The History of the Twentieth Century
Episode 329
"Dawn of a New Day"
Transcript

[music: Fanfare]

In 1939 and 1940, New York City hosted a World's Fair. The theme for this fair would be different from past World's Fairs. Instead of a celebration of what was or what is, the New York World's Fair would celebrate what is to come, hence its slogan, "Dawn of a New Day."

Welcome to *The History of the Twentieth Century.*

[music: Opening Theme]

Episode 329. Dawn of a New Day.

The coming of the Industrial Revolution brought with it national exhibitions, where a nation's manufacturers would come together to show off their products. This idea especially caught on in France, where Paris would regularly host such events.

The year 1851 brought the Great Exhibition at London's Crystal Palace, which did the French one better by announcing itself to be the "Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations," and hosting exhibitions not only from Britain and its Empire, but from 44 other nations. New York City copied the Great Exhibition with its own version in 1853.

London hosted a second exhibition in 1862. In 1876, the United States celebrated its centennial with an exhibition in Philadelphia. The French followed suit by converting their national exhibitions into international exhibitions, grandly labeled *Expositiones Universelles,* Universal Expositions, held in 1878, 1889, and 1900. Barcelona hosted one in 1888, Prague, then a part of the Austrian Empire, in 1891, and Brussels in 1897.

In 1893, Chicago hosted the Columbian Exposition, meant to celebrate the 400th anniversary of the first voyage of Christopher Columbus. In 1904, St. Louis outdid Chicago and most everyone else with its Universal Exposition, which was so awesome I had to devote an entire episode to it, episode 26, to be exact. In 1915, San Francisco hosted the Panama-Pacific International Exposition, which was meant to celebrate the opening of the Panama Canal. It suffered somewhat from the Great War, which broke out a few months before it opened.

In 1928, an international organization, the International Bureau of Expositions was formed to regulate and supervise these world's fairs, mostly to insure two countries didn't end up with

competing world's fairs. That same year, a nonprofit corporation was organized in Chicago for the purpose of holding a world's fair in 1933, the year marking Chicago's centennial. More or less. It depends who you talk to.

That fair was dubbed the "Century of Progress International Exposition," and opened on May 27, 1933, along the Lake Michigan shore. On opening night, the fair's electric lighting was automatically triggered by light from the star Arcturus. Arcturus was believed to be about 40 light years from the Earth, so the idea here was that the lights would be switched on by photons that were created 40 years earlier, during Chicago's Columbian Exposition in 1893.

In our time, more accurate measurements place Arcturus at only 36.7 light years from Earth. Also, Albert Einstein's special theory of relativity tells us that whether two events widely separated in space were simultaneous or not depends on your frame of reference. Yeah, I know. Pick, pick, pick…

Among the most memorable features of the Century of Progress Exposition were the Sky Ride, a bridge that carried visitors over the lake from one part of the exposition to the other, and the scandalous fan dancer Sally Rand, who performed at the fair. Admiral Byrd's ship, *City of New York,* which had explored Antarctica, was on display. Car makers and railroads showed off their latest vehicles. General Motors put up an assembly line where patrons could watch cars being built. In October 1933, the German airship *Graf Zeppelin* visited the exhibition. Many entertainers performed at the fair, perhaps not well known at the time, but visitors surely remembered names like Judy Garland and the Andrews Sisters after they became national celebrities. Major League Baseball's first All-Star Game was held in Chicago that year, in conjunction with the fair.

The theme of the fair was science and technological innovation. It was a celebration of what the past century had brought, bundled with a claim that progress was a distinctly American trait. The fact that the Great Depression struck as the fair was being planned and built has to be regarded as a setback, but this was 1933. The fair opened during Roosevelt's Hundred Days, and America's renewing sense of optimism fit hand-in-glove with the theme Century of Progress.

The fair was so successful in 1933, that its run was extended through 1934. The fair paid back its costs and even earned a small profit; this was the first time that had happened in an American world's fair. More important, the fair generated an estimated $750 million in business for the city of Chicago, a major boost to the local economy during hard times.

Meanwhile, 700 miles to the east, many New Yorkers looked down their noses as their Midwestern compatriots. Maybe a fancy bridge or an ocean-going vessel or a German airship were novelties to the hayseeds out West, but these were everyday sights in New York City. And despite the fair's claims of being about progress, it was mostly about middle-class middle-American consumer products, like Chevrolet and Kraft Cheese and Chicago's own Walgreens and Sears, Roebuck.

In New York, they were celebrating the repeal of Prohibition and the election of Republican Mayor Fiorello La Guardia. A colorful 52-year-old ex-Member of Congress, La Guardia defeated the corrupt New York Tammany Hall machine, with the support of Progressives, labor unions, and New York's substantial Jewish and especially Italian communities, typically Democratic constituencies who had crossed party lines to support La Guardia, who promised an end to patronage and corruption in City government, and a huge spending program to build new highways and parks as a means to pull New York out of the Great Depression.

