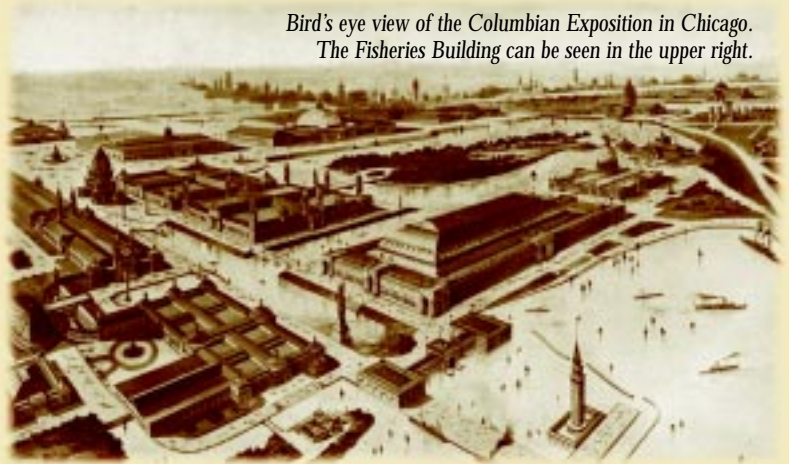




Meet Me at the Fair

by Jay Osman

A turn-of-the-century visit to the Fish Commission World's Fair exhibits.



Bird's eye view of the Columbian Exposition in Chicago. The Fisheries Building can be seen in the upper right.

From 1892 to 1914, the Pennsylvania Fish Commission (now the Fish and Boat Commission) operated a railcar called the "Susquehanna" to distribute fish statewide. Its contribution during those crucial early years is a key factor in the Commission's present-day success. A lesser-known fact is that the "Susquehanna" also played a vital roll in the Commission's participation in one of the premier events of the last century and the beginning of this century: The Chicago World's Fair of 1893, named "The Columbian Exposition," and the St. Louis World's Fair in 1904, named "The Louisiana Purchase Exposition."

The "Susquehanna," with its specially designed interior, was considered a modern marvel, so much so that the Commission's planners of the 1904 fair originally wanted the car to be part of its overall exhibit. But the railcar proved to be too valuable in keeping the exhibit's live fish display replenished with a fresh supply of fish and other necessary supplies. From the mounted specimens of fish and reptiles to the photographic "transparencies" by William H. Rau, and of course, the live fish displays, the Commission's exhibits at both fairs were smashing successes.

Join us now in a nostalgic look back, when the Pennsylvania Fish Commission was visited by the world.

The entrance arch of the Fish Commission's 1893 exhibit. Constructed of oak panels, it displayed photographs of the Commission's hatcheries and various fish. In the center, models of the Commission's hatcheries at Allentown, Corry, and Erie can be seen in part. Live plants including mosses, reeds, and rushes were used throughout the exhibit.



One out of four Americans would visit the Fair, with

The Fish Commission's banner and some of the 20 aquariums used in the live fish display. The aquariums were surrounded with the rough outer growth of young cork trees. The cork bark in itself attracted a lot of attention.



The waterfall (above) in front of the "grotto" of aquariums fed a pond that contained various species of trout. The light for the aquariums was provided by natural means. William Meehan (below, standing) and Alonso Brady are at the entrance of the "grotto." Twisted and gnarled laurel roots, used for the ceiling, can be seen. The fish in the aquariums were kept alive by constantly changing filtered water from Lake Michigan.



a total attendance of 27.5 million.

1893 Exposition



Pennsylvania State Building

World's fairs are about progress, exhibits that show where we are and where we're going. It is literally the entire world getting together and comparing notes. Here are a few of the "facts and firsts" of the Columbian Exposition:

- ☞ Officially opened May 1, 1893, by President Grover Cleveland.
- ☞ The Fair celebrated the 400th anniversary of the discovery of America by Columbus.
- ☞ Total cost of the Fair was \$31 million.
- ☞ Full-sized, functional reproductions of the Columbus ships were built and displayed.
- ☞ The U.S. Postal Service introduced its first picture postcard and commemorative stamp.
- ☞ Pittsburgh bridge maker George W. Ferris introduced his "wheel." It was 250 feet high and could carry 2,160 people at once. You could get a two-revolution ride for 50 cents. After the Fair, the Ferris Wheel was dismantled and used in the 1904 St. Louis Fair. After that it was blown up and buried.
- ☞ Juicy Fruit Gum, Cream of Wheat, Diet carbonated soda, Pabst Beer, Shredded Wheat, Cracker Jacks, Aunt Jemima Syrup, and hamburgers were introduced.

Pennsylvania exhibitors won 74 Grand Prize Medals, 187 Gold Medals, 135 Silver Medals, and 106 Bronze Medals.



Grand Prize



Gold Medal



Silver Medal



Bronze Medal



Fisheries Building

1904 Exposition



U.S. Fisheries Commission Building



Forestry, Fish, and Game Building



1904 Pennsylvania State Building



Poster for the 1904 Exposition emphasizes international flair and appeal.



Transporting live fish and keeping them in a displayable condition for an extended period would be a monumental task even with today's technology. And as William Meehan documents here, the 1904 Fair had its share of problems.

