September 15th, 1896.

Mr. James W. Ellsworth,

Union National Bank, Chicago.

Dear Ellsworth:

As requested by you, I have been making a new study, in order, if possible, to suggest a location for the Museum, away from the center of the Lake Park, but still upon it.

The size and importance of the building demands a commanding position for it, which can only be found either at one of the two ends, or at the center of the Park.

If located at the north end, the Museum must be placed on the axis of the Art Institute; any movement north or south from this will injure the appearance of both buildings, and at the same time the design of the lake front as a whole. Placed here, the Museum will entirely hide the military buildings and will destroy the parade ground; besides this, it will itself be hidden by the Art Institute, except as viewed from the Lake Front Park.
Apart from these practical considerations, the lake front, east of the Illinois Central Railroad, will be dominated by a principal object at one end, instead of in its center. Now, if this lake front park is to be a woodland, or filled with winding paths, there can be no objection to placing the principal building at one end; but no trained landscape man will think of informal or sylvan treatment for this ground. The lake park is surrounded with buildings; everything is artificial, and the conditions, therefore, dictate a treatment in harmony with the architectural idea.

If the Museum is located at either end of the park, you would place it as far to the south as possible, and I would agree with you in this, for, if moved much to the north of the South end, it will awkwardly cramp the remainder of the park, making the general design lop-sided and ugly. At the south end, the Museum would come partially behind the Illinois
Central Depot, and the two buildings near together cannot have any proper relation to each other. Therefore, the Museum must suffer, because the Depot, with its great tower, its awkward general form and color, is bound to dominate everything around it. The result of placing the Museum there would be a go-as-you-please general arrangement, very far removed from the noble subordination and harmonious interrelations that made the Court of Honor what it was. The Museum would be isolated from Michigan Avenue and there would be a difficulty in opening the outside driveway from Jackson Park properly into the down-town space. The approach to this driveway would be hidden behind the Museum buildings, whereas it should be treated monumentally, as I said when talking with you the other day.

I can only see inferior design in locating the Museum at either end of the park; I mean I can only see design which is obviously inferior to what may be if the building is placed in the center of the park.
The Field Museum will be the most extensive and important public building in the country, except those of the Government at Washington. I hope that it will be the most beautiful. Its proper place is upon the intersection of the principal axes of the Lake Front. From Michigan Avenue it will be a magnificent object, a real and competent center of design for such a noble formal terrace as you propose to place in front of the old city of Chicago.

If, because of petty annoyances in administration, or because of possible friction among the lesser authorities of the Park and the Museum, you cast away this great opportunity, you will be condemned by posterity. It does not seem big-minded, to turn oneself away from an opportunity that only comes once in four or five hundred years, because of minor annoyances, incident to administration. It does not seem like you at all. The noble splendid thing is what you should advocate and back, and that is, a mighty design with the great Museum as its dominating center.

Yours as ever,

(Signed) D. H. Burnham.