

**DRAFT**

# A SIMPLE HISTORY OF CHICAGO'S BLOOMINGDALE RAIL LINE CIRCA 1870 - 1935



Figure 1: This 4-4-0 locomotive was built for the Chicago & Pacific and then labored for the Chicago, Milwaukee & St. Paul after the 1880 buy-out. Source: Don Ross collection. <http://donsdepot.donrossgroup.net/dr385.htm>

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Chicago's elevated Bloomingdale Line is many things to many people. Most simply, it is a neighborhood landmark and boundary. Most unfortunately, it has been described as "an overgrown linear jungle atop a causeway wandering through a rapidly gentrifying urban landscape . . . a haven for homeless derelicts, miscreants, and teenagers looking for a private place to get drunk."<sup>1</sup> Most hopefully, it will be "an elevated linear park," connecting neighborhoods instead of bounding them, and serving as a haven for more positive recreation.<sup>2</sup> But aside from being all these things, the Bloomingdale Line is also a small piece of Chicago history.

## I. THE CHICAGO & PACIFIC BEGINNING

The history of the Bloomingdale Line begins in February 1865, shortly before the close of the Civil War, when the Illinois Legislature chartered the Atlantic and Pacific Railroad, to run from the Indiana/Illinois state line by way of Chicago to the Mississippi River near Savanna, Illinois.<sup>3</sup> Formal organization of the company did not actually occur for another five years, when the stockholders met in June 1870 to elect the directors and to organize the corporation. During 1871, then, "the work of constructing the railroad from a point in North Chicago, known as Goose Island, was commenced."<sup>4</sup> After the company established its corporate identity, however, much larger events intervened, when the Great Fire burned through Chicago on October 8-10, 1871. Yet within a little more than two months after the Fire, the Chicago & Pacific began the serious business of establishing itself as an active

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1 David M. Young, *The Iron Horse and the Windy City* (DeKalb, Ill. 2005) at 219.

2 "Logan Square Open Space Plan" at 21, available at <http://www.bloomingdaletrail.org/news/archives/LSOSP-Recommendation-4-Bloomingdale.pdf>.

3 John W. Cary, *The Organization and History of the Chicago, Milwaukee & St. Paul Railway Company* (Milwaukee, Wis. no date (1892?)) at 253.

4 Cary at 253.

railroad. The Atlantic and Pacific road name was dropped in short order, when in December 1871 the board of directors met and resolved to change the company's name to the Chicago and Pacific Railroad Company, which was "deemed necessary by the directors, there being another railroad of the same name in operation in the West."<sup>5</sup>

As the Chicago & Pacific organized itself, the Chicago City Council gave its blessing and passed an ordinance on June 12, 1872 that granted the railroad "permission and authority" to build within the city, which the railroad's stockholders approved five days later. The designated right of way was:

Commencing at the western limits of the city, at Bloomingdale road (or street), thence on said Bloomingdale road to and across Coventry Street, thence on any property said company may acquire, by purchase, condemnation, or otherwise, to Jones Avenue, thence on said Jones avenue and Hawthorne [since renamed Kingsbury] avenue to Willow street, thence on any property said company may acquire by purchase, condemnation or otherwise, to North avenue; thence across North avenue to Cherry Avenue; thence on Cherry avenue and North Branch street to and across the North Branch Canal and to Hawthorne avenue [Kingsbury]; and from said North Branch street on any property said company may acquire by purchase, condemnation, or otherwise, west of Larrabee street and east of the North Branch of the Chicago River to Chicago avenue. And also to put down, construct, and maintain, for passenger cars only, a single or double track from the north side of said Willow Street on said Hawthorne [Kingsbury] avenue to Larrabee street, with authority to run their cars over and along said tracks with steam or other power as said company may deem best.<sup>6</sup>

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5 George H. Daniels, *The Chicago & Pacific Railroad: A Description of the New Railroad Line Across the State of Illinois from Chicago to the Mississippi River* (Chicago 1873) at 12. A 1942 article in *The Milwaukee Magazine* bemusedly speculated that the owners "decid[ed] that the name of their company took in a little too much territory. . . ." William H. Polk, "Junction," *The Milwaukee Magazine*, reprinted in Bob Storozuk, "Tower A-5 (Pacific Junction, Chicago)," *The Milwaukee Railroader* (Fourth Quarter 2004) at 4.

6 Daniels at 13-14.

Exiting the city, the railroad proceeded thirty-four miles through Cook, DuPage, and Kane Counties out to Elgin.<sup>7</sup> By December 1875, construction was complete from Chicago to Byron, Illinois.

In less than a month, the Chicago & Pacific laid its first track on July 10, 1872.<sup>8</sup> The main passenger depot was located at Chicago Avenue and Larrabee Street<sup>9</sup> and connected with the Chicago and Clybourne Avenue streetcars to shuttle passengers to and from downtown. The freight depot stood at the corner of North Halsted and North Branch Streets.<sup>10</sup> The *Chicago Tribune* described the company as owning “large dock room and ample grounds for depots, engine-houses, repair shops, etc., having a more central and advantageous location than many other lines.”<sup>11</sup> However, subsequent events would demonstrate that these locations near and on Goose Island were not so advantageous in the long run. The Chicago & Pacific general offices were located downtown at the northwest corner of Randolph and LaSalle in a landmark building known as the Metropolitan Block, and the general freight and ticket office was at 46 North Clark.

