steel and metal parts procured in this industrial complex. Local firms producing castings, machine parts, tools and dies market much of their product in LaPorte, and nearly all of it within the Calumet region. Most of the timber used comes from the South and far West, although some lumber is produced in the vicinity. The great majority of the city's industrial material needs are met in the Calumet region and the northeastern quadrant of the United States. More than one concern stated that the nearness of requisite materials was a major consideration in locating in LaPorte.

Markets—Diversity in types of manufacturing serves to explain the diverse geographical spread of LaPorte's markets. Some products, like agricultural machinery, furniture and automotive supply, have a mid-western distribution. Products such as florists' supplies, blowers and water heaters, slicing machines and picture frames are more commonly marketed nationally. A certain few products enter the foreign market. Conveyor belts, florists' supplies, slicing machines and 10% of hot water heaters have international sale. This brief description of the geographical distribution of LaPorte's markets points to the mature, extra-regional aspect of much of the local industry.

Trends

The industrial health of LaPorte depends, of course, upon the economic well-being of the entire United States. The presence of two war order plants in the vicinity haunts LaPorte with the specter of periodic industrial

maladjustment. Presently Whirlpool, with greatly curtailed employment, is doing comparatively little government contract work. Such work is also at a minimum at Allis-Chalmers and the U. S. Slicing Company. Kingsbury Corporation is operating with a greatly reduced total of 2,300 employees.

Present unemployment has been somewhat eased by the gradual drifting south of people originally from Kentucky and Tennessee. To further alleviate the situation the Chamber of Commerce is waging a campaign to attract new industry. The Chamber of Commerce has attracted industry to LaPorte in the past 35 years; new success in their present campaign is entirely possible. The most recent labor analysis of the Indiana State Employment Service in LaPorte indicates that the downward trend in employment has been arrested.³

But long-range stabilization and systematic development of industry must necessarily depend upon a far-sighted program in industrial zoning and planning.

Industrial Zoning and Planning

Most sizable cities now recognize the fact that industrial and commercial enterprises are needed to develop a sound community economy; hence such organizations as the Chamber of Commerce, the various manufacturers', merchants' and employment associations and the City Plan Commission. The first agencies are concerned primarily with the immediate day by day problems and programs of the community, whereas the City Plan Commission has for its chief objective the formulation of a sound geographic pattern of form and function for the all around social and economic development of a community for decades to come.

It appeared essential therefore, in a geographic survey of this type to include this inquiry in our questionnaire: "Are local and regional zoning and geographic planning ordinances adequate to meet all the needs of your plant for present operations? For anticipated future expansion? Comments."

Only a 27% response was received on this question. Five respondents gave an unqualified "yes" to the question of present-day adequacy. Two comments: "Yes, probably; we have no critical problem at this time" and "We are located near the center of the business shopping district in an area where zoning ordinances would not permit us to operate had we not been here when the ordinance was passed."

Because of the low percentage return on this part of the questionnaire, the response on this point does not reflect an adequate overall community appraisal of geographic site criteria suited to the development of the total present industrial pattern and the future industrial expansion program. Accordingly, several observations by Mr. Nelson Hazzard, President of the City Plan Commission of LaPorte, prove very helpful in understanding the situation:

1. The areal pattern zones for industry by the City Zoning Ordinance of 1933 has proven inadequate in recent years to meet

3. *Area Labor Market Letter*, August, 1954, Indiana Employment Security Division, LaPorte, Indiana.

the needs of a growing industrial community like LaPorte. Some of the sites remaining are too small to accommodate large plants.

2. One of the problems consists of needed expansion of certain existing industrial sites into undesirable terrain areas such as are found in the marshy tracts on the southwestern and western industrial district.

3. On the other hand, terrain suited to industry and zoned for such, as in the section adjacent to the New York Central about one-third mile east of its juncture with the Nickel Plate, has come to be preponderatingly residential, over three score houses now occupying the area.

Still another industrial site situation is reflective of the condition of earlier days when there was no zoning at all, or "spot" zoning since the Zoning Ordinance was adopted in 1933, in either case resulting, as in the central district, in a fragmented industrial pattern.

As a result of these and other recognized civic needs for the systematic future development of the Community, the City Council of LaPorte is now considering the adoption of the Master Plan proposed by the City Plan Commission. Based on thorough surveys and extensive public hearings, this projected geographic pattern points to a new period of progressive residential, commercial, and industrial development.

As for industry itself, the theme of this paper, several new large sized tracts, geographically well oriented, are being proposed: one at the northeast extremity of the city, north of the intersection of the Nickel Plate and the New York Central; the other, on the southwest extremity between the Pere Marquette and the New York Central.

What the newly modified industrial zone pattern will look like is revealed in Fig. 4.