La Guardia was a short, chubby man, colorful, irascible, and an energetic reformer. Despite being a Republican, La Guardia supported Roosevelt and the New Deal, and Roosevelt reciprocated by steering substantial chunks of New Deal spending to the nation's largest city.

New Yorkers were lining up for tickets to Cole Porter's hit Broadway show, *Anything Goes,* starring Ethel Merman, and uptown in Harlem, the Apollo Theater, a burlesque hall until the new Mayor La Guardia cracked down on burlesque shows, reopened under new management that began putting on shows for African-American audiences. Among the first performers in the new Apollo Theater was a seventeen-year-old singer named Ella Fitzgerald.

And out in Jackson Heights, in Queens, 12-year-old Jacqueline Shadgen came home from school. Her father, Joseph Shadgen, had been born in Luxembourg, raised in Belgium, educated as a civil engineer, and had emigrated to the United States in 1915. He'd done quite well for himself as an engineer during the Roaring Twenties, but the Great Depression left him out of work.

He asked his daughter what she'd learned in school that day. Jacqueline told him that she'd learned that the United States turned 158 years old in 1934. Because the nation was born on July 4, 1776, you see. That was the day the United States began, as Jacqueline was taught and I was taught and anyone who ever went to school in the USA was taught.

Her father, on the other hand, had not been educated in the USA, and he had a different perspective. That was the date of the signing of the Declaration of Independence, but a declaration is merely that. It represents a statement of intent maybe, but not the birth of a nation.

Father and daughter argued the point all through dinner. The next morning, he decided to prove it to her, by taking her downtown on the el, to Wall Street, to Federal Hall, and showed her the statue of George Washington and the inscription on its base declaring that Washington had been sworn in as the first President of the United States at this spot on April 30, 1789. That, he told her, was America's birthday.

I imagine at this point Jacqueline not so much gave in as gave up. Obviously, Dad was not going to change his mind. But as they rode the el back to Jackson Heights, Jacqueline did a mental calculation and realized that April 30, 1939, a date less than five years away, would be the 150th

anniversary of George Washington's inauguration. She asked her father whether there would be any kind of event to commemorate the anniversary. Her father told her no, not as far as he knew.

You can tell this is a stubborn guy, not one to quickly let go of an idea. Some kind of celebration should be held to honor the 150th anniversary of the first President's inauguration. Since New York was the site of the original event, it was the logical place to host the celebration. How about a World's Fair, on the scale of what they were doing in Chicago? The more he thought it over, the more it made sense.

Where should it be held? As a resident of Queens and a civil engineer, Shadgen had an idea about that, too. Since the beginning of the century, the Brooklyn Ash Removal Company had been in the business of…well, what it says right there in the name. Most homes, businesses, and factories of the time were heated with burning coal, which left ashes behind. Just as someone had to deliver the coal to every address in Brooklyn, someone had to haul away all the ashes.

The ashes were dumped in the watershed of the Flushing River in Queens, which at the time was a remote and undeveloped location. Brooklyn Ash Removal dumped something like a hundred railroad cars' worth of ash every day out here. And it was more than just ash. Ash removal customers often put ordinary trash, even food scraps, into their ash pile before it was picked up.

Meanwhile, Queens developed and a city grew up along the site, which the locals called "the Corona Dump," a thousand-acre wasteland of ash and decay that generated foul smells that permeated the borough. The Corona Dump was notorious. F. Scott Fitzgerald had originally titled his novel *Among the Ash-Heaps and Millionaires,* a sly reference to the dump, before his editor talked him into calling it *The Great Gatsby* instead.

The La Guardia administration banned private trash dumps within New York City limits and purchased the site for $2.8 million, but what to do with it? Shadgen proposed renovating the site and building the World's Fair there. Afterward, it could be converted into a public park.

It was a tall order, and the magic date was less than five years away; still, Chicago had done it in five years, surely New York could do as much.

Shadgen took the idea to his business partner, a man named Edward Roosevelt, a cousin of the President's from the less wealthy side of the family. But Roosevelt was well connected. When Shadgen outlined the idea to him, Roosevelt took to it at once and together they presented it to New York's wealthy and powerful.

They convinced George McAneny, a powerful New York banker who saw the potential of the fair to bring business to the city, and he took the project on as his own. McAneny gradually sold the idea to a cross-section of New York's wealthy elite. On September 23, 1935, McAneny hosted a grand dinner at the Ritz-Carlton Hotel. Both the mayor and the governor were present

and spoke in favor of the plan, and McAneny read out a telegram of support from President Roosevelt, and noted that the city's Parks Commissioner, Robert Moses, also endorsed the plan.

