Collection on the 1939-1940 New York World’s Fair, 1934-1993
(bulk dates, 1939-1940)
39 boxes

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Description is in English.

Descriptive Summary
Creator: Museum of the City of New York
Title: Collection on the 1939-1940 New York World’s Fair
Dates: 1934-1993 (bulk dates, 1939-1940)
Abstract: New York’s celebrated World’s Fair of 1939-1940, held on a former ash dump in Flushing Meadows, Queens, drew millions of visitors with its promise to reveal “The World of Tomorrow.” The collection documents the Fair from both a corporate and visitor perspective. A variety of object-types are represented including photographs, design renderings, publications, administrative records, printed ephemera, drawings, and three-dimensional commemorative objects and souvenirs.
Extent: 39 boxes
Accession Numbers: As an artificial collection, multiple accession numbers are represented.
Language: English; one item in French
Historical Note
New York’s celebrated World’s Fair of 1939-1940, held on a former ash dump in Flushing Meadows, Queens, drew millions of visitors with its promise to reveal “The World of Tomorrow.” As one of the last – and the largest – of six world’s fairs that were held in the United States in the 1930s, the New York World’s Fair was the culmination of years of planning that looked to design, science, and technology to alleviate the bleak conditions of the Depression and create a brighter future.

The idea for a New York Fair was introduced in the mid 1930s by a small group of prominent businessmen. Mayor Fiorello La Guardia, Parks Commissioner Robert Moses, Fair Corporation President Grover Whalen, and President Franklin D. Roosevelt all helped nurture the Fair into existence. Groundbreaking took place on June 29, 1936, and publicity efforts were monumental in the years leading to the Fair’s opening on April 30, 1939.

As explained in the Official Guide Book, the Fair was divided into zones, each “devoted to the exposition of some highly important phase of modern life.” The zones (in alphabetical order) were: Amusement; Communications and Business Systems; Community Interests; Food; Government; Medical and Public Health; Production and Distribution; Science and Education; and Transportation. Every large nation in the world participated except for China and Germany; 33 U.S. states and Puerto Rico were also represented. Focal exhibits built and operated by the Fair served as introductions to commercial exhibits in each area. Some of the largest corporations sponsored their own buildings, while other industries co-existed in shared spaces. The Amusement Area included rides, dancing, shows and other carnival-esque amusements of the time. Sculptures, fountains, and murals dotted the grounds.

The zones radiated from the Theme Center designed by Henry Dreyfus: the iconic Trylon, 700 feet tall, and Perisphere, 200 feet in diameter. The interior of the Perisphere housed the “Democacity” exhibit, representing a vision of a perfectly integrated, futuristic city. Similarly, the Fair’s most popular exhibit, General Motors’ Futurama, designed by Norman Bel Geddes, involved a 35,000-square-foot model depicting life in 1960. These innovative designers anticipated a nation of suburbs linked by superhighways.

Fairgoers were introduced to a dazzling array of consumer and household goods, as well as recent innovations like television and air conditioning. On a grander scale, they were encouraged to leave behind the practical world and be swept into a vision of the future in which no far-fetched invention was out of the question. Elektro the Moto-Man, the robot in the Westinghouse exhibit who could smoke cigarettes, count on his fingers, and recognize smells and colors, typified the embrace of modern technology. Overall, the Fair promised improved quality of life and increased leisure time.

The shadow of World War II loomed during the Fair’s second season in 1940. The official theme changed to “For Peace and Freedom,” and the Soviet Union pavilion was dismantled and replaced by the American Common. Other changes meant to boost attendance and appeal to the masses were also evident. The admissions fee was reduced from 75 to 50 cents and the new advertising campaign strove for folksiness, epitomized by the introduction of Elmer, a new mascot representing the “average” American.

By the Fair’s end on October 27, 1940, approximately 45,000,000 people had entered its gates. Despite this enormous number, attendance fell short of projections and the Fair Incorporation declared bankruptcy; backers were repaid around 40 cents on the dollar. Nevertheless, the Fair had a major impact in many spheres of American life. While commercialism certainly shaped the Fair, it is perhaps best known for its
elevation of designers, architects, and engineers, whom the *Official Guide Book* celebrated as the “true poets of the twentieth century.”

**Bibliographic Note**


**Scope and Content**

The Collection on the 1939-1940 New York World’s Fair is comprised of a variety of object types reflecting both a corporate and visitor perspective. Photographs constitute the largest series, grouped in 13 sub-series by creator. Photographic highlights include Kodachrome slides by amateur photographers that show off the Fair’s dazzling colors, over 600 publicity prints demonstrating the Fair’s vaunted marketing strategies, and unique compositions by architectural photographers Richard Wurts and Samuel Herman Gottscho. Also of special significance are 391 design renderings created between 1936-1938 that illustrate buildings, displays and objects that were considered for inclusion in the Fair. The renderings demonstrate the Fair’s artistic and social vision while standing as significant artworks on their own.

The collection includes a large quantity of printed ephemera documenting the Fair’s activities and exhibits, including pamphlets, brochures, programs, handbills, tickets, guides, and maps. Over 300 postcards, many with stamps and handwritten notes, also provide a window into the visitor experience. Advertisements created by exhibitors provide evidence of the marketing of consumer goods and tourism. The transformation of Flushing-Meadows from swampland to Fair site is tracked by a variety of internal and external publications. Memorandums, correspondence, design plans, fabric samples, schedules, and regulations also document the Fair’s execution.

