

Through the Eyes of a Fairgoer: The 1904 World's Fair Memoir of Edward V. P. Schneiderhahn

Introduction by Martha R. Clevenger

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, world's fairs were popular vehicles for nations to exhibit their wares and show off their biggest, newest, and costliest handicrafts and manufactures. At a time when European powers governed vast overseas empires and the United States was just beginning to assert itself in international affairs, Western countries used these fairs not only to promote their products but also to justify their dominance. The 1904 Louisiana Purchase Exposition in St. Louis, commemorating the Louisiana Purchase and American westward expansion, was particularly explicit and even shameless in its promotion of American values and Yankee ingenuity. That it followed on the heels of the Spanish-American War and America's acquisition of its first colonies only reinforced this self-promotion.¹

The Louisiana Purchase Exposition also took place during the Progressive era—an optimistic age when science and technology seemed to offer limitless possibilities, including an ever-improving standard of living and widespread access to education. Progressives commonly believed that everyone, not just the elite, would benefit from modern technological advances, and that the techniques of scientific inquiry could be applied profitably to social and moral problems to produce rational solutions of universal applicability. Reflected at the fair was the assumption that, having joined the ranks of expansionist world powers, America would help lead the way toward ever-higher levels of civilization.

Though the Louisiana Purchase Exposition was a St. Louis event, the Progressive ideology put forth in its exhibits was a national one, developed and refined by experienced fair planners from all over the United States. These planners gave the Louisiana Purchase Exposition a particularly strong educational orientation. Even more than in previous world's fairs, the educational mission had a definite ideological content. According to the director of exhibits, Frederick Skiff—who had worked at several earlier fairs—the Louisiana Purchase Exposition's mission was to "give to the world in revised and complete details, 'a living picture of the artistic and industrial development at which mankind has arrived,' and... [to]

actually provide 'a new starting point from which all men may direct future exertions.' "²

Believing that scientific methods offered the best chance for achieving this goal, Skiff and his colleagues developed a complex classification system for the presentation of the world's knowledge and accomplishments.³ With 16 exhibit divisions divided into 144 groups and 807 classes—a veritable taxonomy of the achievements of man—the classification system was structured to promote the demonstration of processes as well as products and to illustrate techniques for solving social and moral, as well as technical, problems. Thus exhibit departments such as Anthropology, Liberal Arts, and Social Economy received billing equal to those of Manufactures, Machinery, and Agriculture. Model schools, a functioning day, care center, and small communities of tribal peoples imported from around the world were exhibited alongside turbines, locomotives, and fruits and vegetables.

The setting of the Louisiana Purchase Exposition was part of this same educational

mission. Located in the western half of Forest Park, the Louisiana Purchase Exposition spilled over onto the new Washington University campus and used additional undeveloped real estate to the west. Within this enormous space, the fair's experts on grounds and buildings tried to combine artistic beauty and technology to create a grandiose, yet healthful and even pastoral, environment. The exhibits were housed in massive temporary palaces ornamented with appropriately allegorical sculpture, separated by broad avenues, gardens, and waterways, and surrounded by pavilions built by state and foreign governments. Fair planners hoped this setting would enhance the ideological impact of the exhibits; however, the entire effect of the fair was to dazzle and overwhelm the visitor. Its' grandiose scale was such that the fair could not be seen effectively without at least twenty or thirty separate visits.

Any study of the 1904 Louisiana Purchase Exposition, whether scholarly or popular, inevitably raises the question of how fairgoers experienced the fair. The following essay, a contemporary memoir composed by an astute observer who made multiple visits to the Louisiana Purchase Exposition, begins to answer that question. Its author, Edward V. P. Schneiderhahn, was born in St. Louis in the mid-1870s, the oldest child of religious sculptor Maximilian Schneiderhahn. The first of ten children, young Edward grew up in a highly cultured environment and received an excellent classical education in St. Louis' best Catholic schools. After studying law at Washington University, Schneiderhahn practiced his profession for fifty years in St. Louis until his death in 1948. A lifelong Catholic, Schneiderhahn served as legal advisor to Cardinal John Glennon and to his successor, who was then the Archbishop Joseph E. Ritter. He was also active in the German Catholic Central Union, and Pope Pius XII made him a Knight of St. Gregory in 1943.⁴

