

Major Mass Movements

The Eucharistic Congress in Chicago

by Larry Plachmo



In looking for events with impressive attendance and logistics in moving people, some of the historians suggested we look at the Eucharistic Congress in Chicago that not only had substantial numbers participating but also involved moving a huge number of people 40 miles north of the city. This photo was taken at Soldier Field on the day of the Second General Meeting, June 22, 1926. This meeting focused on women and had an attendance of between 250,000 and 300,000 people. UNIVERSITY OF ST. MARY OF THE LAKE ARCHIVES.

As was the case with several previous articles, this one originated with questions to our “Curious Co-chowner” question and answer column. Since it was impossible to deal with in only a few paragraphs, it became necessary to expand it into an article.

The original questions came from readers who have moved athletic teams and attendees to events, rescued people in natural disasters, and moved larger numbers of people for other reasons. They asked about earlier mass movements of people and how they compared to what we do today. Particular questions included numbers of people moved, the planning and logistics involved, and whether they could be repeated today.

In looking at various past events, our historian friends and our staff decided that the one event that might be the most interesting from the standpoint of numbers and logistics

was the Eucharistic Congress in Chicago that took place in 1926. Automobile involvement was at a minimum, which gave public transportation a chance to show what it could do. And, while buses were involved, the heavy work in transporting people fell to rail operations: streetcars, the rapid transit, an electric interurban railway and steam railroads.

Two things make this particular event stand out. One is the sheer numbers of the people moved, which set some records. The second was the logistics involved in moving huge numbers of people on the last day of the event to a rural location 40 miles north of Chicago. The obvious interesting questions would be whether this mass movement of people could be repeated today and whether it could be handled by buses.

While this particular event is more rail than bus, it was chosen because of the numbers of attendees and the impressive logistics

on the last day. We would welcome information for similar articles that highlight what buses and motorcoaches can do.

George Cardinal Mundelein

The story behind the Eucharistic Congress in Chicago is heavily involved with George Mundelein. Born in Manhattan in 1872, George William Mundelein had two sisters, a father of German descent and an Irish mother. His grandfather fought in the Civil War. Mundelein studied in Manhattan, where he received high honors, went to St. Vincent Seminary in Latrobe, Pennsylvania and eventually the Pontifical Urbaniana University in Rome. He was ordained a Catholic priest in 1895.

The fact that Mundelein was selected to study in Rome indicated that he had shown promise and was a candidate for moving up. Upon his return to the United States,



Activities started on Sunday with a procession to Holy Name Cathedral north of Chicago's loop. More than 1,000 clergy were in the procession while a crowd of approximately 250,000 watched the activities. UNIVERSITY OF ST. MARY OF THE LAKE ARCHIVES.



Chicago Surface Lines carried the bulk of the spectators going to the procession and the participants at the following events at Soldier Field. Total ridership for CSL on that Monday and Tuesday reached 5,000,000 passengers. CSL PHOTO, WILLIAM C. JANSSEN COLLECTION.

Mundelein became the secretary to Bishop McDonnell in Brooklyn and he soon became the chancellor for the diocese. In 1909, Mundelein was appointed the Auxiliary Bishop of Brooklyn. He was 36 years old and the youngest bishop in the United States at that time.

In December, 1915, Mundelein was named the third Archbishop of Chicago and installed in February, 1916. At that time Chicago was still considered to be "West" and not far removed from being a mission. Among the challenges facing him was the need to unify the archdiocese and improve education. Chicago was a "melting pot" of immigrants including the Irish, Polish, Germans, Italians and others. Getting the various churches, groups and schools unified was a major goal.

In addition, Chicago did not have a seminary for educating priests. Candidates for the priesthood were being sent to various seminaries in the United States and even Europe. This changed in 1920 when Mundelein revised a prior charter and announced the building of a major seminary to be known as St. Mary of the Lake. It was to be located near the village of Area in a rural location north of Chicago. It started

with the acquisition of 175 acres that had been used as a school but eventually 1,000 acres were acquired. The cost of constructing the seminary was said to be \$10 million.

The resulting seminary is considered by many to be the largest Catholic educational facility outside of Rome. It became an important factor in the forthcoming Eucharistic Congress and it is noteworthy that the first class to be ordained as priests graduated in 1926. In 1924, the village changed its name from Area to Mundelein because of the increasing importance of the new seminary. That same year saw Archbishop Mundelein admitted to the College of Cardinals. Not only was he the youngest Cardinal but also the first Cardinal west of the Allegheny Mountains in the United States.

