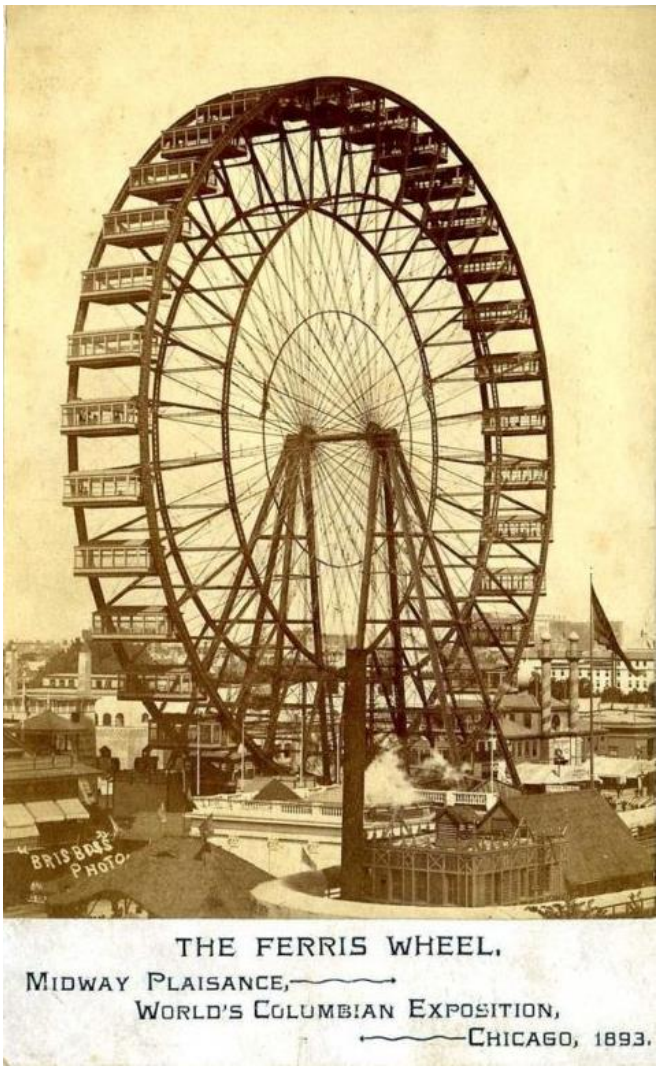
# Papa and the Ferris Wheel
## by Ardis Jones Blenko

For Midwesterners of my vintage, there may have been interest of a mild sort in the Seattle World's Fair, or in the future one which is to rise in New York, but our hearts belong to the past. For us there will never be any World's Fair but one. For us, *THE World's Fair* will always be the great Columbian Exposition of 1893, which in youthful, turbulent Chicago commemorated the discovery of the New World by Christopher Columbus, with replicas of the Pinta, the Nina and the Santa Maria in a turquoise lagoon beside Lake Michigan.

Oddly enough, we never saw THE Fair. We weren't even living when it took place, but it was Iliad and the Odyssey of our childhood legends. It was a saga with souvenir booklets in everyone's golden oak bookcase. Photographs of incredible pools, fountains and the gleaming rococo architecture sparked our craving for beauty. For years, those who had actually seen the fairy castle structures regaled us with its wonders, its science and machinery, the incredible minuteness of its Oriental handicrafts. Sometimes our long ears picked up whispers of Little Egypt and we knew what "Hootchie-coochie" meant.

Biggest thrill of all, they said, was the ride on the wonderful Ferris Wheel, which towered nearly three hundred feet into the air and dwarfed all structures in the flat, prairie city. For me, the thought of the Ferris Wheel has an even greater weight of nostalgia, almost a pain, for in a strange way, it came to dominate the life of my family throughout my early years, and seemed a symbol of the misfortunes which came upon us.

The odd sequence of events which links my childhood to the Ferris Wheel came about most likely because George Washington Gale Ferris, who invented the wheel, and my father were both Pittsburghers. Mr. Ferris was well known as an engineer and bridge builder, and was called upon, with a group of engineers and architects, to devise for the coming World's Fair some structure or attraction which could surpass the Eiffel Tower which had brought great crowds to the Paris Exposition of 1889.




***Original cabinet card photograph of the Ferris Wheel distributed at the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893.***

Mr. Ferris came up with the design for the first huge Ferris Wheel. The idea was too bold and venturesome for most of the men responsible for the affairs of the exposition, and the committee would have none of it. Their opposition stiffened Ferris' determination and he persisted despite discouragement and financial difficulties. He

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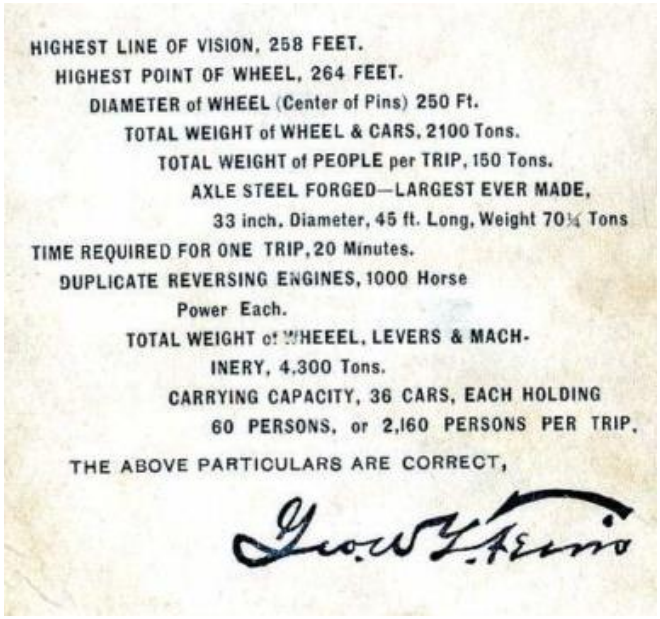
finally got the parts constructed, loaded onto freight cars, and shipped them to Chicago. There he assembled and put into successful operation the world's first Ferris Wheel. It was not only the sensation of the 1893 Fair, but has become one of the staple rides of carnivals and amusement parks all over the world. Mr. Ferris has joined the immortals.

Today, it is hard to realize how very large the original Ferris Wheel was. It rose nearly three hundred feet into the air, and instead of bobbing, bench-like seats for two people, it carried cars, each seating forty passengers. There were thirty-six of these cars and each one was enclosed with plate-glass windows. For the duration of the Fair, which unfortunately collapsed into the financial debacle known as the Panic of '93, the Ferris Wheel was the high spot, literally and recreationally for a whole generation of Americans.