**[INSERT MAP FROM DANIELS, *The Chicago & Pacific Railroad*]**

By September 1874, the Chicago & Pacific was advertising four trains daily, to and from Elgin, Illinois. Two passenger trains were scheduled to leave Chicago in the afternoon at 3:35 and at 5:20. Freight and mail trains departed Chicago on a schedule of 6:13 and 9:40 in the morning. Along the east-west stretch that came to

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<sup>7</sup> Metra’s “Milwaukee District West Line,” leaving Union Station to the west, continues to follow much of the original mainline to Elgin after it jogs northwest.

<sup>8</sup> Daniels at 47.

<sup>9</sup> Roughly the location of the former Montgomery Ward headquarters and warehouse complex, now redeveloped into residences.

<sup>10</sup> Roughly the site of Kendall College.

<sup>11</sup> *Chicago Tribune* (Sept. 11, 1875), reprinted in The Railway & Locomotive Historical Society, *Bulletin* No. 113, “Chicago & Pacific Railroad” (Oct. 1965) at 85.

be known as the Bloomingdale Line, the railroad originally kept station stops at Holstein, Humboldt, Almira, and Pacific Junction. The Holstein station, three miles from the Goose Island terminus, referred to the former town of Holstein, which had been annexed to Chicago in 1865; the stop may have been located at Leavitt, Milwaukee and Bloomingdale in present-day Bucktown. From here, a round-trip ticket to and from Chicago cost fifteen cents. Just less than half a mile further west stood the station at Humboldt; most of this town had been annexed to Chicago in 1869, but part remained a suburb of the city until 1889. The Humboldt stop, believed to be at California and Bloomingdale, was located a quarter mile north of the Park, and the railroad boasted that "a handsome depot, with tastefully arranged grounds, [had] been built."<sup>12</sup> Chicago round-trips cost a nickel more than from Holstein.

