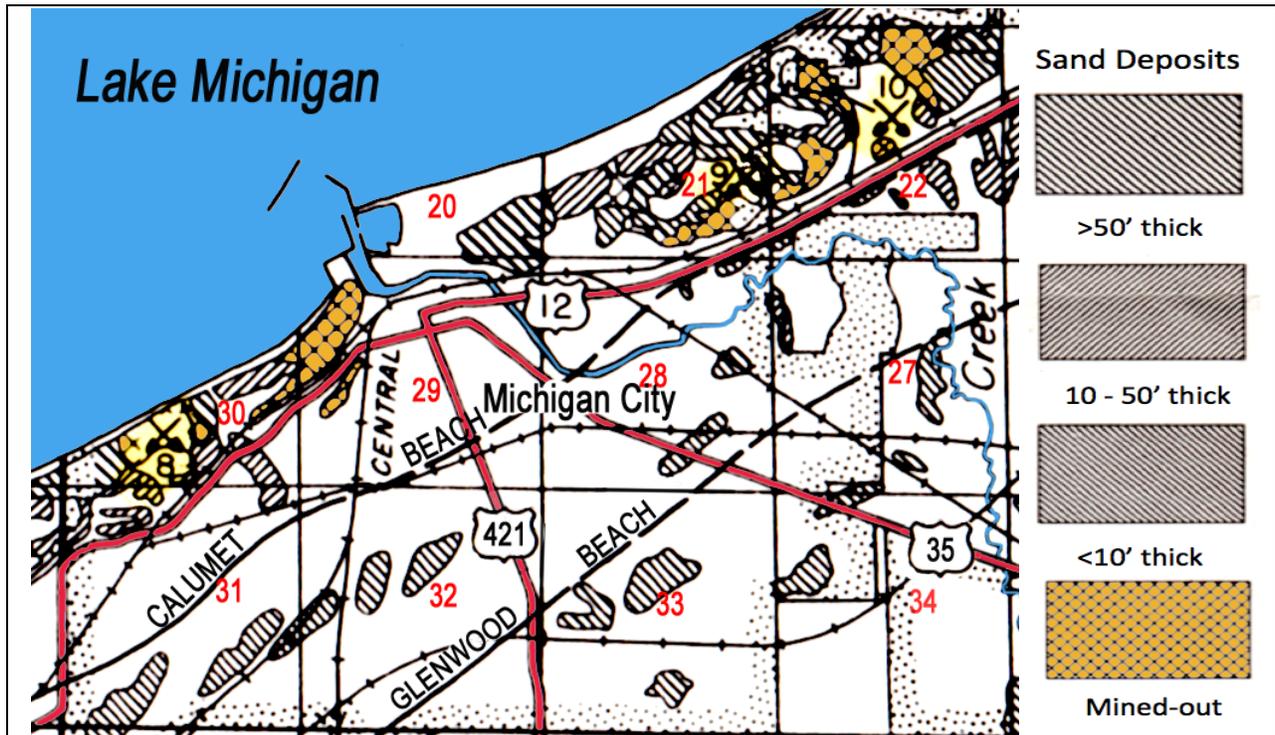


Chapter 7
Sand Mining LaPorte County

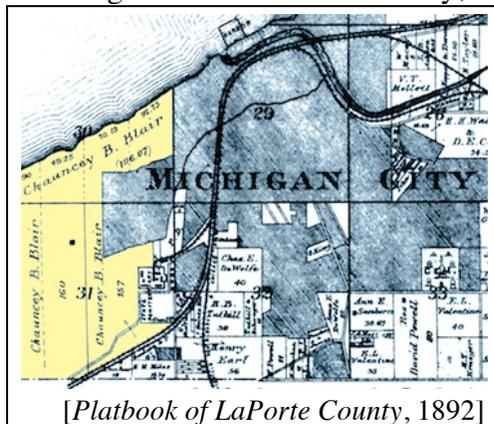


Adapted from Bieber and Smith, 1952¹

In 1950 when this map was prepared by Geologists C. L. Bieber and Ned Smith, there were three active sand mining operations still occurring in LaPorte County. They were:

