

Fairs

9-13-94 SJMN

Santa Cruz left its mark on the 1893 world's fair

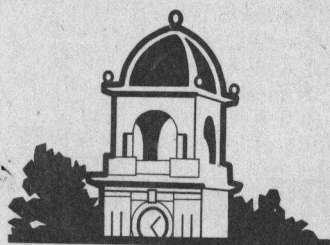
BY ROSS ERIC GIBSON
Special to the Mercury News

For its size, Santa Cruz made considerable contributions to the 1893 Chicago World's Fair. Local wines made a fine showing, as did artists and the former city landscaper.

The fair celebrated Columbus discovering the New World. It featured America in the arts, science, technology and industry. The pavilions were laid out as a vision of the ideal "City Beautiful," using the city-planning principles of Chicago's Daniel Burnham and John Root. The "City Beautiful" movement of planned, landscaped cities and monumental civic architecture remained popular until 1940.

The large California building was the most popular state pavilion and was designed in the new Mission Revival style. James Duval Phelan, whose Santa Cruz estate is now Lighthouse Field, was vice president of the California delegation and commissioner of exhibits. He contributed a large collection of paintings and engravings illustrating the short history of San Francisco.

Phelan was embroiled in a controversy over California wines, chiefly represented by vintners from the Santa Cruz Mountains and Santa Clara Valley. Medals



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were awarded for the Ben Lomond Wine Company's riesling and white burgundy; and to Dr. J.A. Stewart of Scotts Valley for his white burgundy 1891, Haut Medoc 1890, and Haut Medoc 1891. Yet the fair's restaurants were pricing California wines as high as European imports, hurting sales of domestic wines.

California Pavilion officials decided their roof garden restaurant would serve wines from California and other states at only a 10 percent markup. But another wine controversy loomed. A reporter visiting the California Pavilion before opening hours found the eminent, portly Phelan climbing out along a rafter two-stories up. He draped a piece of tarpaper over a painting of Bacchus

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astride a wine barrel. "Stopping a leak?" the reporter asked.

"No," Phelan excitedly replied. "Some idiot painted" a prominent Californian's head on the body of Bacchus. "If any Californian noticed it, I'd be fired from the Mark Hopkins Art Institute!"

Phelan was known as the "California Medici" for promoting the state's artists and writers. His childhood friend was the deaf sculptor, Douglas Tilden, whom he met at the lighthouse-home of Tilden's grandmother, Laura Hecox.

Tilden's sculptures were displayed in the fair's Fine Arts Building after winning high praise in Paris salon showings. This was his first major American show, which included "Young Acrobat," "Baseball Pitcher," "Tired Boxer" (acquired by the San Francisco Olympic Club) and "Indian Bear Hunt" (brought to the White House by Teddy Roosevelt). Afterward, his works became prominent San Francisco



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monuments.

Paintings of Santa Cruz were exhibited by the town's foremost artist, Frank Heath, who later founded the Art League. These views included "Natures Architecture" in the Fine Arts Building and "View of the City of Santa Cruz" as a centerpiece in the California building. This last painting now hangs upstairs in the Santa Cruz Main Library.

The Santa Cruz Decorative Arts Society exhibited a case of seashell and seaweed collages from West Cliff's Vue de l'Eau. The redwood gingerbread display

case was designed by Santa Cruz architect, LeBaron R. Olive. Local photography studios provided an exhibit of county views, and a Mission Santa Cruz Indian choir-book was in the California history exhibit.

Other local contributions included Mrs. A. Mangenberg's tapestry needlework in the Women's Building; Mrs. J. Mill's display of Pacific coast seaweeds; redwood rounds and lumbering equipment in the forestry exhibit; and Santa Cruz magnesite and limestone samples in the minerals exhibit.

In the "City Beautiful" concept, the fair's "Court of Honor" saw enormous neoclassical buildings clustered around a central reflecting pond. It was dubbed "The White City" for its gold-trimmed white buildings. It was intended as a civic improvement model for Washington, D.C., then a homely mish-mash of building styles, with a mall that was a marshy cow pasture with a shipping canal and railroad yard running through it.

Similarly, Chicago's site for the

world's fair was an overgrown lakeside bog called "Jackson Park." Twenty years earlier, the park was designed, but never executed, by America's top landscape architect, Frederick Law Olmsted, who designed New York's Central Park. The fair was landscaped for later conversion into the park Olmsted envisioned.

Olmsted served as consultant to the superintendent of landscape design, Rudolph Ulrich, who had recently retired as the city landscaper for Santa Cruz. Ulrich had laid out the Del Monte Hotel grounds, Holy Cross Plaza, and numerous Santa Cruz estates. His greatest achievement at the fair was "Wooded Island," a picturesque rural centerpiece to the neoclassical pavilions. Ulrich succeeded Olmsted as the nation's premiere landscaper and later landscaped world's fairs for Omaha in 1898 and Buffalo in 1901.

Local historian, architectural consultant and author Ross Eric Gibson writes a weekly history column for the Santa Cruz/Monterey edition.

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OF ROSS ERIC GIBSON