HIGHEST LINE OF VISION, 258 FEET.
HIGHEST POINT OF WHEEL, 264 FEET.
DIAMETER of WHEEL (Center of Pins) 250 Ft.
TOTAL WEIGHT of WHEEL & CARS, 2100 Tons.
TOTAL WEIGHT of PEOPLE per TRIP, 150 Tons.
AXLE STEEL FORGED—LARGEST EVER MADE,
33 inch. Diameter, 45 ft. Long, Weight 70¼ Tons
TIME REQUIRED FOR ONE TRIP, 20 Minutes.
DUPLICATE REVERSING ENGINES, 1000 Horse
Power Each.
TOTAL WEIGHT of WHEEEL, LEVERS & MACH-
INERY, 4,300 Tons.
CARRYING CAPACITY, 36 CARS, EACH HOLDING
60 PERSONS, or 2,160 PERSONS PER TRIP.
THE ABOVE PARTICULARS ARE CORRECT,
Geo. W. G. Ferris

***Reverse of the original cabinet card photograph of the Ferris Wheel listing the specifications of George Washington Gale Ferris' new invention with printed signature of the inventor.***

The Fair's amusement area, known as the Midway, later grew into Chicago's *White City*, a spangled fairyland of roller coasters, chute-the-chutes and enchanted white towers sparkling with the new wonder, electric lights.

The first Ferris Wheel was eventually torn down. It was sold to a junk dealer in Chicago, in June, 1903, for $1,800. Still outstanding against it at that time were bonds amounting to $300,000 and a floating debt of $100,000. Later the wheel was resurrected and once again went into operation at another world's fair. This time the year was 1904 and the place was St. Louis.

After the St. Louis Fair wound up its existence, the Ferris Wheel was once more dismantled. For the world at large it disappeared into limbo. The fact that it eventually came into the possession of our family, and became part of our home seems more and more incredible as each year rolls on. Without the old photographs and newspaper clippings, even I, who remember it so well, would find it difficult to believe that my mother grew palms, lemons, grapes and flowers in its shelter, and that the delirious delight I remember, of roller skating about its concrete floor, is not a trick of imagination.

Recently when I visited the locale of my childhood, and found myself torn with the conflict of nostalgia and eagerness which comes with passing years, the bizarre connection of my family with the remains of that first Ferris Wheel was heavy in my thoughts.

Today, two hundred miles west of the new bridge across the Straits of Mackinac, the broad paving of U.S. Highway 2 sweeps briefly through the mined-out town of Iron Mountain in Michigan's remote Upper Peninsula. As I drove along, I felt closer to the time when the area was a wilderness than to the modern place with its hotels, motels and winter sports area. Back when my father diamond-drilled and explored this place in the early eighties, it had no name. On surveyor's

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plats it was described as the North 1/2, West 1/4 of Section Thirty. Along Main Street, my middle-aged self, gray hair and automobile seemed less real than a fat girl with big teeth who once rode a fat white pony named Lady. The concrete paving wasn't right either. I remembered the old rust-red macadam made with hematite slag and waste ore from the rust-red iron mines. I looked for the old pit, where the mines constantly caved in, and for the side-buttressed red timber tower and buildings of the Hamilton Shaft, which my father had built. Instead of this slick, modern highway, there should have been a red ore road across the pit, with rust-red teams of horses and wagons, constantly working to refill the driving area, for ore removed a thousand feet and more below the surface caused continuous sinking. Most of all, I missed the red mine dust that had frosted everything – the roads, the roadside chickweed and thistles, the miners' houses of "the location," and the wooden boardwalks along the picket fences. I missed the miners themselves, coming to and from work in their oilskin coats and long-brimmed hats with candles and candlesticks perched up in front like hussars' cockades, all overlaid with the crust of rich, red, hematite iron ore.

North of the pit through the mining *location*, U.S. 2 leaves the square right angles of the old streets for the diagonal of the abandoned mine railroad, and before I knew it, I was at the foot of Grand Boulevard which leads to Lake Antoine. On a knoll at the end of the little street still stood the house with the tower which had been our family home.

The afternoon sun in the blue northern sky gave the old house some of the crispness which I remembered, and a nice looking young woman cordially answered my inquiry and invited me to wander about as much as I wished, and to come into the house later if I cared to. She was a pretty brunette and I remembered that someone had said that an Italian contractor now owned the place.

***The John Tyler Jones residence was located at the end of Grand Boulevard near Lake Antoine on Iron Mountain's North Side. [Menominee Range Historical Museum]***

The driveway still led down to the red sandstone stable. Sadness clouded about me for the things it had once sheltered – Lady the pony, Mamma's sedate old Dolly, the high stepping team, Dixie and Dandy, the pony cart, saddles, bobsled, cutters, surrey, buckboard and phaeton – words which today we hear only in songs.

I felt overwhelmed when I looked at the house and remembered that for all of us, it had once been home. I thought of Christmases and Fourth-of-Julys and my mother's steel framed spectacles and how she could instantly quell any misbehavior or wriggling at the dining table with a glance over their silvery rims. She had the innate discipline of her Quaker family, and no matter what happened – tornado, forest-fire or mine disaster – and they all happened – her voice and manner stayed calm and collected. Along with her sternness, I still remember her as the prettiest woman I have ever seen.

Papa was gaiety and optimism at top speed. He was bouncy and quick, and never ran down. Every action – physical or mental – was deft and rapid. I can still see him

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sharpening a lead pencil with six precise cuts of his razor-sharp pearl-handled pocket knife. I can see him buying extra ice cream cones for any stray children on the sidewalk outside Khoury's Candy Kitchen whenever he bought cones for his own group of children and grandchildren. From his start as a poor boy working in a Pittsburgh rolling mill, he'd gone ahead fast to the superintendency of a blast furnace near Sharon in his twenties; then on to the rich iron ore deposits of the wild Lake Superior country in his early thirties.

He was particular about the cut of his salt-and-pepper whiskers, which he wore trimmed in the approved fashion of the steel business, almost identical with the beard of Mr. Andrew Carnegie. His tribute to conservatism ended with his grooming. He seethed with new ideas for inventions and new ways to do old jobs in quicker, better and more economical fashion. He took out patents for over thirty inventions that I know about, and sometimes I wonder how many more I may find.

***John Tyler Jones, seated at the foot of the steps in the conservatory at his home near Lake Antoine on Iron Mountain's North Side. [Menominee Range Historical Museum]***

He thrived on opposition, and George Washington Ferris was close to his heart. Papa had the same sort of fierce faith in himself, which he too had justified in his exploits of taking the first steam shovel into the Mesaba iron range of Minnesota at the Biwabik mine, and in unwatering the Hamilton Shaft at Iron Mountain when it was flooded and unworkable. His procedure in both cases was against the advice of the then "experts."

Papa always had a dozen irons in the fire, and how he juggled them all and still found time to play the violin, build swings and trapeze bars for his children, and to take them swimming and fishing is one of the wonders of Victorian fatherhood. His rotund, well-padded figure was a comforting evening perch for a baby sleepyhead, while he read story books or sang Stephen Foster songs – Pittsburgh too – in his pleasant Welsh tenor.

My mother loved flowers and growing things, so when the house was built, she planned for herself a small, glassy cubicle on the south side, opening off the dining room, which she called *the conservatory*. There, on shelves, flourished begonias and calla lilies. Yellow Chinese lilies grew in water and pebbles in a cut glass bowl. Asparagus fern and sprengeri trailed from hanging baskets. It all looked pretty from the dining room, and when blizzards blew, there were glass doors to shut out cold drafts. The doors had panels of frosted glass in which crystal cuttings made a lovely water scene with flowers, bulrushes, wading birds and ripples. We never decided whether it was prettier with the doors open or shut. It was enchanting to put an eye close to the cuttings and see how the plants and greenery were distorted. It seemed like looking at flowers through diamonds.

