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A Century Of Progress

By Inez Schneider Whitney

While I was in my attic recently, I ran across one of my treasured possessions, an old scrapbook. Pasted on the first page is a folder advertising a tour to "A Century of Progress Exposition," a World's Fair held in Chicago in 1933.

For three years, I had been an elementary art teacher in Oklahoma City, but that summer — 1933 — I was teaching art at Southwestern State Teachers College in Weatherford. Miss Myrle Kelly, head of the Art Department, had called me that spring.

"I need another art teacher this summer. I'm calling to find out if you'd be interested. You'll be paid only fifty dollars for the nine weeks; but if there are any courses at the college you'd like to take, you won't have to pay. Would you want to do it?"

I knew that my living expenses would be quite a bit more than fifty dollars, but I accepted. I thought it was an honor to be asked. Besides I could pursue my interest in watercolor by taking another course.

John Whitney, a young attorney I had been dating, came out one weekend. He handed me the very folder I have pasted in the scrapbook and said, "This trip is being sponsored by our Chamber of Commerce. Look it over."

Here is what I read:
 "Round-trip railroad fare with meals in the dining car. Lodging in first-class hotels — two to a room. Three admission tickets to the World's Fair. A boat trip to Michigan City and return. A fifty-mile motor-coach tour of Chicago."

"What a marvelous trip," I exclaimed. "I've never been to Chicago."

"We're taking reservations," John said. "Why don't you go? Tell some of your friends about it. If I get four more to sign, Rock Island will give me my trip free. I already have my friend, Paul Powers."

It was during the Depression, and money was scarce. My salary was

small, but at least I got it every month. Often John's clients didn't pay him and he had office rent, a secretary, and other expenses.

"How can I leave when I'm teaching every day?" I asked.

"Ask Miss Kelly. She seems like a good old girl. Since she's head of the Art Department, I'll wager she could arrange it."

And she did. I showed her the folder the next morning.

"What an opportunity!" she exclaimed. "There's a fabulous exhibit at the fair. Do you know that WHISTLER'S MOTHER has been brought here from the Louvre? I'll see what I can do."

She called me in to her office the next day.

"It's all arranged and surprise! I'll be going too. Tell John to get me a ticket."

Miss Kelly had gone to the president. She told him that she had been asked to go on the tour as a guide who would lecture to the group about masterpieces on display at the fair. Also, she needed me as her assistant. The president gave his permission. He thought it would be good publicity for the college.

How excited I was! I wondered a little if her exaggeration of the need for our services was justified, but I dismissed it from my mind. After all, what an opportunity to spend some time with my young attorney friend. I contacted two teachers at my school in Oklahoma City. When I called John and told him to get tickets for them as well as for Miss Kelly and me, he said, "I can't believe it! My ticket won't cost me a cent!"

At last the day of departure arrived. Miss Kelly and I took a train to Oklahoma City. And then on Sunday, July 16, 1933, at 10:30 a.m., the Rock Island "Golden State Limited" left Oklahoma City with five hundred passengers bound for Chicago.

Miss Kelly began making short trips from car to car to get acquainted with the passengers. She'd tell a little group of three or four about the masterpieces

to be seen at the fair. She was really rendering the services she had told the president she had been asked to do.

"For purposes of economy, sleeping cars have been omitted in connection with this particular tour," the folder indicated, but no one seemed to mind. They were young and were anticipating a wonderful time at the Century of Progress. Twenty-four hours later the train arrived in Chicago, and we were taken to our hotels. John and his friend Paul were only a few blocks from the one where I was staying with Miss Kelly and my Oklahoma City friends.

The days went all too fast. Now and then John and I managed to steal a few hours to sightsee on our own. One day, Miss Kelly organized a small group for a tour of the Chicago Art Gallery. Afterward John said, "That was great. I really enjoyed it. Miss Kelly's a smart lady; she really knows her art and makes it interesting too."

That pleased me. Miss Kelly had been my favorite instructor. I had spent hours in her department painting oil and watercolor pictures as well as learning from her in the many regular art courses I had taken.

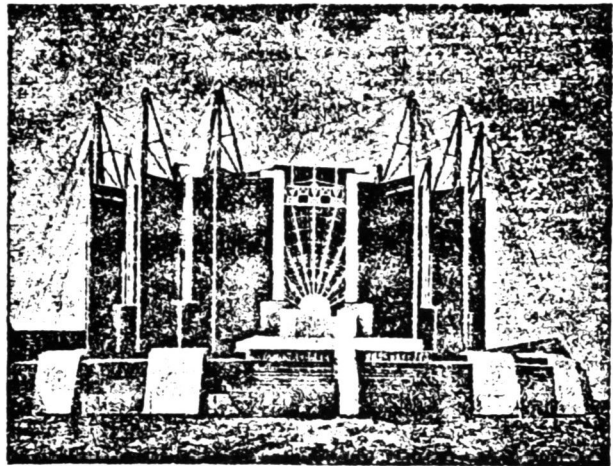
July 22 came and we left for home. Miss Kelly and I were back in the classroom. A clipping in the scrapbook from the local Weatherford paper has these headlines: "Art Teacher Is Back from Excursion to fair in Chicago" and "Miss Myrle Kelly Acts as Official Art Guide for Chamber of Commerce from Oklahoma City."

It didn't make any difference that I wasn't mentioned. Miss Kelly had made it possible for me to have one of the most enjoyable trips of my life.

I almost forgot to mention the cost of this memorable trip, which included every necessary except meals during the stay in Chicago — \$36.95.

The trip to Chicago was only the first of many trips John and I enjoyed together since two years later we said "I do" and had a happy marriage that lasted over fifty years. ♡

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