

Elva Ferguson and Sesquicentennial (150 years) of the Declaration of Independence

Joe P. Bryan

July 16, 2026



Roy Espy, Vice President



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Joe Bryan, Secretary



Todd Lafferty, Member at Large

Friends of Ferguson Home Officers

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Elva Ferguson

- Born in Missouri 1869
- Married at age 16
- Two land runs (1889 and 1893)
- Moved with T.B. and 2 children to Watonga Oct. 1892
- Established and ran *The Watonga Republican* 1892



Oklahoma Territory Exhibit, St. Louis World's Fair

- To promote statehood, Oklahoma Territory built a 3-story house at the 1904 St. Louis World's Fair and invited people to read Oklahoma newspapers
- Oklahoma was also featured as one of 14 states in the Louisiana Purchase
- Indian Territory also had an Exhibit



After her husband's death in 1921

- In 1926 she was a member of the executive committee (commissioner) for the Oklahoma Exhibit at the Philadelphia Sesquicentennial (150) Exposition
- 1928 she became vice chair of the state Republican committee, serving until 1932
 - The 1924 convention provided for national committeeman and a national committeewoman from each state.
- Oklahoma Hall of Fame in 1933
- Authored "They Carried the Torch: The story of Oklahoma's early newspapers" published 1937
- Traveled Extensively and toured Europe and Asia
- Died in 1947 (77 years)



Photo from Oklahoma map of Outstanding People

1924 Republican National Convention

- In 1924 she served as chair of the Oklahoma delegation to the Republican National Convention, Cleveland, Ohio.

1924 presidential election

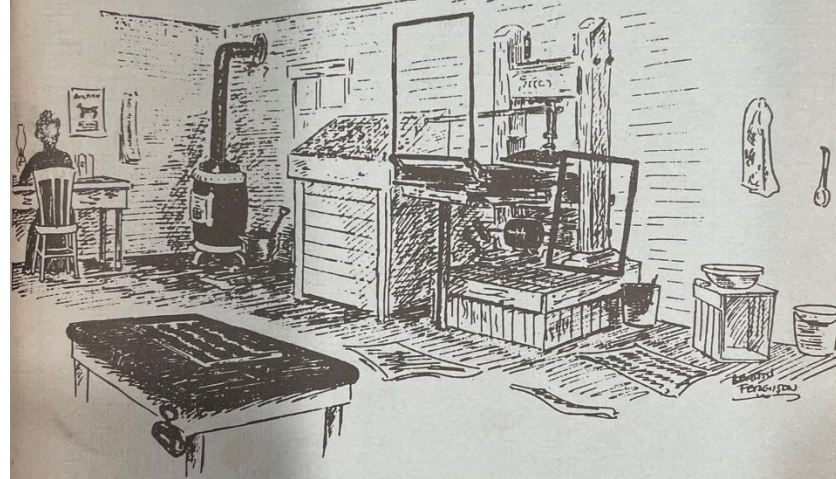
Calvin Coolidge and
Charles G. Dawes



11% of delegates were female, National Committee provided that each state have a male and female co-chair



