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When "Chicago Day" Came to Hyde Park (What the Books Don't Tell You)

By James Stronks

It is astounding but true that 761, 942 people flooded into Jackson Park and the Midway on "Chicago Day" at the World's Columbian Exposition. It was October 9, 1893, and the 22nd anniversary of the Chicago Fire.

The anniversary fell on a Monday, but the proud city declared it a major holiday. They closed the stores and offices and schools, left saloons open, and half the town set out for the Fair.

Hyde Parkers, who could easily walk over to the park, may have stayed home to avoid the crush. Chicago Day was going to be historic, a once-in-a-lifetime event, but they had been visiting the Fair all summer. They could read about the crush in the *Tribune* the next day:

713,646

This Is Chicago Day's Marvelous Record at Fair.

PEERLESS IN HISTORY.

Outnumbered by Xerxes' Army but Never Since.

EXCEEDS ANY COMPARISON.

Vast Multitude Stands Alone in the List of Great Gatherings.

LARGER TOTAL ON FINAL COUNT.

The Xerxes claim was vintage Windy City brag. But the accountants' final total of 761, 942 is a solid fact, recorded in the *Report of the President to the Board of Directors* (1898), page 407. The *New York Times* the next day (after explaining that Chicago means "Where the skunk dwells") conceded it to be "the largest concourse of people ever known."

The 761, 942 people at the Fair that day were more than lived in Boston, or Baltimore, or St. Louis. Indeed, the U.S. *Census* of 1890 proves that the Chicago Day crowd was greater than the combined populations of Albany, Rochester, Toledo, Nashville, St. Paul, Kansas City, and Indianapolis — all compressed within the fences of the fairgrounds.

What was the impact of this human tidal wave along Stony Island and Cottage Grove, and what did it mean for Hyde Park?

The answers are not to be found in the published literature of the World's Columbian Exposition, though it is enormous. The official records and histories are excellent in their way, and we will draw on them here for some statistics. But they are institutional, limited to the precinct of the fairground, with formal photos of white facades amid deserted spaces, described in idealized generalities.

This present paper, on the contrary, is interested mainly in *people*, and specifics, whether in or outside of the fairgrounds, especially people on the streets of Hyde Park, a place the insular, whitewashed histories do not know exists. Our information here will come from the lively newspapers of October, 1893, with due care and discretion in using such fallible sources: the *Tribune*, the *Inter-Ocean*, the *Times*, the *Herald*, the *Record* and *Daily News*, the *Evening Journal*, the *Evening Post*, the scruffy *Mail*, and the exposition's own *Daily Columbian*.

Actually it was not the reporters on these dailies but their editors who wrote most extravagantly about Chicago Day. The *Tribune* op/ed page said the Fair showed "carping critics and envious rivals" (i.e., the *New York Times*) *continued on page 2*