

~Meet Me in St. Louis~

by Terry Primas

The idea for an international exposition had been on the mind of St. Louis civic leaders even prior to the Columbian Exposition of 1893 in Chicago. This failed to materialize due to poor hotel facilities and energetic construction was started to remedy this deficiency. It was hoped that the hundredth anniversary of the Louisiana Purchase in 1903 would mark the occasion of an exposition in St. Louis and further its development.

Efforts were made to interest the fourteen states and territories that comprised the Louisiana Purchase area. St. Louis was to contribute ten million dollars Congress was lobbied for an additional five million, which at the eleventh hour it agreed to do in 1901. The Louisiana Purchase Exposition Company, with David R. Francis president, was formed and two years of frenzied work followed. It became apparent that the planned opening in 1903 could not be met and, with the assent of Congress, a one year delay announced. It was a delay well spent. It gave the exposition promoters and the exposition company some breathing room to put together the biggest and best fair the world had then - or now - ever seen.

Twenty-five nations and all of the states built pavilions but the Fair was the biggest builder of all. Whereas the Chicago Exposition's engineering marvel was the Ferris Wheel and the Eiffel Tower was the hallmark of the Paris Exposition in 1889, the St. Louis World's Fair amazed its visitors with huge buildings, electric lights, and novel products. The Louisiana

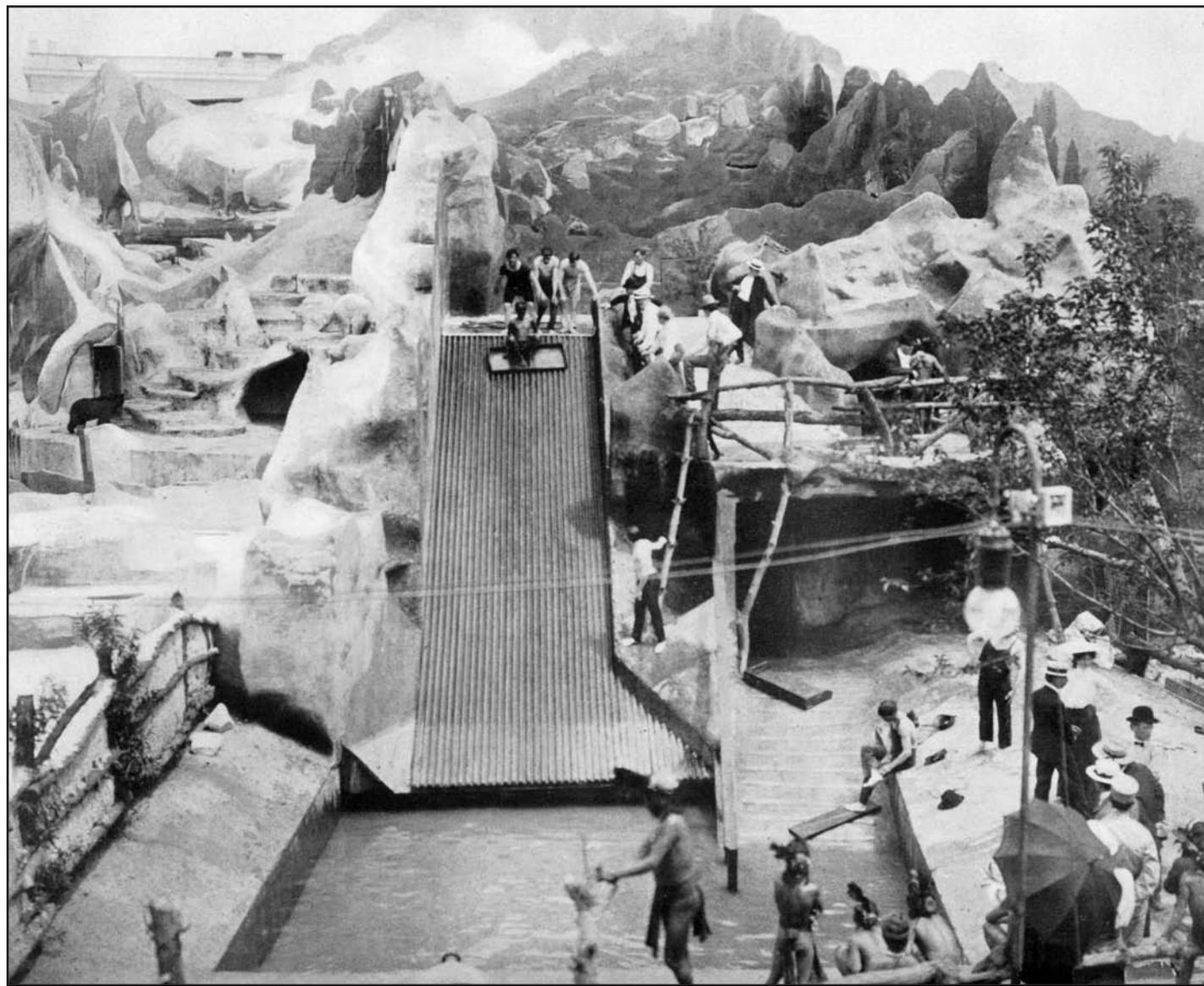
Purchase Exposition, more familiarly called the St. Louis World's Fair, opened on April 30 upon a telegraph signal from President Theodore Roosevelt in the White House. Fair President Francis announced "Open ye gates! Swing wide ye portals!" to the accompaniment of John Phillip Sousa's band playing "Hymn of the West".