They Carried the Torch

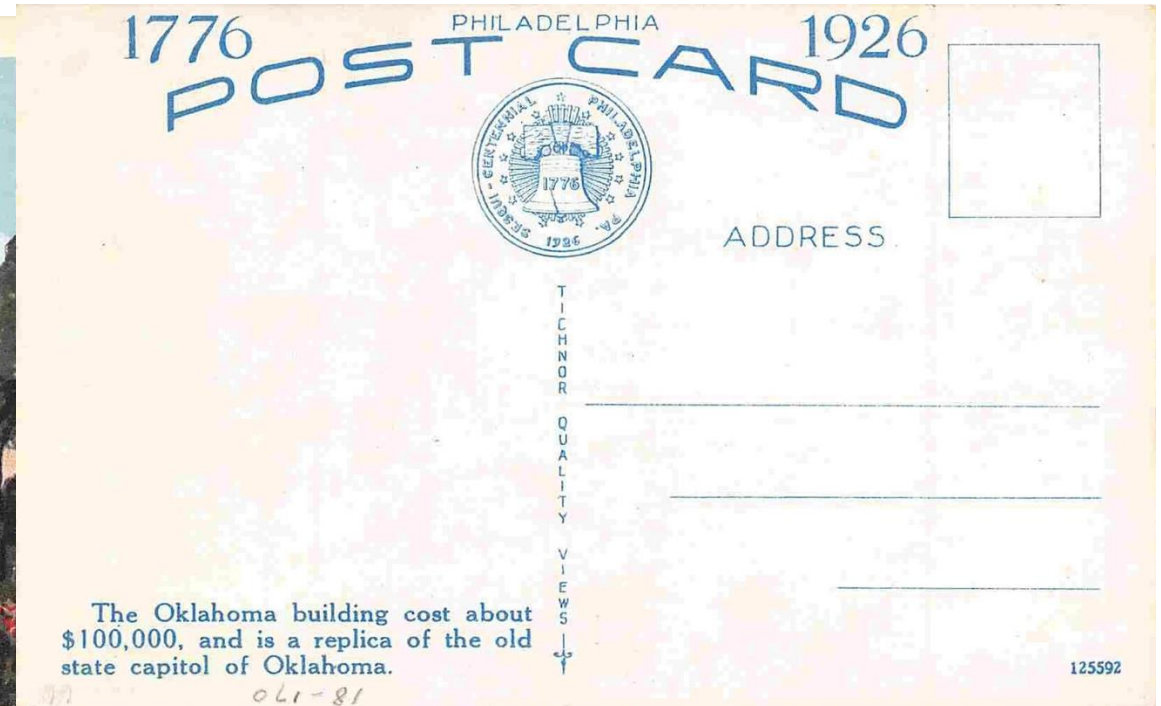


The Story of Oklahoma's Pioneer
Newspapers

by Mrs. Tom B. Ferguson

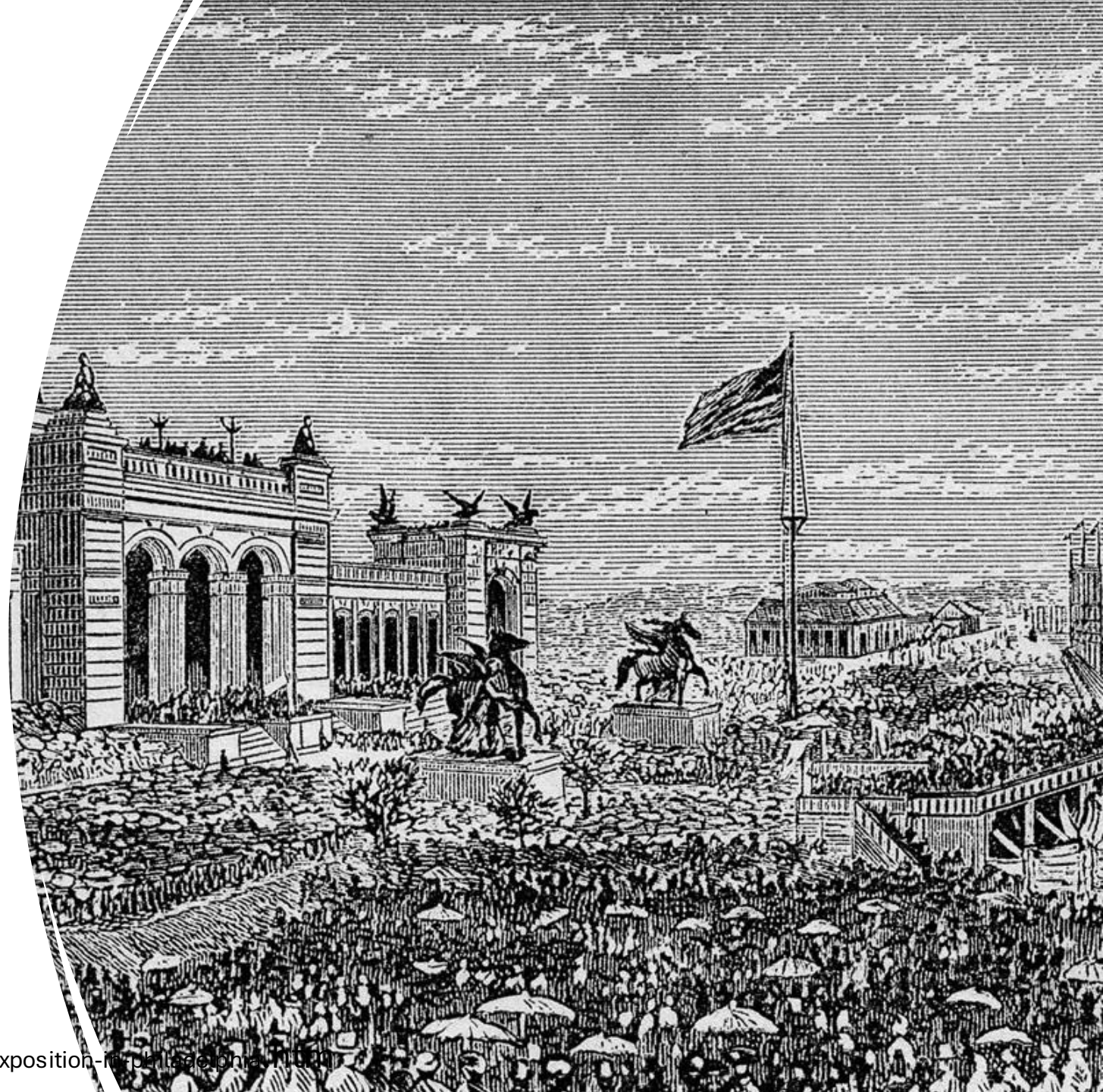
Burton Publishing Comp. 1937
Reprinted by Levite of Apache, 1989

Oklahoma Sesquicentennial Exhibit, Philadelphia 1926



Centennial (100 Year) Celebration of the Signing of Declaration of Independence in 1876 in Philadelphia

- World's Fair
- Great Success
- 10 million visitors
- Held in Fairmount Park
- John Wanamaker was on the finance committee



Origin of the Sesquicentennial

- John Wanamaker (Wanamaker's Dept. Stores) who served on the Finance Committee of the 1876 Centennial Exposition committee, had the idea in 1916 for a the 150th celebration in 1926.
- By August 1916, Wanamaker received support from Howard French, president of the Philadelphia Chamber of Commerce.
- A committee and location were assigned to Fairmount Park along Benjamin Franklin Parkway, the same location as the Centennial Celebration
- Plans were put on hold during WW1, the Spanish influenza and hardships of prohibition.
- New Mayor in 1921, J. Hampton Moore, appointed Committee of 100 with Mayor Moore as president and Wannamaker named honorary chairman
- Congress made Philadelphia the official site in 1921, but did not provide any funding until Feb. 2025

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sesquicentennial_Exposition

<https://www.themagazineantiques.com/article/1926-ambitions-and-ambiguities/>

Divergent Opinions within Sesquicentennial Exhibition Association of 1921

- Commerce vs. Progress in the arts, science and education
- Mayor Moore and Alba B. Johnson favored the commercial focus to bring visitors and \$\$\$\$ to Philadelphia
- Championing Arts, Science and Education was Edward W. Bok, editor of *The Ladies Home Journal* and publishing family
 - Avoid crass commercialism and emphasized Philadelphia's role in American History
 - Herbert Hoover, Charles Schwab of steel industry were suggested as Director General
 - The name "The Liberty Fair for World Peace and Progress" was suggested
- Lack of public support (did not buy bonds, worried taxes would increase, a need for public housing, not a "international party")

Final Development of Site

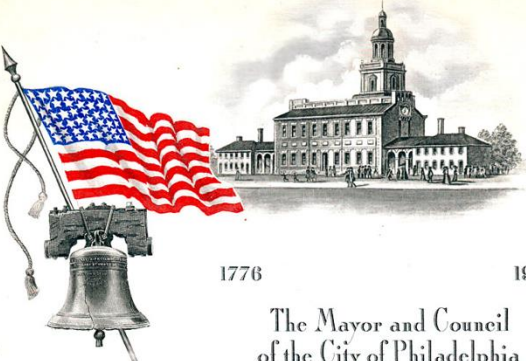
- By 1924, when W. Freeland Kendrick became mayor, little planning had been accomplished
- Changed site to swampy area favored by Republican boss William Vare who had real estate interests in the area.
 - Vare was a US Representative and later elected to the US Senate, but never seated because of corruption charges
- Relocated just above Navy Yard and filled with dirt from North Broad Street subway project.
- Construction began on Exposition's building in the fall of 1925
- Several buildings/exhibits were unfinished at opening May 31, 1926