Schneiderhahn left seven volumes of diaries, which contain voluminous commentary on most of the political and moral issues of his day as well as a record of day-to-day activities. He began recording his thoughts at the age of fifteen in 1890 and, despite an increasingly busy career, Schneiderhahn sustained his diary until 1913 out of the belief that "it is a good training, if for nothing else than to develop character and a habit of observation."⁵ Not surprisingly, Schneiderhahn's regular entries in 1904 are peppered with references to the World's Fair.⁶ The fair, moreover, so impressed Schneiderhan that he was not content to limit his record of it to a series of brief entries. Shortly after it closed on December 1, 1904, Schneiderhahn began to write a twenty-six-page memoir, motivated by a sense that "it did not seem right to pass that subject with the few disconnected and scant memoranda [I] had been able to make,"⁷

Schneiderhahn's memoir is a singularly superb example of its genre. Literate and descriptive, and written close to the event in question, it conveys a depth of feeling and a sense of accuracy that many diaries and reminiscences lack. Though overwhelmed and impressed by the fair, Schneiderhahn was a critical visitor who did not shrink from negative commentary when he thought it was warranted. From today's vantage point, some of his views seem naive, some amusing; others reveal his own peculiar prejudices or reflect the fact that he was a child of his age. Many of his opinions and concerns, however, transcend the Progressive Era and are still with us today, often couched in terms remarkably similar to Schneiderhahn's.⁸

M.R.C.

Schneiderhahn's World's Fair Memoir

Forest Park Site and Preexposition Period

The site selected was the western half of Forest Park. There was a great advantage in this site for picture effects over the site that Chicago had had for its fair in 1893. The Chicago site was a dead flat. But the Forest Park site was very different. There were prominent hills and while this fact made the construction work more difficult, it enabled at least part of the exposition buildings to be erected so as to take advantage of the elevation and enhance both their own beauty and the beauty of the surroundings. It was a pity however to see giant monarchs of the forest fall before the woodman's ax to make room for the exhibit palaces. Standing on one of the hills, in the preexposition period, one could see a whole plain that had been swept bare of patriarchs of the forest such as few cities could boast to possess. . . .

The Fair in General

The picture of the fair was as a revelation. Its beauty indescribable. Standing in the Place St. Louis and looking south, the eye met the Louisiana monument, an ornamental towering column surmounted by the statue of "Peace" and decorated with tablets and reliefs commemorating the Purchase. Passing the monument and still looking south the eye beheld the grand lagoon and its further end the beautiful cascades taking their origin out of the main center of the classic and inspiring and majestic Festival Hall. The Festival Hall was flanked by two gracefully curved rows of colonnades serving as the background for the Louisiana Purchase States statues erected in front on the Terrace of States. Each wing of the colonnades pointed to an architectural gem. Before the east building was erected a fountain surmounted by a symbolic representation of the "Pacific Ocean" and before the west building was erected a fountain surmounted by a symbolic representation of the "Atlantic Ocean." From these fountains descended smaller cascades inclining to the central and main cascade. Festival Hall, the Colonnades and end wings and colossal fountains all on the so-called Art Hill. The combination was simply overpowering. When the cascades were in operation and the fountains played one could fancy himself transported to fairy land. . . . Stopped at this central point for hours to drink of the magic inspiration that this wonderful spot offered. The main plan of the fair had been so arranged that the principal avenues met on Art Hill or at least the view was directed there. Consequently from the Festival Hall and the wings the view was unobstructed to behold the principal great avenues of the fair. . . . [If my] stock of words. . . were so ample as to include all the words of the English language that might be aptly employed to describe dignity, majestic repose, serene grandeur, classic grace, enchanting beauty the description would fall short of the reality. . . .

It is a pity that it is impossible for language to ever adequately describe feelings. And here at the World's Fair—it was scarcely believable that any beholder could see these unforgettably beautiful scenes without the deepest emotion. . . . In fact sometimes, or rather often [I] came to the fair with the purpose to see something—in the buildings—but would stop so long on the outside contemplating (the right word) the architectural beauties of the buildings that there would be little if any time left for inspection of exhibits. And a gentle stroll down Louisiana Way would take one midway between the chief exhibit palaces, past the Louisiana Monument and the Sunken Gardens up to the

Government Building. [I] have no hesitancy in saying that during the World's Fair the avenues of the fair were the most magnificent walks of the whole globe.

