

The Road To Poplar—Jordans

By Dave Jordan

Imagine an English woman, 46 years of age, dressed in a long, black ruffled skirt, white blouse and bonnet, strolling down the Midway Plaisance¹ at the World's Columbian Exposition² in Chicago in the late summer of 1893. Her name is Elizabeth Priscilla **JORDAN**. On her left is her younger brother, Charles **STEWARD**, 42, and on her right, her eldest son, James Oscar Jordan, now 25. The men wear the everyday dark suit coats and hats of the era. In front of them, her second son, Charles Jordan, 20, walks to the left of his grandmother Elizabeth Steward, now in her young 60s, and on her right is 13-year-old James Henry Jordan. The huge Ferris Wheel looms in the distance and the two Elizabeths (daughter and mother), the two Charleses (nephew and uncle) and the two Jameses (brothers) are enjoying the sites, sounds, pleasant smells of food, and the excitement of the Exposition.



Chicago Midway Plaisance - 1893
(with thanks to Wikimedia Commons)

There is a vast attendance at the fair that summer, cumulatively half the population of the United States. The effort leads to a major development of less populated lands seven miles south of the city. The fair showcases Chicago's vitality, leadership in architecture and industrialization, and pushes Chicago onto the world scene as a magnet for commerce and jobs. Chicago, the fastest growing major city of the 1890s, is a melting

¹ The Midway Plaisance is currently a mile-long linear park, called the Midway on the south side of Chicago between 59th and 60th Streets. It joins Washington and Jackson Parks with the University of Chicago buildings on the north and south sides.

² Wikipedia: World's Columbian Exposition

pot of immigrants, mostly from Europe, who fill the ever-expanding need for workers.



Columbian Exposition - 1893
from stereo opticom card
(with thanks to Wikipedia and Infrogmation)



Ferris Wheel on Midway Plaisance - 1893
(with thanks to Wikimedia Commons)



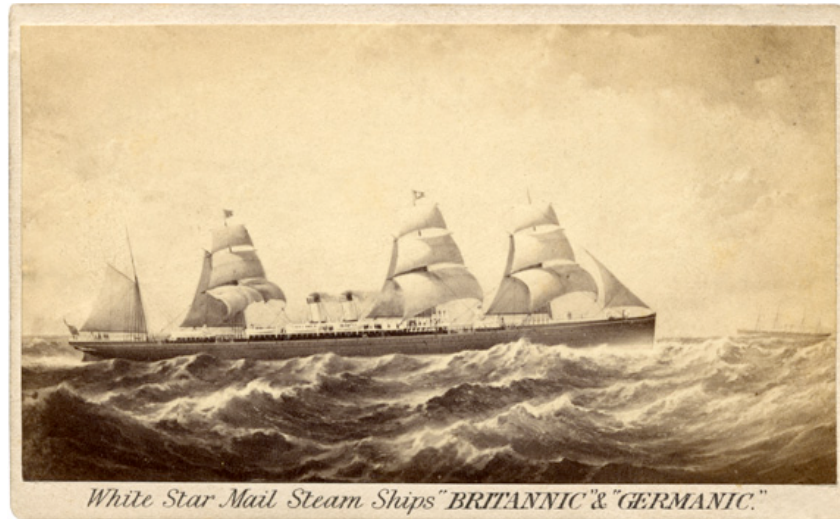
**Jordan Boys on Bikes
at Columbian Exposition - 1893**

l to r: James Henry, Charles and James Oscar Jordan
(with permission of David Jordan)

The scene flashes back to the bustling port of Liverpool where a few weeks earlier Elizabeth Priscilla Jordan, recently widowed, her second and third sons, Charles and James Henry, and her mother, Elizabeth Steward, also a recent widow, have just arrived from central London by rail. They are about to board the White Star Line's *Britannic*, each with a single piece of baggage. They are four of about 80 steerage passengers, and the *Britannic* will be their home for nine days. The steerage fare is \$25 dollars or about £5 English pounds. The *Britannic*³ is a combination steamship and sailing ship that plies the heavily trafficked Liverpool-to-New York route. It carries primarily emigrants to the United States along with the mail. Its iron hull measures 455 feet long by 45 feet wide. It has two funnels and four sailing masts; two positioned in front of the funnels

³ Wikipedia: SS Britannic (1874)

and two located behind. The sailing masts are adjustable, designed to take advantage of the winds to conserve fuel. After embarking from Liverpool on Wednesday, August 9, 1893, the *Britannic* stops in Queenstown, Ireland (now Cobh) where about 230 Irish emigrants embark for the North Atlantic crossing. Captain Smith and the *Britannic* then continue from Queenstown at 1:30 p.m. on Thursday, August 10 for New York.



**White Star Line Mail Steam Ships
“Britannic” and “Germanic”**

2x4 carte visite, circa 1870

A week later, on Thursday evening, August 17 at 10 p.m. the *Britannic* is sighted off of Fire Island and the news is transmitted to the *New York Times* for inclusion in their August 18 *Marine Intelligence* listing.