Illinois State Building under construction



Philadelphia Sesquicentennial

- The Exposition opened on May 31, 1926 (one day ahead of schedule)
- Ran through Nov. (or December) 1926



1776 1926

The Mayor and Council
of the City of Philadelphia
unite with the Officers of the
Sesqui-Centennial Exhibition Association
in announcing the early completion of the
Sesqui-Centennial International Exposition
Commemorating
One Hundred and Fifty Years of
American Independence
and extend a most cordial invitation
to participate in the
Formal Opening Ceremonies
Monday, May thirty-first
Nineteen Hundred Twenty-six
at twelve o'clock noon
Exposition Auditorium



Asher C. Baker Director-in-Chief	W. Freeland Kendrick Mayor
E. J. Lafferty Chairman Executive Committee	Charles B. Hall President City Council

Poster for the Sesquicentennial International Exposition

- Invitation was to many foreign countries, states, US Government and many companies

<https://www.themagazineantiques.com/article/1926-ambitions-and-ambiguities/>



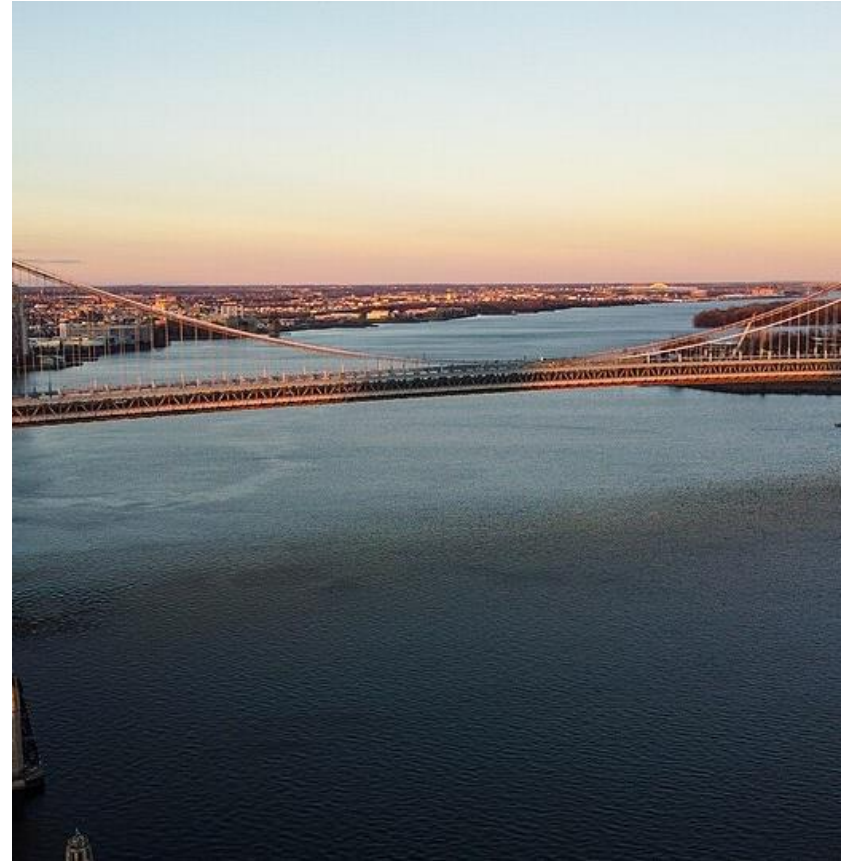
Highlights of Exposition

- 80-foot replica of the Exposition's symbol, the Liberty Bell at the entrance
 - Covered in 26,000 light bulbs
- Sesquicentennial stadium (renamed John F. Kennedy Stadium in 1964)
 - Religious ceremonies,
 - Patriotic pageant "Freedom"
 - Championship boxing match between Jack Dempsey and Gene Tunney drew 125, 000 standing in the rain
- Grand Auditorium and Ballroom
 - 10,000 seat auditorium
 - Curtis Organ, one of the largest pipe organs in the world