Many Fairgoers celebrated their visit by purchasing and holding fast to a variety of souvenirs, from ephemeral items to more permanent household goods. The collection includes over 70 such items, including buttons, plates, cutlery, ashtrays, scarves, dolls, jewelry, thermometers, toys, albums, booklets, lamps, and a chair.

**Arrangement**

The collection is arranged in 11 series:

- Series I: Administrative, 1934-1940 (bulk 1938-1939)
- Series II: Promotional, 1936-1941
- Series III: Visiting the Fair, 1938-1940
- Series IV: Zones and Exhibits, 1937-1940
- Series VI: Photographs, 1937-1942
- Series VII: Commemorative Objects, 1936-1940
- Series VIII: Design Renderings, 1936-1938
- Series IX: Architectural Elements
Series X: Artwork, 1939-1940
Series XI: Audiovisual

Some series are further arranged in sub-series; see series descriptions for more detail. Photographs and Artwork are arranged by creator. All other materials have been interfiled and arranged based on subject and/or object type.

Series and Sub-Series Descriptions

Series I: Administrative, 1934-1940 (bulk 1938-1939)
This series documents the management, duties, and activities of the 1939 New York World’s Fair Incorporated, including communications with exhibitors, vendors and personnel. Materials include correspondence, memoranda, policies and regulations, architectural designs, planning documents, minutes, reports, and invitations. Scheduling materials demonstrate the density and diversity of Fair events, from those that occurred daily to those that commemorated special days and weeks. Publications include the staff newspaper, Fair Play: Tomorrow's News Today, and Information Bulletins prepared by the Department of Research to keep employees informed. Of note is a version of the Official Guide Book used to solicit advertisers containing economic data and projections. A significant amount of the material was donated by John A. Blum, who worked for the Fair in 1938-1939, first in the Department of Information and later in the Department of Special Events, where he promoted the Coronation Scot exhibit, a British train on display in the Transportation zone.

Series II: Promotional, 1936-1941
This series consists of publicly released bulletins, reports, press kits, pamphlets and other publications aimed at promoting the Fair to citizens, the media, corporations and government officials and agencies. The materials range from colorful brochures and posters to highly technical reports detailing expenditures and architectural plans. The Fair Corporation created the majority of the materials, although a smaller quantity was created by ancillary or collaborating institutions, such as schools and universities.

For internal publications see Series I: Administrative. For coverage of the Fair, see Series V: Press and Publications. For materials promoting specific areas or attractions see Series IV: Zones and Exhibits.

Series III: Visiting the Fair, 1938-1940
This series provides evidence of the visitor experience navigating the Fair and the larger New York Metropolitan area. The Fair Corporation, government agencies, and commercial entities all produced literature. Maps, guides, pamphlets, and brochures show routes to the Fair, inside the Fair and around the city by train, bus, and car. Non-Fair attractions such as historic places and museums are also highlighted, in keeping with the goal of jumpstarting the economy through tourism. The Fair’s Official Guide Book offers detailed explanations of the Fair’s organization, exhibits, and themes.

Admissions ephemera includes season passes, short term passes, twenty-admission ticket packs, guest cards for special or specific events, and parking passes. Most tickets list prices, and some passes include small photographs used for identification.

The postcards sub-series is comprised of almost 350 items, many with stamps and handwritten messages to family and friends.
This series is arranged in four sub-series:

Sub-Series A: Admissions  
Sub-Series B: Guides  
Sub-Series C: Maps  
Sub-Series D: Postcards

For maps or guides relating to specific areas or attractions see Series IV: Zones and Exhibits.

Series IV: Zones and Exhibits, 1937-1940
This series is comprised of brochures, pamphlets, programs, souvenirs, maps, news releases, guides, and other ephemera relating to specific buildings, pavilions, exhibits, and attractions. Unique items include costume sketches, a sculptural model, and several three-dimensional objects displayed in exhibits.

In order to mirror the Fair’s internal organization, the materials are grouped in sub-series by zone and arranged alphabetically by exhibit. Every zone is represented except for Science and Education. There are brochures and programs for the Fair’s most iconic attractions, including Futurama, American Jubilee, Billy Rose’s Aquacade, and “Railroads on Parade,” as well as a wide variety of others. Large quantities of pamphlets advertise commercial products and tourism opportunities. Also included are invitations to dedications for various pavilions and menus for restaurants on the grounds.

The Museum also possesses several unique exhibit-related objects. The first is a quarter-size bronze model by William Zorach for the “Builders of the Future” monument installed in the Rose Court in the Communications and Business Systems zone. The second is a pair of George and Martha Washington mannequins that were part of a costume display in the New York City exhibit. Third, the Museum has a ceramic plate and mug that were part of the American Potter exhibit in the Community Interests zone.

This series is arranged in 10 sub-series:

Sub-Series A: Amusement  
Sub-Series B: Communications and Business Systems  
Sub-Series C: Community Interest  
Sub-Series D: Food  
Sub-Series E: Government: Domestic  
Sub-Series F: Government: International  
Sub-Series G: Medical and Public Health  
Sub-Series H: Production and Distribution  
Sub-Series I: Theme Center  
Sub-Series J: Transportation

The materials in Series VI: Photographs have also been grouped by zone and filed by exhibit to facilitate cross-referencing.

