

Despite Controversies, Attendance Passes All Other Expositions

By ROBERT ALDEN

The World's Fair closes today with a two-year attendance that is the highest in the history of international expositions.

Turnstiles at Flushing Meadow have clicked more than 51 million times in the fair's two seasons. Yet, despite this impressive achievement, the New York fair was continually at the center of controversy, particularly because of its president, 76-year-old Robert Moses.

During the exposition's two years, Mr. Moses laid to the right and left of him with verbal cudgels. His targets were critics and detractors of the fair, and they were considerable in number.

Some found the fair "culturally uninspiring"; others "mediocre and unoriginal." Moreover, the fair had set attendance and financial goals that it was unable to achieve, and was therefore vulnerable to criticism.

But there were many, in the

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metropolitan area and around the world who loved it. Hundreds of thousands of these enthusiasts, particularly children, went to the exposition time and time again.

The impact on business in New York during the fair's two seasons was substantial, if not as great as some had first hoped. Hotels, restaurants, and the midtown retail trade were the principal beneficiaries.

Because of high expenditures by the fair corporation in the first season, and an attendance of 27.1 million instead of the 40 million that had been predicted for the first year, it now appears that there will be red ink when the fair's books are audited and closed.

But Mr. Moses remained determined that, in one way or another, some form of the permanent park on Flushing Meadow that he had promised would be a legacy of this fair would be built.

Fair Began as a Dream

The New York Fair began as a dream in the mind of a New York lawyer named Robert Koppie, who wanted his own son to experience a fair, the sense of wonder that had been his when as a boy he had wandered amidst the sights and lights and sounds, the wondrous shapes and colors and banners of the New York fair in 1939.

Many other New Yorkers had had the same idea. It fell on fallow ground and fallow minds. Principal among these were Thomas J. Deegan Jr., a public relations consultant and later chairman of the fair's executive committee; Charles F. Preusse, then City Administrator and later counsel to the fair; and Abraham K. Kaufman, a lawyer and property owner, who, with Mr. Koppie, early displeased Mr. Moses and, like Mr. Koppie, was dissociated from the fair.

It was Mr. Deegan and Mr. Preusse who, in the company of a group of New York business executives, asked Mr. Moses to become president of the fair.

Crowds Set Record

The 51 million visitors exceeded the 41,932,378 for two seasons at the 1939-40 New York fair, 41,454,412 for one season at Brussels in 1958 and 39,032,226 for two seasons in Chicago in 1933-1934.

But, based on the attendance figures at the 1939-40 New York fair and the subsequent growth in population in the metropolitan area, the fair corporation predicted before the opening of the fair's first season that 70,000,000 people would come to the 1964-65 fair.

"If we hadn't made that prediction, we would have come out of this thing smelling sweet as roses," Murray Davis, special assistant to Mr. Moses, said yesterday. "Fifty million is an awesome number of people, any way you look at it."

But all of the fair corporation's fiscal planning and its budget were based on the projection of 70,000,000 visitors. In the same way, concessionaires who, from experience at previous fairs, could figure almost exactly the percentage of fair-goers their concessions would attract, did their reckoning on the basis of 70,000,000.

As a result, at least 14 concessionaires and exhibitors filed papers in Bankruptcy Court at the end of the fair's first season. Dozens of others, borrowing heavily to open in 1965, teetered on the edge of financial disaster.

Loss Replaces Surplus

When the attendance for the fair's first season amounted to only 27,100,000, instead of the 40,000,000 that had been projected, the fair corporation, instead of showing the large surplus that had been projected, showed instead a loss of \$17,540,100 for 1964.

But Mr. Moses had undertaken the task of running this fair only because he had a life-long dream of building a park centered on Flushing Meadow, a place he remembers from his youth as a rat-infested swamp-land, ash heap and refuse dump presided over by a garbage czar whose name was Fishooks McCarthy.

Mr. Moses had projected a profit of more than \$49 million for the fair's two seasons. With that surplus he could repay the city \$23 million it had invested in permanent improvements on Flushing Meadow and have at least \$23 million to build a chain of permanent parks in Queens.

When the fair showed its financial weakness, Mr. Moses borrowed money so that the fair could open its second season.

Even now as the fair ends, he is determined that the city shall have its park.

