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CHICAGO July 23, 1896.

Miss Ida M. Tarbell.

My dear Miss Tarbell,

Undoubtedly your attention has been called to the connection and participation of Mr. Lincoln with the Harbor Convention at Chicago in July 1847. Nevertheless I take the liberty of sending you the enclosed account of it from the Chicago Tribune, June 28, '96

Very respectfully,

H. T. Glover.

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OUR FIRST CONVENTION.

CHICAGO CALLED IT THE FOURTH OF JULY CELEBRATION, 1847.

It Was the Great Gathering Called Together by the Veto by President James K. Polk of the River and Harbor Bill Fifty Years Ago—Many Notable Personages Present—Horace Greeley and Thurlow Weed as Reporters—Lincoln to the Front.

The late Presidential veto of the river and harbor bill suggests a like veto which, fifty years ago, stirred a prodigious excitement in Chicago and other incensed cities. After noting the items of a bill sent to him for signature—a bill relating to marine improvements in which New York, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Michigan, Wisconsin, and Illinois were deeply interested—James K. Polk had returned the document to Congress without his name and with economical comment. Among other things he had written thus:

"Some of the objects of the appropriation contained in this bill are local in their character and lie within the limits of a single State; and though in the language of the bill they are called harbors, they are not connected with foreign commerce nor are they places of refuge or shelter for our navy or commercial marine on the ocean or lake shores. It would seem the dictate of wisdom under such circumstances to husband our means and not waste them upon comparatively unimportant objects."

"'Husband our means,' forsooth," broke forth the Chicago Journal, in a fine Whig rage. "Are not millions being squandered by this same James K. Polk for the invasion of Mexico and the extension of slavery? Are not steamboats being bought and chartered daily, at enormous prices, to enrich his favorite prodigals? Are not the Treasury doors unbarred whenever the open sesame is whispered by the slaveholder? And yet Mr. Polk outrages the intelligence of the people, his masters, by claiming, when a pittance is asked for a great Northern interest, that we must 'husband our means'! That the object for which we ask them is comparatively unimportant! His real hostility to the bill cannot be concealed by such a shallow subterfuge. The objects of improvement lie north of Mason and Dixon's line, and would benefit the North and West, whose growing prosperity is hateful to the slave-owners of the South. . . . The lives of a hundred or two hardy mariners and a few millions of property are of no consequence in the eyes of James K. Polk when weighed against a Virginia abstraction, or that idol of the South, negro slavery."

The Journal continued: "The North can and will be no longer hoodwinked. The same spirit and energy that forced emancipation for the whole country from Great Britain will throw off the Southern yoke. The North and West will look to and take care of their own interests henceforth. They have ever been willing to allow more than justice to their Southern brethren, but they will not allow them to be their masters—they will have justice. The flat has gone forth—Southern rule is at an end."

This was a bold stand for the Chicago Daily Journal to take, since the city it spoke for had then but 16,000 inhabitants; it was a premature announcement, too, since "Southern rule" continued nearly fifteen years longer; but it was properly independent, and must have caused the Presidential ears to tingle.

Other newspapers were also outspoken. Hear the derisive Portland Argus: "Who is James K. Polk? Answer, ye betrayed and insulted Pennsylvanians! Answer, ye friends of internal improvements! Answer, ye long-suffering claimants of national justice! Answer, ye hard currency 'Democrats'! Answer, ye advocates of freedom! Who is James K. Polk?"

Convention Called at Chicago.

With so much indignation voicing itself it was clear something must be done—something concerted and radical—and so a grand river and harbor convention was decided upon, to be held at Chicago July 5, 6, and 7, 1847. This resolve was the result of many preliminary meetings in various cities, and the universal conclusion that Chicago, "from its peculiar location," was the natural place showy antithesis to the procession of substantial measures they felt were forthcoming. Horace Greeley described the pageant as "a truly magnificent spectacle," and warned New York even then against Chicago's enterprise and art.

In truth, the ten-year-old city was agog with hospitable excitement. From her village days she had been accustomed to entertain conventions, but hitherto the delegates had represented the Algonquin Nation, and had worn war paint and brandished clubs. This was her first great Caucasian council, and, as politics was tabooed, war paint and clubs had been left at home. No wonder she was happy! Then, too, looking into the faces of her amiable guests, she read a great future for her too active harbor and her too passive river. What could not these well-dressed, suave gentlemen do for her?

