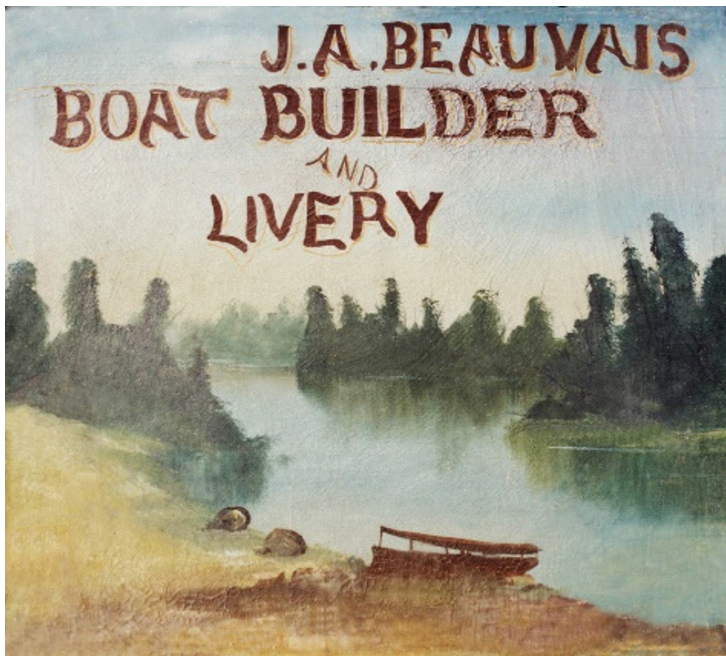


Looking Back #9

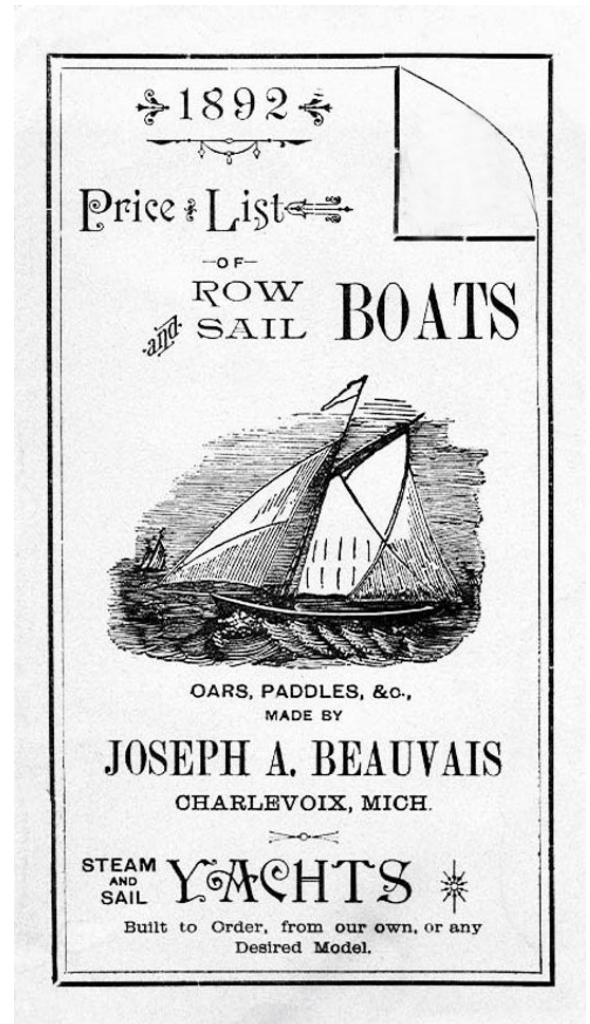
Charlevoix's Displays at World Fairs

By David L. Miles, Curator
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Did you know that Charlevoix has sent two of its citizens to a world's fair in Chicago to display their exquisite handiwork, one in 1893, the other forty years later in 1933-1934? Both times involved boats, the first the actual thing, the second an astonishing model. 1893 was by personal invitation from the fair itself, 1933 was the result of a competition. One was a professional boat builder, the other a hobbyist. Here are their stories.



The original Beauvais sign, oil on canvas



Joseph Beauvais, born in the Canadian province of Quebec around 1854, was one of the most versatile and prolific boat builders ever to put down roots in Charlevoix. His boatyard stood on the southeast shore of Round Lake near the Belvedere Club resort. Over the winter of 1880-81, he manufactured thirty-five rowboats and 800 spoon oars. The *Charlevoix Sentinel* newspaper reported in April of 1886 that "Mr. Beauvais has a reputation in boat-building not excelled by any." An example was one custom-designed boat that contained seventeen different kinds of wood "artistically laid according to colors." In March of 1889, he began constructing forty-five rowboats. A year later the number had grown to 110 boats, "12 to 14 feet long, and rigged for sailing," docked at his three rental liveries.