There came a time of change. The lilies died down and Mamma sat around looking at catalogs of Lord and Burnham greenhouses. Some of these were simple lean-to affairs. Others were truly elegant architectural confections with benches and fountains and glass minarets. Papa started to put filing cases along one end of the little conservatory cubby-hole. Later he added a small desk

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brought home from the machine shop down by Chartiers Creek. (Not the Pittsburgh Chartiers Creek, but our Chartiers, the outlet to Lake Antoine.) Papa moved into the conservatory and now we called it his office.

As children do, we sensed that an exciting, glamorous time was ahead. It might be even more fun than going to Chicago. Chicago was three hundred miles south, but Papa often went there, and usually he would take Mamma along or some of us children. There were free passes on the railroads in those days for the big shippers of ore, and the overnight trip was cozy in gold and mahogany Pullmans with genii, known as porters, to make everyone comfortable. Mamma took us to Marshall Field's for coats, hats, shoes and bolts of yard goods. Papa took us to dine in style at Rector's or the Great Northern Grill, and in the evening to vaudeville at McVickers, or to see John Drew or E.H. Sothern. Once we saw Ethel Barrymore in *Captain Jinks*.

Then, one time, Papa went to Chicago all by himself. The morning he came home, our world almost fell apart. Ruth and Arthur went down with the surrey to meet the morning train. I, the littlest one, was left at home. I was in the kitchen with Hildy when he arrived.

The sound of steps on the porch brought me in through the buttery and when I saw the front door open, I ran to meet my dear Papa. Instead of his familiar bearded face, an alarming apparition walked in. It was wearing Papa's hard hat, flat on top like one of Winston Churchill's, and Papa's clothes, but the face! To me, Papa was whiskers first of all. This newly-shaved, completely naked expanse of lips, chin, jowls and neck was strange and terrifying. I saw only a horrible and unreal monster masquerading in my father's clothes and gestures. This was the boogy man who would come to get me when I wasn't good. I have never in my life been so frightened.

I screamed and ran for refuge to Hildy in the kitchen.

The monster pursued me with outstretched arms. "It's Papa!" he said.

I knew it couldn't be Papa without whiskers. I screamed again and hid my face in Hildy's apron.

Then he smiled. It was worse with teeth. I burrowed further into Hildy's skirts.

Ruth came in. She was crying too. "It's all right," she sobbed, "don't cry, dear. It's Papa. Doesn't he look awful!"

I circled to Hildy's other side further away from the monster.

Mamma's calm voice quieted us, "Oh, John! Why did you ever!"

"Now just wait – I'll tell you." Papa slipped into his dining chair, pulled out his mother-of-pearl knife, and deftly peeled a paper-thin, perfectly spiraled rind from an orange. We watched him do that and knew that nobody but our own Papa could peel a piece of fruit like that. Then Mamma looked at us over her glasses. We settled down, but Papa still looked horrible to us.

He sat back in triumph. "Rachel, I bought the greenhouse. I thought if we're going to have Florida in Michigan, I'd better start by not looking like an old plug. Who wears whiskers today but real old codgers!"

Mamma put down the coffee pot, sat back, and beamed.

"That man Ferris was a wonder," Papa went on. "He was from Pittsburgh, too. Nothing but the best Pittsburgh Plate in that wheel. Too bad the typhoid got him so young."

"But John, what about the greenhouse? What's Ferris got to do with it! Did you get the little plain one or that lovely one with the dome?"

"Hildy," Papa called, "please have my bacon good and crisp. I like it to crunch."

Mamma persisted. "Which one – which one?"

"You really must tell Hildy that I don't like the way she cooks things limp and boiled – especially bacon! I want it crisp!"

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Mamma crisped up herself. She almost thumped the sugar bowl down on the table. "John – which one!" She took a deep breath. "Which one?"

"Which one – why it was the buy of a lifetime. To think it came from Pittsburgh too." Papa beamed.

Mamma sagged. Slowly her head shook from side to side. "Oh, no! What are you saying!"

"Finest in the U.S.A. Rachel, you're going to have the finest greenhouse in the whole U.S.A. Half the price of Lord and Burnham."

Mamma scarcely breathed. She had the calm of catastrophe.

"Not – not Lord and Burnham! John, you can't. I didn't really care if it was the one with the dome. What ARE you saying?"

"You will love it." His words came with a rush. "It's just been wrecked from the St. Louis Fair. Think of having the original Ferris Wheel – first one in the world – right here. It was the buy of a lifetime. I figure I'll use the girders for the roof and the glass for the windows. Imagine having a real plate glass greenhouse. It'll be the talk of the country."

Mamma shuddered. "That will be huge! What will it cost to heat? Remember this is the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. I only wanted a little one."

We children listened and somehow knew that Mamma's dream greenhouse had gone down the drain, and that it is stead, like a changeling child in a bad fairy tale, her pretty house with it stylish shingled tower and stained glass windows would be burdened forever with the Ferris Wheel hooked to its rear.

We sensed that she was bitterly disappointed, but our excitement at the masses of building material which soon arrived, and the number of men working around the back of the house, and the cutting of a new doorway through the old buttery into the dining room, completely dimmed any compassion we may have felt for her.

The greenhouse which rose at the tail end of our house, in size at least, was one to make Mr. Lord and Mr. Burnham shrink with envy. It must have been at least forty feet wide and sixty feet long. The floor and foundation were of concrete, as were the big box-like beds filled with earth for flowers. An aisle ran down the center, and in the middle diverged around a monumental four-sided aquarium, elevated upon a concrete platform. Each side of the aquarium was a sheet of plate glass, about four or five feet square, set into a metal framework. Inside was a scenic contrivance of open work towers, through which the fish could swim.

The first time the aquarium was filled with water, the weight was too much for the original glass. It cracked and all the water seeped out. Nothing daunted, Papa ordered new plate glass of fantastic thickness. Goodness knows what it cost. (Among my treasures, I still keep a small chunk of that heavy plate glass.)

The second time, the glass held, and water plants and goldfish were added. We fed the goldfish with worms and they grew incredibly large.

Above the concrete flower bed divisions, the panes of glass from the Ferris Wheel cars were set into vertical, hinged windows. Many of these windows had initials and hearts scratched on them – mementos of somebody's big trip to the Fair. We children tried to match up the initials of our friends and of our big sister's beaux. Across the top, Papa contrived arched metal supports and struts of reinforcing girders from the rim of the big wheel itself, to support the glass roof.

In that cold northern town of wooden boardwalks and red iron-ore streets, where there was no paving for roller skating, the possession of that large floor area of smooth concrete under glass made the place a child's paradise. Oxalis and sweet alyssum trailed over the front of the flower beds and down to the floor. Even today, when I walk past a

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garden border of alyssum, the far off whir of wooden roller skates on concrete is a part of the haunting fragrance of the small white petals.