This series consists of coverage of the Fair in newspapers, magazines, and other publications. The Fair was debated and analyzed by diverse sectors of society; many newspapers published special sections on the Fair, and popular and trade magazines produced special issues. Together, the materials document the Fair’s construction, development, activities, and milestones as well as its reception by the public and critics.

Many newspapers and clippings in the collection were rapidly deteriorating. Those available through public library databases in the New York area were recorded, with all bibliographic details, in Appendix D. Preservation copies were made of all fragile materials not widely available to the public. The originals of all items in stable condition were re-housed in acid-free folders.

The majority of the clippings are filed alphabetically by publisher and arranged chronologically within folders. A few files are arranged by subject, maintaining the original order created by the donor.

This series is arranged in four sub-series:

Sub-Series A: Books, 1938-1939
Sub-Series B: Clippings, 1937-1993 (bulk 1938-1939)
Sub-Series C: Newspapers, 1939-1940
Sub-Series D: Serials, 1938-1985

For publications by the Fair see Series I: Administrative and Series II: Promotional.

Series VI: Photographs, 1937-1942
This series is arranged in 13 sub-series by creator (or by donor, if the creator is unknown). Mediums include gelatin silver prints, color slides, negatives, albums, contact sheets, and stereo-opticon cards. Many of the photographs were taken by amateur photographers, including George B. Bader and William A. Dobak, who utilized the recently introduced Kodachrome film medium to capture the Fair’s brilliant colors. The series also includes over 600 Publicity Department photos, many with captions providing contextual information. The Fair’s publicity apparatus, led by Fair President Grover Whalen, was known for its monumental marketing efforts, including the incessant distribution of photographic news releases.

Some of the photographers are well known. Celebrated architectural photographers and firms such as Richard Wurts, the Wurts Bros., Samuel Herman Gottscho, and Gottscho-Schleisner Inc. all donated Fair-related photographs. Carl Van Vechten, a significant figure in the Harlem Renaissance and New York City arts scene, donated over 500 prints documenting the Fair.

The objects within each sub-series are physically and/or intellectually arranged by zone and exhibit, to facilitate cross-referencing with printed materials in Series IV: Zones and Exhibits. Exceptions include albums, which retain the arrangement by the creator, and the Richard Wurts photographs, which are ordered based on the exhibition catalog. See sub-series descriptions for more detailed arrangement information.

This series is arranged in 13 sub-series:

Sub-Series A: 1939 New York World’s Fair Publicity photographs, 1937-1940
Sub-Series B: George B. Bader photographs, 1939-1940
Sub-Series C: Frank W. Ballard photograph albums, 1939-1942
Sub-Series D: William A. Dobak photographs, 1939-1940
Sub-Series E: Samuel Herman Gottscho photographs, 1939-1940
Sub-Series F: Morris Jaffe photograph album, 1939-1941
Sub-Series G: William J. Mueller photographs, 1939
Sub-Series H: John Neva photographs, 1939-1940
Sub-Series I: Joe Seckendorf photographs, 1939
Sub-Series J: Carl Van Vechten photographs, 1938-1940
Sub-Series K: Richard Wurts “Building the New York World’s Fair” exhibition photographs, 1938
Sub-Series L: World’s Fair photographs within larger collections, 1937-1940
Sub-Series M: Small photographic collections, 1939-1940

Sub-Series A: 1939 New York World’s Fair Publicity photographs, 1937-1940
This sub-series consists of over 600 gelatin silver prints from the Publicity Department of the 1939 New York World’s Fair. Many are accompanied by typed captions that provide contextual information and demonstrate the Fair’s marketing strategies. The photographs are arranged in subsub-series by zone and filed alphabetically by exhibit. The General subsub-series includes images of notable guests, special events, parades, performances, fireworks, general scenes, personnel, visitors, and aerial views.

This sub-series is arranged in 12 subsub-series:

SubSub-Series 1: Amusement
SubSub-Series 2: Communications and Business Systems
SubSub-Series 3: Community Interest
SubSub-Series 4: Food
SubSub-Series 5: Government: Domestic
SubSub-Series 6: Government: International
SubSub-Series 7: Medical and Public Health
SubSub-Series 8: Production and Distribution
SubSub-Series 9: Science and Education
SubSub-Series 10: Theme Center
SubSub-Series 11: Transportation
SubSub-Series 12: General

Administrative and Biographical History Note
The Publicity Department photographs were donated by Harry C. Anderson, John A. Blum, and Walter A. Lucas. Blum worked for the Fair from 1938-1939, first in the Department of Information and later in the Department of Special Events. Based on the markings on the photos, it is likely that Anderson and Lucas also worked for the Fair’s Publicity Department.

Biographical information on Anderson was not located; however, a 1928 photograph on the cover of the L.A. Times was taken by a Harry C. Anderson, leading one to speculate that he was a professional news photographer. Lucas authored several books on railroads and trains, including From the Hills to the Hudson, a History of the Paterson and Hudson River Rail Road (1944), Pocket Guide to American Locomotives (1953), 100 Years of Steam Locomotives (1957), and 100 Years of Railroad Cars (1958).
Acquisition Note
Harry C. Anderson donated 520 photographs in 1953, Activity 11934. John A. Blum donated 82 photographs in 1981, Activity 22705. Walter A. Lucas donated 35 photographs in 1948, Activity 08939. Because publicity photographs were interfiled and not every photo is labeled, it is possible there are additional unidentified sources.