Government Building

The Government Building stood at the eastern head of Louisiana Way on a high terrace. It was a large and graceful and well-proportioned building, and the style of architecture seemed to have been well suited to give the building a combination of attractive and imposing qualities all [of] which were strengthened by the eminence on which the building stood.⁹

The exhibits were wonderfully rich and complete. Certainly in variety of the subjects covered and in the manner of display this was the first building of the entire fair. Stopped quite a while in the Congressional Library division—but no time to examine the old documents and maps exhibited. The irrigation model taught [me] much. . . . The War Department exhibit was very interesting especially the ordnance division and the West Point exhibit and their text books. It was also curious to note what changes had been brought about in the uniforms in our army since the Spanish war, owing to tropical conditions which American soldiers must now encounter. The agricultural division contained a vast store of information particularly for farmers. The growth of fungi in trees was exhibited in a way that arrested [my] attention. The soil experiments were also very interesting, and the road-building models and the reclamation of arid lands by washing out the salt, etc. The Navy Department had a particularly elaborate display. The large model of [a] United States cruiser provided an opportunity to actually become acquainted with the real conditions on board. The torpedoes with their clockwork and self-propelling device are certainly a devilish contrivance one might almost say. The natural history division offered an unending field for speculation. The collection of butterflies was a marvelous harmony of color. The prehistoric animals might frighten any beholder by their size. They looked monstrous. These simple casts looked most forbidding and formidable. The model of a whale served to dispel some ignorance. Jaw bones immense. . . . The models of ancient Aztec and Yucatan architecture offer many chances for theorizing about departed peoples. . . .

It is impossible to cover the vast field of inquiry opened up by a somewhat careful study of the government exhibits. Spent far more time in the aggregate in this Government Building than in any other building and learned most from the Government Building's exhibits. . . .

Manufactures

With regard to the architecture: The dome in the main center of the south line of the building was a beauty and joy forever. Have stopped and stopped again and again to contemplate the majestic character of this wonderful architectural gem.¹⁰

The interior: The Italian section was full of gems of art—but too much naked stuff—The French section contained wonderful gowns. But female modesty is certainly entirely overcome in a woman who would wear some of the extreme décolleté gowns. The exhibit of the Chicago drainage canal kept [my] attention for hours. The comparison of excavation units of the Chicago drainage canal with the Suez canal was most interesting. The connection of Lake Michigan with the Mississippi River is certainly a foundation for

hope of increasing inland river commerce. Our rivers are sadly neglected. We use them only as sewers instead of employing them as highways of commerce. The day must come when such a vast natural capital and advantage will be properly and suitably employed.

The different manufacturers displayed all their wares, their methods, and manufactures in prolific abundance. This building was a wilderness of articles of commerce, of dainty fabrics—of a forest of interesting things. But a general gaze is about all that an average visitor could bestow. The number of exhibits was astonishingly large and it was impossible and even silly to attempt to see everything thoroughly.

Varied Industries

The architecture was a fit companion piece to the Manufacturers Building across the way. There was nothing over-done (at least it seemed so) about the architecture. All harmonized well.¹¹

The German exhibit was beyond question the most complete and both thorough and artistic. Cannot take a fancy to the "new art" jewelry. There is much labor and all that. But . . . it does not suit. . . [my] taste. . . . The German art rooms are very beautiful and very sombre, very sombre—probably suited to a stolid, thrifty and conservative people. But would prefer a more cheery room. One of the rooms was a municipal council chamber with the ballot box in the center. Would it not aid in repressing corruption in part at least to have a ballot box in our municipal council chambers?

The Japanese exhibited an immense number of vases, beautiful, variegated and costly. Their handwork is simply marvelous. A most patient and rapidly progressing people. They certainly are determined to succeed.

Saw some strange contrivances in this building. A swing where the circular motion is eliminated and a sofa or settee changed or converted into a bed in a moment and a half..

