

# World's fair commemorates Lewis and Clark Exposition

BY TYPH TUCKER  
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PORTLAND — In the summer of 1905, people from across America came to Oregon to watch a pair of elk dive into the Willamette River from a platform two stories high. And they saw Princess Trixie the Mathematical Horse count change back from a cash register.

These were among the oddities at the 1905 Lewis and Clark Exposition. The main attractions at the fair were the wonders and technology of the day.

People stood in awe as they watched flying dirigibles. They saw dials register an unseen force called electricity on the Voltmeter. And they heard scratchy recordings of their own voices created by the Dictaphone.

More than a million people came to Portland for the world's fair, held to celebrate the 100-year anniversary of Lewis and Clark's arrival on the Pacific Coast.

A century later, the Oregon Historical Society has recreated life-size versions of the exposition's exhibits, to give people the experience of walking through the world's fair.

The exhibit, "A Fair to Remember: The 1905 Lewis & Clark Exposition," is a part of three years of events held across the country to mark the bicentennial of the 1803-06 Voyage of Discovery.

The new exhibit has been set up in a large room at the Historical Society, Oregon's main history museum.

A 20-foot-tall picture of the fair's Grand Colonnade is at the entrance. Ladies in frilly ankle-length gowns walk arm-in-arm with suited gentlemen along a columned walkway.

"We wanted to immediately give people a sense of the scale of this event," said Lisa Berndt, curator of the show. "Throughout the exhibit we have huge murals to give them

that sense."

Also on display are a Benson automobile under a glass case, movies similar to those shown at the fair and blueprints of the large buildings constructed just for the 1905 fair.

Another large photo shows the exposition's huge Forestry Building, built from whole trees, which were stacked horizontally to form the walls of the building. Trees also served as columns, holding up a 70-foot-tall vaulted chamber.

"They were blown away by the Forestry Building," said Carl Abbott, consultant to the exhibit and writer of "The Great Extravaganza: Portland and the Lewis and Clark Exposition."

The trees used in the building were cut along the lower Columbia River and their size "spoke to Oregon's role as a provider of natural resources," he said.

The expo's midway was called "The Trail," which had a touch of the exotic: Dancing girls from the streets of Cairo, live insects and the bones of a Dodo bird were just a few stops along "The Trail."

Many people returned home from the exposition with stories of innovations and oddities for families who had never dreamed of such things.

People also took home souvenirs, and the historical society's exhibit displays some of them. They include salt shakers, a cigar case, a pair of scissors, tea cups and a pocket knife — all with the Lewis and Clark Exposition logo on them.

Descriptions of the 1905 fair are placed around the exhibit. They explain that the fair changed the face of Portland, spurring economic, cultural and civic growth.

Trains made traveling to Portland affordable for many people living outside the Northwest.

"Fares came down, and it was

possible to put your family on the train in Chicago, travel out to Oregon, see the fair, maybe take the train to the coast and then go back home," Abbott said.

Portland's population jumped after the world's fair by about 100,000 between 1905 and 1912, Abbott said. Portland's relatively flat skyline became dotted with 12-story buildings.

World's fairs took place in cities all over the country every few years beginning in 1853 and were great diversions of the day. San Diego, Philadelphia and St. Louis hosted world's fairs but perhaps most famous was the Chicago World's Fair in 1933.

But not all of them were successful. The one in Hampton Roads, Va., two years after Portland's was a flop, Abbott said.

Historian Joseph Gaston said in 1911 that "the very decision to hold the exposition strengthened every man who put down a dollar for it; and from that very day, Portland business, Portland real estate and Portland's great future commenced to move up."

Going to the fair could very well have been the trip of a lifetime in an era when people often lived and died in the same county they were born, curator Lisa Berndt said.

"The fair delivered the world to their doorstep," she said. "They could see an Australian boomerang expert, a Coast Guard lifesaving drill, participate in a Japanese peace ceremony and see goods and inventions from around the world."

It was a huge party that lasted 137 days, Berndt said, and it touched the lives of many people.

"There was a real uptick to the community after the fair," Berndt said. "And there was also a shift in mind-set. Even years afterward, people talked about the old Portland versus the new Portland and the watershed event was the fair."

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