STATIONS	Miles		Time		Rate	
	Chicago	Station	Chicago	Station	Chicago	Station
Holstein	1.0	3.4	10	15	7.00	4.00
Humboldt	1.5	4.1	15	20	8.00	4.50
Almira	2.0	4.8	20	25	9.00	5.00
Pacific Junction	2.5	5.5	25	30	10.00	5.50
N. W. Chicago	3.0	6.2	30	35	11.00	6.00
Chicago	3.5	6.9	35	40	12.00	6.50
Chicago	4.0	7.6	40	45	13.00	7.00
Chicago	4.5	8.3	45	50	14.00	7.50
Chicago	5.0	9.0	50	55	15.00	8.00
Chicago	5.5	9.7	55	60	16.00	8.50
Chicago	6.0	10.4	60	65	17.00	9.00
Chicago	6.5	11.1	65	70	18.00	9.50
Chicago	7.0	11.8	70	75	19.00	10.00
Chicago	7.5	12.5	75	80	20.00	10.50
Chicago	8.0	13.2	80	85	21.00	11.00
Chicago	8.5	13.9	85	90	22.00	11.50
Chicago	9.0	14.6	90	95	23.00	12.00
Chicago	9.5	15.3	95	100	24.00	12.50
Chicago	10.0	16.0	100	105	25.00	13.00
Chicago	10.5	16.7	105	110	26.00	13.50
Chicago	11.0	17.4	110	115	27.00	14.00
Chicago	11.5	18.1	115	120	28.00	14.50
Chicago	12.0	18.8	120	125	29.00	15.00
Chicago	12.5	19.5	125	130	30.00	15.50
Chicago	13.0	20.2	130	135	31.00	16.00
Chicago	13.5	20.9	135	140	32.00	16.50
Chicago	14.0	21.6	140	145	33.00	17.00
Chicago	14.5	22.3	145	150	34.00	17.50
Chicago	15.0	23.0	150	155	35.00	18.00
Chicago	15.5	23.7	155	160	36.00	18.50
Chicago	16.0	24.4	160	165	37.00	19.00
Chicago	16.5	25.1	165	170	38.00	19.50
Chicago	17.0	25.8	170	175	39.00	20.00
Chicago	17.5	26.5	175	180	40.00	20.50
Chicago	18.0	27.2	180	185	41.00	21.00
Chicago	18.5	27.9	185	190	42.00	21.50
Chicago	19.0	28.6	190	195	43.00	22.00
Chicago	19.5	29.3	195	200	44.00	22.50
Chicago	20.0	30.0	200	205	45.00	23.00
Chicago	20.5	30.7	205	210	46.00	23.50
Chicago	21.0	31.4	210	215	47.00	24.00
Chicago	21.5	32.1	215	220	48.00	24.50
Chicago	22.0	32.8	220	225	49.00	25.00
Chicago	22.5	33.5	225	230	50.00	25.50
Chicago	23.0	34.2	230	235	51.00	26.00
Chicago	23.5	34.9	235	240	52.00	26.50
Chicago	24.0	35.6	240	245	53.00	27.00
Chicago	24.5	36.3	245	250	54.00	27.50
Chicago	25.0	37.0	250	255	55.00	28.00
Chicago	25.5	37.7	255	260	56.00	28.50
Chicago	26.0	38.4	260	265	57.00	29.00
Chicago	26.5	39.1	265	270	58.00	29.50
Chicago	27.0	39.8	270	275	59.00	30.00
Chicago	27.5	40.5	275	280	60.00	30.50
Chicago	28.0	41.2	280	285	61.00	31.00
Chicago	28.5	41.9	285	290	62.00	31.50
Chicago	29.0	42.6	290	295	63.00	32.00
Chicago	29.5	43.3	295	300	64.00	32.50
Chicago	30.0	44.0	300	305	65.00	33.00
Chicago	30.5	44.7	305	310	66.00	33.50
Chicago	31.0	45.4	310	315	67.00	34.00
Chicago	31.5	46.1	315	320	68.00	34.50
Chicago	32.0	46.8	320	325	69.00	35.00
Chicago	32.5	47.5	325	330	70.00	35.50
Chicago	33.0	48.2	330	335	71.00	36.00
Chicago	33.5	48.9	335	340	72.00	36.50
Chicago	34.0	49.6	340	345	73.00	37.00
Chicago	34.5	50.3	345	350	74.00	37.50
Chicago	35.0	51.0	350	355	75.00	38.00
Chicago	35.5	51.7	355	360	76.00	38.50
Chicago	36.0	52.4	360	365	77.00	39.00
Chicago	36.5	53.1	365	370	78.00	39.50
Chicago	37.0	53.8	370	375	79.00	40.00
Chicago	37.5	54.5	375	380	80.00	40.50
Chicago	38.0	55.2	380	385	81.00	41.00
Chicago	38.5	55.9	385	390	82.00	41.50
Chicago	39.0	56.6	390	395	83.00	42.00
Chicago	39.5	57.3	395	400	84.00	42.50
Chicago	40.0	58.0	400	405	85.00	43.00
Chicago	40.5	58.7	405	410	86.00	43.50
Chicago	41.0	59.4	410	415	87.00	44.00
Chicago	41.5	60.1	415	420	88.00	44.50
Chicago	42.0	60.8	420	425	89.00	45.00
Chicago	42.5	61.5	425	430	90.00	45.50
Chicago	43.0	62.2	430	435	91.00	46.00
Chicago	43.5	62.9	435	440	92.00	46.50
Chicago	44.0	63.6	440	445	93.00	47.00
Chicago	44.5	64.3	445	450	94.00	47.50
Chicago	45.0	65.0	450	455	95.00	48.00
Chicago	45.5	65.7	455	460	96.00	48.50
Chicago	46.0	66.4	460	465	97.00	49.00
Chicago	46.5	67.1	465	470	98.00	49.50
Chicago	47.0	67.8	470	475	99.00	50.00
Chicago	47.5	68.5	475	480	100.00	50.50
Chicago	48.0	69.2	480	485	101.00	51.00
Chicago	48.5	69.9	485	490	102.00	51.50
Chicago	49.0	70.6	490	495	103.00	52.00
Chicago	49.5	71.3	495	500	104.00	52.50
Chicago	50.0	72.0	500	505	105.00	53.00
Chicago	50.5	72.7	505	510	106.00	53.50
Chicago	51.0	73.4	510	515	107.00	54.00
Chicago	51.5	74.1	515	520	108.00	54.50
Chicago	52.0	74.8	520	525	109.00	55.00
Chicago	52.5	75.5	525	530	110.00	55.50
Chicago	53.0	76.2	530	535	111.00	56.00
Chicago	53.5	76.9	535	540	112.00	56.50
Chicago	54.0	77.6	540	545	113.00	57.00
Chicago	54.5	78.3	545	550	114.00	57.50
Chicago	55.0	79.0	550	555	115.00	58.00
Chicago	55.5	79.7	555	560	116.00	58.50
Chicago	56.0	80.4	560	565	117.00	59.00
Chicago	56.5	81.1	565	570	118.00	59.50
Chicago	57.0	81.8	570	575	119.00	60.00
Chicago	57.5	82.5	575	580	120.00	60.50
Chicago	58.0	83.2	580	585	121.00	61.00
Chicago	58.5	83.9	585	590	122.00	61.50
Chicago	59.0	84.6	590	595	123.00	62.00
Chicago	59.5	85.3	595	600	124.00	62.50
Chicago	60.0	86.0	600	605	125.00	63.00
Chicago	60.5	86.7	605	610	126.00	63.50
Chicago	61.0	87.4	610	615	127.00	64.00
Chicago	61.5	88.1	615	620	128.00	64.50
Chicago	62.0	88.8	620	625	129.00	65.00
Chicago	62.5	89.5	625	630	130.00	65.50
Chicago	63.0	90.2	630	635	131.00	66.00
Chicago	63.5	90.9	635	640	132.00	66.50
Chicago	64.0	91.6	640	645	133.00	67.00
Chicago	64.5	92.3	645	650	134.00	67.50
Chicago	65.0	93.0	650	655	135.00	68.00
Chicago	65.5	93.7	655	660	136.00	68.50
Chicago	66.0	94.4	660	665	137.00	69.00
Chicago	66.5	95.1	665	670	138.00	69.50
Chicago	67.0	95.8	670	675	139.00	70.00
Chicago	67.5	96.5	675	680	140.00	70.50
Chicago	68.0	97.2	680	685	141.00	71.00
Chicago	68.5	97.9	685	690	142.00	71.50
Chicago	69.0	98.6	690	695	143.00	72.00
Chicago	69.5	99.3	695	700	144.00	72.50
Chicago	70.0	100.0	700	705	145.00	73.00
Chicago	70.5	100.7	705	710	146.00	73.50
Chicago	71.0	101.4	710	715	147.00	74.00
Chicago	71.5	102.1	715	720	148.00	74.50
Chicago	72.0	102.8	720	725	149.00	75.00
Chicago	72.5	103.5	725	730	150.00	75.50
Chicago	73.0	104.2	730	735	151.00	76.00
Chicago	73.5	104.9	735	740	152.00	76.50
Chicago	74.0	105.6	740	745	153.00	77.00
Chicago	74.5	106.3	745	750	154.00	77.50
Chicago	75.0	107.0	750	755	155.00	78.00
Chicago	75.5	107.7	755	760	156.00	78.50
Chicago	76.0	108.4	760	765	157.00	79.00
Chicago	76.5	109.1	765	770	158.00	79.50
Chicago	77.0	109.8	770	775	159.00	80.00
Chicago	77.5	110.5	775	780	160.00	80.50
Chicago	78.0	111.2	780	785	161.00	81.00
Chicago	78.5	111.9	785	790	162.00	81.50
Chicago	79.0	112.6	790	795	163.00	82.00
Chicago	79.5	113.3	795	800	164.00	82.50
Chicago	80.0	114.0	800	805	165.00	83.00
Chicago	80.5	114.7	805	810	166.00	83.50
Chicago						

