

Business Efficiency and Sports at Pullman

WILMA J. PESAVENTO

University of Illinois — Chicago Circle

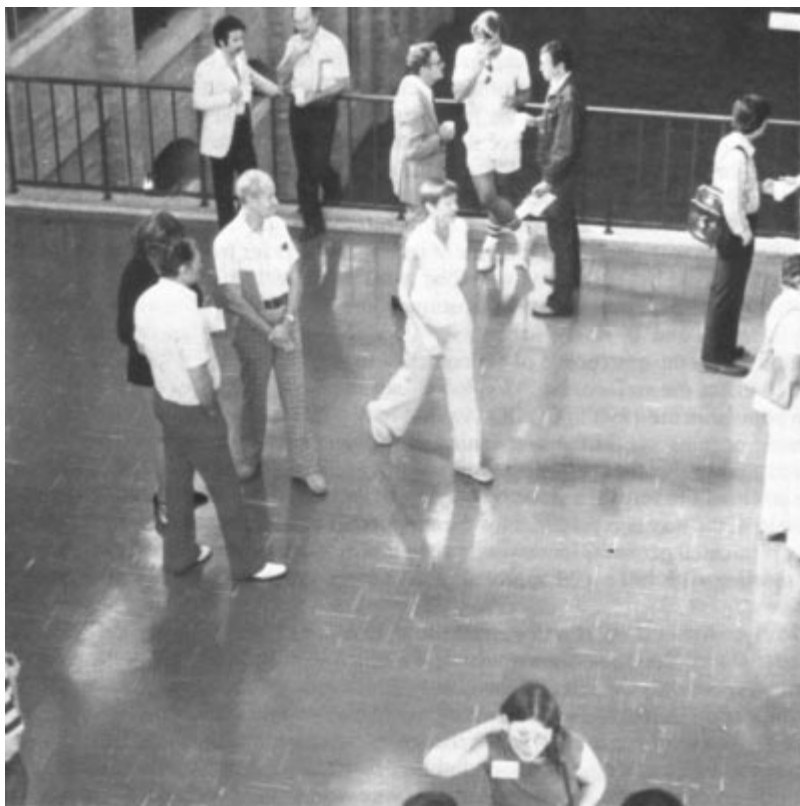
George M. Pullman, post Civil War businessman and member of Chicago's entrepreneur-set of the golden age, built the town of Pullman "overnight" in the early 1880's as a model community for the production of railroad cars and for the housing of the workers. Beyond attendance to physical needs, Pullman wanted to help the inhabitants improve themselves by engendering values, which Pullman referred to as habits of respectability and which he also deemed important to the success of the Pullman Palace Car Company. Pullman believed his community environment would develop a superior type of American working man. Seeing nothing wrong in a society oriented toward the profit motive, he intended to apply principles of business efficiency to meet the needs of the worker. In keeping with this idea, most building in the town was expected to repay the company a six percent profit on its cost, be it home, church, or store.

A number of facilities and structures, in addition to homes, were built almost at the beginning of the red-brick model town. The Arcade, the Florence Hotel, Greenstone Church, Market Hall, the Casino, the public elementary school, Pullman Stable, recreational park, and Athletic Island provided the inhabitants of Pullman with the comforts and luxuries of which George Pullman spoke. The Arcade, a block long and ninety feet high, was the most impressive in town. Begun in 1881, only one year after the acquisition of land, it cost over \$250,000 and contained some seventeen shops, a grand opera house, a public library, a gymnasium, and a museum. Included in the rooms rented to various proprietors were two rented by the YMCA in which town athletes worked out in preparation for annual athletic events. To accommodate the many visitors to the small town and also to serve the residents, the Florence Hotel, named after George Pullman's favorite daughter, was built. At the Florence Hotel the Pullman Athletic Association entertained the visiting athletes and officials of the first national track and field tournament held at Pullman in October, 1882. On the second floor of Market Hall, designed as a market place for fresh meats and vegetables, was a public hall which held 600 people. Washington's birthday was observed each year in this beautifully decorated room. The Pullman Stables were built just south of the Arcade Building to house the Pullman fire department, a livery business, and the horses that were privately owned. In the fall of 1882, foundations were laid for another building at Pullman, the Casino. The main floor housed the repair shops for the town while its second story was devoted to club-rooms, society halls, and photographic galleries. Pullman had a number of social organizations, one of which, the Men's Society, used the first floor and basement of the Casino building. After various renovations, the first floor accommodated an assembly room, gymnasium, and reading room while the basement housed a bowling alley and a bath facility. Ground was broken for the public elementary school south of the Arcade in the spring of 1882. The basement of the school was fitted for a playground for the children in the winter, while the large acre and a half lot upon which the school stood was laid out as an outdoor playground.

One of the town's forty organizations, the Pullman Athletic Club was especially active in sponsoring sporting events in the town. The proceeds of these events were used to maintain the athletic facilities of the athletic island and recreational park and to purchase equipment for the town's various athletic teams. The twelve acre recreational park was located at Florence Boulevard and the lakefront. This 600 foot square play field was devoted

to baseball and cricket, and by 1882 baseball teams were vying for the privilege of wearing the Pullman label against various teams from Chicago. The cricket team was acclaimed the best team west of the Hudson River and held the “championship of the west.” From the recreational park a wooden bridge led to an artificial island, a hundred feet off the shore. An ornately designed boathouse and two huge grandstands were constructed on the island. The smaller of the two overlooked Lake Calumet where spectators could watch topnotch oarsmen and crew teams in various annual regattas of both national and local nature. The regattas of the Mississippi and the National Rowing Association were held in Lake Calumet as early as 1883. The larger of the two grandstands overlooked a one-sixth mile oval cinder track on the island itself. This amphitheater accommodated 7000 spectators who viewed many prize-winning track and field contests including an 1882 Fourth of July tournament open to Pullman athletes. A later fall tournament, where noted athletes of the country vied for prizes, was the capstone of the Pullman Athletic Club in those early ears.

By various means George M. Pullman, railroad entrepreneur of the Gilded Age, had showcased his model town in athletics by the end of the 19th century. He had created an athletic mecca designed according to the visionary’s sense of business efficiency. where-by a structured social climate sought the social regeneration of the worker in an effort to mold industrial efficiency.



Coffee break time between sessions at the Texas Jester Center