

# After 50 Years Prairie Avenue Stirs Again

## Revival of Interest Recalls Halcyon Days of Mansions and Millionaires

By HERMA CLARK

**PRAIRIE AVENUE!** Fifty years ago this was the street where millionaires lived in their brownstone palaces. Their doors were opened by haughty butlers. In front waited smart Kimball broughams drawn by dock-tailed horses loaded with silver-plated harness and driven by correct British coachmen in cockaded top hats and neat livery of brown, maroon, or blue broadcloth.

Today there is a revival of interest in the once fashionable street.

The Marshall Field mansion, 1905 Prairie avenue, so long unoccupied, has been given to the Association of Arts and Industries, and it has been remodeled to suit the needs of the budding architects and designers who are studying there.

The exodus from Prairie avenue began shortly after the turn of the century. Young people, marrying, took apartments farther south in Kenwood or Hyde Park or else went to the near north side. Parents, left alone in the great houses, no longer wanted the care attendant on keeping them up. The problem of domestic help grew increasingly difficult. One by one the mansions were boarded up or rented for business or for rooming houses.

In the eighties and nineties Prairie avenue was the habitat of notably solvent citizens, men who had been the builders of Chicago. Beginning at 16th street, you could hardly throw a stone, they used to say, without hitting a millionaire. Below 22d street there was a break, since business crept near at that point, but again from 26th to 29th streets Prairie avenue was a thoroughfare of magnificent residences occupied by people whose names were among the best known in the city.

Within these three blocks lived such families as the Albert B. Deweys, the Noble B. Judahs, the Lancasters, the Charles L. Hutchinsons, the Henry A. Blairs, the Chauncey Keeps, the Ernest A. Hamills, the Frederick T. Haskells, the Marvin Hughtits, the A. A. Spragues, and the William A. Fullers.

Let us walk south on Prairie avenue, as it was in the elegant eighties, from 16th street to 22d street. Look at these door plates bearing such names as those of George M. Pullman, W. W. Kimball, Wirt Dexter, John J. Glessner, Samuel W. Allerton, Byron L. Smith, M. A. Meyer, Henry Corwith, Charles D. Hamill, M. M. Rothschild, Eugene S. Pike, Robert W. Roloson, P. D. Armour, Clarence Buckingham, W. G. Hibbard. Every great business associated with Chicago was represented in these six blocks—packing, railroads,

wholesale merchandising, retail business, grain elevators, musical merchandise, real estate.

Incredible Chicago! Seventy years after the Fort Dearborn massacre, whose victims met death at what is now the corner of 18th street and Prairie avenue, the brownstone palace of George M. Pullman rose, on almost the very spot where the tragedy of 1812 occurred.

Almost every one of the great houses built in the eighties had a ballroom, so that dances for the young people of the families were frequent. With spacious quarters in their own homes, they did not often go to hotels for dancing.

Johnny Hand played for most of the private balls—Johnny Hand, of whom it was said that when he passed through the pearly gates, if St. Peter invited him to conduct a heavenly orchestra he would inquire if the company was to be a first-class one. For Johnny Hand was accustomed to lift his baton for the great of Chicago, and he had no mind to play for lesser folk.

But though most private dances were held in these homes in the early days of Prairie avenue, there were many gatherings, too, at Bournique's dancing academy on 23d street between Prairie and Calumet avenues. Here the socially elect of the west and north sides, as well as those of the immediate neighborhood, learned the steps of the waltz, the schottische, and the polka. The building still stands, though it has not been used for its original purpose for years.

Here the Pullman dancing class held its sessions, when Gen. Phil Sheridan waltzed the ladies 'round and 'round. He had never learned to "reverse," and every fair one who danced with him had to be caught as the dance ended, for she was sure to be giddy with whirling in one direction. General Sheridan realized this and went to Mr. Bournique, the dancing master, one day, in great distress.

