

The Show Goes On

Jonathan Shipley explores the legacy of Seattle's Alaska-Yukon-Pacific Exposition



IT'S OPENING DAY—June 1, 1909. Thousands are clamouring to enter the grounds. Those inside are putting the finishing touches on booths and exhibits. The Haunted Swing is ready to be swung. Ralph Hodgins has put out his finest array of cigars. Harry Fischer is awaiting the chance to guess the weights of attendees who have some nickels to spare. The Hot Waffle and Sandwich Restaurant has its waffles hot. The Battle of Gettysburg amusement is ready for battle. The Fairy Gorge Tickler is awaiting tickled teems of thrill-seekers, tickets in hand. The Puritan Inn Restaurant is eager to serve. Merchandise is available at the Shingle Mill booth and, of course, the Educated Horse, the Infant Incubator and the Dizzle Dazzle are there to entertain. Those, and the Aeroplunge, the Roller Chair, Louis T. Silvain's gondolas and launches, the Humanatone and the Human Laundry. J.H. Revatt's ice will cool everyone down. Items can be purchased at B.Y. Jackson's Knife and Cane rack. Princess Trixie is there and so is George Veasey's palmistry, and Mr. Tomito's rice cakes will tempt hungry fairgoers.

The gates are yet to open and so Elias and Kohn are there with their shooting gallery, Robinson and Rosenthal are hoping for a little rain with their umbrellas for sale, and the Gillespie brothers are hoping people will part with a little cash for their totem pole lead pencils. Alaska newspaper merchandise can be purchased. So can George Piper's *Official Guides*, R.E. Reid's *Official Ground Plans*, and Davis and Dresen's *Official Daily Programs*. All the while, F.H. Nowell, the Official Photographer of the Alaska-Yukon-Pacific Exposition (AYPE), is taking photos of the grounds—rich, new and immaculate on the University of Washington campus.

And the gates open: 89,286 enter that first day, and before those gates close again, some months later on October 16, more than 3.7 million people attend Seattle's first world's fair—a gargantuan number for a young city of just 225,000. Attendees and participants would include the Olmstead

brothers, the famed landscape architects and designers of the AYPE grounds; ukulele master Ernest Kaleihoku Kaa; the grandparents of Jimi Hendrix (who performed in *The Great Dixieland Spectacle*); Seattle mayor John F. Miller and Washington governor Marion E. Hay. William Jennings Bryan visited by storm, giving fiery speeches on five different occasions. The president of the United States, William Howard Taft, arrived in late September for the festivities and, before playing a round of golf at the Seattle Country Club, toured the grounds, gave speeches, panned for gold, ate olives in the California Building



Source: Wikimedia Commons

(leaving the pit as a souvenir to the manager), reviewed prized livestock at the stadium and, unfortunately, was stung by a bee on the neck during the car ride.

Originally planned for 1907 to mark the 10th anniversary of the Klondike gold rush, the fair was rescheduled to 1909 due to the exposition intended to mark the tricentennial of Jamestown's founding in 1607. The gold rush had transformed the frontier town of Seattle into a city to be reckoned with as some 70,000 stampedeers hit the town to buy outfits en route north to a country made famous in Jack London's *White Fang*, *The Call of the Wild*, and arguably the best short story written by an American writer, "To Build a Fire." A country where famed Canadian poet Robert Service wrote his ballads of *The Shooting of Dan McGrew* and *The Cremation of Sam McGee*. The city prospered mightily because of the prospecting and never looked back. The Alaska-Yukon-Pacific Exposition proved it.

And the celebration continues. Throughout 2009, Seattle has been celebrating the centennial of the world's fair with exhibitions, lectures and special events.

Cultures were a major aspect of the exposition and the centennial was no different, with exhibitions in Seattle on the Arts & Crafts movement in the Pacific Northwest and a symposium highlighting the history of world's fairs. Arguably the best exhibition is the Museum of History and Industry's show, *Photographing the Fair: The A-Y-P Photos of Frank H. Nowell and Others*. Moving to the Northwest, Nowell became the "Official Photographer" of the Alaska-Yukon-Pacific Exposition. He recorded the fair's construction and then the fair itself. The size of Nowell's endeavours warranted a crew of 16 photographers with their oversized cameras and extraneous photographic paraphernalia. The University of Washington's library system houses 660 of Nowell's AYPE images.

The photos are an integral part of the fair's legacy of paper ephemera for Ed Nolan, head of special collections at the Washington State History Museum in Tacoma, Washington. A professional packrat, Nolan has gathered a collection of 50,000 posters, tickets, catalogues, menus and other printed pieces for the museum. Several of these pieces are from the AYPE,

including programs, banners, tickets and more. All counties in the state contributed to the tide of printed material, much of it designed to promote the state as the place to be. Other states and a variety of associations added their own contributions.