The Persian rugs made no impression on [me]. Immense work. But despite the fact that their prices were forbidding they all looked shabby. Preferred the American rugs.

Transportation

[The building was based] on some New York railroad station. Enormous arches for entrances. From the very character of the entrances one would expect the building to be devoted to the transportation interests.

Within: Entire trains stood on the tracks. Palatial cars. Dining cars with extraordinary luxury. Mistake of the American public to demand so much luxury. The luxury is then furnished at the expense of safety. Too much money goes into the rolling stock. More money into the roadbed and into safety appliances to prevent accidents would be better. Enormous locomotives were to be seen. Some so large that it would seem that one ought to be justly afraid of them crushing the roadbed over which they travel, and pounding and even cracking the heavy steel rails. Certainly they could only be used on the strongest roads. A German high speed locomotive was very interesting. Doubt whether such high speed, 80 miles per hour, will have much commercial utility.

And one hates to think of the consequences of a disaster at such high speed. A model locomotive turnstile in action carrying a monster locomotive high in air was a spectacle of power and involved much speculation as to how the locomotive got up so high. The museum exhibit of every model of engine from the very beginning of steam propulsion engrossed much of [my] attention. At first the merest idea—later, and with each new

machine, knowledge increases, until we have the complex and powerful machines of today.

Was very much interested in the models of the new Washington, D.C., Union Station. The wide plaza that is to be laid out before it heightens the effect wonderfully. Wish that our Union Station had a wide plaza in front of it, instead of a narrow street crowded by a multitude of small stores, some of them not even of genuine business.

The automobile section interested me very little. At present the machines look ugly and cumbrous... Their lines must first become beautiful and they stink too much. A whole city of these puffing mad and stinking ugly things would not look very well. . . .

Admired a Japanese map of the world. A monster map—hand embroidered. From but a short distance it appeared like a large printed map... Thousands passed it with this belief. It was so perfect.

It is curious to note how the Japanese have copied the art of illustrating any commercial statistics by pictorial representations. The Japanese section of the Transportation Building is full of illustrations. They certainly intend to apply everything they see that they feel themselves capable of applying. And if they are not yet able to apply, they will learn until they can apply whatever they see. That is the impression the Japanese make.

Machinery

The architecture was complex with a great number of towers. Know too little to give the style a name. The entrance on Machinery Gardens formed a sort of arched walk composed of several domed constructions. It was very beautiful.

Had an opportunity to see some steam turbines. Have read much on their subject but never saw a steam turbine in action until [I] saw it at the Exposition. The horizontal machine made a tremendous noise. The upright machine 3000 HP worked as smoothly as a clock. The great additional power, in [my] judgment, will in course of time revolutionize steam engines. But can the turbine be used where power should be applied in either direction? In [my] opinion... the turbine is the coming machine...

What a multitude of different machinery. It is simply astonishing. For every imaginable purpose. The working steam engines and humming motors interested [me] most. Most machines after all are to [me] little more than machines, so far as understanding their working is concerned. It is curious to note how the exhibitors presented their machines with their signs the "only" machine for this and that and so forth and the building full of similar machines...

Education

The rows of Corinthian columns that adorned this building in beautiful harmony made this one of the most admired of all the buildings of the fair.

The public school exhibits were largely a repetition, one of the other. Chiefly dwelled on the Boston and New York City schools' exhibits.

The exhibits of the charity organizations and of the asylums of New York City occupied a great deal of [my] time, particularly those relating to neglected children. Much remains to be done in St. Louis in this particular regard. . . .

The collection of fetus in the Missouri State University exhibit proved very instructive. A sight of these helpless beings ought to induce everyone to respect human

life more sacredly than ever. But what have we today? Women refuse to be mothers and parents destroy their own offspring. Frightful. Worse almost than the offerings to Baal. It is not worse? The one lust—the other religious frenzy or fanaticism. Horrible! Human, intellectual beings conduct themselves worse than beasts. It is a horrible subject to pursue. On the other hand with what gentleness ought not a mother to be cared for that bears an unborn babe? And how careful she ought to be to do nothing to injure the child either morally or physically!