- 8. Michigan City west: Producers Core Sand Corporation
- 9. Sheridan Beach: Manley Sand Company (in Section 21)
- 10. Michigan City east: Producers Core Sand Corporation

Through much of the 19th century, Chauncey B. Blair was the largest landowner in the Michigan City area. (The 100-acre state prison site, seen on many of the maps in this chapter, was purchased from Blair for \$4,500 in 1860.²) Blair, a Michigan City businessman who went on to become founder and president of Chicago's Merchants National Bank, was the father of Chauncey J. Blair, owner of Consumers [Sand] Company. The northern portion of Chauncey Blair's property is where Mount Baldy and the Crescent Dune are. The Hoosier Slide, said by early settlers to be the tallest sand dune along Indiana's shoreline, was immediately to the east, inside the corporate boundaries of Michigan City.



¹ Sections on the map are in Township 38 North, Range 4 West.

² Goodan, 2010

Michigan City and the Hoosier Slide (Section 29)

Michigan City is built on beds of sand, deep, heavy sand that sometimes blows and drifts like snow, for there are very light particles in what is called heavy sand. Immense quantities of sand from the Hoosier Slide are taken away in carloads to Chicago, but it is a huge mass yet.³ [Timothy Ball, 1900.]

The sand which has been washed up from Lake Michigan and piled mountains high, has been found useful in polishing plate glass, and also in stove and range factories. The Lake Erie and Western Railroad ships over three thousand carloads of this sand annually to the south, the Monon ships about the same quantity in the same direction, and the Michigan Central ships over two thousand, five hundred carloads east to Detroit and other places. Here is a total of over eight thousand, five hundred carloads of sand annually. . . . There is practically an inexhaustible amount of sand, yet under this steady demand some of the sand dunes on our lake shore are diminishing very noticeably. Hoosier Slide is not nearly as high and large as it used to be.⁴ [E. D. Daniels, 1904]

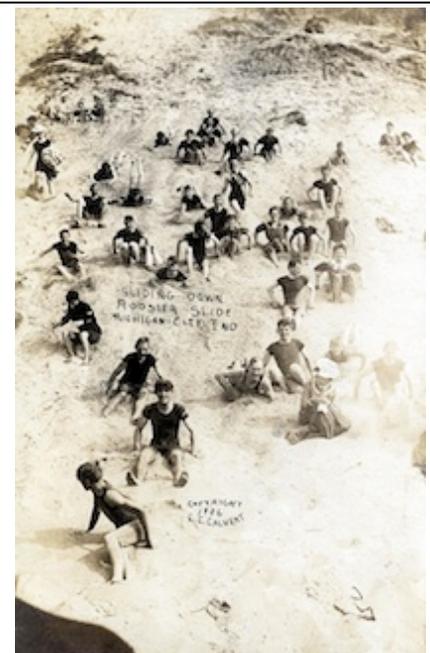
The Hoosier Slide, originally 175 to 200 feet tall⁵, was once said to be Indiana's tallest sand dune. Right on the beach at the mouth of Trail Creek, this bare sand mountain could be seen by sailors way out in the lake and was used by them as a guiding beacon. Certainly the most photographed Indiana dune, it was even said to be Indiana's most famous landmark with many postcards, including some colorized, sending its image to many places across the globe.

Its name has been attributed to both the avalanches of sand that occasionally came cascading down as well as to the sport of sliding down the dune as one does on a sled in winter. At least once the cascading sand had fatal consequences.⁶



Above: The Hoosier Slide and adjacent rail yards, 1906

[both postcards: Old Lighthouse Museum]



Right: Sliding down the Hoosier Slide, 1906.

³ Ball, 1900, p. 411.

⁴ Daniels, 1904, p. 168.

⁵ Most writers said that the dune was originally 200 feet tall, but the only on-site description made before mining began was by state geologist David Dale Owen (with a surveyor) who noted (in 1859) that it was 176 feet tall.

⁶ Manny, 1961. P. 5.