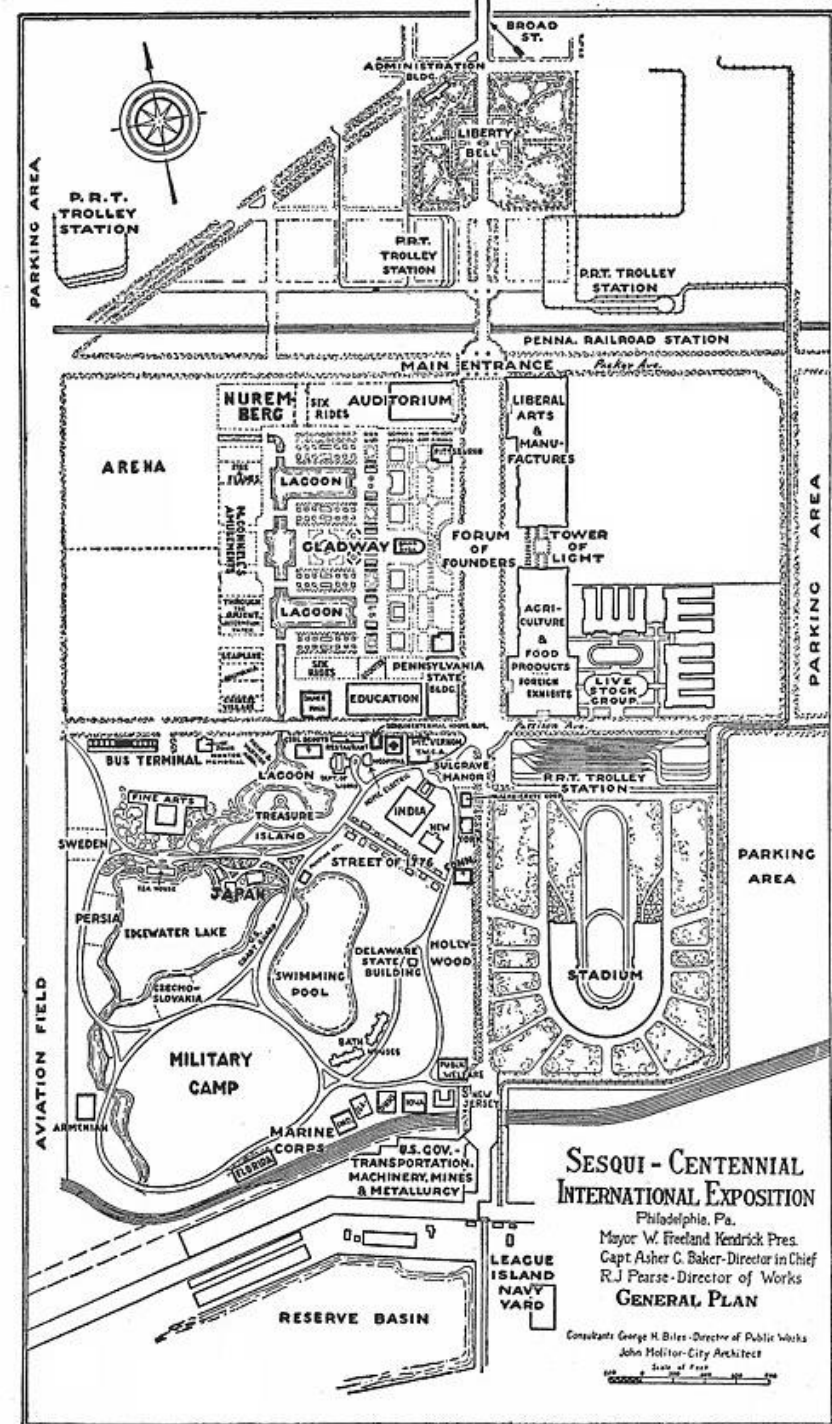
Transportation to the World's Fair

- Benjamin Franklin bridge spanned the Delaware River between center of Philadelphia and Camden, New Jersey to bring crowds from New York (9650')
- Broad Street Subway System
- Pennsylvania Railroad
- Subway System
- Trolley System
- Automobile parking extended toward the Phil. Naval Yard



Main features of 1926 Sesquicentennial

- Southern Boulevard Parkway
 - Forum of Founders
 - Consisting of the Court of Honor,
 - The Liberal Arts Building
 - Agriculture Buildings
 - Group of sculptures
 - Stairway of Nations
 - Re-creation of Philadelphia High Street during colonial times consisting of 20 buildings with guides in period clothing
- Five large Exhibition Halls provided acres of indoor exhibition space represented 31 states, four territories and nine foreign nations.
- Overall size was about 1000 acres with 450 acres of exhibits