Instead of the ambitious chain of parks he had envisaged, Mr. Moses has scaled down his dream. He now foresees a modest single park to be built in part through the use of funds of the Triborough Bridge and Tunnel Authority, over which Mr. Moses presides. He hopes that in the future the city will finance the chain of parks of which he dreams.

The fair corporation had borrowed \$29,829,000 before the start of the first season. It has paid back \$7,457,250 to its bondholders. How much more it will be able to pay is problematical.

To bring order out of what had promised to be a financial chaos at the close of the 1964 season, Mr. Moses pared his budget, halted the heavy spending that marked its first season and, finally, raised the admission price from \$2 to \$2.50.

Exhibitors were dismayed by the increased admission. A higher entrance fee for them meant a lower attendance figure. Mr. Moses ignored their howls and the behind-the-scenes maneuverings to oust him as president.

"If people can spend \$2.50 to

line up to see a movie like 'Goldfinger,' they can pay \$2.50 to come to the fair," he said.

He prevailed. Amid the fury of all this controversy, the fair sometimes became the subject of ridicule. But in hard business terms, it appeared to be an asset to the city.

The best estimates are that, through the two seasons, restaurant business in New York improved 6 to 8 per cent. Retail trade in midtown stores was up 4 per cent, perhaps a little more.

The percentage of hotel occupancy in 1962 was 69.8 per cent, in 1963 it was 64.4 per cent, in 1964, the first year of the fair, it rose to 71.3 per cent.

and in 1965 it will be about 70 per cent.

What were the major successes in that fairyland called Flushing Meadow?

In terms of a relatively modest investment, the Johnson Wax film "To Be Alive" emerged as a real winner. Francis Thompson, who, in the company of Alexander Hamid, made this documentary, was told by the Johnson company to go out and make any kind of film he liked, based on the fair's theme "Man's Achievements in an Expanding Universe," or its purpose, "Peace Through Understanding."

He was told that there need be no commercial message, that quality of product was all the

company desired. After several false starts, the film theme was modified and it became a movie showing that just "To Be Alive" (its title) was a joy. The film had an euphoric quality that sent its viewers back onto the fairgrounds happier people.

General Motors was the biggest single investor at the fair, with an exhibit that cost about \$53 million.

In 1964-65, General Motors had more visitors than any other exhibitor on the fairgrounds—29 million (compared with 24,230,000 at the 1939-40 fair). Each visitor cost the company almost \$2. General Motors would have liked larger crowds, to utilize its capacity to better advantage.

In terms of foreign participation, it was a disappointment.

Mr. Moses took an aloof attitude toward the Bureau of International Expositions in Paris, an organization that he described as "three little men in a cheap hotel room in Paris."

As a result, instead of passive non-endorsement, the Bureau of International Expositions became actively hostile. Britain, the Soviet Union, Germany, Italy and France did not take part.

Most of the remaining participation was by business groups, some with get-rich-quick entrepreneurs as sponsors.

The outstanding exception was Spain, the unquestioned

hit, along with the Vatican Pavilion, of the international section of the fair. Both pavilions had official sponsorship and both, as a result, shipped outstanding art to the fair—Michelangelo's Pietà in the case of the Vatican, and a group of Goyas, El Greco, Velasquez, in the case of Spain.

A major disappointment to many at the fair was the amusement area.

It was said that the New York fair lacked fun. There was no midway and little excitement once the play of fountains and fireworks ended each evening at 9:20 o'clock.

Why was the New York fair so controversial? The principal reason appeared to lie in Rob-

ert Moses, himself. In 40 years of public life he has never shied away from a fight. He relishes fights, lashing back at his critics. He runs his own show. Outside advice is publicly rejected.

But beyond these obvious facts, Mr. Moses incurred the ill will of his exhibitors and controversy resulted from the nature of the people in his own administration.

Outspoken dislike of the Moses team all over the fairgrounds was a principal reason that the 1964-65 fair provoked so much controversy.

What will endure from this fair?

The Paris World Fair of 1889 left the Eiffel Tower; the St. Louis Exposition of 1904 popu-

larized the hot dog. The New York Fair of 1939-40 introduced television. No one knows what will last from this fair. At least at this stage one thing that appears likely to remain will be the Belgian Waffle, a calorie-laden whipped-cream-and-strawberry concoction that grew ever more popular at the fair.