**CHICAGO & PACIFIC RAILROAD.**

**GENERAL OFFICERS.**  
 THOMAS S. DOBBINS, President.  
 GEORGE S. BOWEN, Vice-President and Treasurer.  
 J. M. WHITMAN, Chief Engineer and Supt.  
 JOHN S. WILCOX, General Solicitor.  
 W. T. HUGHES, Secretary.  
 I. G. OGDEN, Jr., Paymaster.  
 GEO. H. DANIELS, Gen'l Freight & Ticket Agent.

**General Offices of the Company.**  
 METROPOLITAN BLOCK,  
 North-West corner Randolph and La Salle Streets,  
 CHICAGO.

**General Freight and Ticket Office,**  
**46 CLARK STREET, CHICAGO.**

**Rules Governing Sale and Use of Commutation Tickets.**  
 The Ten, Twenty-five and Fifty Ride Tickets are Family Tickets. They are issued in the name of the head of the family, and are good for the passage of the person named, or any member of his household. They are good until used.  
 The 100 Ride Ticket is an Individual Ticket, good only for the person named thereon, and good until used.  
 The Quarterly Ticket is an Individual Ticket, good only for the person named thereon and for the quarter in which it is issued.  
 The Annual Ticket is an Individual Ticket, good only for the person named thereon.

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**CHICAGO & PACIFIC RAILROAD.**  
**TIME TABLE No. 6. In Effect Sept. 6th, 1874.**

Trains Leave Chicago for Elgin.					STATIONS.	Trains Arrive at Chicago from Elgin.				
No. 7.	No. 5.	No. 3.	No. 1.	Distance from Chicago.		Distance between Stations.	No. 2.	No. 4.	No. 6.	No. 8.
Express Pass.	Elgin Accom.	Mail and Exp.	Freight.			Express Pass.	Pass. Accom.	Freight.	Mail and Exp.	
P. M.	P. M.	A. M.	A. M.		CHICAGO	A. M.	A. M.	P. M.	P. M.	
Lve 5 20	Lve 3 35	Lve 9 40	Lve 6 00		0.0	Arr 8 45	Arr 11 00	Arr 3 30	Arr 4 40	
5 27	3 42	9 48	6 13	1.8	C. & N. W. R'W.	8 37	10 53	3 30	4 32	
5 35	3 50	9 55	6 24	3.4	* HUMBOLDT.	8 31	10 46	3 10	4 25	
5 38	3 53	9 58	6 28	4.1	* ALMIRA.	8 28	10 42	3 06	4 22	
5 40	3 55	10 00	6 32	4.7	PACIFIC JUNC.	8 25	10 40	3 03	4 20	
5 42	3 56	10 02	6 35	5.1	* PACIFIC.	8 24	10 38	3 00	4 18	
5 43	3 59	10 03	6 39	5.7	N. W. CUT-OFF	8 22	10 37	2 57	4 17	
5 49	4 06	10 08	6 54	7.9	GALEWOOD.	8 16	10 29	2 44	4 11	
5 52	<b>4 09</b>	10 11	7 00	8.8	MONT CLARE.	8 13	10 26	2 39	<b>4 09</b>	
5 55	4 12	10 14	7 08	9.9	* ORISON.	8 10	10 22	2 32	4 07	
5 57	4 15	10 16	7 13	10.7	* TURNE PARK.	8 08	10 20	2 28	4 04	
5 59	4 18	<b>10 18</b>	7 19	11.5	RIVER PARK.	8 05	<b>10 18</b>	2 23	4 02	
6 04	4 23	10 22	7 30	13.2	* MANHEIM.	8 00	10 11	2 13	3 58	
6 12	4 33	10 30	<b>7 52</b>	16.4	BENSENVILLE.	7 52	10 00	1 54	3 50	
6 18	4 40	10 36	8 07	18.6	* SALT CREEK.	7 45	9 53	1 41	3 44	
6 23	4 45	10 40	8 17	20.2	* ITASCA.	7 41	9 48	1 32	3 40	
6 28	4 52	10 45	8 31	22.2	MEACHAM.	7 36	9 41	1 20	3 35	
6 32	4 56	10 49	8 40	23.6	ROSELLE.	7 32	9 37	1 12	3 32	
6 42	5 08	10 59	9 07	27.5	ONTARIOVILLE.	7 22	9 23	12 49	3 21	
6 47	5 13	11 03	<b>9 18</b>	29.2	* BARTLETT.	7 18	<b>9 18</b>	12 29	3 17	
6 54	5 22	11 10	9 35	31.9	* SPAULDING.	7 11	9 10	12 23	3 10	
6 58	5 27	11 14	9 45	33.4	* HAMMOND'S.	7 06	9 06	12 14	3 06	
7 01	5 30	11 17	9 52	34.4	F. R. V. CROSS.	7 04	9 04	12 08	3 03	
Arr 7 05	Arr 5 35	Arr 11 20	Arr 10 00	35.8	ELGIN.	1.4	Lve 7 00	Lve 9 00	Lve 3 00	
P. M.	P. M.	A. M.	A. M.			A. M.	A. M.	M.	P. M.	