The German medical exhibit was really a chamber of horrors. One ought to be forced to the conviction that it is a terrible presumption to be vain or proud. Some of the diseases are unspeakably revolting. To a serious-minded person an inspection of such bold medical facts ought to be salutary. And how little it takes to destroy life?

The German school exhibit was most instructive. The corrections by the teachers of the pupils' work showed characteristic thoroughness. But the German schoolmaster is an honored person—honored to such extent that we Americans do not get an adequate idea. Our teachers on the other hand occupy a different position. A policeman is honored more than a teacher. This would be unthinkable in Germany that a policeman should ever receive more salary than a teacher...

Forestry and Fisheries

A simple but large structure. Strange kinds of wood exhibited. Some of the South American forests ought to offer a wonderful field for investment. But it is to be hoped that when once the lumber man strikes the South American forest that he will not shave off hill and plain and denude the country as he has done in the United States. And we are paying the penalty now. Nobody ever thought of planting anything to take the place of what was cut down. And what would happen when it came to the last tree? The lumber prices are high and getting higher every year. Is it a wonder?...

Agricultural Building

This was an enormous structure with no pretension to architecture. Its corridors and aisles summed up . . . to nine miles in linear distance. The main aisles were regular streets.

The Missouri corn palace (with even its rural pictures made out of corn products) was a splendid method of presenting some facts about Missouri soil.

It would have been impossible to do more than pass a swift glance over all the products of the field. Some of the western states seemed . . . to make too much ado about the tallest corn and the biggest potato. The effort to invite additional immigration seemed a little too forced. . . .

In the Agriculture Building [I] was mainly impressed by the enormous productivity of American soil. When you aggregate the totals of the several states the figures are simply prodigious. Each state appeared as ambitious to outdo all the rest. Agriculture was a field in which it could not be expected that foreign countries should excel in the same measure....

Fisheries

This was an interesting building. The work of the United States Fish Commission is surprising. If it is possible to prevent the depopulation (as it were) of the waters, ought

there not to be some way, to prevent the cutting down of every tree in the land? . . .

The sea horse is certainly a strange creature. The head of a horse and the long tail, with which it fastens itself on limbs, etc., make this fish look like a fabled being of the fairy tales—but it is so small. . . .

Special Events

The British troops that landed in the summer on the Plaza St. Louis went through a strange ceremony called "trooping the colors." It was most staid but would be wholly unsuited to the American character. When did British troops drill on United States soil since the War of the Revolution?

Considered the whole Philippine Reservation a special event. It certainly served to disseminate very useful knowledge concerning the Philippine Islands and its peoples. The exhibits, and they were plentiful, proved the high civilization already attained. The musical drill of the Philippine native troops was most interesting. . . .

But it is not possible to dwell on every feature of the fair. Have omitted much that struck [my] fancy and attracted [my] attention... But just remember that [I] have forgotten the Illumination—May there not be other things forgotten?

The pen cannot describe the beauty of the illumination. Words fail. Magic picture. A flood of light and how harmonious the arrangement? One was lost in wonder. And how the beautiful Grecian columns stood out? And the Festive Hall with its changing illumination of white, red and green. Wonderful! Wonderful. Never expect to see anything so grand again. Too bad that it was a temporary picture.

But so it is with everything of this earth. It passes away. That was [my] uppermost reflection on the closing day. But cannot help to again express the pleasure to have been with such excellent company at the fair at the closing day. It is as if the company has been bound together by common participation in an historic event.

Beautiful fair. Goodbye.

References

1. See Robert W. Rydell, *All the World's a Fair: Visions of Empire at American International Expositions, 1876-1916* (Chicago, 1984), especially chapter 6, pp. 154-83, for Rydell's treatment of the Louisiana Purchase Exposition. Another good general discussion of the Louisiana Purchase Exposition can be found in James Neal Primm, *Lion of the Valley, St. Louis, Missouri* (Coulter, Co., 1984), pp. 345-418
2. Frederick J. V. Skiff, "The Universal Exposition: An Encyclopedia of Society," *World's Fair Bulletin* 5 (December 1903), p. 2. Skiff was in turn quoting a speech by former President William McKinley, delivered in Buffalo, New York, in September 1901, describing the object and result of international expositions.
3. *Official Classification of Exhibit Departments* [St. Louis, 1904?]
4. Maximillian Schneiderhahn obituary, November 25, 1923, Missouri Historical Society Vertical Files; "Among Our New Acquisitions," *Bulletin of the Missouri Historical Society* 18 (October 1961), p. 71
5. Edward V. P. Schneiderhahn diaries, 1890-1913, 7 volumes, Missouri Historical Society Archives, St. Louis. The quotation is found in the December 22, 1904, entry, vol.

