

CHAPTER XL

WORLD'S FAIR AT CHICAGO 1893

A World's Fair to celebrate the four hundredth anniversary of Columbus' Discovery of America was projected for 1892 in Chicago, but was finally postponed for a year. It was widely heralded as a great educational event. Movies had not yet brought the world to the door of Mr. Average Citizen and few families had been abroad. But the World's Fair would bring all foreign nations together and there in a few days one could learn how all the principal nations live and what their principal industries are,

Grandfather and Mr. Schlicher, with whom he had been associated on joint debate, visited the Fair together for a period of ten days. They took the trip seriously. They obtained a room about a mile from the gate. Schlicher, having been a farmer, was an early riser and got himself and Grandfather to the gate when it opened at 8 a.m. Grandfather enjoyed the fireworks and kept Schlicher and himself on the grounds until late in the evening.

Schlicher with his bump of thoroughness laid out the plans. They were to begin at the northeast corner with the Anthropological Building and do each building in turn thoroughly. In that way they would know that they had really seen the Fair. The Fair was located in Jackson Park with an amusement extension along the midway - now the sight of the University of Chicago.

Under Schlicher's plan no provision was made for seeing the

Midway, that being quite too frivolous for so serious a study and probably neither of the sightseers would have caught a glimpse of the Midway except for the fact that the Fourth of July came in the midst of their stay. On this day, crowds were so great that no serious study could be effectively pursued. Furthermore, Grandfather had invited a young man from his home town, who was working in the city, to enjoy the holiday at the Fair, and this youth insisted on taking a walk through the Midway. However, the crowds were too great for the group to get a ride on the Ferris Wheel (a large wheel of steel carrying passengers in little cars suspended from the outer rim) and Grandfather never did get a ride in this, the chief attraction at the Fair.

For Fourth of July night, the "grandest exhibition of fireworks ever seen on the American Continent" was advertised. Schlicher and Grandfather went early to the lake front and established themselves in the front row. Pressure from the growing crowd behind ere long crowded those in the front row forward on the beach. At regular intervals along the beach stood Roman candles. The police could not get the crowd back and when nine o'clock arrived, torches were applied to the Roman candles, and when the Roman candles began to belch forth, sparks in all directions, those in front started a wild stampede backward, while the crowd in back held firm, making a bad jam. The crowd, however, was scared rather than hurt and soon settled down to enjoy the grand display, the rest of the fireworks being shot from rafts out in the lake.

Schlicher and Grandfather planned as soon as the last grand finale started to make a break for the gate. Everyone else in the huge

crowd, planned the same and just when the grand finale of huge set pieces began, the crowd virtually to a man started in a panic toward the exits. Soon people fainted and ambulances tried to push their way through. Schlicher and Grandfather getting in the wake of an ambulance, ran as long as they could keep up. However, by the time they reached the exit, all street cars were overloaded, people were lying on the roofs of the street cars and were hanging on wherever one could get a foothold. The overloaded cars could scarcely move and all was tied up in a helpless congestion.

Grandfather and Schlicher decided to walk home and out as far as they went incoming cars were jammed with people who had walked out that far to get a place in a car which would first go to the Fair and then, if it could, would go out on its route. Next morning when it was time to open the gates, the last of the crowds had not yet succeeded in getting off the grounds.

When the tenth morning of the trip dawned, Grandfather decided to leave for home at once. The first train went by way of Milwaukee. "Do you want to go by way of the moon?" asked the ticket agent. "Yes," said Grandfather, "if that is the first train," and soon he was sound asleep in the day coach, waking only long enough to give the hard-hearted conductor a ticket.

Philadelphia had a Sesqui-Centennial in 1926. It was a failure - partly because the politicians mismanaged it; partly because the day when the public would go to a world's fair for study rather than for entertainment had passed.

Grandmother also visited the World's Fair and had a grand time - in fact, became so enthusiastic she bought two lots out at Glen Ellen (about one hour out of Chicago). Some thirty years later she was fortunate enough to sell the lots for about what she had paid for them, plus the taxes she had paid on them. The purchase of the lots, however, probably turned out to the family's advantage, for they were a constant reminder of the risk in real estate speculation and doubtless prevented investment of larger sums in boom projects.