**Trains Arrive at Elgin from Chicago.**

**Trains Leave Elgin for Chicago.**

\* Passenger Trains will not stop at Stations marked with a star (\*) except when there are passengers to leave or receive, or Trains to meet. Trains should meet and pass at Stations marked with FULL FACED figures. Trains 4 and 5 leave daily. Trains 1, 2, 3, 6, 7 and 8 leave daily, Sundays excepted.

**GEO. H. DANIELS,** Gen'l Freight and Ticket Agent. **J. M. WHITMAN,** Chief Engineer and Supt.

Figure 2: 1874 Chicago & Pacific timetable and passenger tariff card (side two). Source: Richard J. Daley Library, the University of Illinois at Chicago.

Unfortunately for the Chicago & Pacific's long-term prospects, 1873 was the year of the financial Panic that unsettled and doomed businesses throughout the United States, and the railroad did not escape. In May 1876 several of the Chicago & Pacific's creditors filed suit on the debt, including one John I. Blair, and the court ultimately appointed a receiver, who took possession of the railroad's property and operated it for the next four years.<sup>13</sup>

## II. REROUTED TO THE CHICAGO, MILWAUKEE ST PAUL & PACIFIC

In 1879, the Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Paul & Pacific Railroad, as part of a large expansion effort, purchased more than 80% of the Chicago and Pacific stock, \$330,000 of bonds secured under the mortgage, plus "most of the judgments, which

13 Cary at 254.

were quite numerous, which had been entered against said railroad.”<sup>14</sup> The Milwaukee & St. Paul provided the money for the Chicago & Pacific to redeem its property from the sale of the mortgage. On April 1, 1880, the redemption was complete and the received property was returned to the Chicago & Pacific. Its line and property was then transferred to the St. Paul by a lease in perpetuity.

According to period reports in the *Chicago Tribune* between January and April 1880, the fate of the Chicago & Pacific was caught up in substantial financial and legal maneuvering. Mr. Blair had purchased the railroad at a foreclosure sale, yet the company disputed his purchase in court. The old Chicago & Pacific had the right to redeem its property for Blair’s purchase price of \$916,000 plus interest, but since it did not have the money it approached the Chicago & Northwestern, the Illinois Central, and the Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Paul & Pacific for assistance. The Northwestern and Illinois Central were reportedly not interested in that price, but the St. Paul seems to have played both sides of the dispute and negotiated with both Blair and the Chicago & Pacific shareholders. Blair ultimately sold to the Milwaukee & St. Paul, and the old Chicago & Pacific owners were defeated in their bid to take back the company.<sup>15</sup>

Shortly after the Milwaukee & St. Paul took over in April 1880, company officials inspected the former Chicago & Pacific facilities at Goose Island to determine their future use. Their conclusion was that the freight facilities were not particularly suitable, because they were too far from the city’s central business district, so former Chicago & Pacific freight trains would be run to the Milwaukee & St. Paul’s existing yard. Henceforward, the Goose Island yards would be used only for “car storage.” The Chicago & Pacific’s passenger trains were also rerouted from

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<sup>14</sup> Cary at 254.

<sup>15</sup> *Chicago Tribune* (Jan. 30, 1880) at 8; (Feb. 1, 1880) at 7; (Mar. 3, 1880) at 8; (Apr. 4, 1880) at 3; (Apr. 6, 1880) at 3; (Apr. 15, 1880) at 6.

the Larrabee depot to the St. Paul's regular depot at Clinton and Carroll Streets until the new Union Station at Canal and Madison was complete.<sup>16</sup>

### III. TRAGEDY AND TRACK ELEVATION

Today, the Bloomingdale Line's most obvious physical feature is its elevated construction: a sheer concrete embankment to the second story of the adjacent buildings, and viaducts over every street. Yet the Bloomingdale was originally built in the early 1870's at street, or grade, level. Though it is now taken for granted, track elevation was very much a central political and public works question for Chicago between 1890 and 1920.

In the 1840s and 50s, when main rail lines were laid down at grade level, Chicago was still relatively small and undeveloped. As the city boomed in the 1860s as a consequence of the Civil War, and then rebuilt after the Great Fire and grew again in the 1870s, expansion and congestion swallowed the tracks into an increasingly chaotic urban network. As both Chicago and its railroads grew, hundreds of miles of tracks translated into hundreds of street crossings. At the same time, the only available safety measures were primitive and inconsistent: speed restrictions, flagmen, and manual gates, and these were often ignored, neglected, or unavailable.

As a result, every year hundreds of crossing accidents jeopardized life, limb, and property. Second to the issue of safety were the problems of efficiency and convenience. The railroads had to keep their trains to practical and reliable

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<sup>16</sup> *Chicago Tribune* (Apr. 20, 1880) at 6. The Union Station built in 1881 was the predecessor to the familiar building constructed in 1925.

schedules, and failure to meet them invited customer complaints, so the temptation was to disregard speed limits. Where the speed restrictions were kept, the long, slow-moving trains also frustratingly blocked and backed up street traffic. Through the 1870s, the problems were apparent, although there was not yet enough political will to solve them.