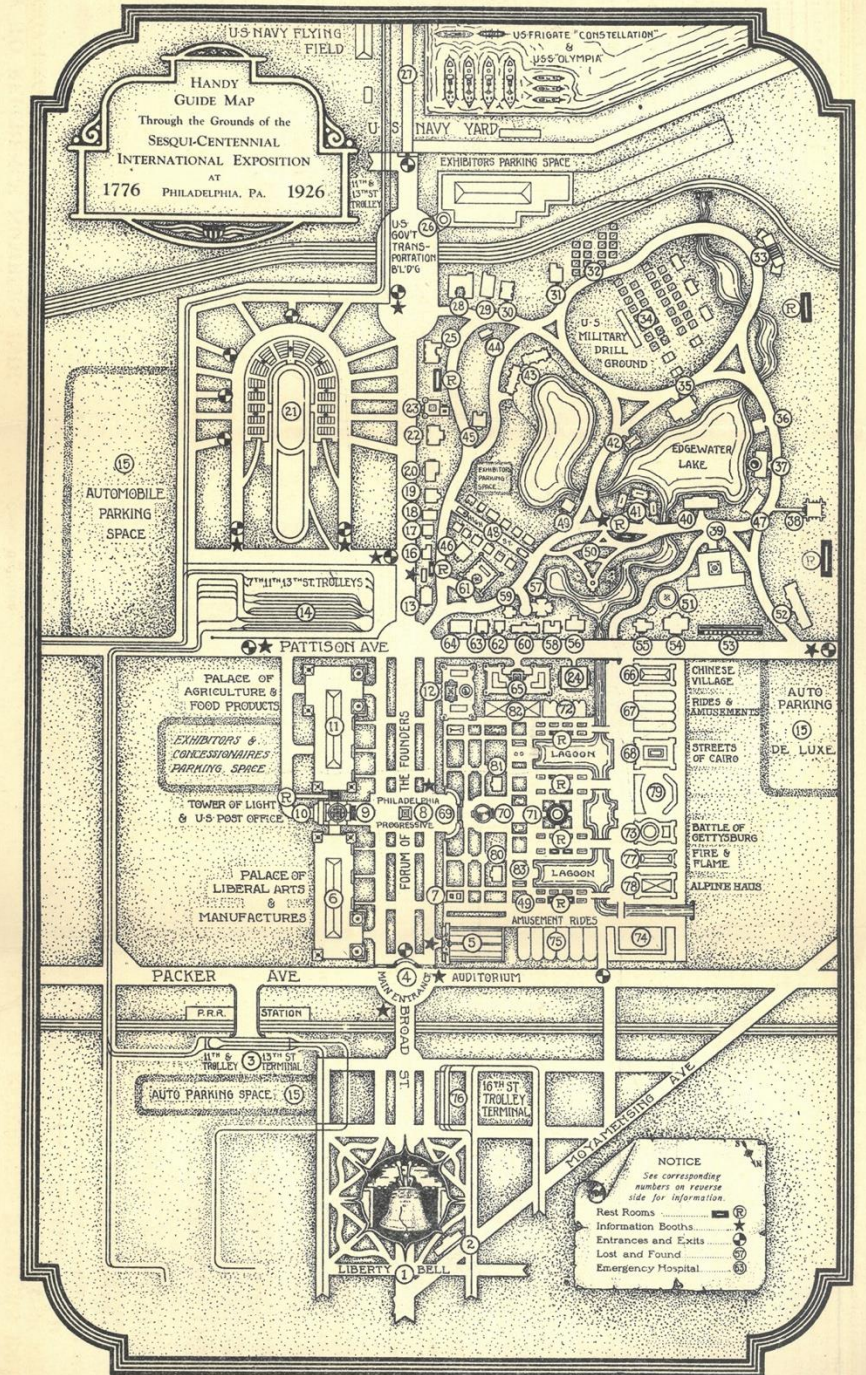


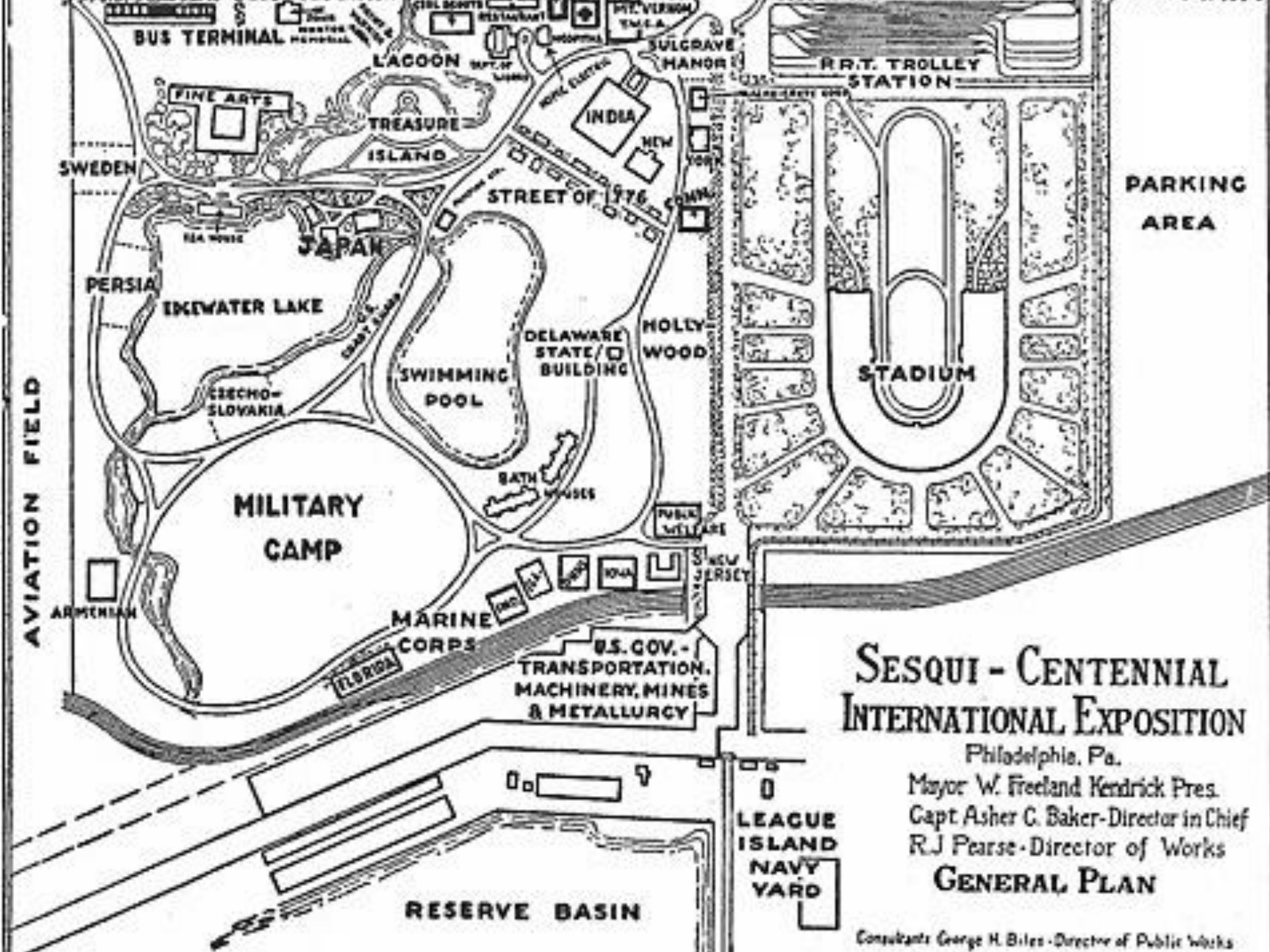
Amusement area

- Within League Island park designated “Treasure Island”
- Replica of the Canadian Rockies
- Miniature railroad
- Mountain slide
- Robinson Crusoe’s Beach
- Pirate’s lair
- Boat rides
- Noah’s Ark complete with animals
- Roller coaster (The Cyclone)

Features of the Sesquicentennial

- Grounds had its own hospital
- Fire Department
- Post Office
- Abutted Philadelphia Naval Yard







Opening Ceremonies

- Held May 31, one day ahead of the June 1 schedule
 - Secretary of State Frank B. Kellogg
 - Secretary of the Commerce Herbert Hoover
 - Philadelphia Mayor W. Freeland Kendrick
-
- Conducted during a downpour of rain
 - Very few attended

Independence Day (July 4) Celebration

- President Calvin Coolidge Spoke in the stadium
- He declared an 8-day American Independence Week spanning June 28-July 5, 1926
- Broke tradition of Blue Laws in Philly as July 4 occurred on Sunday



Navy Air Facility Mustin Field

- Philadelphia Navy Yard
 - Mustin Field named after Captain Henry C. Mustin Naval Aviator No. 11 who recorded the first catapult launched from a moving vessel on Nov. 5, 1915
 - "It was a major event that drew 1,500 spectators, among them:
 - Assistant Secretary of the Navy, [Theodore Douglas Robinson](#),
 - Brig. Gen. [Douglas MacArthur](#),
 - Rear Adm. [William Moffett](#), and
 - Philadelphia Mayor [W. Freeland Kendrick](#), who had been a childhood friend of Capt. Mustin.

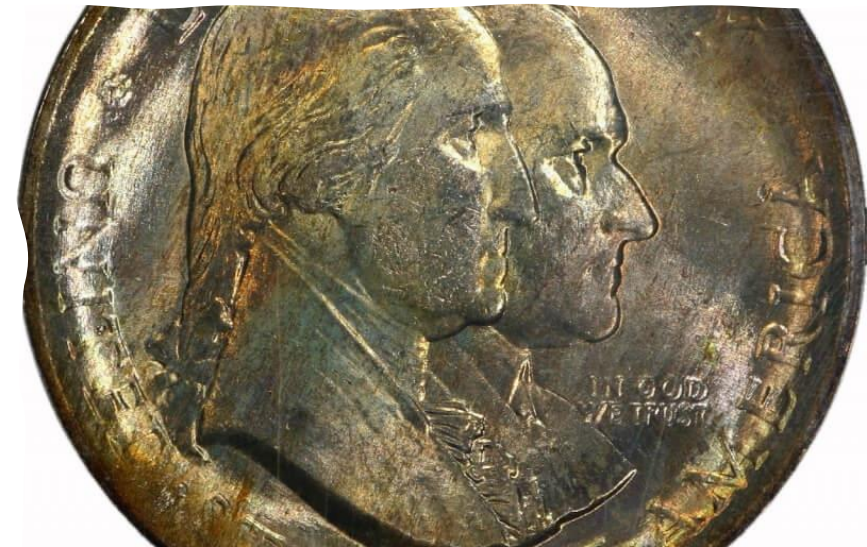
Naval Air Facility Mustin Field dedicated on September 17, 1926

