

Rails connect World's Fair with Barrington

By BARBARA BENSON

(This is the ninth in a series of historical articles about Barrington drawn from the collection of letters written by the Brown Family at the Octagon House between 1889 and 1904.)

In the summer of 1893, Joseph and Emaline Brown, in common with most inhabitants of Chicago and the collar communities, experienced a surge of interest and excitement at the magnitude of the World's Columbian Exposition. Almost everyone had company from out of town friends and relatives seeking lodging as close to the Fair as possible, and the Browns were no exception. Their daughter Laura, who had moved with her husband Joseph Nightingale to Fairmont, Minn. in 1889, was coming to visit with her baby son Arthur, and Joe also came to stay. There is frequent mention of overnight guests that summer. In addition, the Brown's recently married daughter, Hattie, was still living in the Octagon House, it being clearly understood with her husband Ren, that she had no intention of sharing the Porter farm on Oak Knoll Road with her in-laws, especially her mother-in-law, who was, however, very sick. So long as Ren continued to work his parent's farm, and live there, Hattie continued to stay with her parents, and retain much of her lifestyle before she married.

Fair fever

While "Fair fever" touched so many with its glitter, and millions of ordinary folks could view with awe the latest achievements of a rapidly industrializing world, the glories of architecture and the arts and indeed the whole march of civilization; there was also the staggering concept to comprehend that this was all happening at a place that only 60 years before had incorporated as a village, with but 28 men qualified to vote for the election of trustees. Now, a new metropolis had been recognized, and its limits were bursting at the seams.

Not until a vote in the U.S. House of Representatives on Feb. 24, 1890, was it decided that Chicago would be the site for a major international exposition celebrating the 400th anniversary of Columbus' discovery of the New World. As early as the 1876 Centennial at Philadelphia, rumblings had begun about the desirability of some further great exposition to show the Old World that its offspring were progressing mightily well in their vast new territories. One Chicagoan is supposed to have commented: "There was nothing in which all mankind can more appropriately join in celebrating than the material addition Columbus made to the real estate and breathing room of civilization." Between

1876 and 1890, a lobbying effort of unprecedented scope was waged on behalf of several American cities to host the next Fair. New York, Washington, Chicago, Philadelphia, Cincinnati and St. Louis were all possibilities. When by 1889 it was clear that the choice would fall between New York or Chicago, simply because they were the only cities with resources that might match and exceed the scope of the Paris Internationale of that year, the resulting editorial battle in New York and Chicago newspapers is described as one of the most bitter and vitriolic in American history.

Editorial battle

The Chicago Tribune declared that New York "is not an American city—in its history, in its revelations to the nation, in its attitude towards the government during the War of the Revolution and Rebellion, or in its social characteristics." The fair should be both a world's fair and "an all American exposition" and New York is not a patriotic city, "not a national city and never was." New York papers responded that Chicago lacked tradition, it was too new, while the great metropolis of the country was not only surrounded by a more heavily populated region but "had the embellishments of a cultured civilization to a greater extent than this raw new outpost, constantly boasting about its grain, lumber and meat." The

quite frequently from Barrington, access to the Fair could be accomplished by several modes of transportation once in the city. From Barrington, the Chicago and North Western Railway then terminated at the Kedzie and Wells depot. Marvin Snyder once wrote about that ride into Chicago in earlier days, and the interests for a boy around the depot in Barrington:

When we got bored or tired playing (there) we would go over to the turntable, west and next to the stockyards by the round house. Why round house I will never understand. It was a rectangular building where they kept four engines inside. We would watch them run the locomotives onto the turntable, the fireman and engineer would climb down from the cab to push the turntable so the locomotives would be in the right direction to back up to the yellow wooden coaches, with their red plush seats and gas lights. The brakeman would walk through the coaches, turn on each light with a long hollow rod, with a wick which ran through this rod, which the brakeman lit with a match. All was ready for the passengers' dirty trek back to Chicago. With smoke and cinders coming through the windows from the steam locomotives, when some of the passengers thought they had to open the windows on a warm day.

From Wells Street, it was possible to take cable car or horse car lines to reach

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Map showing the grounds of the World's Fair in 1893.

Tribune called New York "the meanest city in America," which had no public spirit and could not be interested in an American celebration. "Chicago slaughters and packs its hogs, New York puts them on committees." And so it went, back and forth.

Paradise out of slime

Today, a study of the conditions in which the Fair was built, in only two years, "boggles the mind." The Jackson Park site required a land reclamation project which could rival those of Holland, and onto this artificially created parkland would be built a great city next to a city—The White City. "It was as though a magician had brought down from some dreamed-of paradise a city of pearl and had laid it gently upon the sands." Out of slime and marshland it came, as many as 7,000 workers at a time toiled through terrible winters and lived in the appalling

the Fair directly or to connect to other railroads such as the Illinois Central. A special terminal had been built behind the Administration Building, so that all of the 35 railroad lines serving the Fair could have direct access to it. However the railroads didn't use it, which resulted in a revenue loss to the exposition, because the railroads were supposed to rebate 5 cents for every passenger brought from within the city limits, and 10 cents for those coming from without. There was a scenic water route down the lake, provided by steamers of the World's Fair Steamship Company, and coach rides could be had down Michigan Avenue. By using connector transport to 12th Street, a visitor to the Fair could then board the first section of elevated railway in Chicago, which ran directly to Jackson Park. After 1893, horsedrawn public transportation waned as the cable and electric street railway systems spread rapidly through

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slums of the sidestreets in Chicago, where at one point it was estimated there was a tavern for every 200 people, men, women and children.

There were about 700 injuries and 18 deaths recorded on the site in 1891, and constant strikes by underpaid workmen. The Fair possibly wouldn't have been completed without the inspiration and leadership provided by Daniel Burnham, one of the principal architects, and others of his caliber including Louis Sullivan and Frederick Law Olmstead.

Dedication Day was on Oct. 21, 1892, and the official opening on May 1, 1893. Attendance at the Fair, which closed on Oct. 29, was 21.5 million. It would be interesting to know how many were repeat visitors who were residents of Chicago and its environs. Joe Brown certainly went

the city and to outlying areas.

Part of Emaline's letter of July 3, 1893, to her daughter Laura reads:

Pat will meet you in Chicago when you come, will borrow a 50-ride ticket if he can, for you and Effie to come out here on, so it won't cost you only 50 cents a piece from Chicago out here. Then after you get here you can decide about the tickets to go on to the Fair. Pa thinks it would be a good plan for you to have a 25-ride ticket as you will stay long enough to ride that out, and Effie can get a 10-ride ticket, or perhaps he can buy a 50-ride ticket for her that is partly rode out, which would be cheaper yet, and you can start from here at six or seven in the morning and get home at eight in the evening, so you can see that will give you a good long day, the Fair does not open until