Cockades and drums! Red fire engines and gorgeously caparisoned horses! Admirable reefing and tacking on board the mimic ship suggestively named Convention! There was reason for civic pride. By a small stretch of patriotic fact, this pageant was called "A Fourth of July procession," and to see it, and the demigods of the convention, everybody flocked from miles around. They paddled to the scene in canoes; they rumbled in on plank roads; they dashed up on ponies; they came afoot. And most of them had to trust body and soul to the dangerous whims of rope ferries or scow bridges. But so brilliant a parade had never before been thought of, so large a deliberate body had never before assembled anywhere in the United States, and the occasion was not to be missed, even at the risk of life and limb. The very sun realized the importance of the day, and blazed with unusual effulgence.

Eighteen States out of the Union's twenty-nine were represented in the convention. The Hon. Edward Bates of St. Louis was made President, and immediately "an army of reporters" encamped upon either side of him. A part of this army "had retired, and the rest had put away their materials"—so the report explains, when, at the close of the convention Mr. Bates, comparatively unknown to most of the assembly, electrified everybody with a speech of surpassing eloquence. As the orator concluded, the convention rose to its feet, climbed up on benches, waved Eastern, Western, and Southern hats in wild unanimity, and shouted itself hoarse in round after round of applause. For once the usually sleepless gentlemen of the press were caught napping. As the speaker used no "notes," this burst of eloquence must, like Sheridan's Begum speeches, draw for its unusual merits upon the faith of posterity.

Tom Corwin as a Prophet.

While awaiting the report of the Committee on Permanent Officers the convention was treated to several pleasing addresses. Mr. Allen of Massachusetts eulogized the Puritans, and emphasized their influence upon the character of the West. The next speaker was "Tom" Corwin, whose "look drew audience and attention still as night or summer's noontide air" while he extolled Ohio and the West-at-large. He declared an admiration for the Puritans eulogized by Mr. Allen—one of whom he supposed Mr. Allen was himself—but the West was to be the ruler of the continent. "It is well, sir," he said, turning to the gentleman from Massachusetts, "that you have come among us to see your future masters."

It may be remarked in passing that this bringing of Ohio to the front in a battle for national progress has become a familiar proceeding since Mr. Corwin's time. After having shown his State loyalty the speaker adroitly complimented his audience by calling it "a congress of freemen without pay or mileage," and averred that he would, if he could, "swap" it for the Congress at Washington. He then satirically defined commerce and trade. The difference was clear—to President Polk and his sympathizers. Cargoes sent upon salt water constituted commerce; those trusted to fresh water, trade. His peroration took the form of vision and showed him and his hearers the West a universal ruler.

Then Mr. Greeley spoke for half an hour. He had hoped to escape a call to the platform because of his reputation as "a bad speaker," but the convention insisted upon hearing him. He talked in an able and practical manner—so Thurlow Weed wrote—and concluded with the hope that when the West came into the power predicted for it by the gentleman from Ohio it would rule for righteousness.

On the second day were read the letters of regret from notables unable—or unwilling—to accept the special invitation tendered them by Messrs. N. B. Judd, E. W. Tracy, Thomas Hoyne, William B. Ogden, S. J. Lowe, G. W. Meeker, and W. L. Whiting—the seven Chicago selected from a long list of wise men to serve her and the convention in the matter of discriminating hospi[illegible]

Presidency. And yet, in a few years' time, and a few feet from where he stood happily replying to Mr. Field, the "tall specimen of an Illinoisan" would be nominated to that high office.

The second day concluded with humor and eloquence from Thomas Butler King of Georgia.

Amusements of the Delegates.

Of how the delegates spent the time between the sessions the records have little to say. Hours were consumed no doubt in debates upon slavery and upon Gen. Scott's then progressing march toward the City of Mexico. We may be morally sure there was a general inspection of the block house as a historic duty, and that the busy shipyards, the ungovernable harbor, and the complex river system were visited as a contemporaneous duty. And probably every Eastern visitor went rattling out "like mad" to see the prairies and the "prairie schooners." The undulating sea of grass, the slow-moving canvas cylinders, the log-house harbors, must have offered, in addition to novelty, a practical adjunct to the practicalities of their business discussion. The evenings offered much the same entertainments then as now; and so it is reasonable to think that some of the delegates attended hops at the hotels, that some went to Rice's Theater, where the "Stage-Struck Yankee" and "Black-Eyed Susan" were then running a prosperous course, and that some went to church gatherings to mingle heart and voice in "Dundee" or "Old Hundred." All of the delegates may have gone to the postoffice once during their stay; they certainly sent no telegrams. But though the little city was without railroads, telegraphic connections, and illuminating gas, all these improvements were under charter and near at hand; and she would soon lift herself to a higher plane of living—higher by eight or ten feet of actual real estate. Her energy of purpose must have impressed Mr. Weed of the Albany Evening Journal, for he wrote that one need only come to Chicago to realize the truth underlying the motion brought before the House of Representatives by Felix Grundy McConnell, the excentric member for Alabama: "Resolved, That this is a great country and is constantly increasing."