- Planes from the exhibition flew in formation with the aircraft of the Army, Navy, and Marine Corps to honor Navy Capt. Mustin
- Ceremonial flyby of the airship USS Los Angeles



1926 Sesquicentennial Half Dollar in Gold

- Up to 1,000,000 authorized
- Minted in Philadelphia
- Designed by John Sinnock
- George Washington and Calvin Coolidge, the only living President to appear on a U.S. coin
- Liberty Bell with inscription “Sesquicentennial of American Independence”
- Sale Price \$1.00
- 859,408 pieces were returned to the Mint and melted



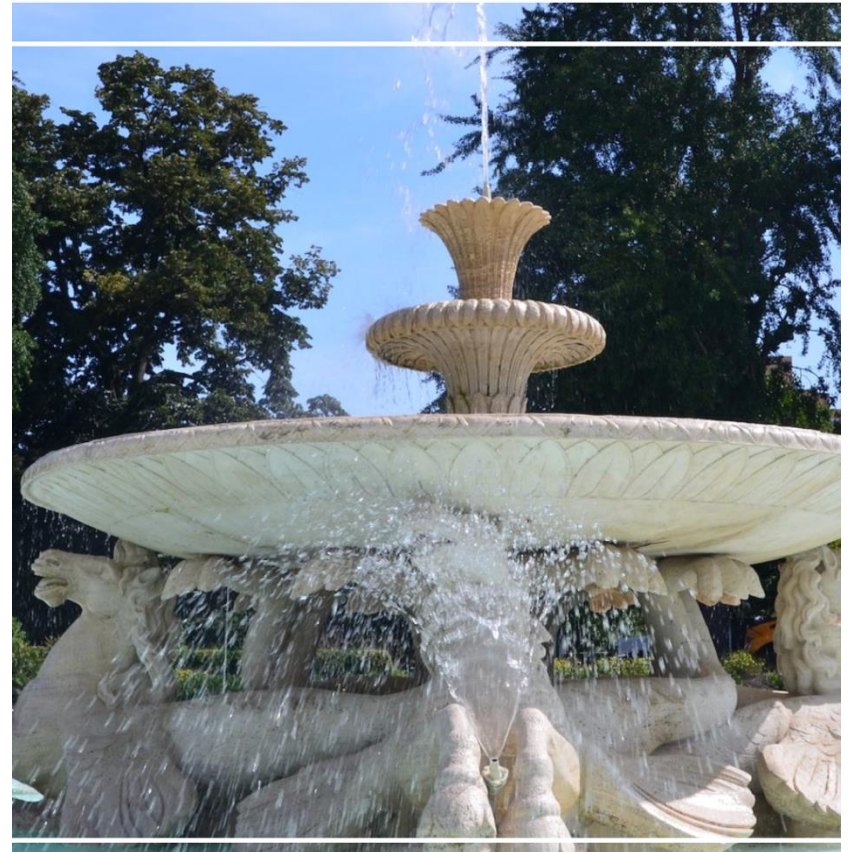
Souvenirs

- Commemorative stamp
- Gold medal of Award sculpted by Al Laesle
- Liberty Bell Ring
- Silver Tray
- Sesquicentennial beauty mark (tattoo or picture of Liberty Bell)

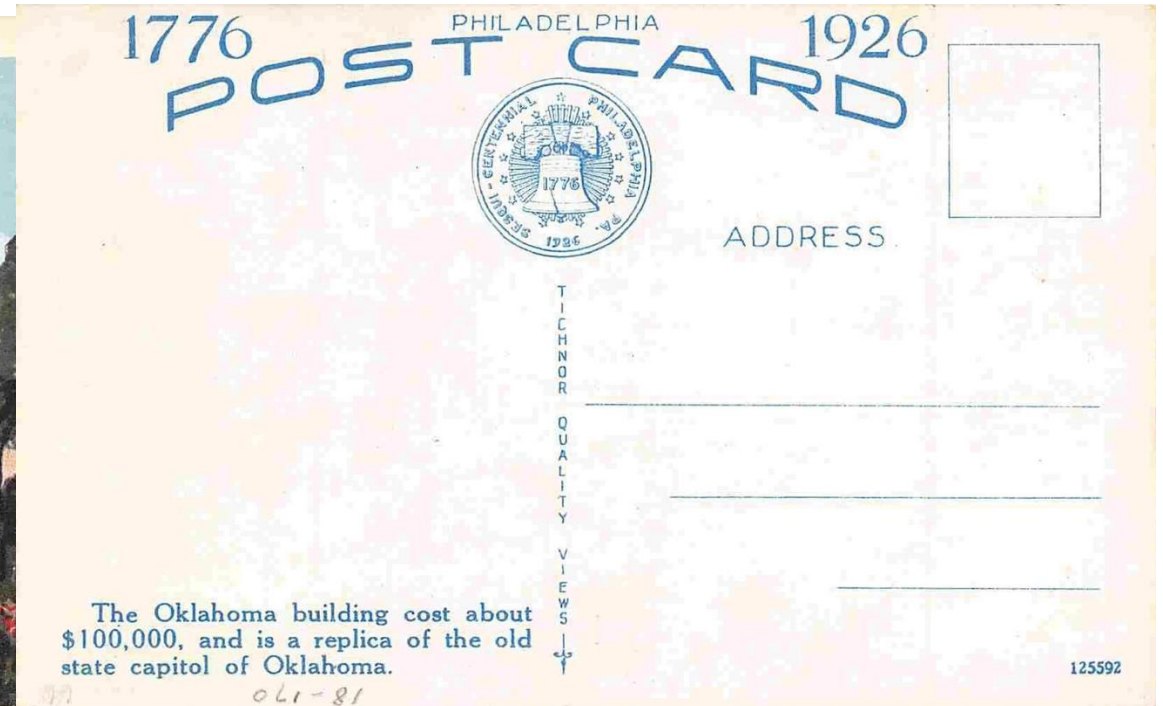


Challenges

- Opening session faced a major downpour
- Fair drew only 10 million visitors (Expected 30 million) < 5 million paid
- Many buildings were not finished until July
- Benito Mussolini gave a \$800,000 replica of Bernini's *Fountain of the Sea*, but it arrived after the fair closed.
 - Restored in 2013
- The Activity went into major debt for Philadelphia on the eve of the great depression