6, p. 93.

6. Schneiderhahn's *1904* entries are in *ibid.*, vol. 6.

7. *Ibid.*, December 11, 1904, entry, vol. 6, p. 67.

8. The Schneiderhahn memoir of the Louisiana Purchase Exposition, written in several sittings between December 11 and December 22, 1904, is in vol. 6 of his diaries, pp. 67-92. The version published here has been edited to make more space available for illustration. Textual changes are limited to deletions, noted with ellipses; corrections in spelling, punctuation, and capitalization which are not noted; and the transformation of Schneiderhahn's characteristic second person narrative to first person, noted by brackets. These latter two changes were instituted only to improve the flow of the narrative.

9. The Government Building housed exhibits from different departments of the United States government. Schneiderhahn's description of the agricultural exhibit in the Government Building is not to be confused with his later description of the Agricultural Building, which was an entire building devoted to agriculture and included exhibits from foreign countries. See M. J. Lowenstein, comp., *Official Guide to the Louisiana Purchase Exposition* (St. Louis, 1904), pp. 89-92, 99-109.

10. The Palace of Manufactures included two major types of exhibits: utilitarian products, ranging from ventilating machines to undertaking tool, and more artistic products, such as textiles, pottery, and marble sculptures. Some of the more artistic works were placed in the Palace of Manufactures because there was not enough space for them in the Palace of Varied Industries. The Palace of Manufactures also included bazaars in which exhibitors could display their products for sale. *Ibid.*, pp. 72-75.

11. The Palace of Varied Industries, a companion building to the Palace of Manufactures, housed exhibits that were quite similar to the industrial art section of the Palace of Fine Arts. It contained, among other things, bronzes, lacquer ware, pottery, vases, rugs, toys, and specially designed rooms. *Ibid.*, pp. 74-76.

12. "Illumination" refers to the electric lights used to light up the fair grounds at night. Different colored lights and different voltages were used. The water cascade was illuminated with projector lamps. See David R. Francis, *The Universal Exposition of 1904* (St. Louis, 1913), pp. 211-12.

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Beginning of a dialog window, including tabbed navigation to register an account or sign in to an existing account. Both registration and sign in support using google and facebook accounts. Escape will close this window. The Louisiana Purchase Exposition, informally known as the St. Louis World's Fair, was an international exposition held in St. Louis, Missouri, United States, from April 30 to December 1, 1904. Local, state, and federal funds totaling \$15 million were used to finance the event. More than 60 countries and 43 of the 45 American states maintained exhibition spaces at the fair, which was attended by nearly 19.7 million people.

Hardy, Lauer, Murphy1 The 1904 World's Fair was an exciting, transformative time full of discovery- for the Westerners. If one were to walk through the fairground, they would be greeted with new sights, inventions and ideas that showed off the excellence that the West embodied. The average fairgoer would also come upon a rather startling and perhaps provocative sight for the time period: non-westerners displayed in large, exotic settings for the pleasure of the viewers. These displays in themselves are a direct reflection on the mood of Americans at the time. The general feeling between most Americans and the West, as shown through the exhibits in the World's Fair, was a feeling full of desire to further advancement and create progress. Start by marking St. Louis: The 1904 World's Fair (Images of America: Missouri) as Want to Read: Want to Read saving! Want to Read. The Pike offered amusement rides, wild animal displays, and fanciful trips through the Hereafter and Creation exhibits. Fairgoers visited the Alps, the North Pole, Russia, and Paris and witnessed famous battles. Everyone wanted to ride the great Observation Wheel. There were hootchy-kootchy dancers and wonderful new foods, such as the ice-cream cone. But it was all temporary, a dream city made to last only a few months. With the exception of today's St. Louis Art Museum, the grand palaces are gone.