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For the Junior Members

EXHIBITIONS IN DUNEDIN

by GRAND-DAD

The very first exhibition in New Zealand was held in Dunedin in 1862 just fourteen years after the first pioneer settlers arrived in Otago. Though quite small its success prompted the citizens of Dunedin to hold a much bigger one three years later. This one was opened on the 12th January, 1865, but as I wasn't born, I don't remember much about it. The discovery of gold in Otago in 1861 had caused Dunedin to become the chief commercial town in New Zealand, and the exhibition had on display as the Otago Daily Times remarked, "all that is rare or curious in both islands of New Zealand."

The next Dunedin exhibition was the "New Zealand and South Seas Exhibition" of 1889-90 which proved that Dunedin was still the leading commercial town in New Zealand though not now the largest. It was held to mark the jubilee of British Settlement in this country. The foundation stone was laid by the Freemasons of Dunedin and proclaimed well and truly laid by His Excellency the Governor, Sir William Jervois who was making his farewell visit to the city. The ceremony took place in Jervois Street named after the Governor. This exhibition occupied all the land north of Anderson's Bay road between Cumberland St. and Crawford St. as far as Jervois Street comprising in all some 13 acres. The buildings alone covered 91 acres and no less than 20 tons of nails were used in their construction. The Exhibition was opened on 26 November, 1889 by the new Governor of New Zealand, the Earl of Onslow, who spoke of the wonderful progress New Zealand had made in the first 50 years of settlement.

From first to last (it closed in April, 1890) the exhibition proved an unqualified success and was visited by more than 600,000 people. The decorations were on an elaborate scale, the amusements were many and varied, and the exhibits covered every aspect of life in Dunedin and Otago, as well as of Australia, and the northern parts of New Zealand. I can remember one or two things about this exhibition though I was not yet attending school. I remember having a ride on the Switchback railway, and I remember the fernery, not so much because of the ferns as because inside the doorway there was a jet of water about three feet high with a ball balanced on top, and I could not understand why it did not fall off. Dunedin was still the Chief Commercial and industrial city in New Zealand, but from now on, the North Island caught up on Dunedin and even surpassed it.

The purpose of every exhibition is to let the people *see* the progress that has been made in recent years by means of exhibits, displays, photographs, models and demonstrations. An amusement park is usually added to attract the crowds and so help to pay the very heavy expenses incurred. The list of exhibits fills over one hundred pages of the official report.

Before I tell you about the 1925 exhibition, I want to tell you about the area where it was built. When the first Dunedin settlers arrived in 1848 there was a wide bay at the head of the harbour called Pelichet Bay which reached to the foot of the hill where the Northern Cemetery now exists; but when a road was constructed across the bay to allow people to travel along the western shore of Otago Harbour, the bay became a lake some 65 acres in extent which was then named Lake Logan. When I was a pupil at the Albany St. school in 1900-1 I often went to the rifle butts for shooting practice. and had to walk round the lake. It was a common sight to see scores of dead and dying octopuses lying in the water near the edge or to see people sailing or rowing boats on the lake.

Early in 1923 it was decided to hold another exhibition, to be the biggest and best ever held in the Southern Hemisphere, but there was no suitable ground large enough for the purpose, so the Harbour Board was asked if it would be possible to fill in enough of Lake Logan for an exhibition. They agreed, and at once linked Lake Logan to a suction dredge on the Otago Harbour by means of a pipe line a mile long. Sand and silt were sucked up from the floor of the harbour and poured into the lake. A year later enough of the lake had been filled in to allow the erection of the necessary buildings and the laying out of an Amusement Park and demonstration plots. The buildings alone covered 12 acres and the Amusement Park 25 acres.

I can recall seeing the first load of timber being transported to the site in July, 1924. A year later the seven main buildings had been erected as well as the Festival Hall. This was surmounted by a huge dome shaped like half an orange and reaching a height of one hundred feet above the ground. The Hall was large enough to seat 2,500 people and was placed at the far end of the Entrance Court. Right in front was a large lakelet in which the buildings were reflected ; and, especially at night when the exhibition, was lit up, the view was superb.

The 1925 exhibition was opened on November 17 by His Excellency the Governor General, Sir Charles Fergusson, and remained open till the first of May, 1926. He unveiled a commemoration tablet on which were these words—"Commemorating the dauntless courage of our pioneer men and women, typifying the resources of our Dominion, and symbolizing the progress of the world to 1925". During the five and a half months the exhibition remained open it was attended by over three million visitors. Boys and girls from all parts of Otago numbering over 9,000 were given three or four days to visit the exhibition, about 700 every week being billeted in Dunedin homes. Many of these boys and girls are now your fathers and mothers or perhaps your grandparents, and they will be able to tell you more about this wonderful display. In the Amusement Park there was a scenic railway, a fun factory, a device called the whip, dodgems, and other novelties. There was one game where a long row of people were each given five or six balls which they tried to throw into a box with nine holes each with a number, and the person with the highest score won a guinea box of first class chocolates. I rarely went home without one of these boxes.

The main purpose of the exhibition was, however, not amusement but education. Since the previous exhibition the world had made more discoveries than in the previous thousand years—motor cars, moving pictures, wireless, telegraphy, electric motors, aeroplanes, etc.—all of which were to be seen. All the main Government Departments had elaborate displays as did scores of private firms. Whole courts were devoted to displays by England, Canada, Australia, Samoa and Fiji.

In the Education Department's display were scores of exhibits by boys and girls including drawings, paintings, maps, projects, needlework, woodwork, handwork, and even poems. So important was this exhibition that visitors came from all over the world to see it, and I am sure, none were disappointed. Outside there was a large area devoted to demonstration by the Agricultural and Forestry Departments. There was a fernery showing most of New Zealand's ferns, and also a fine aquarium. There was also a free cinema where you could sit and rest while viewing New Zealand scenery, industries, etc., or life in other parts of the British Empire. It would take a large book even to make a list of all the exhibits.

When the exhibition was closed and the exhibits removed, the buildings* were demolished, and the rest of Lake Logan was filled in. The Harbour Board then leased the whole area to the City Council, who had it sown in grass after levelling, to provide the playing fields we now know as Logan Park. Both the 1889-90 and 1925-26 exhibitions were held on land reclaimed from the harbour. You will remember that the first settlers landed at a spot beside the present main Post Office in what is now Water St., all the land between there and the harbour having once been part of the harbour.

*(with the exception of the Art Gallery which was presented to the city by Sir Percy Sargood).