Now, I've talked about Moses before on the podcast. He was a colorful and controversial figure who was in charge of much of the highway and parks construction in New York during the Great Depression. He had a testy relationship with Mayor La Guardia. La Guardia didn't think much of the commissioners who led the various city departments and worked under him. One of his favorite insults when chewing out a subordinate was to tell them, "You're so stupid I should appoint you a commissioner." Moses was a visionary, but he was also temperamental and stubborn. He threatened to resign so many times that La Guardia had a pad of forms printed up, which he kept on his desk. The pre-printed forms read, "I, Robert Moses, hereby resign effective:" with a space to fill in the date. Whenever Moses came to the mayor to complain about something, La Guardia would tear off a form from the pad and hand it to him.

But the World's Fair plan was in line with Moses' own thinking. He had come to the same conclusion about the Corona Dump, that it needed to be converted into a park, but he couldn't get the money to do the job. Moses had gone so far as to run the new Grand Central Parkway through the dump. The parkway project used some of the land; Moses hoped that once people regularly began driving past the eyesore that was the dump, this would create political pressure to deal with it.

Now the parkway would help people reach the site of the proposed World's Fair, about which Moses cared little, but the proposal to convert the site to parkland after the Fair ended was music to Moses' ears.

The plan was well-received, and a month later, over a hundred of New York's elite invested their money to fund a New York World's Fair Corporation. And here is where Shadgen and Roosevelt fade from the story. The corporation paid them both salaries to do very little actual work, but control of the project was out of their hands. Shadgen would eventually resign and sue the corporation. They settled out of court, but he remained bitter.

Time was running out. Wrangling over funding between the corporation, the city, and the state cost another six months. When that was all settled, there were only three years remaining. It had taken Chicago five. Could this still be done?

The corporation selected a new president to run the operation, a man named Grover Whalen. Whalen was a former police commissioner and current chair of the Mayor's Committee on Receptions to Distinguished Guests, and in that capacity he had become something of a celebrity himself, hobnobbing with people like Admiral Byrd and Charles Lindbergh. He came to be known as "Mr. New York." Whalen did not invent the idea of dropping ticker tapes, but he perfected the ticker tape parade, turning it into the New York version of a Roman triumph.

With the deadline to open the fair looming, Whelan put the project back on track. The Fair needed a theme. Chicago's had been the Century of Progress. Celebrating progress was all well and good, but it meant looking backward. Whelan wanted something different. He wanted a fair that would look ahead, to the future. Except he didn't like that word, "future." To him it evoked fortune tellers and mysticism. So he went with "Building the World of Tomorrow." In 1936, this was announced officially. Over time, it got shortened to "The World of Tomorrow" and an accompanying slogan, "Dawn of a New Day."

In addition to traditional forms of publicity, Whelan pioneered new ways of keeping the coming fair in the public consciousness. In 1938, he persuaded New York State to stamp its license plates with the words New York World's Fair 1939. Every player in all three of New York's baseball clubs, the Yankees, the Giants, and the Brooklyn Dodgers, wore a uniform decorated with the Trylon and Perisphere, which had been unveiled as the symbols of the Fair. Sales of New York World's Fair merchandise helped fund the project, which was a novel idea in its time. Among the branded merchandise was fabric adorned with the Trylon and Perisphere. The Fair got a royalty when it was sold, and women who wore dresses sewn from it became walking billboards for the World's Fair. When aviation magnate Howard Hughes attempted to break the record for fastest flight around the world, Whelan talked him into naming his airplane *New York World's Fair.* Hughes carried the name and the Trylon and Perisphere image with him as he broke the record previously held by the late Wiley Post.

There was also the matter of persuading foreign countries to invest in pavilions. When Britain and France refused to go big, Whelan decided to go to Moscow to convince the government of the USSR to use the fair to promote Soviet achievements. He couldn't even get a visa to visit Russia; as New York police commissioner, he had overseen crackdowns on the Communist Party, and Comintern had a long memory.

Undeterred, Whelan went to Washington and got a meeting with Konstantin Umansky, *chargé d'affaires* at the Soviet Embassy, and convinced him to spend a weekend in New York, to be wined and dined and presented with plans and models of the upcoming fair. Umansky was convinced, and surprised Whelan by asking to use the telephone to call General Secretary Stalin right then and there. Umansky got Stalin on the line and Whelan listened to Umansky as he enthused over the World's Fair, telling Stalin how Whelan had promised the USSR a prime location. Stalin asked Umansky how much would it cost. Umansky forwarded the question to Whelan. Whelan said four to five million dollars. Stalin committed to four million, then and there.

Once the Soviet agreement was announced, other countries began to take interest. Whelan traveled to Europe and managed to get a ten-minute meeting with Benito Mussolini, who opened the discussion by noting that Whelan was a former police commissioner and asking, "How did my people behave?" meaning Italian Americans in New York. Whelan said, "Some good, some bad." Mussolini asked, "The bad ones…from Sicily?"