Sub-Series B: George B. Bader photographs, 1939-1940
This sub-series consists of 101 Kodachrome slides by George B. Bader. Railroads are the most frequently depicted subject with over 30 images of locomotives, the majority from the “Railroads on Parade” show.

Sculptures are the second most frequently depicted subject, including The Astronomer, George Washington, Time and Fates of Man, Moods of Time, and Four Freedoms in the Theme Center area; Speed in the Communications and Business Systems zone; Golden Sprays in the Food zone; Dances of the Races and the Four Victories of Peace in the Production and Distribution zone; and Riders of the Elements and Europa in the Transportation zone.

The Government zone is well represented, including the Italian Pavilion, British Pavilion, U.S. Federal Building, Hall and Lagoon of Nations, League of Nations, and Court of States. There are also a variety of depictions of the Trylon and Perisphere. Smaller quantities of additional buildings and exhibits are represented including (in alphabetical order): Court of Power, Electric Utilities courtyard, Ford, General Electric, Hall of Petroleum, Heineken’s on the Zuider Zee, Parachute Jump, Sun Valley, U.S. Steel. The General subsub-series includes pedestrians, courtyards, walkways, and the Greyhound trolley.

The slides are physically arranged by accession number. To facilitate access, they are intellectually arranged in Appendix B in the following subsub-series:

SubSub-Series 1: Amusement
SubSub-Series 2: Communications and Business Systems
SubSub-Series 3: Food
SubSub-Series 4: Government: Domestic
SubSub-Series 5: Government: International
SubSub-Series 6: Production and Distribution
SubSub-Series 7: Theme Center
SubSub-Series 8: Transportation
SubSub-Series 9: General

Biographical and Acquisition Note
George B. Bader was a Holy Cross alumni, class of 1916. Presumably he was an amateur photographer. Deed paperwork was not located; however, the donation box was labeled “2x2 Kodachrome slides of the New York World’s Fair 1939-40 taken by Dr. George B. Bader,” accession numbers F2012.67.1-101.

Sub-Series C: Frank W. Ballard photograph albums, 1939-1942
This sub-series consists of three photograph albums created by Frank Ballard. The first album consists of 359 photographs documenting the opening of the Fair and the 1939 season. The second album consists of 408 photographs documenting the 1940 season. The third album consists of 734 photographs documenting the demolition of the Fair. The albums include occasional news clippings. A majority of photographs were
taken during the day, but there are also nighttime photographs. Pages are in brittle condition and adhesives used to affix the photos have deteriorated.

Biographical Note
Frank W. Ballard Sr. (1893-1975) owned the Long Island Blueprint Co., founded in 1921. He was an amateur photographer, used a Speed Graphic camera, and did his own darkroom work.

Acquisition Note
These scrapbooks were donated in 1989 by Frank W. Ballard Jr. with the assistance of Rev. Louis D. Springsteen, accession numbers 89.95.1-3.

Sub-Series D: William A. Dobak photographs, 1939-1940
This sub-series consists of 283 Kodachrome slides by William A. Dobak. Sculptures are the most frequently depicted subject, followed by the Trylon and Perisphere. Dobak captured most of the sculptures in the Theme Center/Central Mall area. He also captured many others throughout the Fair: Shot Putter and Wings in the Amusement Area; Europa, Riders of the Elements, and Spirit of the Wheel in the Transportation zone; Mercury, Speed, and Time in the Communications and Business Systems zone; American Womanhood and The Harp in the Community Interests zone; Golden Sprays in the Food zone; the Celestial Sphere in the Government zone; and Dances of the Races in the Production and Distribution zone.

The Government zone is well represented, including the New England pavilion, five U.S. states, the U.S. Federal building, eleven nations, the Pan American Union and the League of Nations. Amusement area subjects include “American Jubilee, “Billy Rose’s Aquacade,” “Frank Buck’s Jungelaland,” “Little Miracle Town,” National Cash Register and the Parachute Jump, among others. There are a substantial number of images of the “Railroads on Parade” show as well as fireworks and light shows.


The slides are physically arranged by accession number. To facilitate access, they are intellectually grouped in Appendix C in the following 11 subsub-series:

SubSub-Series 1: Amusement
SubSub-Series 2: Communications and Business
SubSub-Series 3: Community Interests
SubSub-Series 4: Food
SubSub-Series 5: Government: Domestic
SubSub-Series 6: Government: International
SubSub-Series 7: Medical and Public Health
SubSub-Series 8: Production and Distribution
SubSub-Series 9: Theme Center
SubSub-Series 10: Transportation
SubSub-Series 11: General
Biographical Note
William A. Dobak (1905-1987) was a lifelong employee of AT&T who took photographs as a hobby. At the time of the 1939 New York World’s Fair he lived nearby in Flushing, Queens. Many of his images appear in *Trylon and Perisphere: 1939 New York World’s Fair*, which was published in conjunction with exhibitions at seven NYC institutions in 1989 on the 50th anniversary of the Fair.

