



Book Review

The 1964-1965 New York World's Fair: Creation and Legacy Gives Details

The 1964-1965 New York World's Fair: Creation and Legacy

By Bill Cotter, Bill Young

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The 1964-1965 New York World's Fair: *Creation and Legacy* by Bill Cotter and Bill Young, among the latest offerings in Arcadia Publishing's Images of America series, cannot really be said to cover any new ground, at least not for anyone who has read Lawrence R. Samuel's *The End of the Innocence: The 1964-1965 New York World's Fair* (Syracuse University Press, 2007, reviewed in the *Gazette*, Oct. 10, 2007). However, *The 1964-1965*

New York World's Fair: Creation and Legacy does an admirable job of explaining how the fair came about and why, and what happened after the gates closed for the last time in October 1965 in lay person's terms and in a conveniently portable version.

Young and Cotter have long been qualified as experts on the subject. Cotter supplied all 55 photographs in *The End of the Innocence* and Young first began amassing information and memorabilia about the fair in the early 1970s when his research for a junior high school project on the fair led to correspondence with Fair President Robert Moses. The two have contributed to numerous other books, magazine articles, and documentaries on the fair and host two popular Web sites devoted to its study and appreciation and collaborated on *The 1964-1965 New York World's*

Fair, published by Arcadia Publishing in 2004.

Still, the question remains: why yet one more book about the 1964-65 World's Fair? According to Cotter and Young, the subject is far from exhausted. "Letters from readers of the first book often asked for more information on how the fair came to be, so we decided the time was right to more fully explore the early stages and aftermath [of the fair]," the authors explained.

"The pictures preserved on countless photographs, showing space age pavilions, splashing fountains, manicured gardens, ballooning children and Belgian waffle-eating adults, tell a story of the 1964-1965 World's Fair that everyone remembers. However, there is a beginning and an end to that story that is as remarkable as the story of the fair itself but [is] seldom given much thought or consideration," Young states in his portion of the Introduction. *The 1964-1965 New York World's Fair: Creation and Legacy* in nine chapters: Why A Fair?, Designing the Fair, Building the Fair, The Phantom Fair, Promises of the Fair, The Changing Fair, The Fair on Sale, The End of the Fair and The Fair's Great Legacy, relates the beginning and end of the story as well as providing a glimpse into the behind-the-scenes maneuvering that was a part of the fair during its two years in existence.

As has been the case with several other newer publications in the Images of America series, *The 1964-1965 New York World's Fair: Creation and Legacy* intersperses text and photographs in such a way that captions are for the most part dispensed with. This makes for an "easy read" that conveys information more efficiently than other text-illustration-caption formats. The book also imparts information about the fair itself that might be overlooked in longer, more scholarly works. "The choice of Flushing Meadows for the second fair meant that hundreds of millions of dollars in design and construction costs were saved by utilizing the infrastructure left behind by the first fair." Cotter and Young explain in Chapter Two, Designing the Fair. Their concise and succinct style prevails

throughout the book. In Chapter Three, Building the Fair, they explain that the fair buildings had to withstand an Atlantic seaboard winter, yet have an estimated "natural life" of about five years, the exception being the Unisphere, which stands in Flushing Meadows-Corona Park as the symbol of Queens today.

Chapter Four, The Phantom Fair, touches a subject little known except to true fair aficionados: the fair that never was. Some exhibits, announced with great fanfare, quietly disappeared from maps and the public consciousness when the political or business organizations that had proposed them found constructing exhibition space at the fair far too costly. Many of the Promises of the Fair described in Chapter Five have come to fruition; some, such as a General Motors creation described as a machine that could "crawl through virgin rain forests and leave a paved road behind it" thankfully did not.

The Changing Fair, chapter six, points out a little known and often ignored fact: the exhibits and performances changed over the course of the fair's existence. Some live stage shows after flopping almost from the moment they opened quietly faded into obscurity; others that succeeded the failures found success. Not all exhibitions withered and died; a few had to be expanded to handle an unexpected swell of visitor enthusiasm and others needed upgrades to accommodate new product development that had taken place while the fairgrounds were closed during the winter of 1964-65. Some new additions for the 1965 season proved popular, among them the Aston Martin DB5 featured in the James Bond movie "Goldfinger".

The question of what to do with exhibitions, rides, equipment and structural components after the fair closed for the last time posed a sizable problem for fair management and exhibitors. Fair components were offered at bargain-basement prices and the result was "bits and pieces of the fair being scattered throughout the country and the world" as Chapter Seven, The Fair on Sale, relates. Some parts of the fair still in existence are almost unrecognizable today; others, such as all four Disney shows, became part of Disneyland or Walt Disney World.

"Here today and gone tomorrow; that is the nature of a world's fair," Cotter and Young point out in Chapter Eight, The End of the Fair. The New York World's Fair 1964-1965 Corporation asked for two extensions to the deadline by which demolition and restoration—razing structures, putting top soil on the now vacant sites, seeding and planting—were to be completed. Demolition and restoration were completed by June 1, 1967, six months ahead of the deadline for the second extension and the site formally turned over to the

city on June 3. This was a remarkable achievement in light of the fact that some 35 exhibitors simply abandoned their buildings in spite of their agreement to demolish their structures in accordance with the contracts they signed with the corporation.

The fair's administration and press buildings, the post office, maintenance building and the Singer Bowl stadium as well as the Pavilion's geodesic steel frame were left standing, as were the Space Park, Heliport, Greyhound, United States and New York State Pavilion. The New York City Building and the Amphitheater, remnants of the 1939-40 World's Fair, along with the Hall of Science, were also spared the wrecking ball. Few of these structures stand today, almost 50 years after the 1964-65 World's Fair, as detailed in Chapter Nine, The Fair's Great Legacy. Moses followed his overwhelming ambition: to see the fairgrounds become the park he had envisioned at the end of the 1939-40 World's Fair, even sinking the \$1.5 million cash assets remaining into the park, rather than paying the fair's debts. But while the New York State Pavilion was turned over to the city in perfect working order and allowed to deteriorate into a decaying hulk, other sites have fared better. The site of the Chrysler Pavilion has become the Queens Wildlife Center, better known as the Queens Zoo, and two time capsules from both World's Fairs are buried on the park grounds, with their marker at the center of a circle of benches in a grove of trees. While Flushing Meadows-Corona Park never quite became the grand public space that Moses envisioned, its athletic fields, the zoo and the various other museums and buildings that dot its grounds today still provide the people of New York City, and especially those of Queens, with a recreational venue unequalled by many other municipalities throughout the United States and the world.

The 1964-1965 New York World's Fair: Creation and Legacy is well written with a narrative that fully complements the photographs and maps used as illustrations. Our only complaint is the use of the word "snuck" instead of "sneaked", and we reiterate a comment made in other reviews: Arcadia Publishing's works would be well served by an index. So much information is encompassed in *The 1964-1965 New York World's Fair: Creation and Legacy* that trying to find a particular fact or reference can take more time than, we are sure, the book's readers have to spend. This caveat aside, *The 1964-1965 New York World's Fair: Creation and Legacy* is a worthy and worthwhile addition to the reference shelf of anyone interested in the 1964-65 World's Fair. It is also sufficiently entertaining in narrative as to make it a "good read" entirely for its own sake.