The third day was devoted to miscellaneous business—final reports, respectful but unyielding resolutions, and the appointment of three dozen gentlemen, two from each State represented in the council, whose business it should be to write, print, and transmit to Congress "the principles and views of the River and Harbor convention." After this Chicago was thanked for her hospitality and the original papers of the convention were awarded her to be placed among her archives. Who dreamed that these papers would be resolved into their original gases in 1871?

Then followed the surprising eloquence of President Bates—called forth by a tribute of thanks for just and courtous ruling, to which succeeded, when order could be obtained, adjournment without day.

Committee of the Whole.

There were some hours left before steamers and stage coaches would start, so the delegates resolved themselves into a committee of the whole—Whigs, Democrats, and Neutrals—in maritime concord—placed Horace Greeley in the chair, and had a two-sessioned meeting, enlivened by the wit and wisdom of such men as Messrs. Burlingame of Massachusetts, Bebb of Ohio, Hubbell of Wisconsin, and S. Lisle Smith of Illinois. Concerning the speech of the last named gentleman Mr. Greeley wrote: "It was beautiful, thrilling, highly poetic, enchaining and enrapturing the audience. I will not attempt to sketch it."

At this supplementary meeting a memorable address was made by Mr. Moseley Hall of Buffalo in support of three resolutions pertaining to the building of a national railroad to the Pacific. This is now claimed to have been the first public speech ever made upon the subject of a transcontinental railway.

The convention had politely laid Mr. Hall's resolutions upon the table—probably as chimerical, but the mass-meeting, less hampered by cultivation and constitutional doubts, indorsed them. Twenty-one years, however, would pass before the Union Pacific's last spike would be driven, and the feasibility of Mr. Hall's resolutions be thus established.

It should be noted that Mr. Hall was the originator of the River and Harbor convention. As the agent for a Steamboat Association serving Buffalo, St. Louis, and intermediate points, the needs of improvement in transportation devices had been lying heavily upon his soul. He saw traders brought with anxiety over the great lakes to Chicago, then put into Frink & Walker's stage coaches and jolted or dr[illegible] to some navigable point[illegible]

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watched with interest and gratitude the various appropriations for lighthouses, channel-making, piers, and other water needs from 1831 onward. The first light-house had immediately fallen, but no matter—a new one promptly arose upon its ruins. Men, women, and children had personally superintended both those harbor improvements. As town and city she had been thus far unusually interested in commerce and waterways. She had seen the Sheldon Thompson draw near with Gen. Winfield Scott and the Asiatic cholera; she had, with eight yoke of oxen, pulled the Westward Ho over the bar; she had gone into a frenzy of joy when the Illinois came from Sackett's Harbor straight up to the heart of the town. It may be fairly asserted that with a portage given to overflows; with swamps, sloughs, a Mud Lake, and a branching bayou; with ferries, bridges, soggy streets, and a much-talked-of, occasionally-worked-at, and never-ending canal she had had, like poor Ophelia, "too much of water." But being the daughter of a plain Indian trader instead of a pretentious Prime Minister, and not being enervated by luxury and love, she had remained triumphantly buoyant. For the $247,000 Congress had given her harbor up to 1844 she had been duly thankful, but this executive veto of Aug. 3, 1846, impressed her as an outrage upon just expectations. To be sure, her interest in the lost bill was not large—only $12,000 for the harbor and $15,000 for lake dredging—but she had been classed among "comparatively unimportant objects," and so to financial injury had been added municipal insult.

She proceeded at once to get ready for the convention. Through a committee consisting of William B. Ogden, S. Lisle Smith, and George B. Dole, appointed at the New York meeting, Chicagoans were summoned to the Court-House on a November evening of 1846 to make arrangements for the coming convocation. To this call the City Council, the four public schools, and the ten churches responded with lanterns and enthusiasm. The following gentlemen were appointed to draw up a paper setting forth marine rights and wrongs: Messrs. John Wentworth, Geo. Manierre, J. Young Scammon, Isaac N. Arnold, and Grant Goodrich. In due time the enjoined proclamation was sent abroad. It began with a statement of the large yearly loss of life and property on lakes and rivers and ended with an invitation to everybody—friends and foes—to come to Chicago and take free part in a discussion of proposed measures for sundry maritime improvements. There is a singular fairness about an invitation that sought its enemies with hospitable italics.