Acquisition Note

Sub-Series E: Samuel Herman Gottscho photographs, 1939-1940
This series consists of 40 images of the World’s Fair taken in 1939. Subjects include the Trylon and Perisphere; the Electric Farm in the Community zone; the Schaefer Center building and interior in the Food zone; the Florida Building and interiors of the Italian Line Restaurant in the Government zone; and the Ford Building and exhibits, General Motors building, Railroads Building and exhibits, and the “Railroads on Parade” show in the Transportation zone.

Biographical Note
Samuel Herman Gottscho (1875 – 1971) grew up in Brooklyn, New York, and started taking photographs as a hobby at age 21. Later in life, after attending several architectural photography exhibitions and meeting architects in the area, he decided to pursue architectural photography more seriously. At age 50, after 23 years as a traveling salesman, Gottscho became a professional full time photographer, forming the Gottscho-Schleisner firm with William Schleisner. During the 1930s Gottscho was often grouped with the leading art photographers of the time. He was known for his depictions of Rockefeller Center, Times Square, the World’s Fair, office skyscrapers, retail stores, city living, hotels, apartment houses, and new housing projects. After World War II he shifted his focus, primarily photographing wildflowers in their natural settings.

Acquisition Note
Donated by Gottscho-Schleisner, in 1950, accession numbers 50.137.1-40.

Sub-Series F: Morris Jaffe photograph album, 1939-1941
This sub-series consists of one large photo album containing 454 prints taken by Morris Jaffe when he was 20 years old. Each page contains two to four photos with handwritten captions. 308 photographs document the 1939 season, including Opening Day; 128 photographs document the 1940 season; 4 photographs document the Fair’s construction; and 13 photographs document the Fair’s demolition. Photographs are mounted on orange, blue, and black paper.

Biographical Note
Morris Jaffe credits his father for nurturing his interest in photography. In 1953, Jaffe won the Village Camera Club’s contest for Print of the Year, awarding him a one-man show at the Club’s gallery on Bank Street in New York City. Jaffe married Edith, and the couple eventually became successful photographers. Jaffe was also a photo consultant for Bristol-Myers Company in New York City.

Acquisition Note
The album was donated in 1987 by Morris Jaffe’s widow, Edith Jaffe, accession number 87.77.
Sub-Series G: William J. Mueller photographs, 1939
This sub-series consists of 58 gelatin silver prints taken by William J. Mueller in 1939. The prints are arranged in subsub-series by zone and filed alphabetically by exhibit. Of note, Mueller captured some of the more risqué aspects of the Amusement area, including the “Living Magazine Covers” exhibit, where for a small fee one could photograph topless women posing in mock-ups of magazine covers.

This sub-series is arranged in eight subsub-series:

- SubSub-Series 1: Amusement zone
- SubSub-Series 2: Communications and Business Systems zone
- SubSub-Series 3: Food zone
- SubSub-Series 4: Government zone: International
- SubSub-Series 5: Production and Distribution zone
- SubSub-Series 6: Theme Center
- SubSub-Series 7: Transportation zone
- SubSub-Series 8: General

Biographical Note
William J. Mueller was born in 1910 in New Rochelle, New York. He served in the Army during World War II and became an Assistant Vice President with the Chase Manhattan Bank in Eastchester, New York. After retiring in 1975 he moved to Sarasota, Florida, where he passed away in 1999.

Acquisition Note
William J. Mueller’s daughter, Virginia M. Teerlink, donated Mueller’s photographs in 1996 and 1997. Based on the total number of photographs, it appears that she made a third donation for which there is no gift paperwork, accession numbers 97.81.1-16 and 96.74.1-14.

Sub-Series H: John Neva photographs, 1939-1940
This sub-series consists of approximately 1,472 negatives of the 1939 season, 320 negatives of the 1940 season, and 95 contact sheets. The photographs depict a wide array of subjects including Fair construction, exhibits, parades, events, sculpture, and artwork. A majority of the images are from the International, Transportation, and Amusement zones. The images are arranged by accession number.

Biographical Note
John Neva attended the World’s Fair as a member of the press. The deed paperwork does not explicitly specify whether he took the photos. He also donated three World’s Fair press passes, two of which include employment credentials and signatures. One pass dated June 14, 1939 lists Neva as a writer for *Facetas of Havana x La Voz* and has a small photograph attached. The second lists him as a staff member of *Amerique* and grants access for the Fair’s opening weekend, May 11-12, 1940. The third is a general pass valid for the whole 1940 season.

Acquisition Note
Donated by John Neva in 1946, accession numbers 40.200 and 43.243.

Sub-Series I: Joe Seckendorf photographs, 1939
This sub-series consists of 145 negatives and 280 prints. The photographs include daytime and evening shots of buildings, exhibits, and sculptures; most frequently in the Amusement, Transportation, and Theme Center areas. Visitors, participants, crowds and lines, fountains, light displays, events, and unidentified buildings and sculptures are grouped in General.

The prints are arranged in 10 subsub-series based on Fair zones:

- SubSub-Series 1: Amusement
- SubSub-Series 2: Communications and Business
- SubSub-Series 3: Community Interests
- SubSub-Series 4: Food
- SubSub-Series 5: Government: Domestic
- SubSub-Series 6: Government: International
- SubSub-Series 7: Production and Distribution
- SubSub-Series 8: Theme Center
- SubSub-Series 9: Transportation
- SubSub-Series 10: General

**Biographical and Acquisition Note**
Donated by Joe Seckendorf, a resident of Jamaica, Queens, in 1977. The deed does not specify whether he was the photographer. Additional biographical information has not yet been located, Activity 21667, assigned: X2013.160.