"Nearly five thousand fish were brought in the first shipment and it was attributed to the skill of Mr. Nathan R. Buller that on that one thousand two hundred miles journey only three died. It is to be regretted that this condition could not continue, but they were scarcely placed in the tanks before my fears of the unsuitable character of the water furnished by the Exposition authorities were realized. The water instead of being clarified by subsidence as it should have been was filtered first by the city of St. Louis with lime and again on the Exposition grounds by means of alum water; water filtered by any process is not well adapted for the maintenance of fish life and that which was supplied was so heavily impregnated with lime and alum as to form a heavy deposit on the iron pipes, was necessarily fatal to nearly all the high-grade fishes. The trout, pike-perch, whitefish and blue-pike died within twenty-four hours. Yellow perch and several other species, notably blue catfish, died within a few days. At the expiration of ten days there were not more than fifteen species of fish alive, although curiously enough among those which seemed able to accept filtered water were several thousand Lake Erie minnows. Under the circumstances I felt it my duty to refuse to send another load of fish until the water was put in a better condition. After several weeks this was done by materially reducing the quantity of alum. I then shipped the second load, taking charge of the car myself. This was early in June, although the water was very warm, less than one dozen fish were lost in transportation. I regret to say that on my arrival I found that the Exposition officials had not kept their pledge to install the refrigerating plant to supply clear water. The consequence was when the fish arrived the water in the tanks had a temperature of over eighty degrees. The trout and many of the lake fishes consequently died very quickly. The refrigerating plant was installed in August, and on the 18th of August, Mr. A. G. Buller, Superintendent of the Erie hatchery, brought down a third lot, losing less than a dozen on the way. Owing to the chilled water in several of the tanks and by heavily icing the water in other tanks we were able to carry no less than thirty-six species of Pennsylvania fishes until the middle of September."



"At the east end of the space extending southward is constructed a circular pool, twelve feet in diameter and five feet deep, fed by water falling over an eight foot cascade at the east end of the aquarium, and along a winding stream bordered by living evergreens, ferns, cat-tails and vices. The stream contained live fish and in the pool were huge specimens of catfish and carp, some weighing twenty to thirty pounds each. The pool attracted scarcely less attention than the aquaria itself. All day long the projecting railing was overhung by large and curious crowds, who watched with interest the movements of the huge fish." -Wm. Meehan.



A portion of the model of a Commission "hatch house" can be seen in this photograph. "The confiscated nets and the mounted fish... were artistically displayed on a partition twelve feet high. The photographs and water color drawings were displayed on a neat wall of oiled yellow pine, guarded by the wings of a huge trap-net set upon the floor. In the center of the space was a large railed enclosure completely filled by two huge specimens of sturgeon and a porpoise caught... in the Delaware River."—Wm. Meehan.

I was at the fair . . .

"Shortly after my appointment the Pennsylvania Commission to the Louisiana Purchase Exposition asked me to prepare and take charge of an exhibit exemplifying the fisheries interests of the Commonwealth at the World's Fair in St. Louis.

"I notified the Commissioners of my willingness to take personal charge of the collection of material, the installation of the exhibit, and the care after being put in place. The Commission set aside ten thousand dollars (\$10,000) for my use in the work. Application was made to the Exposition authorities for space in the Forestry, Fish and Game Palace, and nearly 4,000 square feet were allotted at the north end of the building.

"Space was provided for the thirty-five tanks for aquaria...over the top of each tank was a paper label neatly framed and fronted by glass, giving the common and the scientific name of the exhibit, together with a brief data of its value arranged in characteristics. On each side of the label a transparency of fishing streams were set in frames. When this was all completed the grotto, the transparencies, and living fish formed a scene of great beauty and attracted enormous crowds. Indeed at times it became necessary for guards to walk westwardly along the aquaria to the end and then eastwardly on the other side.

"The work of installing the exhibit began on the 15th of March, and, by hard work, despite many great difficulties, and extortionate prices made by labor, both skilled and unskilled, and unreasonable exactions by these



Meehan

people, on the morning of the 29th of April the work was concluded and ready for live fish. On the afternoon of the 29th the live fish arrived from Corry in the Department car "Susquehanna," in charge of Nathan R. Buller, Superintendent of the Wayne County Hatchery, with four assistants.

"From the opening to the closing day there was constantly a dense crowd of people in front of the aquaria and around the pool and the exhibit space was nearly always comfortably full. The judges of the Exposition awarded the exhibit one grand prize and four gold medals, or for everything which

was distinctly classified, with the exception of the display of the confiscated nets. The prizes were as follows: Grand prize, for aquaria of live fish and accompaniments; Gold medal, for angling appliances of E. K. Tryon, Jr., & Co.; Gold medal, for mounted specimens of mammals, birds and reptiles which prey upon fish; Gold medal, display of photographs of wild animals by Hon. George Shiras, III; and Gold medal for Pennsylvania woods by Philadelphia Lumberman's Exchange.

"The Fair closed on the afternoon of December 1st, and within fifteen minutes the work of packing the exhibit for return to Pennsylvania was begun under my direction and by the 14th everything was completed and given into the hands of the freight companies for shipment.—Wm. Meehan's personal account, from Commission bound reports.