The sand in and around Michigan City was originally, probably universally, thought to be practically useless, even a nuisance. Its major use was to fill in the wetlands that had constituted



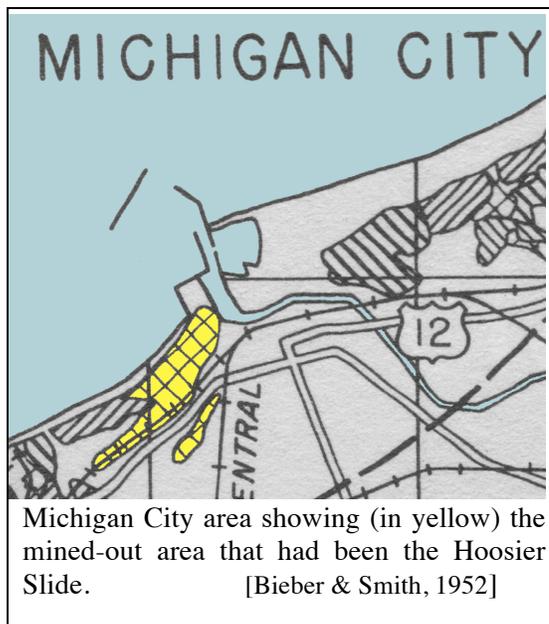
Franklin Street, Downtown Michigan City, circa 1880. Note the wooden plank pavement. [Old Lighthouse Museum]

much of the downtown area. High winds would blow the sand from the Hoosier Slide all the way to the primitive but busy downtown area of the city⁷. When it seemed that blowing sand might almost bury the Methodist Church at Second and Pine, the congregation built a new building five blocks further south.⁸

In 1874, E. T. Cox, Indiana state geologist, noted that the Hoosier Slide, which originally had been covered with “small white oaks and other hardy vegetation,” was by then bare and smaller as the trees had been cut down for fuel and the wind had eroded the hill so that it was (in 1874) only 120 feet tall.⁹ He made no reference to its being mined.

Climbing the Hoosier Slide was a popular sport. Tourists came to see it. Many weddings were held at its summit.¹⁰

Commercial sand mining began about 1890, perhaps a bit earlier, after the Monon Railroad laid tracks along the east side of the dune to serve the docks along the west side of Trail Creek.¹¹ When dockworkers weren’t needed at the docks, they used shovels to dig and wheelbarrows to transport sand to waiting cars.¹² (See photo on next page with the silhouette of a man doing precisely this. Another photo appears in Chapter 3.)



Michigan City area showing (in yellow) the mined-out area that had been the Hoosier Slide. [Bieber & Smith, 1952]

⁷ Manny, 1961

⁸ Munger, 1969, p. 47.

⁹ Cox, 1874, p. 467. Estimates of the dunes’ heights can hardly all be correct. However, the Hoosier Slide was undoubtedly Indiana’s best known and most photographed dune. It stood by itself next to both Lake Michigan and Trail Creek and was easy to frame by photographers. Mount Tom, further west was part of a series of dunes and thus not as easily photographed.

¹⁰ Manny, 1961, p. 2.

¹¹ Manny, 1961, p. 3.