Sub-Series J: Carl Van Vechten photographs, 1938-1940
This sub-series consists of 540 gelatin silver prints by Carl Van Vechten taken between 1938 and 1940. The prints are arranged in subsub-series by zone and filed alphabetically by exhibit. Sculptures found throughout the grounds, the International Pavilions in the Government zone, and the Amusement area attractions are particularly well represented. SubSub-Series 10: General, includes portraits of Carl Van Vechten, Favis Marinoff, and Morris Best, buildings under construction, murals, parades, and employees. A majority of photographs have handwritten captions on the back listing location, date, and subject.

This sub-series is arranged in 10 subsub-series:

- SubSub-Series 1: Amusement
- SubSub-Series 2: Communications and Business
- SubSub-Series 3: Community Interests
- SubSub-Series 4: Food
- SubSub-Series 5: Government: Domestic
- SubSub-Series 6: Government: International
- SubSub-Series 7: Production and Distribution
- SubSub-Series 8: Theme Center
- SubSub-Series 9: Transportation
- SubSub-Series 10: General

**Biographical Note**
Carl Van Vechten (1880-1964) was a music and dance critic for the *New York Times*, a novelist, a photographer, and an important player in the Harlem Renaissance in the 1920s and 1930s. The Museum’s Van Vechten collection also includes theater ephemera, Christmas cards, and over 2000 photographs.

**Acquisition Note**

**Sub-Series K: Richard Wurts “Building the New York World’s Fair” exhibition photographs, 1938**
This sub-series consists of 50 photographs by Richard Wurts featured in an exhibition at the Museum of the City of New York, “Building the New York World’s Fair,” from November 2, 1938 to January 9, 1939. The collection consists of one set of 8 x 10 publicity prints and one set of exhibition quality prints mounted on 11 x 14 boards. The photographs capture the construction of many Fair structures and sculptures, including the Trylon and Perisphere, several aerial shots taken from the top of the Trylon, and images of construction workers, surveyors, and World’s Fair policemen. There is one photograph by Joseph G. Lootens of Wurts with his camera at the Fair. The photographs are arranged by accession number based on the order in the exhibition catalog.

**Biographical Note**
Richard Wurts joined his family’s photography business, the Wurts Bros., in the 1920s. The Wurts Bros. was established in 1894 by Richard’s father (Lionel Wurts) and uncle (Norman Wurts). One of the first architectural photography studios in New York City, the firm gained recognition and many prominent clients over the decades, including Cass Gilbert (The Woolworth Building), Consolidated Gas Company (now known as Con Ed), and Skidmore, Owings & Merrill (the firm now building One World Trade Center). Richard Wurts was best known for his images of the 1939 New York World’s Fair, featured in the late 1938 exhibition “Building the New York World’s Fair” at the Museum of the City of New York and later in the 1977 publication *The New York World’s Fair, 1939/1940 in 155 photographs*.

**Acquisition Note**
Donated by Richard Wurts in 1940, activity number 04385.

**Sub-Series L: World’s Fair photographs within larger collections, 1937-1940**
This sub-series is comprised of photographs of the 1939 New York World’s Fair located within larger non-World’s Fair collections. When known, collections are listed by creator. If the creator is unknown or the collection contains mixed creators, it is named after the donor. The Wurts Bros. and Gottscho-Schleisner, Inc. photographs each contain approximately 30-75 Fair-related photographs. The remaining collections, listed consecutively based on quantity, all contain less than 20 Fair-related images and as few as one.

- **SubSub-Series 1: Wurts Bros.**
- **SubSub-Series 2: Samuel Herman Gottscho**
- **SubSub-Series 3: Gottscho-Schleisner, Inc.**
- **SubSub-Series 4: Kahn & Jacobs collection on Sigurd Fischer and William Ward**
- **SubSub-Series 5: John Albok**
- **SubSub-Series 6: Irving Underhill**
- **SubSub-Series 7: Museum of the City of New York’s photomural**
- **SubSub-Series 8: Benjamin Blom**
- **SubSub-Series 9: Harry J. Fields**
SubSeries M: Small photographic collections, 1939-1940
This series consists of small donations (25 or less photographs) and one small subject-based collection with unknown creators:

SubSub-Series 1: Gladys Hatos Zurkow photographs, 1939-1940
SubSub-Series 2: John A. Blum photographs, 1939
SubSub-Series 3: Michael L. Radoslovich photographs, 1939
SubSub-Series 4: Stereopticon cards, 1939
SubSub-Series 5: Unknown creator, 1939-1940

SubSub-Series 1: Gladys Hatos Zurkow photographs, 1939-1940
This subsub-series consists of seventeen acetate negatives. Subjects include the Amusement area (“American Jubilee,” Parachute Jump); Communication and Business Systems zone (Time sculpture); Government zone (Italy, Belgium, Court of States); Theme Center (Trylon and Perisphere, Constitutional Mall); Transportation zone (“Railroads on Parade” show); and general scenes and unidentified buildings.

Biographical Note
Aladlar (Alfred) Hatos immigrated from Hungary in 1899 and raised Gladys and her brother, Alexander, on 14th Street in Manhattan. No further biographical information on Gladys was located. Alexander Hatos worked for the Pennsylvania Railroad for 45 years and was an amateur photographer who documented the destruction of Penn Station and the construction of Madison Square Garden.