Planning the Eucharistic Congress

The first Eucharistic Congress was held in Lille, France in 1881. It is a Catholic gathering of both religious and laity centered around bringing Catholics closer to the sacraments, especially the Holy Eucharist. Subsequent events were held every year or two but almost always in Europe. The first Congress held outside of Europe was in Jerusalem in 1893. In 1910, a Eucharistic Con-

gress was held in Montreal and became the first Congress held in North America and in the Western Hemisphere.

Because of World War I, the Eucharistic Congress events were suspended after the 1914 event in Lourdes, France and not restarted again until 1922 in Rome. Mundelein was able to obtain approval for a 1926 Eucharistic Congress in Chicago. It would be the first Eucharistic Congress in the United States and only the second one in North America and in the Western Hemisphere. In addition to the religious implications, it would show how Chicago had progressed and call attention to the new and impressive seminary. One of the reasons given for approving this event was that Chicago was a major transportation center and was served by 40 railroads. At that time, Chicago and its suburbs had three million residents and ten million people lived within a one-day train ride.

Planning started more than a year in advance and came to include several leading businessmen. Noteworthy was Samuel Insull, who was born in England and came to the United States to become a secretary to Thomas Edison. He later took over the electric and gas utilities in Chicago along with

the elevated railways and several interurban lines. Though not a Catholic himself, Insull supplied numerous staff from his companies to help with the events and was invaluable in moving people on the last day of the Congress.

The Eucharistic Congress events were primarily designed as a one-day activities for Chicagoans and others living nearby. However, one account suggests that as many as 1,000,000 people stayed one or more nights in Chicago, filling up the available hotels. Several railroads parked pullman cars in downtown yards that could be used for accommodations, and some even had dining cars to provide meals. Others arrived by railroad from a wide range of cities. Boats were docked at what is now Navy Pier to provide accommodations. There was no commercial aviation at that time. Those coming from Rome and Europe arrived on steamships and then transferred to trains. The Archbishop of Boston arrived in Chicago on a boat from Buffalo.

Sunday through Wednesday Events

Eucharistic Congress events were scheduled from Sunday, June 20 through Thursday, June 24, 1926. Each day was somewhat different and had different themes so people could pick which events to attend.

Sunday saw a procession to Holy Name Cathedral and a Mass. This took place a few blocks north of Chicago's loop. Chicago police estimated that a crowd of about 250,000 watched the parade.

The actually impressive numbers were those in the procession. This included 500 monsignors, 300 bishops, 60 archbishops and 10 cardinals. It was claimed that this was the largest gathering of prelates outside of Rome. An interesting side note is that those making presentations mentioned the modern innovations like the loudspeaker system and being able to broadcast the event via radio.

Monday through Wednesday saw outdoor events scheduled at Soldier Field. Newly constructed in 1924, Soldier Field is



Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday events took place at Soldier Field with a different theme and agenda on each day. This photo was taken on Wednesday, June 23 when activities were dedicated to Higher Education Day. The majority of participants arrived via Chicago Surface Lines. UNIVERSITY OF ST. MARY OF THE LAKE ARCHIVES.

located on the south end of the "Museum Campus" that now includes Field Museum, the Shedd Aquarium and the Adler Planetarium. Years later, the McCormick Place Convention Center would be built a little further south. In 1971, Soldier Field became the home of the Chicago Bears football team who remain there today.

In spite of being located south of Grant Park and southeast of Chicago's Loop, Soldier Field was somewhat isolated. The Museum Campus was bordered on the east by Lake Michigan and on the west by the Illinois Central Railroad tracks, separating it from the commercial and residential area to the west. The nearest rapid transit station was several blocks to the west. In addition, parking was prohibited in much of the downtown area. Hence, much of the transportation needs fell to Chicago Surface Lines.