During the rigor of winter and the blasts of spring preparations went warmly forward, and by July 4, 1847, Chicago was as ready as she could be for her tremendous guests. With Mark Skinner, Esq., as President, and every pioneer philanthropist from Gurdon S. Hubbard and John H. Kinzie onward, serving upon Committees of Correspondence, Address, and Arrangements, everything needful and courteous had been done. "Taverns" had been swept and garnished, homes had been thrown wide open; steamers had promised to be entertainingly at the wharf; and, for executive deliberation, a tent 100 feet square had blossomed in the center of the city. Finally, to these varied forms of hospitality distinguished people had been invited from all parts of the United States, "without distinction of party."

When we read that the deliberative tent held but 4,000, and that 20,000 was "a judicious estimate" of the number in attendance—10,000 of whom were members—we fear there may have been some grumbling. However, to judge from the letters of two reputable editors—Horace Greeley of the New York Tribune and Thurlow Weed of the Albany Evening Journal—high good-humor characterized the opening of the convention, and, with some minor exceptions, its entire course. But no doubt these two gentlemen had good seats. The delegates who were obliged to stand and look over the heads of the favored 4,000 may have been less amiable. Yet there is no record of any one having been otherwise than acquiescent with his lot, whatever it was.

"A Truly Magnificent Spectacle."

There was a procession—of course! and the line of march wound from Dearborn Park to Court-House square. The delegates, with State boundaries patriotically defined, marched foremost, and, having reached their destined seats, or standing ground, had heard the welcome of Mayor Curtiss, when the grand finale of the parade, deafening bands, decorated fire engines, and a full-rigged ship drawn by twelve horses, drove in sight, and encompassed the pavilion. This display was offered by the citizens as a

hospitality.

Thomas H. Benton, Henry Clay, ex-President Van Buren, and Daniel Webster all sent more or less cordial letters, Webster's being especially sympathetic. Among other letters of regret and definition of view were those of Silas Wright of Canton, Thomas Curtiss of Boston, Joseph Grinnell of New Bedford, Bradford R. Wood of Albany, George P. Barker of Buffalo, and Alpheus Felch of Ann Arbor. These were, for the most part, satisfactory to the body addressed.

Cass Raises a Storm.

But there was one letter which produced a storm as sudden and violent as any Lake Michigan itself was in the habit of evoking from placid depths. This letter came from Detroit and was addressed to E. W. Tracy of the Correspondence committee. It read thus:

"Dear Sir: I am much obliged to you for your kind attention in transmitting me an invitation to attend the convention on internal improvements which will meet in Chicago in July. Circumstances, however, will put it out of my power to be present at that time. I am, dear sir, respectfully yours,

"LEWIS CASS."

After "a broad laugh"—one of surprise and gathering scorn—came loud calls for a second reading. Could it be that the Governor of the old Northwest Territory, the stanch friend of settlement and progress, the man who of all others knew the perils and the needs of lake navigation, had written no word of sympathy? A second reading failed to suggest even a latent warmth under the cold lines, and then, indeed, indignation vented itself. Even the serene-faced Mr. Greeley was severe. He wrote scornfully of "the United States Senator from harborless Michigan, the aspirant to the Presidency via South Carolina," and added that the man's letter reminded him forcibly of the following incident: "A lank, lop-sided Marylander, who, for a consideration, conducted visitors (mainly British) over the battlefield of Bladensburg, upon being asked one day by an Englishman, 'How came so many of your countrymen to run away from so strong a position as this?' replied: 'O, they didn't seem to take no interest.'"

Detroit heard dim echoes of the commotion, and when the steamer which carried homeward the first detachment of delegates arrived at that city it found the wharf thronged with people anxious to learn details of the Northwest's reputation of her old-time protector, Lewis Cass.

But let Chicago's self-control be noted. She did not blot out from her book of street nomenclature either the name of the temporizing politician or of the vetoing President. It was a thing she could do and had done for John Tyler.

Lincoln to the Front.

Dinner, with its midday siesta, seems to have restored the convention to a state of legislative fairness, for one of New York's 400—delegates—the Hon. David Dudley Field, who, as a "strict constructionist," was not in harmony with the expansive policy of the convention, was allowed to elaborate his views. Mr. Greeley even "rejoiced to hear the wrong side so ably and so courteously presented." It is true resolutions expressing pain over Mr. Field's utterances were offered by some aggrieved delegates, but these memorials of discord were peacefully laid on the table. The gentleman from New York was, however, vigorously answered, among others by an obscure man for whom fame, world-wide and deathless, was in hiding. Mr. Greeley's report for July 6 has this entry:

"In the afternoon the Hon. Abraham Lincoln, a tall specimen of an Illinoisan, just elected to Congress from the only Whig district in the State, was called out and spoke briefly and happily in reply to Mr. Field."