These lucrative liveries were located at the Belvedere Club's boathouse 'bayou' off Belvedere Avenue, the Chicago Club's waterside property along Old River that used to be the main outlet from Lake Charlevoix, and a stretch of the west side of Round Lake below today's Bridge Street Tap Room for the summer tourist crowd. In the day, Beauvais was said by many to have the largest and best-built livery fleet of any resort in Michigan. By 1896, his success led to a second location in Harbor Springs north of Charlevoix, by which time the perfectionist had achieved one of the highest reputations for boatbuilding on the Great Lakes.



The Chicago Club livery on Old River



The Belvedere Club livery in its boathouse 'bayou'



Beauvais's Round Lake livery between Clinton Street and the lower channel, established for the summer tourist trade



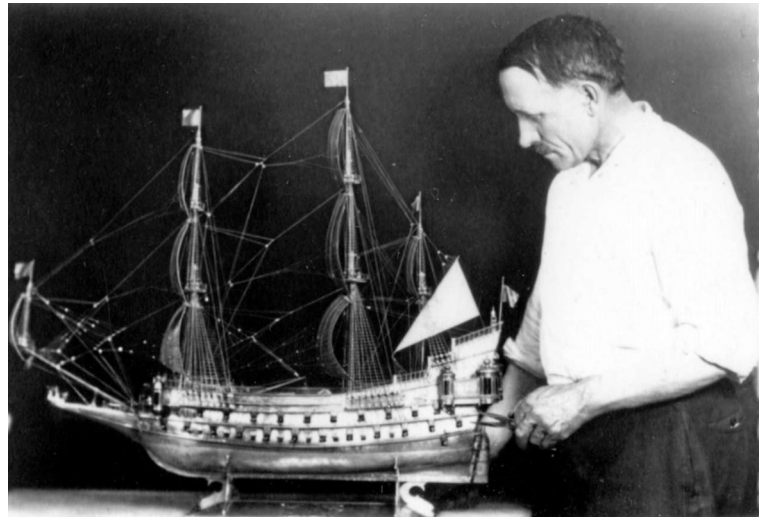
In December of 1892 came news that the Beauvais Boat and Canoe Co. had been awarded a coveted space in the Transportation Exhibit at the Chicago World's Columbian Exposition of 1893, the famous 'White City' that would become the sensation of its time. The *Sentinel* reported that "those who are familiar with the fine work that Beauvais has turned out in the past will not be surprised to see a display at the World's Fair from Charlevoix that will take the shine from all others of a like character." It was one of the crowning events of Beauvais's long career.

The final years of his life remain uncertain. In 1896, a serious fire broke out at the Charlevoix boatyard. By around 1900, Beauvais appears to have relocated to Louisiana, and apparently severed all connections to Charlevoix. He was last reported to be living in Picayune, Alabama in 1912.



Once the location of Frank Novotny & Son Plumbing, background, beside the 1968 Charlevoix Public Library being constructed on Clinton Street. That building would become the Charlevoix Circle of Arts after the turn of the century.

Frank Novotny was born in 1882 in Czechoslovakia. He learned the artistry of metal working at an early age, studied art, and traveled all over southern Europe as a young man, becoming interested in ships after seeing sailing vessels in the ports of Italy. Model ship building became a hobby in his late youth. After emigrating to Detroit, Frank arrived in Charlevoix in 1916. He founded a plumbing trade alongside other members of his family, their longtime business first located in a lengthy building on Clinton Street where the Circle of Arts parking area is today.



Frank constructed an all-metal galleon called *La Couronne*, 'The Crown,' from January 14, 1929 to May 31, 1933. The boat was modeled on a French man-of-war from 1638. Assisted at times by his son James, Frank spent 2468 hours on the model. They worked in a converted chicken coop on their farm south of Charlevoix in Marion Township. *La Couronne* is 32" by 32" and contains 3482 pieces of metal, mainly copper and brass, each piece individually hand-crafted including all ropes and masts. Every gun is on wheels and may be moved back and forth.

Upon the model's completion, a friend suggested to Frank that he enter it in a contest for model ships at the huge upcoming "Century of Progress" Exposition in Chicago, 1933-1934. Before this happened, *La Couronne* was displayed in Don Campbell's Boot Shop on Bridge Street.

The model was taken to Chicago by Belvedere Club member Logan Thompson aboard his palatial yacht *Sylvia*. *La Couronne* won first prize and was displayed in its own place of honor in the fair's Transportation Building. Critics of the time found but a slight variance from the original. After the fair, the model returned to Charlevoix where it was exhibited in the office of the *Charlevoix Courier*. In the fall of 1948, Frank took *La Couronne* to San Diego for exhibit at Brookings Hardware, afterward to the Fine Arts Museum in Balboa Park. The model then remained in the possession of the Novotny family until it came to the Charlevoix Historical Society in the late 1970s, over twenty years after Frank's death in 1956.