***John Tyler Jones and his wife Rachael posed at the foot of the steps in the conservatory made from the glass of the original Ferris Wheel. [Menominee Range Historical Museum]***

The steps coming down from the house into the greenhouse made an ideal spot for family group pictures, and from the last Christmas when all of us were in the old house, there is a picture which shows us as we were then. We have on our best clothes and are trying to give Mr. Mortensen, the photographer, our best smiles. There are grape vines festooning the high girders of Mr. Ferris' wheel, and drifts of southern smilax and sweet peas climb strings at the windows. There is a leopard skin rug to hide the concrete, and palms, Azaleas and Norfolk pines sit about in wooden tubs. It was the last time we were all together.

As I climbed from the old stable up the slope to the spot where the old greenhouse had stood, the last Christmas was heavy in my memory. How fast it had all changed after that! Rachel, the frail sister named for Mamma, had died soon after. Papa's luck had somehow run out, and all his efforts with inventions, patents and experiments only exhausted all his resources. All the older children scattered to new places and new jobs. The bank foreclosed on the mortgage. In a few years, Mamma and Papa suddenly became very old people, and the three of us left the house beside the lake forever.

Back on the knoll, overlooking Lake Antoine, I found nothing standing of the old greenhouse but the concrete walls and pillars which had supported the arched roof. All glass and wood were gone.

As I peered over the wall to see what desolation might be left in the interior, flowers and color surprised me. In the center, where I had roller skated around the old aquarium, was a sunken blue swimming pool. Cushioned summer furniture sat about its edge. Against the concrete wall, tuberous begonias flamed in the sun. The whole place looked gay and well kept. There were strong gates with locks at all the entrances, to prevent mishap to a child. Down below, on the pavement toward the stable, stood a child's tricycle.

As I walked to the drive to get back into my car, I knew that I could not go into the old house just yet; but the steps were edged with bright borders of petunias, and cascades of blossoms fell from jardinieres upon the porch pillars. The wind sighed through the pines with its remembered muffled murmur. The sound was oddly comforting and I fancied that I could smell alyssum.

It seemed that the wheel in some mysterious fashion had again come full circle, and that the old house once more bloomed with happy living and young children. I found myself contemplating the past with less ache and more peace of mind that I could ever have believed possible.

And wouldn't Mr. Ferris have been surprised!

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THE END

*This story was printed in 1972 under the title* Tales of the Menominee *as part of the Ardis Furnace Dedication held on July 29 of that year by the Menominee Range Historical Foundation. The Ardis Furnace was named for John Tyler Jones' daughter, Ardis, and was an experimental furnace used to extract iron out of low grade ore. Jones' idea was to be adapted into the pelletizing process used in later years of mining.*

*[Transcribed by William John Cummings.]*

*Memorial Record of the Northern Peninsula of Michigan: Illustrated*, Chicago, Illinois: The Lewis Publishing Company, 1895, pp. 329-330

**JOHN T. [JOHN TYLER] JONES**, of **Iron Mountain**, Michigan, is superintendent of the **Ludington & Hamilton mine**, and is one of the most prominent men of the **Menominee Range**. We take pleasure in presenting a sketch of his life to the readers of this work.

John T. Jones was born in Pittsburg, Pennsylvania, September 14, 1847. His father, **Thomas J. Jones**, a native of Wales, settled at Pittsburg when he was thirteen years of age. Both **Thomas J.** and his father, **John**, were iron workers, as was also our subject's maternal grandfather, **Mr. Williams**. Grandfather Williams emigrated from Wales to this country and located at Pittsburg when his daughter, **Margaret**, the mother of John T. Jones, was four years old. In that city the parents of our subject grew up and were married, and as the years passed by sons and daughters came to brighten their home, eleven in all, nine of whom reached maturity, John T. being the third born and eldest son. The father died in Sharon, Pennsylvania, in June, 1894, at the age of seventy-seven years. At the time of his death he was the oldest mechanic in that city.

John T. Jones spent the first twenty-three years of his life in Pittsburg. He attended school until he was twelve years old and then commenced work in the rolling mills as an apprentice to the trade of millwright and engineer. His father being a master mechanic, young Jones came naturally to this work and ere long became an expert. In 1869 he went to Sharon, Pennsylvania, where he had charge of the machinery and furnaces of the Keel Ridge Furnace of Sharon. He remained there until June, 1881, when he came to the **Menominee Range** and located at **Keel Ridge**, as superintendent of mines, having under his supervision the **Emitt *[sic – Emmett]***, **Keel Ridge**, **Iron River**, and **Ludington & Hamilton mines**. He was the first to prospect for the last named mine. He has also been connected with various other mines, and has done much to advance the mining interests of this section of the country, and is well and favorably known as an authority in his line of work.

Mr. Jones and his family occupy one of the finest and most elegantly equipped homes in **Iron Mountain**. This residence was built by him in 1891, at a cost of $7,000. He was married, in 1871, to Miss **Rachel A. Milligan**, a native of Pittsburg and a daughter of **John Milligan**, of that city, the Milligans being a prominent Quaker family. They have had eight children, six of whom are living, viz: **Albert**, **Elmer**, **Carrie**, **Rachel**, **Ruth** and **Arthur**. **Harry** and **Margaret** are deceased.

Politically, Mr. Jones is in harmony with the Republican party, and has served as a member of the City Council. He is identified with Iron Mountain Lodge, F. & A.M.

*Iron Mountain Press*, Iron Mountain, Dickinson County, Michigan, Volume 11, Number 7 [Thursday, July 5, 1906], page 1, column 2

**Beautiful Home.**

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Probably the most beautiful country home in the upper peninsula is that of Mr. and Mrs. **John T. Jones** on the banks of Lake Antoine. It contains about twenty acres and embraces many natural advantages. Nature has been aided very materially in the work of beautifying by Mr. Jones. This spring Mr. Jones planted some fifteen hundred fruit trees and nearly all are flourishing. He is now engaged in building a large greenhouse. In this connection it is interesting to note that the glass used in the construction of the building was used for a number of years in the Ferris wheel, which was recently destroyed at St. Louis.

**George Washington Gale Ferris, Jr.** (February 14, 1859–November 22, 1896) was an American engineer. He is most famous for creating the original Ferris Wheel for the 1893 Chicago World's Columbian Exposition.

Ferris was born on February 14, 1859, in Galesburg, Illinois, the town founded by his namesake, George Washington Gale. His parents were George Washington Gale Ferris Sr. and Martha Edgerton Hyde. In 1864, five years after Ferris was born, his family sold their dairy farm and moved to Nevada. For two years, they lived in Carson Valley.

From 1868 to 1890, his father, George Washington Gale Ferris Sr., owned Sears-Ferris House, at 311 W. Third, Carson City, Nevada. Originally built in about 1863 by Gregory A. Sears, a pioneer Carson City businessman,[2] the house was added to the National Register of Historic Places for Carson City on February 9, 1979.

Ferris Senior was an agriculturalist-horticulturalist, noteworthy in Carson City's development for much of the city's landscaping during the 1870's, and for importing a large number of the trees from the east that were planted throughout the city.