By the early 1890s, however, the situation had become intolerable. English reformer William T. Stead came to Chicago in 1893 to report on many different social ills, yet he leveled some of his harshest damnations against the railroads and the conditions they created. “This great city with a million and a half of its population,” he wrote, “is stretched over a gridiron of rails which cross and recross the city and form a complex network of tracks, every mesh of which is stained with human blood.” Stead thundered on:

As regularly as the sun rises these great [locomotives] slay their man in and upon the streets of Chicago. No other great city in the world has allowed its streets to be taken possession of to a similar extent, and the massacre resulting therefrom is greater than that of many battles.

He estimated that there were roughly 1375 miles of track and as many as 2000 street crossings within the Chicago city limits. According to Stead’s figures, 1699 people were killed in crossing accidents between 1889 and 1893.<sup>17</sup>

Period newspaper accounts show that the Bloomingdale Line was very much a hazard in its own right, the site of several maiming and fatal accidents (the victims seemed to be predominantly children). In one poignant 1896 story, two girls were riding in a carriage at Humboldt Boulevard, looking for the minister who was supposed to preside over a funeral, when they were struck by a train. A flagman had tried to warn the carriage driver, who was suspected of being drunk. The girls,

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<sup>17</sup> William T. Stead, *If Christ Came to Chicago* (Chicago 1894) at 193-94, reprinted by Chicago Historical Bookworks. Contemporary historians would correct these figures without disputing the nature of the problem. See Young at 158-59 n. 25.

like many others who were injured in the area, were taken to St. Elizabeth's Hospital. One girl was expected to die; the other's injuries were not deemed serious.<sup>18</sup>

More than once serious accidents had area residents up in arms and threatening to tear up the tracks. In the summer of 1897, the *Chicago Tribune* reported that two recent accidents involving the Bloomingdale Line, each of which resulted in maiming injuries to children, had residents protesting the three unguarded crossings between Rockwell Street and California Avenue. One person reportedly stated that "the feeling among his neighbors was so strong that they had determined to tear up the tracks of the company unless relief were granted."<sup>19</sup> Two years later, a nine-year old boy was killed at Bloomingdale and apparently Humboldt when playing with his friends after supper; the other children ran home without giving an alarm.<sup>20</sup> A week later a meeting of angry Humboldt residents threatened that "'5,000 citizens would get together and tear up the tracks'" if the Milwaukee & St. Paul failed to provide for crossing safety.<sup>21</sup>

Other incidents were merely ironic. In a 1908 court case, a homeowner sued the St. Paul and won after his house was totally destroyed by fire. The Fire Department had been prevented from reaching the blaze by parked railcars that blocked a street crossing. In the expansive legalese of the day, the Illinois Supreme Court held:

It seems clear to us that, if a prudent man of experience had reflected upon the probable consequences of entirely closing up this street in a great city, he would have foreseen, first, that to so close the street would obstruct and delay public travel thereon; second, that among

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<sup>18</sup> *Chicago Tribune* (Jul. 31, 1896) at 1.

<sup>19</sup> *Chicago Tribune* (Aug. 5, 1897) at 8.

<sup>20</sup> *Chicago Tribune* (Oct. 14, 1900) at 1.

<sup>21</sup> *Chicago Tribune* (Oct. 21, 1900) at 8.

the travel to be delayed would be the passage of teams, engines, and other appliances of the fire department; third, that if the travel of the fire department was so obstructed and delayed any fire which the men of that department were seeking to reach would be more extensive and do greater damage than if the obstruction and delay had not taken place.

The plaintiff's judgment recovery of \$650 was affirmed.<sup>22</sup>

Political and popular pressure, plus the railroads' ultimate recognition that the situation at street-level was intolerable and that elevation offered tremendous improvements in efficiency, led to a breakthrough in 1893. On February 23 the Chicago City Council passed a comprehensive General Ordinance that required the railroads to elevate all tracks city-wide within six years, a mandate that officials later conceded was "too comprehensive."<sup>23</sup> For this reason the railroads balked, although they agreed with elevation in principle.

The issue then strangely figured in a bizarre tragedy. On October 28, 1893, a man named Eugene Prendergast went to the home of Chicago's World's Fair Mayor, Carter H. Harrison I, and assassinated him. Prendergast was under the delusion that Harrison had promised him a job as the city's chief lawyer, on which the mayor then reneged. Central to the crime was Prendergast's belief that "I had a scheme for the elevation of the railroad tracks so that it would cost the railroads but little and the city nothing. I wanted to be corporation counsel so that I could push this scheme, and he said I should have the office. I was justified in what I did."<sup>24</sup> In April 1897 Carter H. Harrison II, the son of the murdered Mayor, was elected to the office himself. He later recalled that the killing of his father "made up my mind to

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<sup>22</sup> *Houren v. Chicago, M. & St. P. Ry. Co.*, 236 Ill. 620, 86 N.E. 611 (Ill. 1908).

<sup>23</sup> The Track Elevation Department of the City of Chicago, *Track Elevation within the Corporate Limits of the City of Chicago to December 31<sup>st</sup> 1908* at 10-11.

<sup>24</sup> Richard Lindberg, *Return to the Scene of the Crime* (Nashville, Tenn. 1999) at 298-99.

go the limit on track elevation” and he was “dead set in the determination to make [it] an outstanding feature of my administration.”<sup>25</sup>

The undertaking was revised in 1894, when the city was surveyed and divided into “zones” of priority, so that elevation could be done in discrete, manageable stages. Over the next 20 years, the City Council passed dozens of ordinances, each ordering the subject railroad(s) to perform the work under some specified engineering parameters. Roughly, the plan was prioritized to relieve the most congested and hazardous stretches first. Mayor Harrison II created the Department of Track Elevation of the City of Chicago to supervise the work.