The ten-minute meeting ran an hour and a half. Whelan convinced Mussolini that a fair all about "Building the World of Tomorrow" was the perfect place to present the vision of Fascism. Mussolini asked how much. Whelan, having learned his lesson with Stalin, said, five million dollars. Mussolini agreed.

In the end, total of 62 nations would be represented at the Fair; 22 of them built their own pavilions, more international participation than had ever before been seen at a world's fair. The only major nation that declined to appear at the Fair was Germany.

Chicago's fair had been planned for one year, but extended to two. New York's would also run for two years, 1939 and 1940. The corporation calculated the Fair would need fifty million visitors to break even; Grover Whelan confidently predicted sixty million, which would close out the fair with a substantial profit.

[music: Scarlatti, *Sonata in d minor*]

Despite fears to the contrary, the World's Fair opened on schedule on Sunday, April 30, 1939. The weather forecast was for sunshine and unseasonal warmth, perfect for the occasion. Special trains were put in service to carry attendees out to the former dump, now rechristened Flushing Meadows, to attend the Fair, which also reserved over 30,000 parking spaces for those who came by automobile.

The Fair opened at 11:00, with opening ceremonies to begin at 2:00, with a series of speeches culminating in an appearance by President Roosevelt, who arrived with his family, including his wife Eleanor, who wore a silk dress that bore the Trylon and Perisphere pattern, with matching hat and handbag. Roosevelt officially declared the Fair open, speaking for about fifteen minutes, about as long as he could stand behind a podium in his leg braces. RCA, the Radio Corporation of America, carried the President's speech on its network, but also chose this occasion to inaugurate the first television broadcast in the United States. RCA boasted that the President's speech could be seen on any television set within fifty miles of the Empire State Building, which was true, although this amounted to only about 200 television sets. TVs of the time had screens ranging in size from 6 to 12 inches.

Contrary to the weather forecast, the afternoon turned cold, with threatening clouds moving in just as the President and First Lady were leaving. The next major ceremony was scheduled for 4:00, by which time it had begun to rain, and visitors began streaming for the exits. This ceremony was the dedication of a sixty-foot statue of George Washington followed by the appearance of a Washington re-enactor, dressed in period clothes and bearing a ceremonial sword, who would take the Presidential oath of office. The re-enactor had begun his journey at Washington's Mount Vernon home and ridden in a horse-drawn coach to Flushing Meadows for the occasion. Alas for him, the rain turned into a downpour as he arrived, driving away most of the small crowd that waited for him.

At dusk, 7:00 that evening, came the last big event of the day, a speech by Albert Einstein, who had agreed to chair the Fair's committee of science advisors. Einstein had come to regret that decision and expressed his frustration at how the Fair was promoting showy, crowd-pleasing exhibits at the expense of real science education. He was also regretting his decision to give this speech. He was assigned the task of explaining cosmic rays to the audience, then told to limit his remarks to five minutes.

Einstein delivered the speech as requested. Between his German accent, the technical nature of the subject, and the dodgy public address system, no one understood a word his speech, but by 1939, the public was quite used to the idea that Albert Einstein operated on a whole different plane, beyond the comprehension of ordinary people.

Einstein's speech was just the prelude to the real show. Chicago had its Arcturus; New York was going to capture ten cosmic rays at the Hayden Planetarium in Manhattan. The lights went out. Then, as each was detected, one additional beam of light would illuminate the Trylon, from the bottom up. After ten lights fully illuminated the Trylon, Einstein would throw a switch to light up the whole Fair with fluorescent lights, a newly introduced technology.

Only, when Einstein threw the switch, the electrical system overloaded and blacked out the entire Fair. After several frantic minutes of troubleshooting failed to solve the problem, Grover Whelan ordered the fireworks show to begin early.

An inauspicious beginning, compounded by the fact that despite Whelan's prediction of a million visitors on the first day, the actual number was 200,000. The rain had kept people away. Whelan's predictions of huge crowds may also have scared visitors off.

The centerpiece of the World's Fair was the Theme Center, consisting of those Trylon and Perisphere structures familiar to everyone in America by now. They cost nearly $2 million alone to build and required sinking over a thousand wooden piles into the former ash pit below to provide sufficient support. The Trylon and Perisphere were supposed to represent the finite and the infinite, though more than one commentator remarked on their resemblance to male genitalia.

The Trylon was a 600-foot three-sided spire. Its name was a portmanteau of "triangular pylon." The Perisphere was a sphere, 180 feet in diameter, built over a reflecting pool. Its eight supporting columns were obscured by eight fountains, creating the illusion that the huge white sphere was floating in the air.

Visitors entered the Perisphere and rode up what was then the longest escalator in the world to one of two revolving balconies that completed a circle every six minutes. From this vantage, they would look down upon Democracity, a huge model of city, suburbs, and countryside meant to represent life in the future, each of its wonders explained by a recorded narration, accompanied by original music composed by African-American composer William Grant Still. After two minutes of daylight, evening would fall. The space grew dark as tiny lights appeared in the

windows and street lights of the miniature city. Pin holes in the dome overhead provided starlight.