Ferris left Nevada in 1875, to attend the California Military Academy in Oakland, where he graduated in 1876. He graduated from Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in Troy, New York, where he was a Charter Member of the local chapter of the Chi Phi Fraternity and a member of the Rensselaer Society of Engineers, in the class of 1881 with a degree in Civil Engineering. He was made a member of the Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute Alumni Hall of Fame in 1998.

Ferris began his career in the railroad industry and was interested in bridge building. He founded a company, G.W.G. Ferris & Co. in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, to test and inspect metals for railroads and bridge builders.

His house at 1318 Arch Street, Central Northside, was added to the list of City of Pittsburgh Designated Historic Structures on June 28, 2001.

News of the World's Columbian Exposition to be held in 1893, in Chicago, Illinois, drew Ferris to the city. In 1891, the directors of the World's Columbian Exposition issued a challenge to American engineers to conceive of a monument for the fair that would surpass the Eiffel Tower, the great structure of the

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Paris International Exposition of 1889. The planners wanted something "original, daring and unique." Ferris responded with a proposed wheel from which visitors would be able to view the entire exhibition, a wheel that would "Out-Eiffel Eiffel." The planners feared his design for a rotating wheel towering over the grounds could not possibly be safe.

Ferris persisted. He returned in a few weeks with several respectable endorsements from established engineers, and the committee agreed to allow construction to begin. Most convincingly, he had recruited several local investors to cover the $400,000 cost of construction. The planning commission of the Exposition hoped that admissions from the Ferris Wheel would pull the fair out of debt and eventually make it profitable.

The Ferris Wheel had 36 cars, each fitted with 40 revolving chairs and able to accommodate up to 60 people, giving a total capacity of 2,160. When the fair opened, it carried some 38,000 passengers daily, taking 20 minutes to complete two revolutions, the first involving six stops to allow passengers to exit and enter and the second a nine-minute non-stop rotation, for which the ticket holder paid 50 cents. It carried 2.5 million passengers before it was finally demolished in 1906.

After the fair closed, Ferris claimed that the exhibition management had robbed him and his investors of their rightful portion of the nearly $750,000 profit that his wheel brought in. He spent the next two years in litigation.

His father died in 1895, followed soon after by George Ferris himself, who died on November 22, 1896 at Mercy Hospital in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania of typhoid fever. His ashes remained at a Pittsburgh crematorium for over a year, waiting for someone to take possession of them.

**Ferris, George Washington Gale Jr.**
**Born:** February 14, 1859, in Galesburg, Illinois
**Died:** November 21, 1896, in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania
**Vocations:** Engineer, Inventor

**Abstract:** George Washington Gale Ferris Jr. was born on February 14, 1859, in Galesburg, Illinois. After spending his childhood with his family in Carson City, Nevada, Ferris attended the California Military Academy and the Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in New York. He married Margaret Ann Beatty from Canton, Ohio. Ferris' career as a civil engineer was rewarding. His success skyrocketed when he created the Ferris wheel, thus solidifying his reputation. Ferris died from typhoid fever on November 21, 1896, in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, where he spent most of his life.

**Biography:**

George Washington Gale Ferris Jr. was born on February 14, 1859, in Galesburg, Illinois. Silvanus Ferris, his grandfather, and Reverend George W. Gale founded this village in central Illinois, according to Judith Adams-Volpe in the *American National Biography*. Ferris was the son of George

# Papa and the Ferris Wheel
## by Ardis Jones Blenko

Washington Gale Ferris Sr. and Martha Edgerton Hyde Ferris; he grew up on a farm with his four sisters and two brothers. In 1864, when Ferris was five-years-old, the family decided to sell the farm and move west to San Jose, California. However, when they arrived in Carson City, Nevada, they were unable to travel farther because money was not worth as much due to inflation caused by the Civil War. California was out of reach at the time, so the Ferris family settled on a ranch near Carson City.

After spending nine years helping his father on the ranch, Ferris attended the California Military Academy in Oakland, California in the year 1873. After graduation in 1876, Ferris attended Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in Troy, New York. During his college career, Ferris found time to join clubs and extracurricular activities, such as the Glee Club, football, and baseball. Ferris did not take his education as seriously as many would think because he had to retake particular courses in order to graduate. Nevertheless, Ferris buckled down and received his degree in civil engineering in February 1881. With a degree under his belt, Ferris was ready to find work as soon as possible.

His first job was with a railroad constructing office in New York City; he worked under General J.H. Ledlie, a famous contractor who taught Ferris the ropes of real life engineering. During the first year working for the company Ferris traveled to West Virginia to locate a reasonable route for the Baltimore, Cincinnati & Western railway to run through the Elk River Valley; the railway had to consist of 78 miles for the project to be completed correctly. Ferris was also assigned to locate a route for a narrow-gauge track in Putnam County, New York. After working for one year under General J.H. Ledlie, Ferris became a professional civil engineer and then a general manager for the Queen City Mining Company in West Virginia during the year 1882. Ferris designed and built a coal trestle, a tower used to support a bridge, over the Kanawha River. After the bridge project was completed, Ferris was assigned to build three 1,800-foot tunnels as well. Ferris only spent a year working for the Queen City Mining Company because in 1883 the company closed. Fortunately, Ferris did not lose work due to the company's closing; he became an assistant engineer for the Louisville Bridge & Iron Company in Louisville, Kentucky. During this time, Ferris earned a reputation "for concrete work under heavy pressure in pneumatic caissons" while he worked on the Henderson Bridge located across the Ohio River. He also earned a reputation as "an astute businessman" since he became an expert of large steel structures during the mid-1880s. Ferris then transferred to the Kentucky and Indiana Bridge Company of Louisville in 1885 due to health hazards from working with the previous company. Ferris was in charge of testing and inspecting the steel and iron bought from Pittsburgh steel mills, as stated in the *Dictionary of American Biography*.

Even though the civil engineering profession consumed most of his time and energy, Ferris found the time to enhance his social life. He fell in love with a woman from Canton, Ohio; in 1886 he married Margaret Ann Beatty. The happily married couple moved to Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Ferris continued to pursue his dream of becoming a successful engineer as he established the firm of G.W.G. Ferris & Company, Inspecting Engineers along with James C. Hallsted. The company soon spread to other major cities, New York and Chicago. Ferris began to give his full attention to the promotion and financing of large-scale engineering projects. Ferris founded another firm, Ferris, Kaufman and Company, in 1890 as well as keeping

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close ties with his original firm. The new firm focused on constructing major bridges across the Ohio River at Wheeling, Cincinnati, and Pittsburgh. Ferris earned a name for himself during the early years of his career as an engineer; however, he did not realize the fame and recognition he was about to receive in the next few years of his life.

