

# “Wheels of Time”

By Zeus Preckwinkle

During the 1970's a number of murals were painted in the Hyde Park-Kenwood community. The viaducts underneath the Illinois Central tracks were the focal areas for much of this work. They not only had long walls that might otherwise be covered with graffiti, but they were also areas which pedestrians, commuters, and car passengers frequented. The last of these murals was completed in 1980, and the weather has slowly taken its toll.

This year in commemoration of Hyde Park's annexation centennial, Regents Park and the Clinton Company commissioned artist Barbara Westerfield to work with the community to paint “Wheels of Time” under the viaduct at Hyde Park Boulevard and Lake Park Avenue. On June 24, 1989 the mural was dedicated; and on July 13 Barbara Westerfield presented a slide/lecture at the Historical Society headquarters during which she described the mural and the planning that went into it.

While Barbara Westerfield was the artist in charge of the mural, she was quick to point out that nearly 900 people were involved in one way or another with the mural's production. Regents Park had requested that the theme of the mural be transportation in the past, present, and future and it is from this theme that the mural's title was derived. Along the wall there are more than a dozen large colorful wheels which school children in the neighborhood painted. Wheels, of course, are central to our transportation systems today but these wheels refer also to something more specific in Hyde Park's history, the Ferris Wheel from the 1893 World's Fair.

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How the Ferris Wheel came to be such an important part of the mural is an interesting story in itself. Early in her planning for the mural, Ms. Westerfield talked with local educator, Mary Hynes-Berry, who is an accomplished storyteller. Mary Hynes-Berry told her and later told children throughout Hyde Park - the story of her grandmother who had visited the World's Fair in 1893 as a young woman in her 20's. The story, entitled “The Chicago Spoon”, is a delightful one which tells how the Ferris Wheel carried 1,000 people at a time on its half-hour trip. Mary Hynes-Berry quotes her grandmother, “I could see what the birds see,” and “There were more people there than there is corn in Iowa.”

Two neighborhood young people, Madeline Klein and Angelica Hernandez, produced winning posters which were used in making the broad outline for the mural. The selection of the Ferris Wheel as a form of transportation is an interesting one. As adults we tend to think of transportation as a means of getting us to work or carrying freight from one place to another. The selection of the Ferris Wheel points out that transportation is also a way providing new perspectives on the world.

Because Ms. Westerfield wanted to keep writing on the mural to a minimum, she asked children to identify their work with their handprints and numerous prints can be seen in the mural. She also observed how children and adults developed a sense of the mural being their own work. In addition, there were a number of people who simply watched the production of the mural who also felt involved in it.

See image of mural

The site of “Wheels of Time” had, prior to April, been the site of the mural “Seasons in the City”. “Seasons in the City” had been completed in 1973 under the direction of artist Nina Ward and included the four seasons portrayed by students from Ray School, Laboratory School at U. of C., Harvard-St. George, and Shoemith. When it became clear that the mural was going to be sandblasted, the Historical Society's newly established committee, Friends of the Murals, had color slides made to keep a record of the old mural. One panel from the mural showing children skating had been used as an illustration in a Scott Foresmen social studies text during the 70's. To show a link between the old mural and the new one, Barbara Westerfield saw that this scene was recreated in “Wheels of Time”.

**Friends of the Murals** was suggested as a committee of the **Historical Society** by Professor William Pattison from the University of Chicago. In addition to establishing photographic records of “Seasons in the City” and “Wheels of Time”, the committee has put together a brief historical record of public response to some of the murals. Photographic records of all the murals are being sought, and the committee is attempting to contact the artists to see whether there are plans to restore their works or whether they should be replaced. Anyone interested in being a part of Friends of the Murals should contact Zeus Preckwinkle at 288-5148.