Then on Friday, August 18, 1893, the *Britannic* once again enters New York harbor. On her port she passes the seven-year-old *Statue of Liberty* and then slows to dock at the newly opened Ellis Island. After a quick processing, medical check, and exchange of English pounds to US dollars, our three Jordans and one Steward take a short ferry ride to the Central Railroad of New Jersey Terminal⁴. Here they board one of about 300 trains that daily transport immigrants and goods. The family chooses a Chicago-bound train pulled by a steam-belching locomotive for the 800-mile journey across New Jersey, the hills of Pennsylvania, the flat lands of Ohio and Indiana, and into Illinois.

The train makes many stops along the way, disembarking and loading new passengers. Finally, it pulls into the Chicago rail station. Once in Chicago the family reunites with Elizabeth Jordan’s brother Charles Steward and her son James Oscar Jordan. Both Charles and James Oscar had left England many years before in order to find work in the new

⁴ Wikipedia: Liberty State Park (includes links to Ellis Island and the Central Railroad of New Jersey)

world. They then travel a few miles west to the Douglas Park area of Chicago and settle in at their new home at 1469 Fillmore Street. The small family is now reunited, perhaps prompted by the widowhood of both Elizabeth P. Jordan and her mother, Elizabeth Steward.

*If my **Jordan Family History** were a movie, the opening segments would include the above scenes: the family enjoying the 1893 Chicago Exposition, the embarking at Liverpool, their arrival at New York harbor, a locomotive steaming across Pennsylvania and arriving at a classic Chicago rail station. The story is a fair representation of what actually happened, including their attendance at the Exposition. Although the scene of the family walking on the Chicago's Midway Plaisance is fictitious, it is probable.*

Our Jordan family handed down no letters and little oral history. In fact, almost nothing was known except for a couple of names. However, after many years of investigating, I was able to reconstruct what happened in America and eventually determine the exact locale of their home in England. Determining specific origin and name of the ship is, in a way, the "holy grail" of American family genealogists.

The scene in my movie now advances to September 1974. My wife and I are touring London, Amsterdam, Brussels and Paris, viewing and enjoying the sites. I am nearing 30 and have no interest in my ancestors. But while in London, England and Amsterdam, Netherlands I vaguely recall that some of my great-grandparents were from those countries if not those cities. I wonder, "Am I walking in their footsteps? Who were they and what were their names?"

Within a year I begin to query my parents for the names and origins of my four sets of immigrant g-grandparents. I discover I have one pair from the Netherlands, another from Germany, one set from what was then Bohemia, a g-grandfather from England and a g-grandmother from Montreal. By my generation, many of their names were unknown. During my parent's generation, their countries were known, but cities and villages of origin were unknown except for one g-grandfather who was born in De Cocksdorp, Netherlands. All knowledge of their languages and customs had disappeared except for a few words and phrases and a few short remembrances.

How fast it all fades away! The immigrant arrives full of pride about his heritage and culture. Yet even within the first generation, the children are quickly assimilated into the new lifestyle—in fact, so fast that in the very diverse city of Chicago, all my grandparents married someone whose parents' origins were from another country. And so it was that my grandfather of Bohemian extraction married a woman of Dutch descent, and my grandfather of English/Irish lineage married a woman of German parents. And the mixing of origins in our family and in America continues.

The scene now changes. It is 1975 and you are looking over my shoulder as I sit at my desk, equipped with a pencil, pad, typewriter, envelopes and stamps. There is no computer or internet connection. Those old enough will remember those by-gone days when all genealogical

research was done through letters to libraries, archives and repositories. And most important were those hand-written letters to distant great-uncles, aunts and cousins you had never met.

Within a year, I finish searching most of the usual sources in Chicago and Illinois for the Jordans. Records indicate that England was the Jordan's origin; but no city is mentioned. Extended family recollections, though, suggest that the Jordans came from London. And though it is a starting place, London is such a large city that confirming information will still be difficult.

In 1977, I discover that there is a nationwide index of birth records in England kept at St. Catherine's House. I request a search of birth registrations for James Oscar Jordan (born February 18) and his mother, Elizabeth Priscilla Steward (born February 27) within a likely five-year range. After weeks of waiting, I receive the response all genealogists dread—the *Not Found* box has been checked. The next year I try to obtain Elizabeth Priscilla Steward's marriage registration to a Jordan using only her name and a guess at a five-year range, but again, the dreaded *Not Found* box comes back checked.

I am now almost out of options. But I have one more chance, and that is to find out more about James Henry Jordan, the teenage half-brother of James Oscar Jordan⁵ who arrived in Chicago in 1893 and later settled in Madison, Wisconsin. My search of Madison City Directories year-by-year yields addresses and occupations from 1904 through 1965. A death certificate indicates that James Henry Jordan died on September 20, 1967 at age 87 as a result of being struck by an automobile. It also states his date of birth as December 26, 1879 in London, England. In the cemetery records is a newspaper clipping that shows an address for next of kin, and I am able to contact his daughter, Janet.