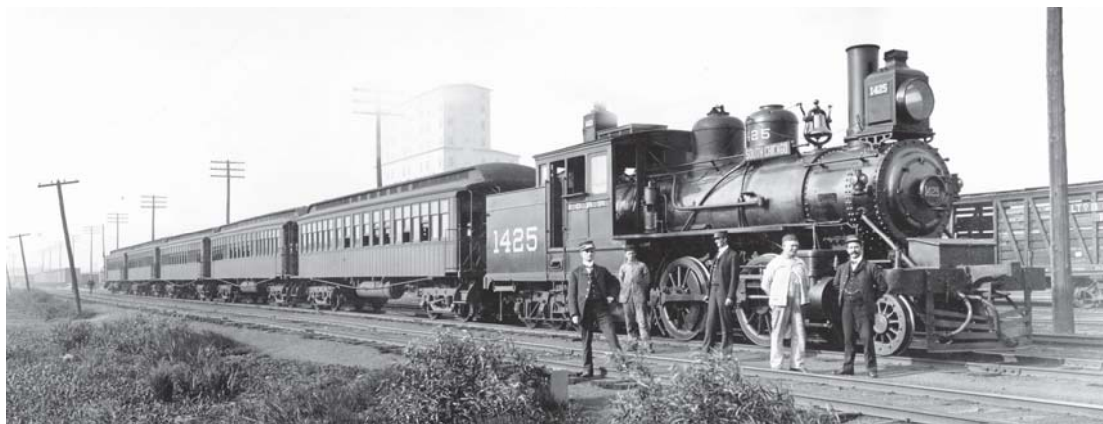
Monday, June 24 was designated as Children's Day. A total of 400,000 people were inside or surrounding Soldier Field including 62,000 school children from 325 parochial schools assembled in the center of the stadium. The press called them the world's

largest choir. Many from the south side of Chicago arrived on the Illinois Central suburban trains that were still operated with steam power and only a few weeks away from being electrified.

Tuesday, June 22 was designated as Women's Day. The estimated attendance was 300,000 of which about 250,000 were women. A group of about 12,000 women from various religious orders in the archdiocese were in the center of the stadium and served as the choir for the day.

Wednesday, June 23 was Higher Education Day. Attendance was about 200,000. After the event was over, many of the prelates went north to Mundelein to prepare for activities on Thursday. The North Shore Line provided private interurban trains including one specially decorated as the "Cardinal's Special" to take them to the seminary at Mundelein.

For those looking for records, it should be noted that most public transportation in and around Chicago set records. Chicago Surface Lines set two records on Monday



Only weeks away from electrification, the Illinois Central suburban trains carried many participants to Soldier Field using the new trackage. The IC was particularly busy on Monday, June 21 when 62,000 school children from 325 parochial schools attended the Childrens Day events. ILLINOIS CENTRAL PHOTO, NORMAN CARLSON COLLECTION.



After the activities at Soldier Field on Wednesday, the North Shore Line provided special trains from the Wilson Avenue rapid transit station to transport the clergy to the seminary at Mundelein. Show here is one special train designated as the *Cardinal's Special*. UNIVERSITY OF ST. MARY OF THE LAKE ARCHIVES.

and Tuesday. The extra people going to Soldier Field brought their passenger totals up to approximately 5,000,000 rides on these two days. The fact that one company could move more than 5,000,000 passengers on two consecutive days is impressive.

Thursday, June 24

Thursday, June 24 was the closing day of the Eucharistic Congress. Two activities were planned; a Solemn Pontifical Mass at 10 a.m. and a closing Procession at 2 p.m. What made this day special is that these events would take place at the new St. Mary of the

Lake Seminary just east of Mundelein and about 40 miles north of Chicago. The logistics of moving hundreds of thousands of people to this rural location are mind-boggling.

Up until a month prior to the event, the logical route for public transportation would have been up the Chicago, North Shore & Milwaukee Railroad (North Shore Line) interurban electric railroad that extended from the rapid transit lines in Chicago to Milwaukee and then riding the North Shore Line's branch from Lake Bluff to Mundelein that had a stop near the entrance to the new



Pens and fences were necessary at the temporary seminary station to keep passengers away from the electrified third rails. This photo looks east with the North Shore Line main line to the left. COMPANY PHOTO COURTESY OF THE LIBERTYVILLE-MUNDELEIN HISTORICAL SOCIETY.



Events at Mundelein on Thursday centered around the seminary property which is located adjacent to St. Mary's Lake and just north of the North Shore Line tracks. UNIVERSITY OF ST. MARY OF THE LAKE ARCHIVES.