Acquisition Note
Gladys Hatos Zurkow donated a small quantity of family papers and photographs in 1995. The deed stipulates that some of the photographs were taken by Alexander Hatos; however, the World’s Fair negatives are unattributed, Activity 26489.

SubSub-Series 2: John A. Blum photographs, 1939
This subsub-series consists of several photographs taken at the National Cash Register Company in Ohio. Blum visited the company in his capacity as a staff member of the Fair.

Biographical and Acquisition Note
John A. Blum worked for the Fair in 1938-1939, first in the Department of Information and later in the Department of Special Events. Blum donated these photographs in 1981, along with a large quantity of administrative papers, ephemera and publicity photographs, Activity 22705.

SubSub-Series 3: Michael R. Radoslovich photographs, 1939
This collection consists of photographs of the Spiral Fountain in the Community Interest zone and the Long Island Rail Road (LIRR) entrance to the Fair, both structures designed by Michael Radoslovich.
Biographical and Acquisition Note
In addition to his work for the 1939 New York World’s Fair, Radoslovich served as a faculty member at Cooper Union and as Director of Architecture for the New York City Board of Education. Radoslovich donated these prints in 1941, activity number 05047.

SubSub-Series 4: Stereopticon cards, 1939
These 16 stereopticon cards are labeled “Copyright 1939 Rogers & Rogers” on the top left and have numbered captions on the bottom right. Subjects include international exhibits (Canada, France, Japan, Netherlands, U.S.S.R.); domestic exhibits (Florida, Georgia, Maine, New England); Electrical Utilities, Petroleum Industry, and Railroads. There are also views of the Peripshere, Constitutional Mall, and Lagoon of Nations. The stereopticon viewer became popular in the U.S. in the later half of the 19th century as a method to view images of countries and cultures from around the world. The viewer is designed so that one picture appears to dissolve while the next is forming. The donor is unknown.

SubSub-Series 5: Unknown creator, 1939-1940
This collection consists of prints and negatives arranged by subject. These photographs were previously interfiled and are no longer linked to donors. Of note, there are images of President Roosevelt speaking on Opening Day in 1939, and 63 negatives of the “Railroads on Parade” show in the Transportation zone.

Series VII: Commemorative Objects, 1936-1940
By 1938, 400 manufacturers had been given permission to use official New York World’s Fair designs. This series consists of over 70 objects ranging from ephemeral items like buttons, pins, and coasters to more permanent household goods such as plates and cutlery made of ceramics, silver, and silver-plate. Also included are ashtrays, scarves, dolls, jewelry, toys, albums, booklets, a miniature movie viewer, a lamp, and a chair. Items are listed alphabetically by object type. For objects displayed in Fair exhibits, see Series IV: Zones and Exhibits.

Series VIII: Design Renderings, 1936-1938
This series consists of 391 illustrations of buildings, displays and objects that were considered for inclusion in the Fair. They were created by delineators, also known as architectural illustrators, whose job it was to create realistic portrayals of complex ideas. The designs were created between 1936-1938, before the Fairgrounds were constructed, and used to garner support and enthusiasm. While some of the designs were built as shown, a number of others changed considerably or were never realized. The renderings were printed on souvenirs, postcards and other merchandise and stand as significant artworks on their own. Items are stored in flat files and organized by accession number.

Administrative History Note
The Museum’s collection includes renderings by John Wenrich, Edward Punnet Chrystie, Hugh Ferriss, Theodore Kautzky, Chester P. Price, Nemhard N. Culin, Emrich Nicholson, Cornelius M. Flynn, Eric Mose, Lloyd Morgan, and Frank Rudolph Paul, among others. Over 100 architectural firms worked on the Fair; many talented architects and artists who had been languishing during the Great Depression were employed. The architects worked within parameters set by the Fair’s Board of Design, chaired by Stephen F. Voorhees, president of the American Institute of Architects. Board of Design members included industrial
designers Norman Bel Geddes, Raymond Loewy, Henry Dreyfuss, and Walter Dorwin Teague. The Board of Design is often credited with creating the artistic and social vision of the “World of Tomorrow.”

Acquisition Note
The majority of the renderings were donated by the Legal Department of the 1939 New York World’s Fair in 1940 and 1941, accession numbers 41.44; 2011.15. Additionally, Edward Punnet Chrystie donated three renderings, accession number 41.448, and Ely Jacques Kahn donated one rendering, accession number 42.70.17.

Series IX: Architectural Elements
The Museum of the City of New York does not possess World’s Fair related architectural elements. The forthcoming joint finding aid with the Queens Museum of Art will list their holdings in this area.

Series X: Artwork, 1939-1940
This series consists of drawings and cartoons by notable artists and cartoonists John H. Cassel (1872-1961), Rollin Kirby (1875-1952), Rea Irvin (1881-1972), and James Thurber (1894-1961).

The collection includes Rollin Kirby’s "Friendly Rivalry," featured in the February 20, 1939 issue of the New York World Telegram; an original cartoon, proof, and blueprint by James Thurber for the cover of the April 29, 1939 issue of The New Yorker; a drawing by John H. Cassel in anticipation of the Fair’s 1940 season; and two cartoon drawings by Rea Irvin demonstrating rising tensions due to World War II.

See Series VIII: Design Renderings for drawings and watercolors of proposed Fair buildings and exhibits created for the Fair’s Board of Design.

