

## Tom Marshall's Weekly News, November 8, 2010

**World's Fairs in North America:** For three generations in this country, the epitome of a fun vacation was to visit a short-term exposition, commonly called a World's Fair. I have not researched them all, but I recall some of the well-known ones here. Prince Albert started the ball rolling with the Crystal Palace Exhibition of 1851 in London. Brussels and Paris staged famous ones in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and the latter in 1889 introduced the Eiffel Tower to the world. Hot air balloon rides were also popular (and quite unsafe), and the two bronze statuettes in the front hall at Auburn Heights were cast for the Paris fair.

Not to be outdone, the young United States wanted to be recognized as a place rich enough and resourceful enough to stage its own World's Fair. What better time than to celebrate the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of our country? In 1876, with President Grant officiating, the Centennial Exposition opened in Philadelphia with great fanfare. Marvels of the Industrial Revolution were on display, and George M. Corliss powered almost everything that operated on the grounds with a giant Corliss steam engine. This was also the first time there was a serious interest in antique furniture in this country, as reproductions of the Colonial period were on sale. My mother's oldest sister, Mary Shallcross Ferguson (1876–1976), was carried to the fair on a pillow as a four-week-old infant by her proud parents.

Another great one was the 1893 Columbian National Exposition in Chicago. This major event was carefully described in an edition of the Encyclopaedia Britannica, which came out shortly afterward. Beautiful wood-cut drawings of the major attractions were shown in great detail, and many considered this edition of the Britannica the best one ever. For this fair, George W. Ferris built a mammoth Ferris wheel that carried 2,160 people in 36 baskets on one load. When the fair closed, it was dismantled to be re-erected at the St. Louis World's Fair of 1904. My dad, eight years old in 1893, was standing at the Yorklyn station, to watch the afternoon train for Landenberg come through. The weather was warm, and the car windows were open. His uncle and aunt, Howard and Lizzie Mitchell of Woodside Farm, were on the train returning from the trip of their lifetimes to Chicago to visit the World's Fair. They had left three small children at home with Howard's parents; two were yet to come.

My father accompanied his older brother, Warren, to the 1901 Pan-American Exposition in Buffalo. Less than ½ hour short of their destination, their train was delayed for an unknown reason. Eventually, they were informed that President McKinley had been shot. They ultimately got to Buffalo and visited Niagara Falls for the first time as well as the fair.

Three 19-year-olds went to the Louisiana Purchase Exposition in St. Louis in 1904. My father and his first cousin, Henry C. Mitchell, were two of them. Another great fair, they came home ecstatic about what they had seen, especially the huge Ferris wheel and the thousands of electric illuminations. My father visited the fairgrounds in Philadelphia just prior to the opening of the Sesquicentennial Exposition of 1926. Workers were completing the construction of a small steam railway to circumvent the grounds, powered by several Cagney locomotives.

I have attended only two World's Fairs. In 1934, the second year of the Century of Progress Exposition in Chicago, my parents took me and Joe Stoeckle in our 1932 Packard Super Eight seven-passenger sedan. As we approached Chicago, I developed a high fever and was put to bed. It so happened that Dr. J. W. Stanton, a family physician who had just attended the Yorklyn trapshooting tournament about three weeks before, had his practice a few blocks away and helped me back to health, so I did take in two days of the fair. I recall the *President Cleveland*, one of the B & O Railroad's Pacific-type passenger steam locomotives, was on display, and visitors could walk through the cab. Near the end of this technology, it was still popular in 1934, as no one envisioned railroads without steam power. The other fair I attended was the 1939 New York World's Fair, where we went the last weekend of the first year. In 1940, the fair opened again but without exhibits from the Soviet Union and Germany, as World War II was under way.

More recent fairs I recall, of varying importance, were Brussels (1958), Knoxville (1982), Seattle (1962), New York (1964–65), the Expo in Montreal (1967), and San Antonio's Hemisfair (1968). Seattle made money; I'm not sure any of the others did. The Disney Parks, Six Flags, and other theme parks have made World's Fairs obsolete.