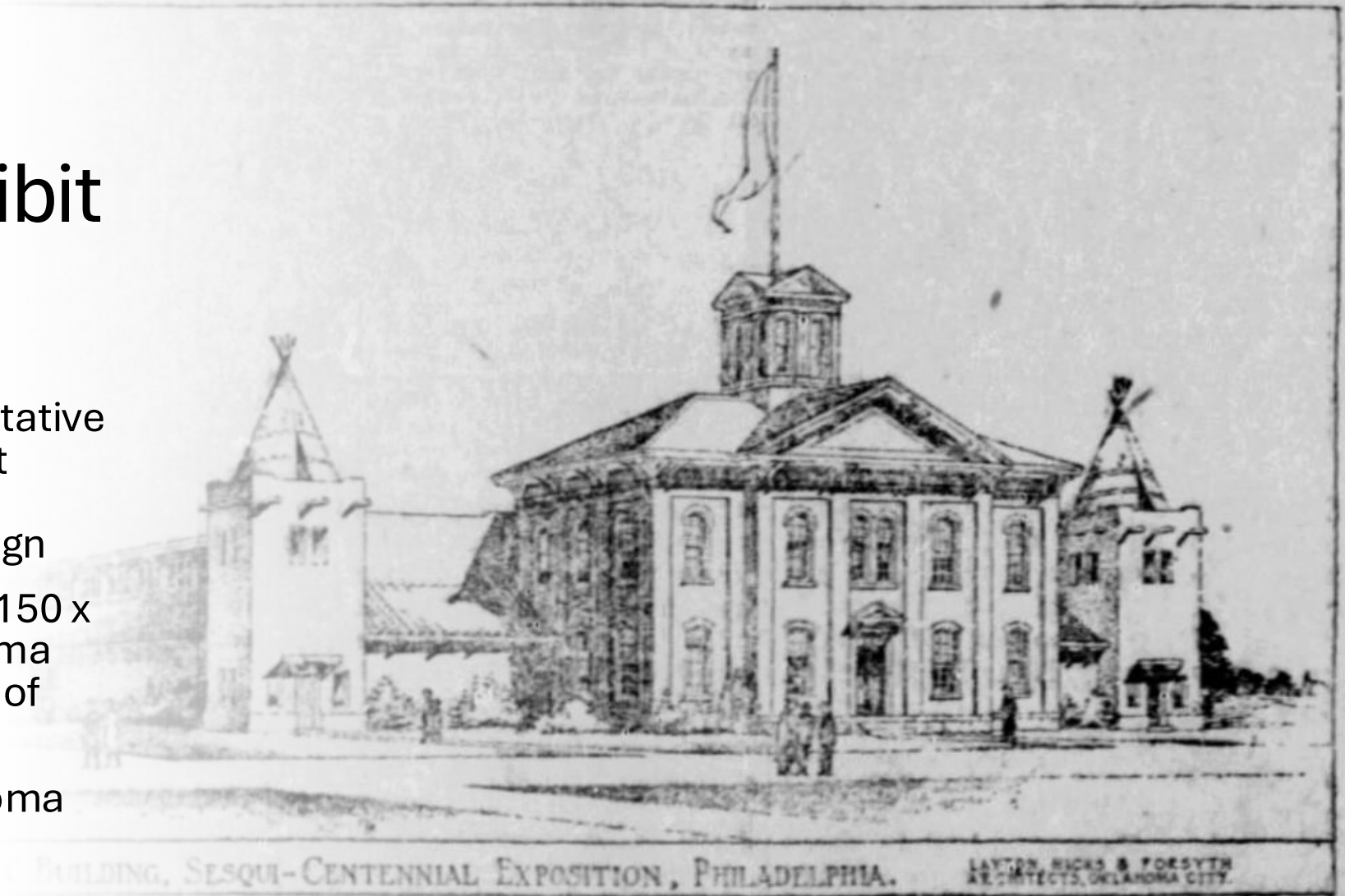


Oklahoma Sesquicentennial Exhibit, Philadelphia 1926?



Proposed Exhibit

- J.G. Sanders, a representative on the Oklahoma Exhibit proposed the Cherokee meeting house as a design
- He proposed a building 150 x 208' made of all Oklahoma materials with a glass roof made in Oklahoma
- Steel made from Oklahoma iron ore???
- Guides would be all native American college graduates



*Cherokee Council House at Tahlequah
Be Reproduced in Oklahoma Building
for Sesqui-Centennial Exposition, Phila.*

Oklahoma Exhibit in Philadelphia

- While the overall 1926 exposition in South Philadelphia was widely considered a financial and attendance disappointment, it still managed to attract exhibits from over 30 states, including Oklahoma??
- Oklahoma's participation was primarily housed within one of the fair's state buildings, which showcased regional agricultural, industrial, and cultural displays to a national audience???
- Right-sized considering the economy of Oklahoma in 1926 with agricultural prices low and the disorganization of the Sesquicentennial and estimated cost of the building exhibit of \$150,000