Series XI: Audiovisual
The Museum of the City of New York does not possess World’s Fair related audio-visual materials. The forthcoming joint finding aid with the Queens Museum of Art will list their holdings in this area.

Language of Materials
Materials are in English, except for the serial Legion d’Honneur.

Access and Use
The Museum of the City of New York collections must be examined on site. Appointments to examine materials must be made in advance by contacting the Archivist through e-mail at research@mcny.org.

Collection use is subject to all copyright laws. Permission to publish materials must be obtained in writing from the Rights and Reproductions Office at the Museum of the City of New York. For more information please contact:

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Administrative Information

Preferred Citation

Custodial History
This collection was compiled over several decades by Museum staff.

Acquisition Information
Materials were obtained from diverse sources over several decades. The bulk of the donations consisted of printed ephemera, commemorative objects, and photographs from average Fairgoers. The Fair and Fair employees were also significant donors. In 1940 and 1941 the Legal Department of the 1939 New York World’s Fair donated close to 400 design renderings. In 1953 Harry C. Anderson donated 520 Publicity Department photographs. And in 1981 John A. Blum, who had worked in the Fair’s Department of Information and Department of Special Events, donated a collection of several hundred administrative and promotional items.

Other notable acquisitions include:
Mrs. Gover Whalen, wife of Fair President Grover Whalen, donated a small quantity of papers in 1966, including many invitations to Fair related dedications and ceremonies.

Carl Van Vechten, a significant figure in the Harlem Renaissance and New York City arts scene, donated 540 gelatin silver prints in 1953.

Several donations by well-known architectural photographers and firms:
• In 1940 Richard Wurts donated 50 images featured in “Building the New York World’s Fair,” an exhibition held at the Museum of the City of New York from November 1938 through January 1939.
• In 1950 Samuel Herman Gottscho donated 40 photographs of the Fair.
• Large collections by the Wurts Bros. and Gottscho-Schlesisner, Inc. each contain dozens of Fair-related photographs.

See Appendix A for a complete list of donors. You may consult the archivist for specific acquisition information for particular objects.

Processing Information
This collection was processed by Project Archivist Annie Tummino with assistance from Archival Fellow Hoang Tran from March to July, 2013, as part of a Council on Library and Information Resources (CLIR) Hidden Collections grant. The CLIR grant is a collaborative effort with the Queens Museum of Art. A forthcoming finding aid will intellectually unite the World’s Fair collections from both institutions.

The majority of the Museum’s materials had previously been maintained as an artificial collection (grouped by subject rather than donor), with only a rudimentary and incomplete inventory to facilitate access. The archivists physically re-housed and intellectually described these materials, arranging them in Series and Sub-series.
The Museum’s Postcard Collection, Pamphlet Collection, and Fairs Collection also contained World’s Fair materials; these were physically removed and integrated with the Collection on the 1939-1940 New York World’s Fair.

Provenance was preserved for photographic collections. All photographs were re-housed and intellectually described, with biographical notes provided for each creator.

Additional objects including decorative arts items, textiles, theater material, sculptures, and toys which have are related to the World’s Fair but exist within previously established collections were intellectually described within the schema of the finding aid but were not physically integrated with the collection. These objects are listed as “stored separately” in the box column of the inventory and may be examined pending consultation with the archivist.

**Related Material**

**Museum of the City of New York**

Collection on the 1964-1965 New York World’s Fair

**Collections in Other Repositories**

- Queens Museum of Art, Collection on the 1939-1940 New York World’s Fair *(forthcoming finding aid will intellectually unite this collection with the City Museum’s collection)*
- New York Public Library, New York World’s Fair 1939-1940 records
- New York Public Library, Schomburg Center, New York World’s Fair Negro Week Records
- MTA Bridges & Tunnels Special Archive
- Queens Historical Society
- Queens Library, New York World’s Fair Collection
- New York City Municipal Archives, Grover A. Whalen Papers
- New York City Department of Records, Municipal Archives Collections, Department of Parks, 1850-1960
- Donald G. Larson Collection on International Expositions and Fairs, California State University, Fresno
- World’s Fair Historical Society

**Access Points**

**Personal names**

Bader, George B.
Ballard, Frank W., 1893-1975
Blum, John A.
Dobak, William A., 1905-1987
Geddes, Norman Bel, 1893-1958
Gottscho, Samuel H. (Samuel Herman), 1875-1971
Jaffe, Morris
Mueller, William J., 1910-1999
Neva, John
Radoslovich, Michael L.
Seckendorf, Joe
Van Vechten, Carl, 1880-1964
Whalen, Grover A. (Grover Aloysius), 1886-1962
Wurts, Richard
Zurkow, Gladys Hatos

Corporate names
Gottscho-Schleisner, Inc.
New York World’s Fair 1939 Incorporated
Wurts Brothers (New York, N.Y.)

Topical subjects
Amusements
Architecture
Corporations, American
Exhibitions
Fairs
Industrial design
Industries
New York World’s Fair (1939-1940)
Popular culture
Sculpture
Technology--Social aspects
Tourism
Transportation

Geographic subjects
Flushing Meadows-Corona Park (New York, N.Y.)
Flushing Meadows Park (New York, N.Y.)
Queens (New York, N.Y.)

Container List
Please email research@mcny.org for a container list.