In 1892, the chief of construction for the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago, Daniel H. Burnham, challenged the prominent civil engineers of the United States to create a structure that would become a rival to the Eiffel Tower, constructed at the recent World's Fair in Paris. As Michael Valenti stated in *Mechanical Engineering*, the structure had to be original, daring, and unique. Ferris immediately began thinking of a creation that would prove worthy of such a description. That very evening he sketched a revolving "observation wheel" on a piece of paper and planned to present his idea to the committee the next day. Ferris imagined two large, parallel circles connected with struts that revolved around a steel axis. The wheel would lift passengers in railroad-style cars and move them in a circular rotation. The committee found the idea unrealistic and superficial due to its size and purpose. Ferris was still determined to find a way to design and build this wheel. After convincing several engineers to sponsor his structure and finding investors to pay $400,000 for construction, the committee finally approved Ferris' idea on November 29, 1892.

His partner, William F. Gronau, was assigned the design detail and construction responsibility while Ferris took on the responsibility to secure the concession. The United States was going through a period of depression in 1893, so financing the entire project was extremely difficult. Ferris also had to contact several companies in the East and Midwest for the production of parts needed to build the wheel. Many components were manufactured in Cleveland and Youngstown, Ohio, and in Pittsburgh and Bethlehem, Pennsylvania; these parts were then loaded onto 150 railroad cars and shipped to Chicago where the excavations were under way. The major task Ferris had to conquer in January 1893 was the pouring of the concrete footings. With temperatures below freezing, the crews dug as quickly as possible. At about 35 feet down the cubic blocks of concrete were poured while steam was used to keep them from freezing. After the foundation was built, the two parallel towers were next on the agenda. They were built out of vertical posts and horizontal braces that were supported with crisscrossed rolled-metal rods. Plate-iron girders were placed on the bottom of the wheel for more strength and support.

Upon completion of the towers, the main component, the wheel, needed to be put into place. The 45-ton axle was fastened to the two towers with spokes, beams, and iron rods for safety and stability. The addition to the monstrous wheel was the thousand-horsepower horizontal coal-fired steam engine needed for rotation; a Westinghouse air brake was also installed in case the wheel needed to stop immediately. The finished product rose to a height of about 264 feet with a circumference of about 825 feet; the 4,000 ton ride carried 36 passenger cars that could hold more than 2,000 people at a time. Ferris' wheel proved able to withstand the vicious Chicago winds with its strength and stability, according to the *American National Biography*. Ferris designed and built a structure that would never be forgotten.

On June 16, 1893, the Ferris wheel was open to the public at the Chicago Exposition. According to the *Pittsburgh Commercial Gazette*, Mrs. Ferris made a toast to her husband while in one of the passenger cars

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on the Ferris wheel. She toasted the health of her husband and the success of the Ferris wheel. At first, many visitors were afraid to ride on such an enormous wheel, but the fear soon subsided as more passengers ventured into the nicely designed passenger cars. For 19 weeks the Ferris wheel made over 10,000 revolutions without incident and carried more than 1.5 million passengers who paid 50 cents for a 20-minute ride. During this time, the Ferris wheel brought in over $750,000 in profit for the Chicago Exposition, according to the *Inventor of the Week Archive*. Once the Chicago Exposition closed, the wheel made its final appearance in St. Louis at the 1904 Louisiana Purchase Exposition. Finally, May 11, 1906, Ferris' wheel was dynamited as the novelty came to an end.

Ferris did not experience the destruction of his marvelous creation because he passed away on November 21, 1896, in Pittsburgh without his wife by his side. She previously returned to her hometown in Canton, Ohio when their childless marriage came to an end. The *American National Biography* stated that Ferris died from typhoid fever; however, complications from kidney disease could have played a role in the cause of his death. Suicide also seemed like a rational possibility because Ferris was alone and bankrupt at the time of his death; some believe his overwhelming sadness was the driving force to take his own life.

According to Judith Adams-Volpe from the *American National Biography*, Ferris' partners Gustave Kaufman and D.W. McNaugher gave a praiseworthy eulogy of Ferris; they said, "He was always bright, hopeful and full of anticipation of good results from all the ventures he had on hand. These feelings he could always impart to whomever he addressed in a most wonderful degree, and therein laid the key not of his success. In most darkened and troubled times…he was ever looking for the sunshine soon to come… he died a martyr to his ambition for fame and prominence."

Ferris earned a reputation as one of the most daring entrepreneurs, optimists, and engineers of the nineteenth century in the United States. Ferris' wheel brightened the horizon for new technologies and inventions that could be possible with imagination and determination. "The feverish pace of his engineering projects and businesses mirrored the accomplishments of U.S. engineers who created a civilization for a new country," as Adams-Volpe stated.

Ferris became a subject of interest to many people, especially Erik Larson who based his book, *The Devil in the White City*, on the Chicago's World Fair in 1893. Larson wrote about the true story of the architect who created the World Fair and the serial killer who murdered his victims in the fair. Throughout the suspenseful book Ferris' wheel was one of the major attractions at the World's Fair. Today most amusement parks and carnivals around the world have smaller versions of Ferris' wheel as well as more complex versions, such as the London Eye and the Vienna Prater wheel. Even though these amusement parks have new improved structures, such as roller coasters, Ferris' wheel will always be a legendary part of each and every park. Ferris left behind an unforgotten legacy after he passed away; his success as an engineer and as an inventor is now admired and appreciated as people wait in line to ride the legendary Ferris wheel.

# The Man Who Invented the Wheel, and Paid the Price

by Dennis Bell

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## by Ardis Jones Blenko

George Washington Gale Ferris invented the wheel, and it cost him his life.

The Illinois-born civil engineer gave the world the Ferris Wheel, and got next to nothing for one of the greatest novelties in human history. George was just five years old when his parents moved the family from sedate and affluent Galesburg, Illinois to wild and woolly Nevada Territory. They had sold their dairy and cheese plant in Illinois for $60,000 and headed west in 1864, intending to settle in San Jose, California. However, the family fortune had shrunk to the equivalent of $30,000 by the time the Ferris family arrived by wagon in western Nevada. Money was worth just 50 cents on the dollar thanks to inflation caused by the U.S. Civil War, and it prevented the family from continuing on to California. Instead, George Ferris Sr. bought a ranch a mile north of present-day Minden, Nevada, in the Carson Valley, where the couple lived with three sons and four daughters for the following six years. During this time, George Jr. wrote of ranching as "the best occupation I know of" and expressed his delight at living near the Carson River. The story goes that his inspiration for the Ferris Wheel came from his fascination with a large undershot water wheel at Cradlebaugh Bridge on the river. Presumably, he imagined what it would be like to be riding around on one of its buckets.

George Sr. decided to create a landscaping business and the family moved into Carson City, occupying a residence on the southeast corner of Third and Division streets – the restored house is still there at 311 W. Third. George Sr. surrounded his new home with trees imported by rail from Illinois. The legacy of the Ferris family includes not only the Ferris Wheel, but much of the landscaping of Carson City, dating back to the 1870's, including the state capitol grounds. The blue spruce that is now the official State Christmas Tree was planted by Ferris, Sr. in 1876. George Jr. left home in 1875 to attend the California Military Academy in Oakland, later moving east to study engineering. In 1880, he graduated from Rensselear Polytechnic School in Troy, New York with a degree in civil engineering. George Jr. launched his career in New York City, designing bridges, tunnels and trestles throughout the industrial northeast and Midwest. Foreseeing an increase in the use of structural steel, he moved to Pittsburgh and founded G.W.G. Ferris & Co., a civil engineering firm that tested and inspected metals for railways and bridge builder, and later he opened offices in New York and Chicago.