¹² <http://www.monon.monon.org/bygone/hoosierslide.html>

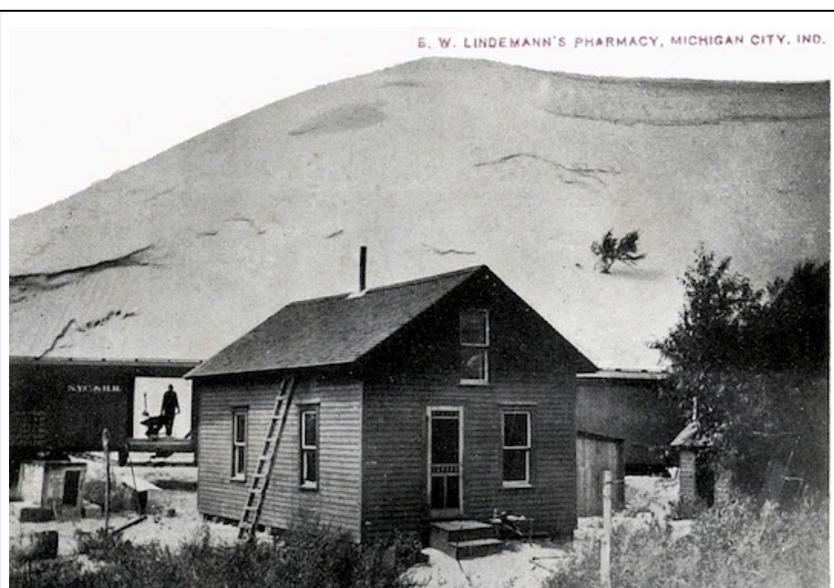
An early account, from an 1891 edition of the *Lafayette Morning Journal*, gave this account:

**An Indiana Landmark Going to Chicago
An Interesting Letter from the Lake—The Fate of “Hoosier Slide.”**

MICHIGAN CITY, Ind.,—May 16—Your readers may be surprised to learn that “Hoosier Slide is disappearing, but such is the fact. The east line of its summit was the highest point and a scrubby tree used to stand up there.... A force of men are at work six days in the week shoveling the sand on to flat cars for railway uses, and as they burrow into it at the foot, it rolls down from the top. It is a mountain of sand yet and will be for years to come—even should the shoveling process go on. But even now the east line is no longer the highest point. The scrub tree is gone, the shape of the whole top has changed and what is now the chief outlook was a year ago a secondary point.

[*Lafayette Morning Journal*, Monday May 18, 1891.]

When, in the late 1890s¹³ Monon employee William Manny realized that many railroads needed “engine sand” to increase the traction between locomotive wheels and the rails, he began purchasing sections of the dune (primarily on its north side) and established the Hoosier Slide Sand Company.¹⁴ The Company was incorporated in 1906.¹⁵ Meanwhile the Pinkston Sand Company, served by the Michigan Central Railroad, started mining sand on the south slope of the Slide.¹⁶ In 1907 the Pinkston company advertised sand at 20¢ a ton in *Foundry Magazine*.¹⁷



Hoosier Slide, Michigan City, Ind.

E. W. Lindemann's pharmacy, also called the Hoosier Slide mining office, at the base of the Hoosier Slide. Note the man with a wheelbarrow in the boxcar in the left photo.

[Old Lighthouse Museum]

A sand brick and building block factory was located in the southeastern part of the Slide. Because sand removed at the bottom of the dune was shortly replaced by sand sliding down from above, the factory found its supply of raw material continually replaced at its shed doors.¹⁸

¹³ Manny, 1961, pp. 2-3.

¹⁴ Boomhower, 1993, p. 15.

¹⁵ News-Dispatch, September 13, 1950, p. 23

¹⁶ Manny, p. 6.

¹⁷ Nicewarner, 1980

¹⁸ Shannon. 1912, p. 199

In 1912, Indiana geologist Edward Barrett reported that with much mining of the Hoosier Slide, its summit was then only 75-100 feet above the surface of the lake.¹⁹

Several of the glass sand industries of the State use this sand in the manufacture of glass products. Notable among these is the well-known firm of Ball Bros. of Muncie, Indiana, manufacturers of jars. The company has been using the sand from Lake Michigan for about twenty-five years and it has proved very satisfactory. The sand has the advantages of freedom from the usual impurities, which accompany indurated deposits for the reason that it comes ready washed from the lake. Ball Bros. use about 150 tons of this sand per day. ... The Michigan City sand is also used in foundry work in making cores, particularly by the Chandler-Taylor Company of Indianapolis.²⁰