Perhaps a program was purchased by someone attending Women of Woodcraft Day (August 4). Or a banner was garnered by someone at Order of the Eastern Star Day (June 15). The tickets may have been pocketed and kept by someone at Hoo Hoo Day (September 9), National Funeral Directors Association Day (September 27) or Maccabees Day, United Spanish War Veterans' Day, Vashon Island Day, Women's Christian Temperance Union Flower Mission Day, Puget Sound Navy Yard Day, Baby Christening Day, Washington Rural Letter Carriers' Day, American Association of Titlemen Day, Foreign Consuls Day, Japan Day, German Day, Manila Day, Idaho Day or International Order of Odd Fellows Day. The museum has scanned a great deal of material, which is on its Web site, WashingtonHistory.org.

When the fair closed on October 16, 1909 (Hurrah Day), millions of people had been bedazzled by it all. They had taken the Vacuum Tube Railway. They had been refreshed at the Welch Grape Juice Company soft drink booth. They had seen the airships, been wowed by the Jinrikishas amusement, been educated at the Carsten Packing Company cattle exhibit. Fairgoers had sat at George Bouckret's Army & Navy Tea Room and had seen Mr. Kushibiki's Destruction of 'Frisco exhibit. They had purchased a magic wand from Mr. Welch and jewellery from the Macomber Manufacturing Company. They had slurped oyster cocktails, purchased "postal cards" and sent them to loved ones with AYPE stamps. All of that is gone now, except in memory and the scripts and scraps that have found their way into the holdings of institutions or lay still within dusty attics and forgotten. No more souvenir badges from Mr. Swezea or rides on Mrs. Hamley's Shetland ponies. No more toys or blown glass or cut flowers from Carlson & Farish. It's all in the past being celebrated today so it's not forgotten about tomorrow.

~ Jonathan Shipley is a freelance writer based on Vashon Island, Washington.

The Exposition Beautiful: The 1909 Alaska-Yukon-Pacific Exposition Legacy in Paper

An extract from a presentation Ed Nolan delivered at the Book Club of Washington's dinner during the Seattle Antiquarian Book Fair on October 10, 2008

THE ORIGINAL INSPIRATION FOR SEATTLE'S world's fair of 1909 came initially from a group of Alaska's gold-rush pioneers who merely wanted to establish an Alaska exhibit in Seattle. Godfrey Chealander of Skagway, and several other leaders of the Arctic Brotherhood, an organization that was originally formed during the Gold Rush era to provide mutual assistance, friendship, and social interaction in the northern communities, were the first to publicize the project. Chealander's previous experience in developing the Alaska exhibit for the 1905 Lewis and Clark Exposition in Portland, gave him the opportunity and experience to develop the idea, and in July of 1905, Seattle's Alaska Club approved the proposal.

The proposal for a 1907 exhibition met with immediate and enthusiastic support from Seattle newspapers and the Chamber of Commerce. In the spring of 1906, fifty Seattle businessmen formed an exposition corporation and suggested a radical expansion of the concept and postponed the opening date from 1907 to 1909 in order to seek financial support from Congress and to avoid a conflict with the Jamestown Exposition previously scheduled for 1907. Perhaps the most important decision they made was that of enlarging the scope of the fair to take in all of the countries bordering the Pacific Ocean, including the islands of the sea.

The official name selection for the exposition was the Alaska-Yukon-Pacific, recognizing and incorporating the importance of Alaska and its role in Seattle and Washington's development; the Yukon for the immense amount of gold that poured forth in the last few years of the nineteenth century and finally made Seattle a city of some significance; and Pacific, hopefully divining Seattle's dominant role in the trade of the Pacific Rim. The Alaska-Yukon-Pacific Exposition.

It was hoped that the exposition would make Seattle the capital of a vast hinterland and a port that would successfully compete with San

Francisco. At the groundbreaking ceremonies on June 1, 1907, Henry McLean, president of the Washington State Commission for the Alaska-Yukon-Pacific Exposition, asserted that the fair would mark the end of the obscurity of pioneer days, as Washington would take its proper place among the great states of the republic, and he expected that Washington would become well known throughout the world for its climate, its economy, and its society.

Four other Western states also erected buildings for the exhibition of their products and resources: Oregon, California, Idaho and Utah. New York was the only state outside the Far West to present a large display. Washington, on the other hand, constructed a significant building that included exhibits from 36 of its 38 counties. The state commission coordinated the individual county commissions, which resulted in quality displays promoting all regions of the state.

And, as might be expected, most exhibits were supplemented with souvenir booklets, souvenir coins, ribbons, and post cards, which were freely distributed to any interested party. And to read these promotional materials, one could only deduce that Washington was paradise on earth, the Garden of Eden. California and Oregon competed vigorously, and their advertising offered golden promises, which easily matched those of Washington.

The exposition left us a rich legacy of paper ephemera. But while the exhibits were attractive and there were lots of promotional freebies, they didn't seem to fully live up to their hoped for educational objectives. The United States commissioner to the Exposition noted that "a great many persons among the large crowds which thronged to the federal building simply wandered around aimlessly, ignoring the guides and looking only for novelties."