Conclusions

If there is a minimum of periodic fluctuation in local government contract work, LaPorte's industry should fare as well as the national economy allows. This ever-present variable of contract work will, however, determine the local short-run manufacturing situation.

LaPorte has a century-old tradition of manufacture, and her regional position in relation to raw materials, semi-processed goods, labor and markets is advantageous to the maintenance of such a tradition. LaPorte, the eastern entry-way to the Chicago-Calumet complex, is astride the funnel of major east-west rail and road routes which converge onto the greatest railway center of the United States. In close proximity to the markets and facilities of the Chicago-Calumet area, LaPorte suffers none of the disadvantages of congestion of those metropolitan centers. The projected toll road will serve to strengthen LaPorte's commercial relations with the manufacturing and market areas to the east and to the west.

In spite of the recent fluctuation in local industrial activity, a note of stability is provided for manufactural LaPorte by the presence of established industries couched in the geographic advantages of the city's total situation. But it will require long-range planning, now apparently assured

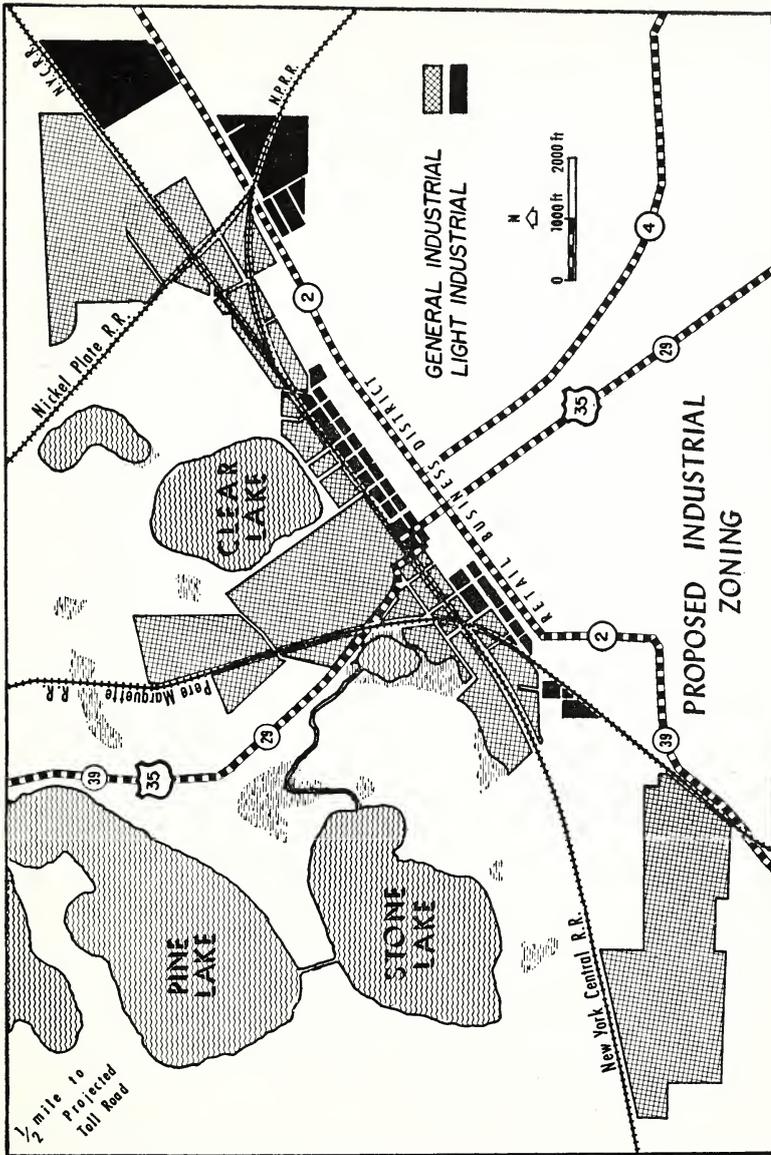


Fig. 4—The presently projected Master Plan of the city of LaPorte proposes, among other changes in zoning, an expansion of areas zoned for industry, which would assume the spatial relations shown above.

through the prospective adoption of a Master Plan, to realize fully these potential benefits.⁵

5. Grateful acknowledgments are due the many individuals and agencies who have contributed significantly to this study. These include :

The individual plant managers who responded to our questionnaire : the LaPorte Chamber of Commerce, which supplied general manufactural data ; the Indiana Employment Security Division, which supplied data on employment trends ; Nelson Hazard, President of the City Plan Commission, who contributed map and other data on the proposed Master Plan ; Robert E. Kellner of the Sanborn Map Co., who granted the privilege of consulting the Sanborn atlas ; and Stanley Showalter, Insurance Agent in LaPorte, who extended the courtesy of checking Sanborn map data in his office.