The Chicago Journal of the same day noted with pleasure the attendance upon the convention of Abraham Lincoln, observed that it was his first visit to the commercial metropolis of his State, and concluded thus: "We expect much from him as a representative in Congress, and we have no doubt that our expectations will be more than realized, for never was reliance placed in a nobler heart and a sounder judgment."

Upon this visitor—since he was evidently honest and stood for what they either positively demanded or neutrally desired—all the city papers may have favorably commented—the Chicago Democrat, the Commercial Advertiser, the Gem of the Prairie, and other contemporaries of the far-seeing Journal. If history is to be trusted THE CHICAGO TRIBUNE did not start into life until three days after the close of the convention, and was thus debarred from giving Mr. Lincoln early praise and Gen. Cass late censure. But while there seems to have been a general feeling that the diplomat of Michigan had overleaped the side of his Presidential intent, it is almost certain that no delegate and no newspaper representative connected even by a passing thought the unassuming Congressman with the

point on the Illinois and Michigan Canal, there stowed in packets and carried to the Illinois River, and there tranferred to steamers for a deliberate voyage to St. Louis. It seems to have occurred to him early in 1846 that something must be done to advance the interest of travel. And so he had taken into his counsel Robert Fergus of Chicago, William Duane Wilson of Milwaukee, and other progressive spirits, and, with them had held at Rathbun Hotel New York, the first of a series of preliminary meetings, which ended in the rally at Chicago a few months later.

Buffalo, Pittsburg, Cleveland, Cincinnati, and Detroit each wished to entertain the convention, and St. Louis insisted upon doing so, but Mr. Hall steered the honor steadily to Chicago—just as his Steamboat Association did its steamers. This was a distinguished compliment to Chicago, coming, as it did, from a man who lived in Buffalo and boarded in St. Louis. But we are amazed as we read the story. When he had gathered the wit, wisdom, and worth of the land together to consider ways and means for promoting lake and river travel this man stood forth the bold and persistent champion of that deadly foe to marine finance—a railroad! The commercial audience must have been astounded. But as the reach and aptitude of railroads was not then suspected no one among the 10,000 delegates was seriously alarmed; no one rose "to a point of order," and no one reminded the speaker that he was the agent of a Steamboat Association, and "the father" of a River and Harbor convention.

While it must be admitted that the proposed railroad—trending off as it did directly westward—promised in no way to interfere with the composite line which stretched between Buffalo and St. Louis, yet it is evident from all we can learn of Mr. Hall that he would, in any event, have spoken for general progress. Let his disinterested spirit and long foresight be duly honored.

"The King of France."

It was thought this gathering of "enlightened and discriminating men," with "action deliberative and emphatic," could not fail "to be effective." Thurlow Weed wrote: "I venture to predict that no more harbor and river bills will be vetoed."

It will be seen that this was an extravagant prophecy. Mr. Weed was sometimes more moderate in his forecasts. As he steamed from the Straits of Mackinaw to the mouth of the Chicago River, he wrote home to the Hudson that "these lake shores would, by the end of the century, nourish a million of inhabitants."

The question now must be sternly met—what came of it all—the months of varied preparation, the miles of long-suffering travel, the days of fine speeches, the prayers of the thirty-six gentlemen of the Executive committee?

History answers: Very little, as far as the Chicago harbor was concerned. Five years passed before Congress took any moneyed notice of the troublesome port, during which time the sand went on playing the wildest possible pranks, and "the principles and views of the river and harbor convention" seemed to have been promulgated in vain. Then, after a careful grant of $20,000, followed fourteen years of non-appropriation. But in those years—between 1852 and 1866—the government was, for a time, too busy with Mexican boundary disputes, the Kansas-Nebraska bill, the Dred Scott case, and the John Brown raid, to think of anything but making a safe harbor for herself from a sea of troubles; and then came the civil war, bringing a bitter need for all the money she could command.

It is claimed that the river and harbor convention was a strong stimulus to Chicago's growth; that it promoted immigration, increased property values, and prepared the way for the railroad enterprises of the next decade. But, despite this assurance, the conspicuous muster with its vanishing results, suggests to the general student of history the barren campaign of "the King of France with all his men." Certain it is, however, Chicago must cherish as an educating epoch in her crude childhood those July days of 1847 when she entertained her first Caucasian Council and felt a boundless faith in Federal legislation.