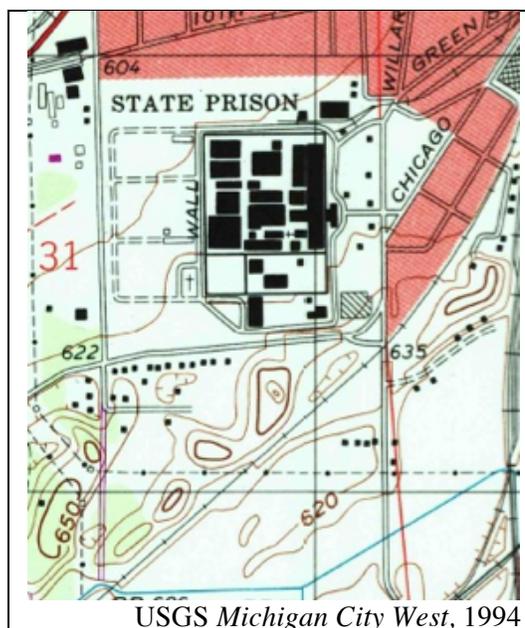
Edward Barrett, Indiana State Geologist, 1914.

By the early 1920s the excavation was done and the dune was gone. In 1925²¹ the Northern Indiana Public Service Company (NIPSCO) purchased the property that the Hoosier Slide used to occupy and all the land west to and including Mount Baldy. In 1929 NIPSCO began construction there of its Michigan City generating station.

Michigan City and the State Prison (E½ Section 31)

Construction of the Indiana State Prison just north of the Calumet-era dune ridge began in 1860. It has been greatly enlarged since then.

More than one hundred years later in 1970 the Brown Partnership purchased some of the adjacent dune lands south of the prison for excavation. When human bones were discovered, the mining was stopped. Some of that area in the triangular plot of land immediately southeast of the prison, is now an Indiana Department of Natural Resources classified burial ground. It is assumed that some prisoners who died at the prison were buried there in unmarked graves.



¹⁹ Barrett, Edward, 1912.

²⁰ Barrett, 1914, p. 49.

²¹ Calvert

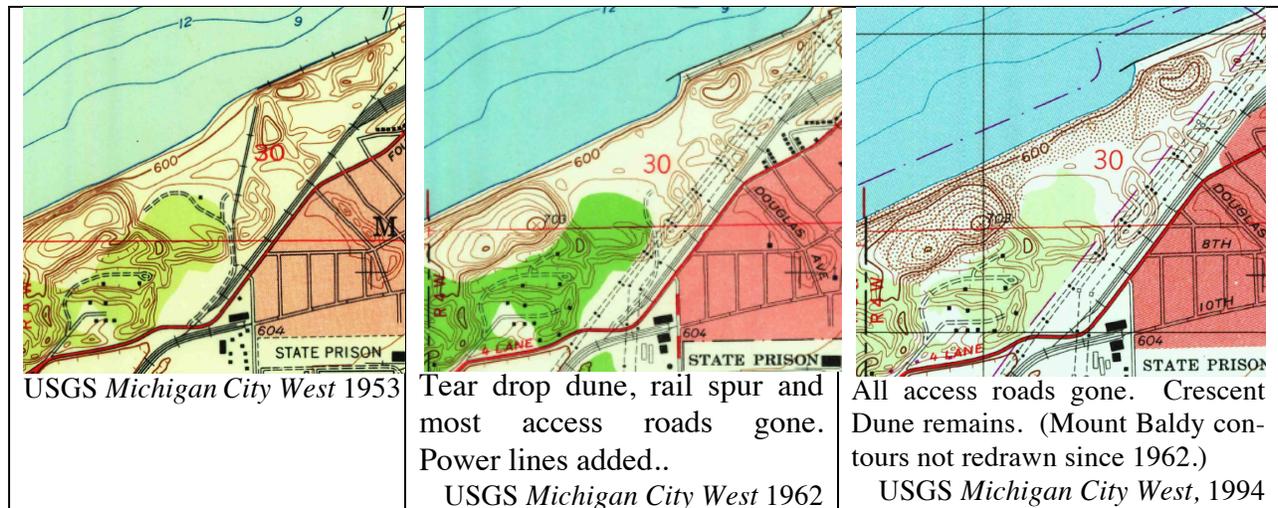
Western Michigan City: Mount Baldy / Crescent Dune (Section 30)