"Can you teach me to reverse?" he asked. "I have never

learned." So Mr. Bournique taught the hero who never reversed (either in war or in peace) to "unwhirl." He did it well—until he waltzed with a lady, when, old custom being too much for him, he went 'round the room again as before, always in one direction, his partner growing ever dizzier and dizzier with each round. However, dizzy or not, every woman wanted to dance with the hero of Five Forks, who was popular with men and women alike.

Col. Frederick Dent Grant, son



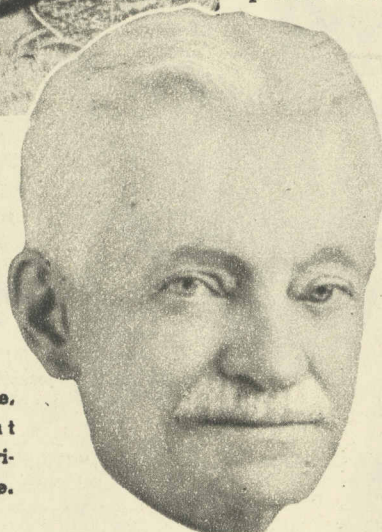
(Photo courtesy Chicago Historical Society)

A section of Prairie avenue, taken about 1890.



(Acme photo.)

Gen. Phil Sheridan, dashing figure at Prairie avenue parties, who could whirl a partner in only one direction.



A. E. Bournique, who taught General Sheridan to reverse.

of the President, was another member of the Pullman dancing class while he lived in Chicago, though his home was not on Prairie avenue, but on Michigan avenue. This famous class, organized by Mrs. Pullman, continued for seventeen years, with the Prairie avenue set enjoying it as much as when it began in 1878. Robert T. Lincoln, son of President Lincoln, was another member. Byron L. Smith, banker, and Col. Huntington W. Jackson, the latter a handsome bachelor, tripped the measures of favorite dances with this Prairie avenue set.

Mr. and Mrs. Augustus E. Bournique, who founded the dancing school with which their names are associated and which has continued until the present time, lived to celebrate their sixty-fourth wedding anniversary, proving, perhaps, that dancing prolongs life.

In January, 1886, there occurred in the Marshall Field home a ball which was the most expensive, as it was one of the most beautiful, ever given in a private home in Chicago.

The Fields had two children—Marshall Jr. and Ethel—the former 17 years old at that time. He

was a shy, rather delicate lad, while Ethel, three years his junior, was lively and full of energy. It had been the custom of Mrs. Field to give a Christmas party for her children, to which the youngsters of the neighborhood were invited, but, now that Marshall was almost grown up, the holiday festivity was to be a real ball, with everything that should accompany an adult party.

Gilbert and Sullivan's "Mikado" had come out the year before, and Mrs. Field decided on a "Mikado" ball, with guests in costume. Decorators were called in to transform the house into a miniature Japanese town. The front hall was decorated with a large copy of the stage set from the second act of "The Mikado," presented at the Fifth Avenue theater, New York.

On one side of the hall was

erected a miniature pagoda, in which Johnny Hand's orchestra was seated. There was another orchestra playing, too, called Vallicia's, the first mandolin band heard here. Later Tomaso, one of the mandolin players, was to have his own mandolin orchestra, to whose music many Chicagoans have danced.

Eugene A. Bournique, son of Mr. and Mrs. A. E. Bournique, recalls vividly this famous party of the eighties. A young man at that time, he had been trained by his parents to teach the children's classes, and for many years the youngsters of Prairie avenue had a children's dancing class at the Field home. Thus it was that he managed the "Mikado" ball for Mrs. Field, leading the cotillion, outstanding feature of balls of the period.

"I should say that it was the handsomest ball ever given in a private house in Chicago," says Mr. Bournique.

"There were perhaps 500 guests present—parents and children. Many of the favors for the cotillion were obtained by Mr. Field's buyers in Paris and were the loveliest imaginable. Some of these must have cost as much as \$15 apiece. The entire cost of the ball must have been between 50 and 75 thousand dollars."



Mrs. A. E. Bournique. Eugene Bournique.

Some of the favors were designed by Whistler, the American artist, then living in London.