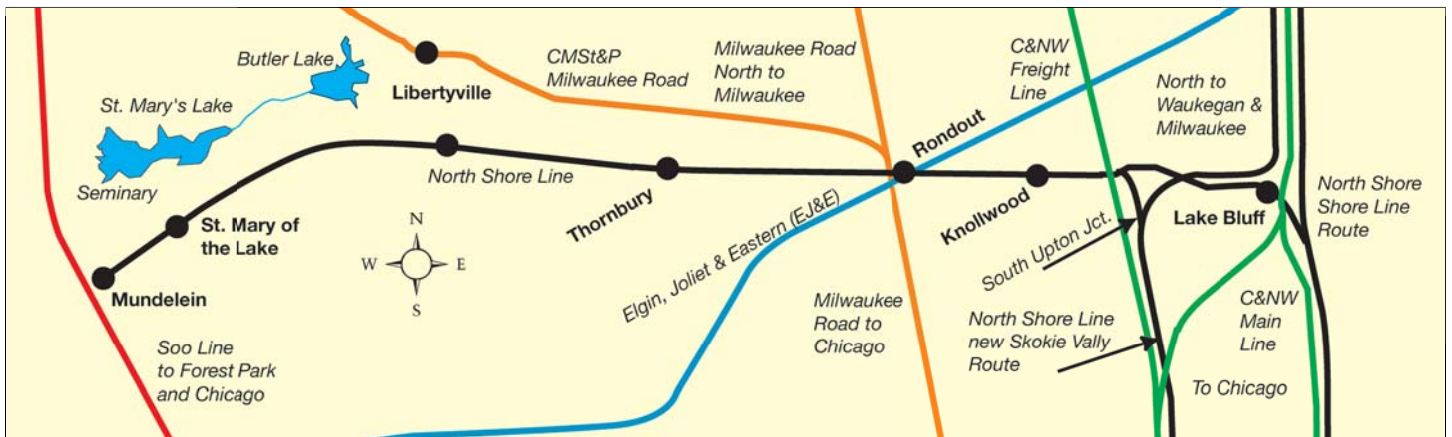
seminary. However the original route from the north suburbs to Waukegan, known as the Shore Line Route, was built to interurban standards with slow operation, street running and even some single track.

What saved the day was that Samuel Insull had acquired the North Shore Line and was busy building a new high speed line starting from the Chicago city limits but further west in a rural area known as the "Skokie Valley Line." This would connect with the Mundelein branch just west of Lake Bluff and would shave about 30 minutes off of the schedules of trains between Chicago and Milwaukee. This new line was operational on June 5, less than a month prior to the Eucharistic Congress. It had its busiest day on June 24, 1926, the day of the Congress. While other railroads were involved, and will be explained later, this became the primary route for most attendees. I will try to provide a simple map showing the area between Lake Bluff and Mundelein so those not familiar with the area can follow what transpired.

I might briefly mention that parking for 72,000 automobiles was provided in open fields south of the tracks at St. Mary of the Lake Seminary. Some roads in the area were closed to two-way traffic to accommodate the crowd. There were 12,000 people waiting to get in when the gates were opened at 4 a.m. Only about 18,000 of these parking spots were used and many of the cars were stuck in the mud when it began raining on Thursday afternoon. Hence, the people who rode public transportation may have come



This overhead photo looks northeast and shows the temporary terminal at the seminary in the center of the photo. The double track main line of the North Shore Line is just north of the temporary terminal. The temporary bridge across the North Shore Line main line is just off of the photo to the left while some of the auto parking area can be seen at the lower right. Those with sharp eyes might see a couple of cars parked on the main line as well as numerous people along the road to the north of the tracks, presumably walking from the Milwaukee Road at Libertyville. UNIVERSITY OF ST. MARY OF THE LAKE ARCHIVES.



Shown here is a simple map of the railroads in the area between Lake Bluff and Mundelein. Lake Michigan is just off the map to the right while Chicago is south or beyond the bottom of the map. The C&NW even brought participants up its freight line and transferred them to the electric trains at Lake Bluff. The Milwaukee Road passengers had the longest walk while the Soo Line station was relatively close to the seminary. NBT.

out ahead. Several of the motorists rode public transportation back home and came back for their cars when the ground dried.

Since Samuel Insull had control of both the North Shore Line and the Chicago Rapid Transit it was possible to combine operations. Starting at 4 a.m. at the two south side rapid transit terminals – Englewood and Jackson Park – rapid transit trains left every four minutes for Mundelein. These tracks joined on Chicago's south side and from there north there was a train every two minutes. Two of the "L" lines, Lake Street and Evanston, used trolley poles and their cars were primarily used for this service although some Metropolitan (West side) cars had trolley poles affixed for this one day,

These cars ran up the rapid transit line and then at the city limits at Howard Street, they turned west into the new Skokie Valley Line. The trains stopped when changing from third rail to trolley poles and a special crew on the ground made sure this was done properly. Guards were stationed at road crossings to improve safety. Approaching the Mundelein Branch at South Upton "Y," the special trains turned west to Mundelein.