In the 1920s, with Hoosier Slide gone, the S. J. Taylor Sand Company had the South Shore run a line to its mining operation east of Mount Baldy and west of what had been the Hoosier Slide.²²

Although it was not shown by sand pit symbols the area was, in mid-twentieth century, being mined by Producers Core Sand Corporation. In 1950 Producers Corp. was able to load and send out 10 cars per day.²³ They were also mining the area southeast of Mount Baldy. The area was then served by unimproved roads (the dashed double lines) with a spur from the South Shore Railroad. Bieber's notes show that the "large dune ¼-mile to the west" (Mount Baldy) was under lease.²⁴

At this one location Producers was able to mine three grades of sand:²⁵

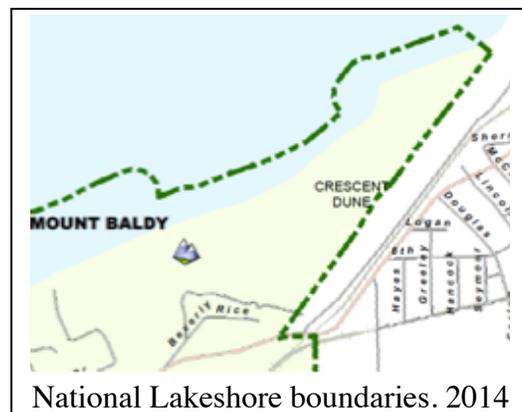
- Fine-grained sand from the top of old dunes
- Medium-grained sand – from below the tops of dunes
- Coarse-grained sand – from lower in the old dune and also from new dunes



Peoria Caterpillar purchased much of the sand and used it for making molds. Other customers used the sand for cores, for glass, and for abrasives.

Mount Baldy has significantly migrated southeastward since the 1962 map was plotted, and is now close to advancing onto the NPS public parking lot that serves the area.

The 33-acre Crescent Dune area owned by NIPSCO was purchased by the National Lakeshore in 1996.



²² Nicewarner, p. 267.