Every one was in costume, from wig to sandals, and the result was a riot of color. Sherry of New York furnished the supper, bringing all the supplies—linen, silver, and food—from the east in two private cars. They did things on a magnificent scale in those days.



The "Three Little Maids" of the famous Field "Mikado" party. Left to right they are Florence Otis, Ethel Field, and Alice Keith.

Did Marshall Field, merchant prince, who could spend \$75,000 on an evening's entertainment for his children in 1886, recall his first year in Chicago, as a clerk in Cooley-Wadsworth's store, when his annual salary was \$400, when he slept in the store and bought no new clothes except a pair of overalls? He saved \$200 that year, by the way, which explains why he could spend lavishly thirty years later.

Prairie avenue on that night of the ball was illuminated by calcium lights all the way from 16th street to 22d street, and it must have been a gay sight—that of the skilful coachmen driving into the carriage way, the horses stepping proudly to the music of the jingling harness. The conveyances paused to deposit the gayly attired occupants at the north door, then sped on through the open doors of the stable to the alley and thence north or south, since there was no way of turning around in the driveway, and the next in line must not be kept waiting long.



Residence of George Pullman on Prairie avenue, taken about 1902. The Pullmans were sponsors of the avenue's popular dancing class. (Photo courtesy the Chicago Historical Society.)

The Bournique academy "for dancing, physical culture, and deportment." It was located on East 23d street between Prairie and Calumet avenues.

SIXTEENTH STREET		PRAIRIE AVENUE	TWENTY-SECOND STREET	
John L. Shortall	1600		1415	Thomas D. Rhodes
Henry L. Frank	1608	1419	J. Foster Rhodes	
P. E. Studebaker	1612	1421	John M. Hamline	
William R. Stirling	1616	1423	Granger Farwell	
Dr. Lyman West	1620	1425	Hugh J. McIlrney Jr.	
Abraham Langini	1624	1427	Jesse Spalding	
Morris Einstein	1628	1701	William G. Hibbard	
Peter Brust	1630	1709	Mrs. Palmer V. Kellogg	
Erastus Foote	1634	1721	Mrs. Wirt Dexter	
H. Morris Johnston	1636	1729	George M. Pullman	
Robert B. Gregory	1638	1801	W. W. Kimball	
T. W. Harvey	1702	1811	William B. Keep	
Albert Sturges	1712	1823	Thomas Dent	
Mrs. James M. Walker	1720	1827	J. W. Doane	
James R. Walker	1726	1901	Norman B. Ream	
Joseph B. Otis	1730	1905	Marshall Field Sr.	
Hugh J. McIlrney	1734	1919	Marshall Field Jr.	
John J. Glessner	1800	1923	Mrs. Sarah H. Kellogg	
O. R. Keith	1808	1945	Mrs. Henry Corwith	
G. H. Wheeler	1812	2001	Dr. John W. Streeter	
Charles M. Henderson	1816	2003	George F. Bissell	
Charles Schwartz	1824	2009	Mrs. M. A. Meyer	
D. B. Shipman	1828	2011	Mrs. Camille Storey	
Fernando Jones	1834	2013	William H. Reid	
Eilbridge G. Keith	1900	2017	Silas B. Cobb	
Edson Keith	1904	2021	James L. High	
Mosher T. Green	1912	2027	William B. Walker	
Samuel W. Allerton	1936	2031	Samuel A. Tolman	
John M. Clark	2000	2033	F. R. Otis	
William L. Gray	2010	2035	Mrs. H. O. Stone	
J. L. Lombard	2018	2101	Eugene S. Pike	
Mrs. Levi Rosenfeld	2024	2109	Robert W. Roloson	
Clarence Buckingham	2034	2115	P. D. Armour	
John B. Sherman	2100	2123	T. M. Avery	
Mrs. Irene C. Ames	2108			
M. M. Rothschild	2112			
Frank S. Gorfan	2120			
Charles D. Hamill	2124			
Thomas Murdoch	2130			
Byron L. Smith	2140			

Chart showing house numbers and owners' names along the famous section of Prairie avenue between 16th street and 22d street.