Track elevation was a massively impressive project, when one considers the following three factors. First, the railroads had to continue to run trains on the existing ground lines without disruption while simultaneously building the adjacent elevated track. Second, the work had to present the minimum possible interference with street traffic; city officials forbade the railroads from blocking more than four consecutive crossings at a time. Third, all of this was happening in a massively congested urban setting. For these reasons, elevation work throughout the city was time-consuming and expensive. At its peak the track elevation project employed 40,000 men. By the early 1900s most major rights-of-way were elevated and city streets passed under them via “subways,” although the work continued. In 1911 the Department of Track Elevation estimated that the work completed to date presented a total cost of \$66,256,000 to the railroads.<sup>26</sup> An estimate for the end of 1919 held that the railroads spent almost \$95 million to elevate roughly 550 miles of track.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Carter H. Harrison, *Stormy Years: The Autobiography of Carter H. Harrison* (Brooklyn, N.Y. 1935) at 128 & 185.

<sup>26</sup> The Track Elevation Department of the City of Chicago, *Track Elevation within the Corporate Limits of the City of Chicago from January 1, 1909, to June 30, 1911* at 4.

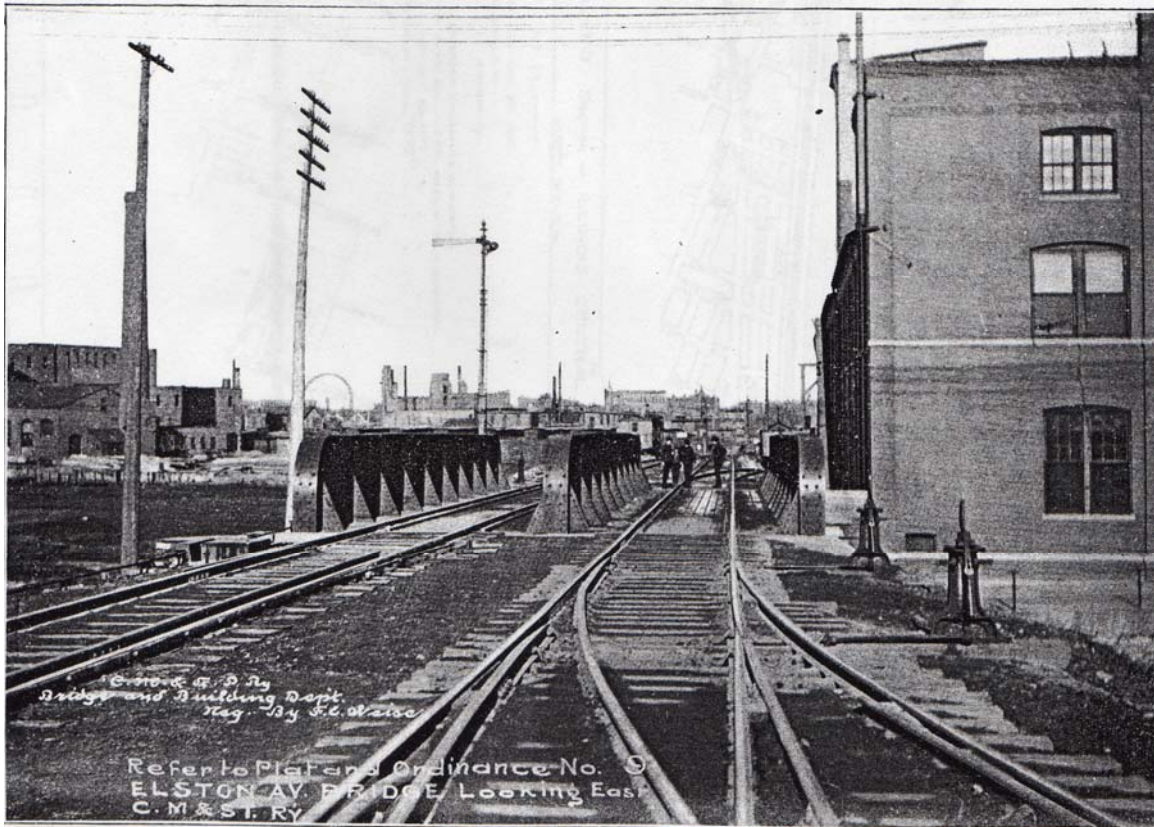
<sup>27</sup> Young at 163.



Figure 3: Representative example of track elevation work at 31<sup>st</sup> Street in Bridgeport. Source: Chicago Department of Public Works Annual Report, 1906, p. 469. Available at: <http://www.uic.edu/orgs/LockZero/2image/RRx31.html>

Returning to the Bloomingdale Line, although there had been some formal political efforts as far back as 1898, track elevation did not substantially reach it until 1910. In point of fact, because they involved substantial north-south mainlines, both Clybourn and Pacific Junctions at the eastern and western ends of the Line had been elevated before 1900, but the stretch of track between them along Bloomingdale remained at street-level.