Ferris's ascent to fame began when he attended an engineers' banquet in late 1891 in Chicago, just selected to host the World's Columbian Exposition – the Chicago world's fair of 1893. Daniel H. Burnham, director of works for the fair, challenged the engineers to produce a structure of some sort rivalling the Eiffel Tower, the superstar of the 1889 Paris International Exposition. Although the fair's planners had received many proposals, none of them were considered novel or daring enough to put Chicago on the world map. The best they could come up with were plans for towers taller than Eiffel – mimicry rather than innovation. Alexandre-Gustave Eiffel himself offered to surpass his Paris tower by building a bigger and better one for the Chicago fair. However, Burnham quickly received a scorching letter from 25 leading U.S. engineers demanding that any tower built for the exposition "be the result of American genius."

Ferris's imagination was fired, and he began toying with four or five ideas – all of them round in shape. Later, he told a reporter: "We used to have a Saturday afternoon club, chiefly engineers at the

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World's Fair. It was at one of those dinners, down in a Chicago chop house, that I hit on the idea. I remember remarking that I would build a wheel, a monster. I got some paper and began sketching it out. I fixed the size, determined the construction, the number of cars we would run, the number of people it would hold, what we would charge, the plan of stopping six times in the first revolution and loading, and ten making a complete turn. In short, before the dinner was over, I had sketched out almost the entire detail and my plan never varied an item from that day." The basic nuts and bolts of the Ferris Wheel emerged from the chop house scrawled on a series of gravy-stained dinner napkins. Basically, Ferris had rekindled an idea that had been in the back of his mind since childhood, converting the Carson River water wheel into a gargangtuan Ezekial's Wheel.

Many other engineers said it simply couldn't be done – the stresses involved were simply too great, the wheel would collapse before it would rotate. But Ferris persisted, spending $25,000 of his own money on plans and specifications. The fair's directors hesitated and dithered, questioning whether the design was feasible. After granting permission in the early summer of 1892, they withdrew it almost immediately. Finally, on Nov. 29, 1892, they again accepted Ferris's idea, with the proviso that he find his own financing, because their construction budget had already been allocated to other projects. The Eiffel Tower's builders had received a large subsidy from the French Government, but Ferris was on his own. He used his personal credit to begin placing orders for steel and formed a joint stock company, but the sale of shares went slowly until he attracted several prominent investors, including railway magnate Andrew Onderdonk and Judge William Vincent. Ferris faced another serious problem that hadn't bothered the French – time. Eiffel took more than two years to build his tower. But in Chicago, because of the directors' vacillation, Ferris had only 22 weeks before the fair's inauguration on May 1, 1893. Moreover, he would have to work through one of those legendary Chicago winters, and his chances of success seemed slim.

While excavation and concrete pouring was under way in Chicago in ten-below-zero weather, most the wheel's components were being wrought at nine steel mills in Detroit and loaded onto 150 railway cars for shipment. Other parts were being manufactured in Cleveland and Youngstown, Ohio, Pittsburgh and Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. Eventually, George Ferris's dinner napkin concept became a steel wheel 825 feet in circumference rotating on a 45-foot axle 82 inches in diameter that weighed 56 tons – at that time the biggest single piece of steel piece ever forged. The steel towers supporting the wheel 144 feet above the ground were anchored in 30 feet of concrete. The wheel was powered by a pair of 1,000-horsepower engines. It rose 266 feet and carried 36 cars. Each car was 13 feet wide, staffed by a conductor, with accommodation for 2,160 riders at a time. The entire structure weighed 4,100 tons, the size of a small ship.

The $250,000 wheel opened June 21, 1893, seven weeks behind schedule, revolving under perfect control, and stable against the strongest winds blowing in from Lake Michigan. Its riders were elevated the equivalent of 26 stories, and on a clear day were able to see the scenery in three different states from the top of the circuit. A newspaper reporter who rode the wheel with George and his wife Margaret Ann a few days before it officially opened told of the experience in typically purple prose: "As the mad storm swept round the cars the blast was deafening. It screamed through the thin spider-like girders, and shook the windows

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with savage fury. It was a place to try a man's nerves. The inventor had faith in his wheel; Mrs. Ferris in her husband. But the reporter at that moment believed neither in God nor man." Built to withstand 150-mile-an-hour tornado-force winds, the Ferris Wheel easily survived the remnants of a full-scale hurricane that roared inland off the Atlantic later in the year and did a lot of damage to other exhibits and attractions at the fair.

The ride cost 50 cents per person in 1893 and each ride lasted about 10 minutes – it took that long to make two complete circuits. It was stop-and-go for one circuit of loading and unloading, a full and much faster rotation on the second. The daring and accuracy of its design and the precision of the Ferris Wheel's machine work won the admiration of engineers and the joy and wonder of generations. During the 19 weeks it operated, the Ferris Wheel carried 1,453,611 paying customers. Its gross take was $726,805.50, triple its capital cost, and it was by far the greatest single attraction at the Columbian Exposition. The Ferris Wheel was by no means the only invention unveiled at the Chicago world's fair. Juicy Fruit Gum, Cream of Wheat cereal, diet carbonated soda pop, Pabst Beer, Shredded Wheat, Cracker Jacks, Aunt Jemima Syrup, and hamburgers all made their debuts there. But it was certainly the most spectacular – and least fattening – of them all.

Ultimately, the wheel did little for George Washington Gale Ferris Jr. After the fair closed, much smaller Ferris Wheel reproductions were set up as attractions at amusement parks across the U.S., but they generated little cash for the inventor. He became obsessed with the wheel, investing his dwindling cash reserves in schemes to build and sell bigger and better wheels across the country and around the world. But there were no buyers, and George's wife finally left him in early 1896 as he slumped deeper into despair and depression. He moved into a cheap hotel in Pittsburgh, where a friend asked him during this troubled period in his life if he had other projects in mind. "Better not say," George replied in a dark whisper. "Some of them might be too frightening."; He didn't live to see the advent of his machine's offspring – the first roller coaster, ancestor of the high-tech speed thrillers dominating today's fairs and amusement parks. But he finally saw that his great wheel did something much more than compete with the Eiffel Tower. It really did thrust the rider "out into the sky, for the outward curve down" for a mind-boggling vision of reality. Ferris soon took the outward curve down himself, dying the night of Nov. 21, 1896 in Pittsburgh's Mercy Hospital, with no one at his side. Newspaper obituaries reported that George had died of typhoid fever, tuberculosis or Bright's disease, a kidney ailment. His marital and financial problems gave rise to rumors of suicide, but no real evidence has ever surfaced that he took his own life. He simply refused to seek the medical attention that might have kept him alive. "He was eminently engaging and social," two engineering colleagues wrote in a memorial, describing George as an entertaining storyteller fond of amusing his friends with colorful anecdotes. They portrayed him as an optimist, convinced that he would ultimately overcome any troubles. Even in the darkest times, "he was ever looking for the sunshine to come. He had, however, miscalculated his powers of endurance and he died a martyr to his ambition for fame and prominence." George Washington Gale Ferris Jr. was just 37 years old, a lonely, bankrupt, sickly and broken man.