We meet and she provides me with James Henry Jordan's October 1964 biography in the *Scottish Rite News*, a Masonic organization publication. The biography conveyed much information, in particular, the reference to his arrival in the U.S. in August 1893. That information leads me, in 1978, to do a ship-by-ship, passenger-by-passenger search of New York ship arrival records. Beginning with August 1, 1893 and proceeding day-by-day, reading tens of thousands of handwritten, faded names on microfilm, I finally find the Jordans on the August 18, 1893 *Britannic's* manifest!

I now know when they came and also the name of the ship. And I have confirming information that they had left from London but not where in London.

Using the newly found information on James Henry Jordan, born December 26, 1879 in London, England, I try St. Catherine's House

⁵ James Oscar Jordan and James Henry Jordan were half-brothers. The text uses middle names to minimize confusion. Why they both had the same first name is discussed in *Road to Poplar - My Surname is What? Cockney Ancestor*, No. 136, Autumn 2012.

again. In late September 1978, almost 99 years after his birth, a copy of his birth registration arrives at my home in New Jersey. It states that his parents were James Jordan and Elizabeth Priscilla Holloway Jordan, formerly Steward. And then I notice a street address. James was born at 4 Wade Street, **Poplar**, England. Poplar is in the Borough of Tower Hamlets in an area of London called the East of London.

It had taken three years to find the Jordan's specific neighborhood in England. I was very pleased as were my dad, siblings, aunts and uncles who had never known their origins. I was on my way and thought it would be easy to discover much more. But 30 years later, the Jordan unclocking continues. Many unexpected surprises have popped up along the way, and they will be related in upcoming sequels of The Road to Poplar.

Notes

1. The original *Road to Poplar - Jordans* article was written in March 2008 and submitted to the East of London Family History Society's quarterly publication, the *Cockney Ancestor* for publication. The article was published in early 2009 in *Cockney Ancestor*, No. 121, Winter 2009.
2. This updated version contains additional photos and additional information about the fares, dates and length of the *Britannic's* transatlantic crossing in August 1893.
3. Special thanks are in order to my sister Marianne Garcher for her excellent proofreading and input in the creation of this document.
4. In 1989, I joined the East of London Family History Society and in the mid-1990s became its first Webmaster. I stood down from that position in 2000.

Photo Captions

1. *Chicago Midway Pleasanc - 1893* with thanks to Wikimedia Commons; Wikipedia search word: Columbian Exposition.
2. *Ferris Wheel on Midway Pleasance - 1893* with thanks to Wikimedia Commons; Wikipedia search word: Ferris Wheel.
3. *Columbian Exposition - 1893* from stereo opticom card with thanks to Wikipedia and Infrogmation; Wikipedia search word: Columbian Exposition.
4. *Jordan Boys on Bikes at Columbian Exposition - 1893 (l to r: James Henry, Charles and James Oscar Jordan)*; with permission of David Jordan
5. *White Star Line Mail Steam Ships "Britannic" and "Germanic" 2x4 carte visite, circa 1870* with thanks to Wikimedia Commons; Wikipedia search word: SS-Britannic (1874).

File Information

Master File Name: Stories_The_Road_To_Poplar_Jordan

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Contact: [Dave Jordan](#)

What's New

Going forward it is intended to briefly describe what major items were added since the last version of this document.

1. 10/18/2017: Miscellaneous format changes.
2. 6/13/2013: Corrected a mistake in the wording within File Connections.
3. 12/16/2012: Primarily formatting changes and fixes of a few typo's.
4. 4/22/2009: Initial Jordan Web Publication. Includes additional information not available when published in *Cockney Ancestor*, No. 121, Winter 2009. In particular, additional photos and additional information about the fares, dates and length of the *Britannic's* transatlantic crossing in August 1893.

File Connections

As follows are other files that connect with The Jordan Story. All are available at [Jordan PDF Downloads](#) as individual pdf documents with titles and file names as listed below.

The Jordan Story

File: Stories_Jordan.pdf

Summary: The Jordan Story provides a written history of the origins of our Jordan family. As part of this story there are many appendices and sections.

Recollections of the Jordans

File: Recollections_Jordan.pdf

Summary: Recollections of the Jordans provides a collection of short anecdotes and memories of our Jordan family.

The Road to Poplar - Jordans

File: Stories_The_Road_To_Poplar_Jordan.pdf

Author: Dave Jordan

Published: East of London Family History Society/Cockney Ancestor

The Road to Poplar - Stewards

File: Stories_The_Road_To_Poplar_Steward.pdf

Author: Dave Jordan

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The Road to Poplar - My Surname is What?

File: Stories_The_Road_To_Poplar_Name.pdf

Author: Dave Jordan

Published: East of London Family History Society/Cockney Ancestor