Edna Ferber

FIVE COMPLETE NOVELS

So Big
Show Boat
Cimarron
Saratoga Trunk
Giant



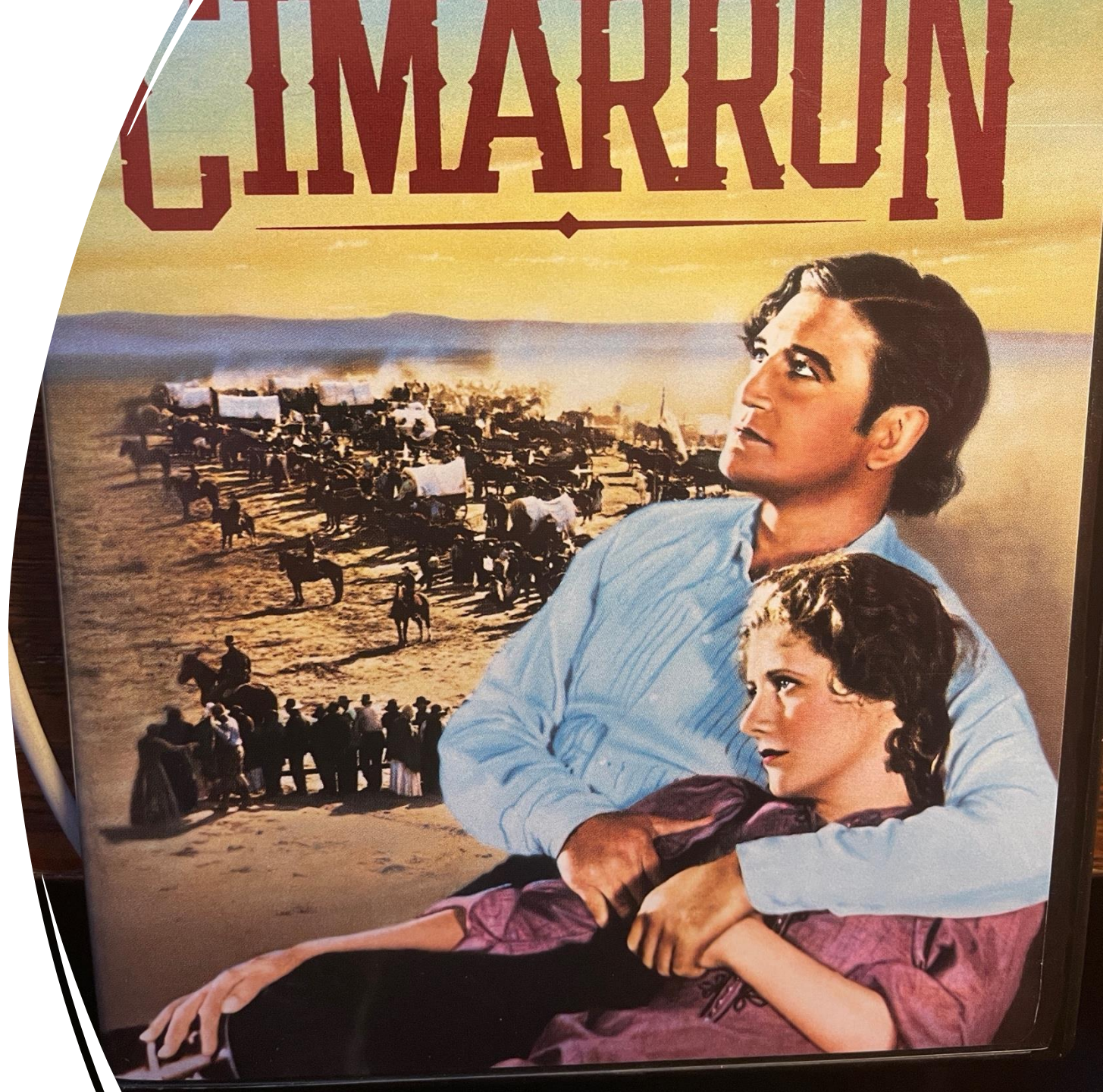
COMPLETE AND
UNABRIDGED

Edna Ferber

- Came to Watonga, stayed with Mrs. Ferguson in 1927, and started writing “Cimarron” loosely based on the Ferguson’s Lives
 - TB Ferguson had died in 1921
- Made into Academy Award winning best picture in 1931
- Remade in 1960

1931 Academy Award Winner

- Edna Ferber's Novel
"Cimarron"
- Starring
 - Richard Dix
 - Irene Dunne
 - Estelle Taylor

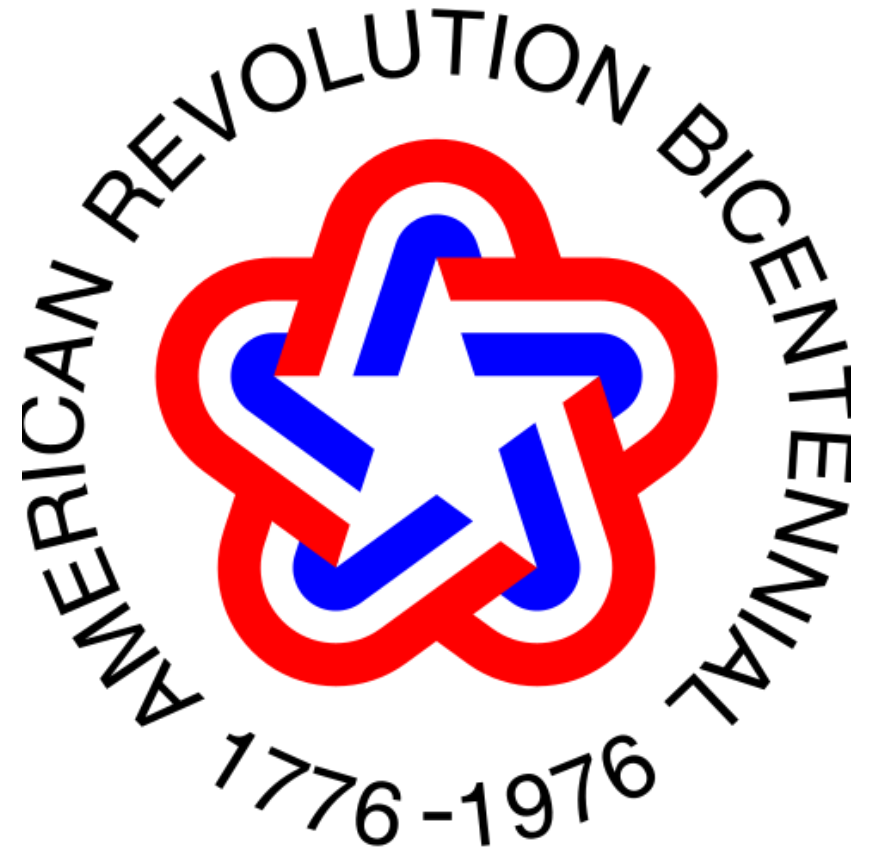


From the Watonga Republican 1926

- Cattle were shipped to Philadelphia from Miami
- Nowata Slim Richardson of Lenapah was adjudged the champion Bull Riding cowboy of the world at the Sesqui
- Two students and a teacher were selected to attend and meet dignitaries
- Elva Ferguson did serve as a Commissioner for the Exhibit
- Did Oklahoma miss a bullet, or miss the boat at the Sesquicentennial?

Bicentennial 1976 in Philadelphia

- The 1976 United States Bicentennial in Philadelphia featured historic civic celebrations, including:
 - A massive 40,000-person parade on July 4th,
 - Distinguished visits from President Gerald Ford and Queen Elizabeth II, who gifted the city a replica Liberty Bell.



Great State Fair in Washington, DC July 2026

“Bold Belongs Here”



Scents, Breezes, Sunrises, Dark Skies, Route 66, Oil, and the OKC Thunder