Upon reaching St. Mary of the Lake Seminary, these trains reverted to third-rail operation to facilitate changing ends. A special five-track terminal had been built south of the main line near the seminary. Fences and pens were used to keep the passengers away from the third rail. There was also a temporary bridge over the main line tracks that safely allowed attendees go north to the St.



In order to transport the crowds from Chicago, rapid transit cars equipped with trolley poles ran up the new Skokie Valley Line route of the North Shore Line from the south side of Chicago to the temporary seminary terminal. WALTER R. KEEVIL COLLECTION.

Mary of the Lakes property without crossing the tracks at ground level.

In addition to the trains from Chicago, shuttle service was operated on the Mundelein Branch from Lake Bluff to the seminary. In addition to the North Shore Line trains north from both Chicago and the northern suburbans and south from Milwaukee, Lake Bluff was also served by trains of the Chicago & Northwestern from both Milwaukee and Chicago. As a result, the shuttle trains between Lake Bluff and the seminary were interspersed with the rapid

transit trains coming north from Chicago on the new Skokie Valley Line

It is interesting that in spite of this crowd, the Chicago & Northwestern maintained regular passenger schedules this day; carrying passengers south from Milwaukee, Racine and Kenosha and north from Chicago and the northern suburbs. To provide additional trains, the C&NW operated some trains north from downtown Chicago on their northwest line to Mayfair and then up their freight line, crossing the North Shore Line south of South Upton and terminating at Lake Bluff, where passengers could board the shuttles to the seminary.

The Chicago, Milwaukee St. Paul and Pacific (the St. Paul or Milwaukee Road) ran special trains – two every half hour – from downtown Chicago to Libertyville. These two trains discharged passengers at Libertyville and then backed to Roundout to clear the single track between Roundout and Libertyville for the next pair of trains. From the Libertyville station, these passengers had as much as a four mile walk to the seminary.

The third steam railroad involved with the Eucharistic Congress was the Minneapolis, St. Paul & Sault Ste. Marie (Soo Line) Railway. They operated several trains from Forest Park to their station in Mundelein, which was located near the seminary. Forest Park, a west suburb of Chicago, provided connections to the west side rapid transit, the Chicago, Aurora & Elgin interurban line to the Fox River towns, and the West Towns Railway streetcars serving western suburbs.

Interesting items include the fact that during the major part of the movement, there was a train every two minutes coming up the Skokie Valley Line and a train every 78 seconds on the line from Lake Bluff to the seminary. A total of 97 medical staff were



In addition to the Chicago Rapid Transit and North Shore line, steam railroads brought numerous participants to the seminary for Thursday's activities. Shown here is a Chicago & Northwestern train similar to the ones used. A. W. JOHNSON, KRAMBLES-PETERSON ARCHIVE.

assigned to the event along with "Hospital Cars" at both the Seminary and Lake Bluff as well as Army field office medical tents.

The North Shore Line and Rapid Transit carried about 275,000 passengers. Sources reported that the Northwestern brought in

about 40,000 from Milwaukee and points north with about an equal number from Chicago. About 15,000 people arrived on the Milwaukee Road at Libertyville and another 15,000 to 25,000 on the Soo Line. The Soo line carried more passengers southbound when people discovered that their station was

close to the Seminary. In addition, some of those who drove automobiles took public transportation home when their cars were stuck in the mud following the afternoon rain.

In total, we are looking at a mass movement of about 400,000 people to the Eucharistic Congress on this day. The majority were carried by the North Shore Line and Chicago Rapid Transit cars but three steam railroads contributed to the success of the event. If you want to sit down and talk about mass movements of people for special events, **this one deserves some special recognition.** One also questions whether the same thing could be duplicated today.

For those interested in the full story behind the 1926 Eucharistic Congress, we recommend a 100-page book titled *A Transportation Miracle* that was published by the Shore Line Interurban Historical Society who helped us with this article. They are offering NATIONAL BUS TRADER readers a special price by eliminating postage costs. **Just send a check for \$20.00 payable to Shore Line Interurban Historical Society, PO Box 425, Lake Forest, Illinois 60045-0425.**

We are looking for information and photos on other mass movements of people that we can work into articles for NATIONAL BUS TRADER. □



This view looks east and shows passengers boarding at the temporary terminal at the seminary. Note the control bridge over the tracks at the left where management controlled operations. A.F. SCHOTZ PHOTO FOR THE NORTH SHORE LINE, PHOTO COURTESY OF THE LIBERTYVILLE-MUNDELEIN HISTORICAL SOCIETY.

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