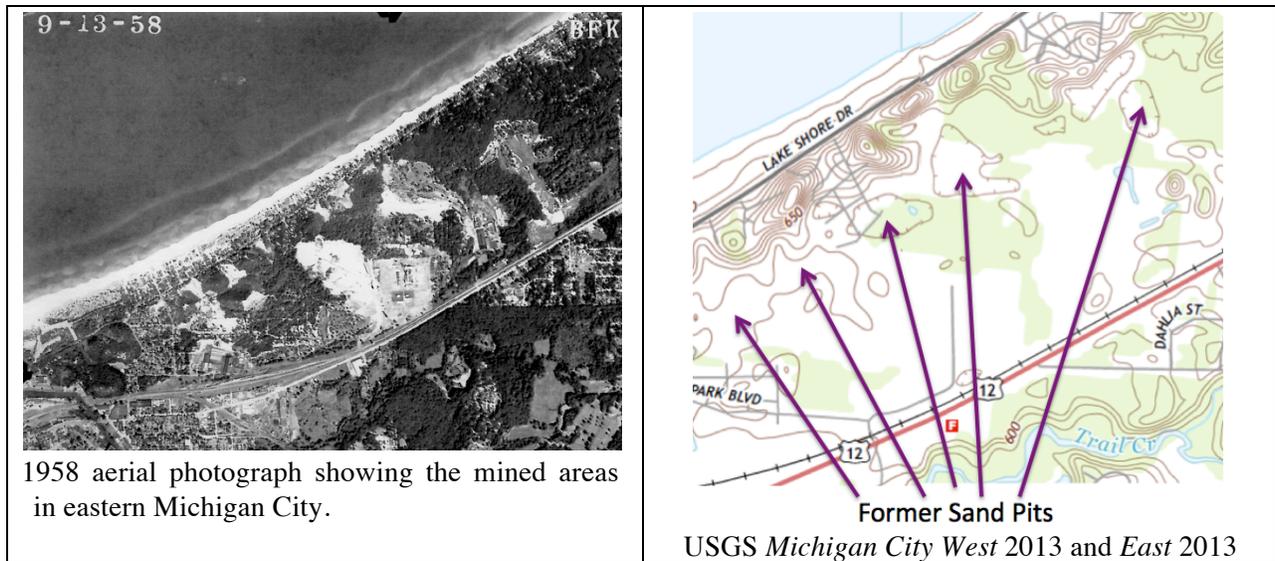
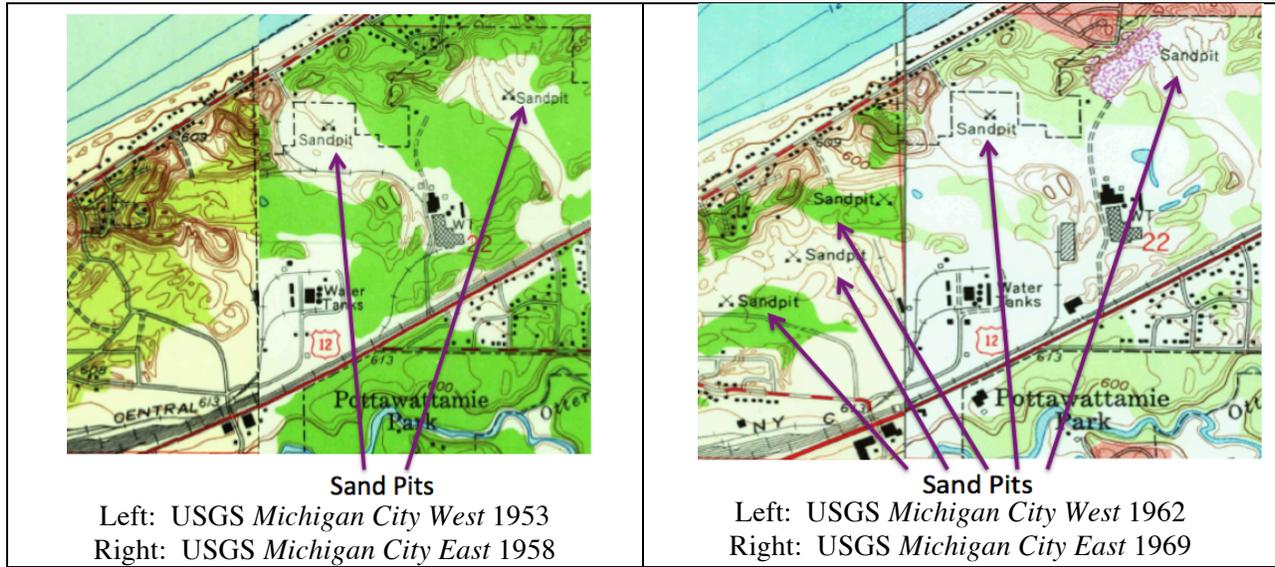
²³ Bieber's field notes, 1950, p. 27. He noted that the demand for sand was higher during the Second World War and at that time they were moving 20 cars per day.

²⁴ Bieber's field notes, 1950, p. 27.

²⁵ Ibid.

Michigan City—East (Sections 21 and 22)

In the mid-20th century, Producers Core Sand Corporation and Manley Sand Division of Martin Marietta Corporation²⁶ mined sand in eastern Michigan City between Sheridan Beach and Long Beach to the north and Pottawattamie Park. Producer’s pits were located in Section 22 (to the right on the maps below). Manley’s pits were located in Section 21. In April 1984 Manley Brothers firm was approved to continue the mining in this area. Note the differences between the three maps. The contour interval on all maps is 10 feet.



Gravel

In 1906, W. S. Blatchley, the Indiana state geologist, reported that there was “very little” gravel in the county and no place where a deposit was large enough to mine it for roads. Whereas there were then 1200 miles of roads in the county, only 89 of those miles were covered with crushed stone and none of them with gravel.²⁷

²⁶ Bieber and Smith, 1950; McGregor, 1963.

²⁷ Blatchley, 1906, p. 180-181.