Bryson (2010) *At Home* is a compelling book for people who might think that history is a dull subject. His style inevitably draws a reader into a sense of participating in a thoroughly lively experience in events that may have taken place a century or more before any of us were here…or there, as the case may be.
If we’d like a sense of what else was going on in that 5-year slice of mid-19th century that we missed but identified earlier, try Bryson. His focus on the Crystal Palace is choice, and its very magnitude captures readers’ attention.
Bryson (2010) *At Home*

[100,000 years before present (100 kybp): onset of Last Glacial Maximum (LGM)]
CE 1810-20 DeWitt Clinton’s Erie Canal; effect on American Industrial Revolution.
1830-31 Chas. Darwin obeyed father, Robert; withdrew from *Beagle* Expedition #2; Uncle Josiah Wedgwood saved the day;
1832 British Emancipation (of slaves) en-Acted;
1842-Darwin’s outline for *Origin of Species* completed;
1846 American Whaling fleet = 650 ships, largest by far; Huge hailstorm, U.K.
1850 – Marsham, Norfolk Rector, Bryson’s home;
1850-51 Crystal Palace built for 1851 Exposition, Hyde Park
Mid-19th Century >50% urban dwelling by English; 20% Anglican Church attendance;
Brits living a life of plenty;
1850 midwinter storm, much damage, but half-built Crystal Palace unscathed; During storm, Skara Brae revealed, Neolithic village of 15 kybp; good housing, good food; p.138 servants; gamekeeping; 6th Baron Walsingham (1,070 grouse/ 1day)
By 19th century fashion: ridiculous, uncomfortable p.541, wigs caught fire;
1851 Marx & Engels both in London;
1851 Chas. Darwin’s *Cirripedia* manuscript;
1853 Bissell petroleum (Drake credited); By 1900 electric lights, Swan, Edison;
1856 British **Royal Charter** sunk by disastrous gale, Moelfre, Wales
1858 (July) A.R. Wallace sent his MS to Chas. Darwin;
1859 (Nov.) **Origin** 1st Edition published; Wallace & Darwin shared deep time, prehistory concepts;
1863 **Phylloxera** aphid in U.S.==>Europe; vine-killing in France p. 396ff.
1889-91 **Eiffel Tower**; biggest, most advanced engineering; most obsolete material; most useless; longest lived? 130 workers, no fatalities, <2 years to complete; 1892-1930: tallest (Chrysler Bldg topped it) greatest and last built of iron; 18,000 joints. 1901 J P Morgan- US Steel amalgam; 2x US Fed Govt by ann. Revenue, & still growing;

1990 Neolithic Ötzi (~5 kybp) discovered, European Alps;

Here are a few milestones either side of the 1850-55 time slice that either Bryson or I have chosen to highlight.
The 1851 opening of the Crystal Palace is depicted here.
Among noteworthy events in *La Belle Epoque* or Gilded Age was the construction of the Eifel Tower in Paris.

Here’s a currently practically useless structure that has a footprint comparable to that of the metropolis of downtown Fairbanks (bounded by the Chena River, Cowles and Lacey Streets, and Airport Way). Annual visitorship to that tower in the first 5 years of the 21st century topped 6 million paid entrants per year. What is the annual visitor count to the State of Alaska?
Besides astonishing the engineering profession by its completion in a few short months, by its 4 anchoring legs not collapsing before they were joined at their tops by the first encircling structures of iron joined those legs, and by lasting so long, this visitor destination continues to attract attention well over a century since its completion.
Its elevator systems may have looked impractical in the 1880s, but their pioneering design has served well.
Here is the very Treasury Warrant that ceded Russian America to the United States in 1867. Cost then was $7.2 million. The phenomenon of “scoundrelism” was not new. history.

If Norman Rockwell had lived in the gilded age (1868-1890) he could have painted these rich depictions of the home lives of well-to-do persons. The Rockwell of the Gilded Age was Julius LeBlanc Stewart, the Parisian from Philadelphia.

Of course, we should acknowledge the completion of the trans-continental railroad and completion of the Suez Canal both in 1869, among the signature industrial feats of the age.
With railroads, canals, commerce, newspapers, industrialization…there were unheard-of concentrations of wealth…and power.

Yachting was one pursuit of the tremendously wealthy.

When the afternoon sun threatened to enervate the passengers, the crew spread an awning to protect the affluent. Here’s the same yacht and the same cast of characters as depicted in the 1890 Stewart painting.

The model for Stewart’s 1890 and 1896 paintings of the gentleman at the center of this painting is the owner/publisher of the *New York Herald, James Gordon Bennett, Jr.*, of whom there is much more to say. He happened to own this yacht, the Namoura. The lady at the far right is Lillie Langtry, a French-born actress, model, socialite and mistress to a number of Gilded Age figures including England’s Prince Bertie, later King Edward VII.

How many of us have been watching the first season of Queen Victoria on Masterpiece Theater?
The artist, Stewart, had a sharp eye simultaneously for beauty, craftsmanship, and the body language of dogs. Speaking of “correcting memory,” this painting by Stewart reminds me of the Fountainhead Antique Automobile Museum here in Fairbanks. The very year that Soapy Smith’s gang plundered hapless gold-seekers in Skagway, this horseless carriage was catching the fancy of wealthy Europeans. As the Fountainhead Museum demonstrates, the late 19th and early 20th centuries marked an awesome explosion of technological creativity in Europe and America. One that is widely lost to memory, except by exceptional artists and in extraordinary museum collections.

SHOW OF HANDS: How many of you have visited our world-class Antique Automobile Museum?