From there, visitors would exit the Perisphere at its equator and descend a huge ramp called the Helicline that would take them through the Trylon and then down to the ground below.

From the Theme Center, three avenues extended outward, dividing the Fair into zones. They were color-coded yellow, red, and blue. The Theme Center was the only white building; along each avenue, colors began pastel and grew deeper as you progressed. Besides giving the Fair a unified color scheme, this layout had the added advantage of making it all but impossible to get lost. You could tell where you were by the colors around you, and the pavilions and exhibition halls were designed with a futuristic look. Exhibitors were forbidden to put advertising on their building's exteriors, but there was plenty of salesmanship going on inside.

The Theme Center was voted the second most popular attraction at the Fair. It was upstaged by the Futurama exhibit at the General Motors pavilion. Futurama cost GM $7 million and was intended to sell the nation on the idea of superhighways linking the country, and of course, creating more demand for cars. It was an enormous scale model of an American landscape in 1960: cities, farms, mountains, rivers, containing five hundred thousand tiny buildings, a million tiny trees, and naturally, fifty thousand automobiles, ten thousand of which moved along the superhighways of the future. Visitors rode through the exhibit in pairs on a double seat for eighteen minutes, simulating a flight of hundreds of miles, at a time when most people had never ridden in an airplane. Changes in the scale and rises and dips in the ride gave the feeling of diving low to examine a community in detail, then climbing to a higher altitude to travel over a mountain range, while speakers hidden in the upholstery narrated the scene.

Streamlined cars sped along fourteen-lane highways at speeds up to 100 miles per hour in perfect safety, as each car automatically maintained its distance from the car in front. The climax of the ride was a look at the city of the future, where pedestrians used elevated sidewalks to pass between skyscrapers, while the ground below was entirely dedicated to the automobiles. The end of the ride brought passengers down low to examine an intersection in that future city. At the four corners stood an auditorium, a department store, an apartment building, and a GM dealership. The *piéce de rèsistance* came when the ride took the visitors outside and deposited them at a real-world replica of the intersection they had just flown over, leaving the impression that their journey had been a real one.

Visitors were dazzled, and left sporting buttons that read "I Have Seen the Future." Journalist Walter Lippmann's judgment was less kind: "GM has spent a small fortune to convince the American public that if it wishes to enjoy the full benefit of private enterprise in motor manufacturing, it will have to rebuild its cities and highways by public enterprise."

The line to get into Futurama was never less than an hour long, and often three hours long.

By contrast, the Ford exhibit merely showed you the Road of Tomorrow. General Electric showed you the Kitchen of Tomorrow. Firestone demonstrated the Tire of Tomorrow. There was a life-size Town of Tomorrow, showcasing the houses of the future. There was even a Drug Store of Tomorrow, were you could buy an ice-cream soda at the Fountain of the Future. Or taste the Sandwich of Tomorrow. Actually, that last thing was a joke that appeared in *The New Yorker* magazine.

IBM showed off electric typewriters and a calculator that could solve arithmetic problems, using punched cards. Borden demonstrated cow-milking machines. AT&T demonstrated the Voder, a device that took typed input and generated synthetic speech. RCA showed off televisions, including one with a transparent cabinet, so you could see the electronics inside. This was to reassure skeptics who thought it was all some kind of trickery. Visitors could even see themselves on television, and make their own record to take home.

As for foreign exhibits, the USSR had an amazing pavilion, including a pylon topped with a steel statue of a Soviet worker that was the tallest structure at the Fair, aside from the Trylon. The Soviets showed off the latest Tupolev ANT-25 aircraft, the very plane that had recently flown nonstop over the North Pole from Moscow to Vancouver, Washington, and a full size replica of Moscow's palatial Mayakovskaya subway station.

There was a Jewish Palestine pavilion; Albert Einstein returned to the fair to speak at its dedication. And there was a Czechoslovak pavilion. Its completion was interrupted by the German occupation in March of 1939. Fewer than half of the intended exhibits had been shipped to New York when the German government halted the rest. A private committee raised funds to open the pavilion anyway, over the objections of the German government. A plaque on the front explained that the pavilion was unfinished, begun by the Republic of Czechoslovakia and maintained by its friends in America.

The Italian Pavilion offered a jumble of imagery, combining ancient Rome and modern Fascism. Similarly, the Japanese Pavilion was designed to resemble a Shinto shrine, set in a Japanese tea garden, yet it also housed a replica of America's Liberty Bell, done in silver and ornamented with diamonds and pearls, dubbed the "Million-Dollar Liberty Bell." Both pavilions were popular with fairgoers.

On the first of September 1939, the cumulative attendance figure was sixteen million, well below estimates. Grover Whelan was sidelined and cost-cutting measures were implemented.