The site chosen was Forest Park, much of which was a tangle of scrubby trees and underbrush on the western edge of the city, in the country. The Fair covered 1275 acres and spilled over onto the newly developing campus of Washington

University where the 1904 Olympics were held and airships could be seen. The large area was required for the grand scale. Eight huge exhibition "palaces" were constructed: Mines and Metallurgy, Liberal Arts, Education and Social Economy, Manufacturers (a fourteen acres shopping mall), Electricity, Varied Industries, Transportation, and Machinery. The largest, Transportation, covered fifteen acres. The Palace of Electricity covered seven acres. Although electricity and the light bulb had been around 25 years, its use and the incandescent light bulb were

only read about for most people. Thomas Edison came to oversee the proper setup of the displays and 500 tons of coal were burned each day to generate electricity for the 500,000 light bulbs, in varying colors, that illuminated the Fair grounds at night. The Wireless Tower demonstrated the wonders of pulsing message signals sent invisibly through the air which became radio.

The buildings were large, Victorian ornate, and most were temporary. Designed to last only a few years, the hundreds of sculptures and scores of buildings were made of



(Hagenback Managerie) This may look like a modern water slide but it was one of the attractions at Hagenback Animal Managerie. The chute was constructed like the "shoot-the-chutes", the water slide of 1904, but it was intended for the baby elephants. Twice each day the little elephants were led to the top of the chute, put in an iron scoop, and sent sliding down the incline for a plunge in the pool. An Igorrote, native of the Phillipines and also on display, saw the elephants slide and asked to do the same. This picture was taken just as he was released by three Hagenback animal trainers.



(The Maine Building) The building representing the state of Maine was an immense log building, 140 feet long and 63 feet wide, two stories in height. The timber was cut in Maine, the building put together there, then taken apart and reassembled at the Fair by Maine lumbermen. In 1905 the Maine Hunting and Fishing Club moved the building to Hollister, Missouri and placed it on a bluff site overlooking the White River. It served as the sportsmen's clubhouse for ten years when it became the home of The School of the Ozarks.

"staff". Staff was a mixture of plaster-of-paris and manila fibers. It could be sawed and nailed or poured into molds (providing over 1200 statues on the grounds). The framing for the structures was pine lumber, much of which undoubtedly came from the pineries in the Ozarks.

The Pike was the Fair's midway, a giant amusement park. It stretched for a mile with concessions that took the visitor to the Tyrolean Alps or the depths of Hades. Will Rogers entertained with rope tricks and banter and Scott Joplin's rag-time music mixed with the Fair's anthem, "Meet Me in St. Louie, Louie". Adding to the cacophony was the world's largest organ with 10,159 pipes. Hagenback's Animal Paradise featured elephants, lions, and



(Battle Abbey) One of the largest buildings on the Pike, Battle Abbey was magnificent with its medieval architecture of towers, bastions, and parapets. It housed cycloramas of famous battles, such as Manassas, Gettysburg, and the Custer Massacre. There also were hundreds of artifacts in the form of cannon, smaller weapons, and armor plate. Although the Abbey looked formidable and built to last for centuries, it, too, was built of plaster.

bears in open pits. Baby Incubators provided life to premature infants cared for at the Fair. Of course, there were rides such as the Magic Whirlpool, Water Chutes, and the screaming Scenic Railway roller coaster.

It was a Fair of firsts. The forerunner to the Popsickle, called fruit icicles, was introduced. Hot tea sales were slow in the steamy St. Louis summer and an unknown server in a tea house poured the beverage over crushed ice and iced tea sales zoomed. Fairgoers were often seen licking that new delight, the ice cream cone. For a much lighter snack, one could buy fairy floss, known today as cotton candy. The hot dog barked its way into existence. Health drinks and foods, such as Dr. Pepper and peanut but-

ter, were popularized by the Fair.

Admission was fifty cents and almost 20 million paid the Fair fare. On December 1 the Fair closed and the dismantling began. The world's largest pipe organ was taken apart and loaded onto 13 railroad cars and shipped East. It was reassembled at Wanamaker's Department Store (now Lord and Taylor) in Philadelphia where it can be seen today. The States' buildings were the easiest to dispose. Designed as permanent buildings, many were sold and moved to new locations as homes, club houses, or public buildings. Maine's log hunting lodge, built with no nails, resided in the Ozarks for a time. The huge temporary buildings were razed and the thousands of tons of staff were

loaded on railroad cars and used for fill in other construction projects. The Ferris Wheel, which had paid for its \$380,000 cost in four months at the Chicago Exposition in 1893, proved harder to relocate. The demolition contractor dynamited it and sold some of the pieces for scrap. He buried the rest under what is now part of the golf course. It took three years and a million dollars to restore Forest Park.

So what is left of the world's greatest fair? The Palace of Fine Art stands today as the St. Louis Art Museum, with the welcoming statue of St. Louis in front. The largest bird cage in the world, built by the Smithsonian, was given by that institution to the city and is an attraction at the zoo. The Jefferson Memorial, was built

after the Fair (1911-1913) from Fair proceeds, today houses part of the Missouri Historical Society's collection and stands at what was the Fair's main entrance.

Pulaski, Phelps, Texas, Laclede, and Maries counties were descended upon in the summer by tourists fleeing the heat and bustle of the city. They sought the healthful ozone and peaceful rivers of the Ozarks. But in 1904, streams of Ozarkers were tourists in the city to view the spectacles of the Fair. Some went more than once. They were the lucky ones. We missed the ice skating rink where a daily snowstorm occurred in the heat of summer, a statue of President Theodore Roosevelt sculpted in butter, and a bear made entirely of prunes.