The original Ferris Wheel soon followed him. Seized by sheriff's officers on orders of a bankruptcy court, It was dismantled, eventually transported by rail south and

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reassembled in New Orleans for the Louisiana Purchase Exposition of 1904. But it wasn't nearly as great an attraction in New Orleans as it had been in Chicago – the novelty had worn off for Americans. The wheel was dynamited on May 11, 1906, almost two years after the fair closed, with the rusty metal remnants unceremoniously buried as landfill in the Mississippi delta. A Chicago newspaper lamented its destruction as the loss of "America's rival to the Eiffel Tower"; Engineer William Sullivan of Roodhouse, Illinois, succeeded where George failed. He created the world's first portable Ferris Wheel in Jacksonville, Florida, in 1897 and formed the Eli Bridge Company, the oldest Ferris Wheel maker still in operation today, still making Ferris Wheels rather than Sullivan Wheels.

Fifteen months after Ferris's death, a Pittsburgh crematorium was still holding his ashes, waiting for someone – anyone – to claim the remains of one of the great champions of North American technology, the engineer who proved Americans were capable of topping the Eiffel Tower. But the mad rush of American history into the 20th century had passed him by. Curiously, it was the French who paid George Washington Gale Ferris Jr. the ultimate posthumous compliment. When planning got under way for the Paris Exposition of 1900, the French decided they wanted a Ferris Wheel of their own, just like George's. The French engineers were given a copy of Ferris's original schematics and reconstructed his Ferris Wheel down to the last rivet. The dead inventor's soaring, shocking technological answer to the Eiffel Tower dazzled France, and dazzled Europe.

**Some genealogical notes:**

George Washington Gale Ferris Sr. – (born May 14, 1818 at Norway Township, Herkimer County, New York, on his father's farm, the youngest son of Silvanus, died April 20, 1895 at Riverside California). LDS Batch #8531506. G.W.G was named for the Rev. G. W. Gale, the Presbyterian clergyman with whom Silvanus formed a lifelong friendship that led to the founding of Knox College. George spent his first 10 years in Norway Township, New York, and his next six in Russia, New York. G.W.G went out to the new country in the fall of 1836, and there he remained awaiting the final arrival of his parents and family members that came in the summer of 1837. He married a 20-year-old settler, Martha Edgerton Hyde, on Sept. 3, 1840. She had come to Galesburg in the fall of 1836 with a party of Vermonters who had heard of Dr. Galeâs plan for founding a college and were attracted by the opportunity of exchanging their hardscrabble farms in the Green Mountains for the flat and fertile plains of Illinois. After their marriage, they immediately began farming the 640 acres given George by his father. They subsequently expanded that farm into 1,200 acres, running a dairy operation with 115 cows. In the 1850 census, Martha is credited with $10,000 worth of real estate. In the 1860 census, George is listed as a farmer with $40,000 in real estate and $4,863 in personal property. But in 1864, he became a victim of the western fever, "which seemed to run in the Ferris blood, sold the farm and set out by wagon for ranching country outside of Carson City, Nevada. "I lost $10,000 to $12,000 by the change," George said in a newspaper interview published in 1887 in Galesburg. "The money that I realized from the sale of my property was in greenbacks, but in Carson City gold was used and that was at a market premium. I lost heavily in exchanging the greenbacks for gold." His wife and eight of their 10 children arrived five months behind him and they took up residence in a rudimentary ranch house in a fertile valley a few miles south of Carson City. Their ranch was not far from where Billie Cradlebaugh

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had built a bridge across the Carson River, near the present town of Minden. They lived there for six years, then moved into Carson City proper, which was only six years old when the Ferris family arrived. They built a home in 1869 at 311 South Division Street. It was known as the Ardery House, named after Alexander M. Ardery, G.W.G.'s son-in-law. It was restored in 1978 and placed on the National Register of Historical Places in February, 1979. It is now called the Ferris Mansion. The city had been settled in 1858 as a trading post and named in honor of Kit Carson, the American frontiersman. When Nevada was made a state in 1864, Carson City was named the capitol and it was G.W.G. Ferris who landscaped the state capitol in 1871 and 1872. He planted the grounds with trees, many of which are still standing – hickory, black walnut, butternut, chestnut, maples of various types that George Ferris brought in by the boxcar from the east. In the 1875 Carson City directory, he listed himself as a "farmer and horticulturalist," which seems to have been the main thrust of his business life in Nevada. In 1880, the Ferris family moved to California, taking up residence in Riverside, where George was one of the earliest settlers and founders. G.W.G. made four train trips across the United States after settling in California, on the recently completed trans-continental railway. He visited his old home in Illinois twice. On Aug. 10, 1887 he was in the disastrous wreck of a Niagara Falls excursion train at Chatsworth, Illinois, that killed 85 people and injured another 215. George escaped serious injury and helped rescue numerous victims from the wrecked coaches. His last trip east was in 1893, when, at the World's Fair in Chicago, he shared with paternal pride the great engineering triumph of his son and namesake, the inventor of the Ferris Wheel. On this visit to Illinois, he attended with his wife, at Galesburg – Sept. 5, 1893 – a great picnic reunion of the Ferris family at Lake George, east of the city, attended by some 60 members of the clan. In the 1889 Riverside City and County Directory, G.WG. is listed as a horticulturist at the corner of Magnolia and Madison, Riverside. His obituary from the Galesburg Republican Register, April 22, 1895 reads as follows: Ferris, G. W. – a telegram received yesterday afternoon told of the death of the father of Fred Ferris. G. W. was 77 years old and died at his home in Riverside, California, Saturday night. The deceased was the son of Mr. and Mrs. Sylvanus Ferris and came to this country with his parents at an early age. He assisted the Rev. George Gale in founding Galesburg. He remained here until 1864 when he disposed of his farm he owned west of the city and in company with a number of others he started by wagon across the plains for Carson City, Nevada where he remained for some time finally going to southern California. He was a Christian in every sense of the word and since coming to Galesburg helped to establish the Brick Congregational Church. He married Martha Hyde in Galesburg, she survived him. Also surviving were children: Fred of Galesburg, Benjamin of Riverside, George W. G. of Wheel fame, in Pittsburg, Pennsylvania, Mrs. Maggie Danburg of Carson City, Nevada, Mrs. Callie Barber of Riverside, Mrs. Mattie Shultz and Mrs. Mary Ardway of Carson City.

His Wife: Martha Edgerton Hyde (born Oct. 24, 1820, Plattsburg, New York, died March 23, 1897) Martha was the daughter of of Jabez Perkins and Martha (Edgerton) Hyde. They had ten children, including: 9. Son – George Washington Gale Ferris Jr. – (born Feb. 14, 1859, Galesburg, Knox, Illinois, died Nov. 22, 1896, in Pittsburgh)