The first of September also marked the invasion of Poland. Ironically, the second of September had already been scheduled as Polish National Alliance Day. It produced a record turnout at the Fair of Polish-Americans who came to listen to speeches and watch a parade, which kicked off with a marching band playing "The Star-Spangled Banner" and the Polish national anthem, "Poland Is Not Yet Lost." Many visitors wept as they viewed the exhibits that day. Outside stood a bronze portrait of Józef Piłsudski, who had led the struggle for Polish independence, the fact

that he had fought with the Germans against the Russians now posing a sad historical irony. Mayor La Guardia spoke to the crowd, assuring them that, "When the World of Tomorrow writes the history of today, the people of Poland will have a glorious page in that history."

On October 31, the Fair closed for the season. That night, the Perisphere was lit up to resemble a jack o'lantern. Total attendance for 1939 was 26 million, making it clear the Fair was not going to turn a profit. Indeed, it would struggle to make the break-even point of fifty million total over two years.

The Fair opened again on May 11, 1940, and within minutes, the line to get into Futurama was as long as ever. Administrators had made a few changes to entice more to come, or come back. The admission price was lowered, but once inside, there would be fewer restaurants that charged higher prices. More of the exhibits were air conditioned. And the Fair changed theme, from "Building the World of Tomorrow" to "For Peace and Freedom," in response to the Second World War.

General Motors had added more railings outside Futurama to help control the crowds and give people something to lean on while they waited. Inside, they added 600 churches to the Futurama exhibit, in response to criticism from church groups that GM's vision of the America of 1960 didn't seem to have any Christians in it.

The most dramatic change was the disappearance of the imposing Soviet Pavilion. The Russians had dismantled it and shipped it home at the end of the 1939 season. In its place was a hastily assembled open-air amphitheatre called the "American Commons," where they performed songs and dances from various ethnic groups found in America, a celebration of diversity (although they didn't call it that in 1940) and also an implicit rebuke of Nazism.

The Polish Pavilion was still open, though draped in black. Its restaurant was still defiantly dishing out Polish ham, and every night at dusk, a bugler in the tower played a short bugle call cut off in mid-note. This was the *hejnał*, which supposedly commemorates a bugler who awakened the sleeping city of Kraków one morning in 1241 to warn them that Tartars were attacking. It is said he was shot in the throat with an arrow as he blew the warning, hence the custom of stopping the *hejnał* in mid-note, before it was finished.

It added a distinctly downbeat feeling to what was supposed to be a happy occasion. Even more depressing was the fact that the Czechoslovakia and Poland pavilions were now joined by the Norway and Denmark pavilions, on the list of exhibits celebrating countries under German occupation. As 1940 unfolded, the list grew longer. And as you know, the Fair's opening on May 11 coincided with the German offensive in the West. The Netherlands pavilion never opened. The pavilions of France, Belgium, and Luxembourg did open. So did Finland's and Portugal's, although both those countries shut down their exhibitions by July.

As the Fair progressed through the summer of 1940, New York experienced a series of bombings. In June, powerful bombs went off nearly simultaneously at the office of the German Consulate in Manhattan and at the Communist newspaper *The Daily Worker*. Who was targeting Germans *and* Communists? It left the New York Police Department's bomb squad scratching their heads.

Publicity about the bombings triggered a flood of copycat telephone bomb threats around the city. A telephone operator in the Italian Pavilion at the World's Fair received one of them, a call warning there was a bomb in the pavilion. Police searched the building and found nothing, but the police department decided to keep plain-clothed members of the bomb squad stationed full time at the Fair, just in case.

On July 1 another telephone bomb threat was received, this time at the British Pavilion. Again, the bomb squad searched the building and the fairgrounds, but found nothing.

July 3, 1940 was "Superman Day" at the Fair, and it included a public appearance by an actor costumed as the Man of Steel, which is notable because this is the first occasion on which a live actor portrayed Superman in costume, and yet the identity of the actor is unknown. No record of who that man was survives, though personally, I suspect a newspaper reporter named Clark Kent. I'll have a little more to say about Superman in a few weeks.

That same morning, an electrician named William Strachan was doing electrical work in the British Pavilion, related to the pavilion's new air conditioning system, when he came across a small canvas suitcase. Strachan was in the building's mechanical room, which was not open to the public, so he assumed it belonged to one of the pavilion's employees and left it alone.

The following day, July 4, 1940, was Independence Day in the United States. That afternoon, Strachan returned to work in the mechanical room and noticed the suitcase was still there. He examined it more closely and determined that it was ticking. He decided he should turn the case in to someone, but apparently did not consider that the bag might be dangerous. He carried it downstairs and delivered it to the man he was working for, a British man named Cyril Hawkings.

Hawkings didn't know what to make of it either, though he agreed that it was ticking. They decided to show it to Sidney Wood, the person in charge of security at the British Pavilion. But first they had to find him. So Strachan picked up the suitcase, and he and Hawkings began threading their way through the crowds in the busy pavilion to look for him.