**Figure 5: Elevation of Chicago, Milwaukee & St. Paul tracks at Elston Avenue and Bloomingdale Road (looking east). Source: The Track Elevation Department of the City of Chicago, *Report of the Department of Track Elevation, 1900.***

The first step in changing that situation was the City Council Ordinance passed on June 27, 1910. The Chicago, Milwaukee & St. Paul Railway Company was ordered to elevate, at its own expense, its “Bloomingdale Road Tracks” between Ashland and Lawndale. Authorized to occupy and use designated sections of Bloomingdale Road for its right-of-way, the Milwaukee & St. Paul was in return required to construct, among other things, the familiar brick cobblestone road on the north side of the embankment. Bridges over the subways had to be specifically built to keep storm water, dirt, oil, and the like from dropping onto the streets beneath. Thirty-five subways would have to be built. The railroad was given five years from

passage of the ordinance and approval of the Mayor to complete the work (with a grace period for strikes, riots, legal injunctions, and city delay).<sup>28</sup>

As an example of the foresight that went into the ordinances by this point in the overall project, provision was made for the fact that between Milwaukee and Winnebago Avenues, the Metropolitan West Side Elevated Railroad Company (a private predecessor to today's CTA Blue Line) crossed above the Bloomingdale. Obviously, the Bloomingdale could not be elevated until the West Side Elevated was itself raised, which the ordinance required. In fact, one resident of North Leavitt wrote the *Chicago Tribune* in 1913 to note that the Milwaukee & St. Paul had done a good deal of the work but was stalled because the el that crossed Milwaukee and Leavitt had not yet been raised. The *Tribune* responded that city hall assured that the work would be finished the next year.<sup>29</sup>

Once the Bloomingdale was elevated, however, this did not necessarily solve all the problems that existed when it ran at grade. Children continued to be critically injured when they fell under passing trains while attempting to hitch rides. Even the adjacent homes were not safe. In 1922, the *Chicago Tribune* reported that one man was injured and two houses on Hoyne were "nearly demolished" when one of the couplers on a switch train broke, and ten boxcars rolled down the slope, left the track, and jumped the embankment.<sup>30</sup>

#### IV. CRIME AND PUNISHMENT ALONG THE BLOOMINGDALE

Chicago's reputation for urban mayhem may be deserved or not, but it should not be surprising that one could find the Bloomingdale Line featuring in

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<sup>28</sup> The Track Elevation Department of the City of Chicago, *Track Elevation within the Corporate Limits of the City of Chicago from January 1, 1909, to June 30, 1911* at 102 et seq.

<sup>29</sup> *Chicago Tribune* (Oct. 31, 1913) at 6.

<sup>30</sup> *Chicago Tribune* (May 17, 1922) at 3.

several criminal incidents over the years, ranging from the relatively mundane to the notorious.

In early 1893, it was reported that a Wicker Park grocer operated “a kindergarten for young lads desirous of becoming thieves,” recruiting and paying as many as a dozen youths to steal sacks of grain and other items from parked freight cars at the Chicago, Milwaukee, and St. Paul yards along the Bloomingdale. Using the fences’ excuse, as old as theft itself, the grocer admitted to buying the grain, “but claimed he did not know it was stolen.”<sup>31</sup>

In 1898 a man was found on the tracks at Humboldt with his skull crushed before he eventually died, and it was first assumed he had been hit by a train. Later investigation indicated he had been hit in the head by some other object. A witness’ report suggested the man had been killed after a saloon altercation at 1150 Armitage, leading to the arrest of a suspect who was charged with murder.<sup>32</sup>

In the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century, so-called “Black Hand” extortion and murder was another common crime story across Chicago, and in 1912, the Bloomingdale Line was included. A Wicker Park businessman named O. C. S. Olsen received a letter commanding:

Leave \$10,000 in a brown package near the south end of the St. Paul railroad tracks at Bloomingdale road and Rockwell street at 8:30 tonight. Your failure to do so will cost your life.

BLACK HAND

In response to this letter, Olsen left \$25 in five dollar bills at the designated location - after first recording the bills’ serial numbers. The money disappeared.

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<sup>31</sup> *Chicago Tribune* (Jan. 20, 1893) at 1.

<sup>32</sup> *Chicago Tribune* (Jun. 16, 1898) at 5.

The next day Olsen went to the Pinkerton Detective Agency, which set up a decoy and sting operation. He also received another letter escalating the threat:

You and your wife will be killed and your factory blown up if you disobey instructions again. Leave the money where we told you to. We know you are having us watched, but beware, for we have inside information which will protect us.

BLACKHAND

The plan was to wait for several days, while the extortionists sent additional threatening letters until they made their final demand. On the night of the sting, after Olsen placed a bogus package of money, ten Pinkerton operatives hid nearby and waited for the pickup. Two men arrived and grabbed the package, and the detectives fired shots in pursuit. The attempted Black Handers were caught, and as a motive it was reported that one of the men had once worked for their intended victim and had not gotten "a square deal." Found on one of them were the five dollar bills that Olson had thought to record.<sup>33</sup>

During the notorious 1930's, the Bloomingdale Line again figured in a handful of reported incidents. In 1931 a policeman heading home after work was shot by a man who attempted to rob him at Damen and Bloomingdale.<sup>34</sup> A 1933 report told of "a minor police character" who had been "taken for a ride" and fatally shot three times under the viaduct at Ballou Street (now St. Louis Avenue).<sup>35</sup> In 1936 the *Chicago Tribune* reported on two career criminals who had been executed in the electric chair for killing a policeman at Wood and Bloomingdale following a pursuit for armed robbery. The two men had later aggravated their crimes by

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<sup>33</sup> *Chicago Tribune* (Jul. 7, 1912) at 1.

<sup>34</sup> *Chicago Tribune* (Dec. 12, 1931) at 4.

<sup>35</sup> *Chicago Tribune* (Sep 17, 1933) at 16.

attempting an abortive courthouse escape in which they stabbed two guards and hit two others before being recaptured.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> *Chicago Tribune* (Oct. 21, 1936) at 1.