But wait, it gets even worse. They found Wood in the Magna Carta Room. This was where the British kept their most interesting and popular exhibit: one of the four existing copies of the original Magna Carta. This was the first time one of these copies had been exhibited outside of Britain, and it was the highlight of any visit to the British Pavilion, and there, in the packed room that also contained an irreplaceable historical treasure, they showed the suitcase to Wood. He

didn't know what to make of it either, so he called his boss, C.M. Pickthall, the British Commissioner General, the man in charge of the British Pavilion.

When they explained the situation to Pickthall, he suggested they contact the police. I guess we can see why *he* was the one in charge. The two plainclothes detectives from the NYPD who were on duty at the Fair that day were summoned. They called in a report on the situation. Then one of them suggested that maybe the suitcase should be taken out of the British Pavilion to someplace away from the crowds. They exited the pavilion and carried the bag to a secluded spot behind the Polish Pavilion, near the chain-link fence at the perimeter of the fairgrounds.

NYPD sent two detectives from the bomb squad out to the World's Fair to investigate. Their names were Joe Lynch and Freddy Socha. They arrived on the scene a little before 5:00 that afternoon and met up with the canvas suitcase and the five police officers guarding it. After establishing for themselves that yes, the bag was ticking, Lynch asked the other officers how long it had been ticking. They reported to him that the electrician, Strachan, had first noticed the ticking about an hour and a half ago. He hadn't noticed any ticking yesterday.

What do you mean, yesterday? They explained how the bag had first been spotted yesterday morning.

Then it couldn't possibly be a time bomb, the bomb squad detectives concluded. Time bombs were set off by clocks, hence the ticking sound, but a clock only counts out twelve hours before starting over again. Maybe it was a hoax? Lynch decided to cut a small hole in the bottom of the suitcase and take a peek inside. He and Socha cut the bag open while another police officer watched closely. The others were some distance away.

When the hole was cut, Lynch and Socha looked inside. They saw sticks of dynamite. "This looks like the real goods," Lynch said.

The officer watching stood up and turned to his fellow police officers and warned them to get back. "It's the business," he said.

A few seconds later, the explosive blast caught that police officer in the back and blew him into the other waiting officers, knocking them all to the ground. The bomb had exploded, killing Lynch and Socha and wounding the other five police, two of them seriously. It left a five-foot diameter crater in the ground, blew a hole in the chain-link fence, and filled the air with leaves stripped off a nearby maple tree.

That was bad enough, but had the bomb exploded inside the British Pavilion, the death toll could have run into the hundreds. The force of the explosion might have been enough to collapse the entire building. Indeed, the bomb had been placed in the mechanical room, which stood in the center of the building. That was probably deliberate on the part of the bomber.

And by the way, even in 1940, they did have alarm clocks that counted not only minutes and hours but also days, and it was quite possible for someone to build a time bomb and set it to explode at a specific time days in the future. As indeed, someone did.

News of the explosion triggered another wave of copycat bomb threats. New York put its entire police force on 24-hour duty and searched the Fair grounds and other public venues. In Washington, police cordoned off the US Capitol.

But who would do such a thing? Some suggested radical Zionists. The British government had recently placed sharp limits on Jewish immigration to Palestine and restrictions on the Jewish community already there, which many Zionists denounced as betrayals of the promise made in the Balfour Declaration. Maybe some Zionists had decided to move beyond denunciations. Maybe it was radical Irish nationalists.

But the group upon which suspicion fell most heavily was the German-American Bund, an organization of American Nazi sympathizers. In July of 1940, the group was much diminished from the glory days of its 1939 rally, but perhaps zealots in the group were willing to strike one more blow for the Nazi cause.

A popular theory in our time is that the British put the bomb in their own pavilion as a way of winning American sympathy at a time when Britain was standing alone against Nazi Germany. This theory has the advantage of explaining how the bomb was placed in a room that was not open to the public, but it has the disadvantage of being completely bonkers. It just reeks of 21st-century conspiracy paranoia. While it is true that the Churchill government was trying hard to win American sympathy, it was trying to elicit respect, not pity. It was trying to project an image of a nation standing tall and determined to win the war no matter how long it took. I'm having trouble seeing how a bomb going off in their World's Fair pavilion fits in to that PR campaign.

The World's Fair closed for good on October 27, 1940. Newspaper reports of the time quote employees of the Czechoslovak and Polish Pavilions lamenting it would cost them their lives to return to their home countries. Employees at the Belgian Pavilion told the papers they had not heard from their families since the German invasion five months earlier. Most of the staff from occupied countries would remain in the United States. The Polish government, now in exile in the UK, sold the contents of the Polish Pavilion to the Polish Museum of America, located in Chicago.

Futurama was destroyed. General Motors said it was too big and too intricate to move or keep.

Attendance in 1940 amounted to about 19 million, bringing the overall attendance number to about 45 million, short of the break-even point. Bond holders received about 40 cents on the dollar for their investment. The New York Convention and Visitors Bureau estimated that the World's Fair generated about $280 million dollars' worth of business for the city, well short of the projected billion dollars, but a tidy sum still.

Before the Fair opened, Westinghouse buried a time capsule, intended to be opened in five thousand years, that is, in the year 6939. It contains thousands of books on microfilm, a copy of *Life* magazine and of the Sears, Roebuck catalog, a newsreel of President Roosevelt, another of Jesse Owens winning the gold medal in the hundred-meter race at the Berlin Olympics, and letters from figures that ranged from Thomas Mann and Grover Whalen. Whalen's letter opened with the words, "We were thinking of you in the World of Tomorrow…"

Albert Einstein also contributed a letter, in which he explained to the people of the future that in the twentieth century, "[p]eople living in different countries kill each other at irregular time intervals…I trust that posterity will read these statements with a feeling of proud and justified superiority."

The 1939 New York World's Fair is better remembered than most. What is especially remembered is its focus on the future. Previous expositions were celebrations of how far had we come. This World's Fair chose to contemplate where we were going.

This contemplation of the future, sometimes called futurology, came into its own during the Jazz Age, possibly because the world of 1939 had changed so radically since even, say, 1919. Imagine what the years to come would bring. The Fair was an attempt not only to imagine the future, but to celebrate it, and to think seriously about how to prepare for it, a project that previously had been the preserve of Mr. H.G. Wells.

Another manifestation of this budding interest in futurology is the emergence of science fiction as a distinct category of literature. We will talk about that next week. As anyone who has read the science fiction of this era can attest—and I grew up on it—its writers of this time had little interest in conventional literary concerns, like plot or character, choosing instead a keen focus on developing plausible scenarios for what the future might bring. Science fiction, like the World's Fair, aimed to prepare the public for what was to come. It is no coincidence that the first World Science Fiction Convention, with about 200 attendees, was held in New York City in 1939, coinciding with the World's Fair.

The Fair introduced the American public of 1939 to a number of new technological wonders. Principal among them was television, which began in the US at the Fair. Westinghouse brought to the fair the first machine that could play a game against a human opponent. It was called the Nimatron, because it played the game of Nim. It was about the size of a large refrigerator. DuPont introduced nylon stockings, and Sawyer's Photo Finishing Service introduced a re-invented form of stereoscope that took advantage of modern color film to produce breathtaking 3-D landscape images in vivid color, marketed as the "View-Master." Everyone had one of those when I was a kid. Does anyone still have them today?

As for the bombing, a reward was offered for information leading to the arrest and prosecution of the person responsible, which grew to $25,000, which in 1940 was roughly the equivalent of $500,000 today. Even so, no one was ever charged with the crime and the identity of the

perpetrator remains a mystery, even in our time. The reward money is still out there, if anyone wants to claim it.

What else is there to say? I'm going to give the last word to Grover Whelan, who said this on the day the World's Fair closed: "We dreamed dreams, and the dreams all came true. We stimulated the world. We did our best to prove that nations can live in peace and freedom. I think we're stopping at the right time, but I've cried more than once, just thinking about it."

And now is the right time for us to stop as well. I thank you for listening, and I'd especially like to thank Nestor for his kind donation, and thank you to John for becoming a patron of the podcast. Donors and patrons like Nestor and John help cover the costs of making this show, which in turn keeps the podcast available free for everyone, so my thanks to them and to all of you who have pitched in and helped out. If you'd like to become a patron or make a donation, you are most welcome; just visit the website, historyofthetwentiethcentury.com and click on the PayPal or Patreon buttons.

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I'm going to be at the North American Science Fiction Convention in Winnipeg, Manitoba in July. I don't know yet if I'll be presenting, but if any of you are planning to be there, do look me up. And I'm pleased to be able to announce that a short story of mine will appear in the forthcoming fantasy anthology, *Artifice and Craft*. It's a collection of stories about magical artifacts. The anthology will be released on September 1. The ebook is already available for pre-order at Amazon, and I understand there will be a trade paperback edition as well.

And I hope you'll join me next week, here on *The History of the Twentieth Century,* as we take the first of two episodes to talk about pulp fiction. We're going to begin by examining the literary genre that was born in pulp fiction, but eventually grew far beyond it. I refer of course to science fiction. Amazing Stories, next week, here, on *The History of the Twentieth Century.*

Oh, and one more thing. When those of you listening today heard the name *Futurama,* I bet what probably came to mind first for most of you was the animated cartoon series created by Matt Groening that debuted on the Fox television network in the United States on March 28, 1999. The cartoon has a decidedly late twentieth-century take on the future, but yes, the name was taken from the 1939 World's Fair exhibit.

[music: Closing Theme]

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