

New Zealand International Exhibition 1906

CCL, n.d.[c]

Introduction

Advertising New Zealand

The New Zealand International Exhibition of 1906-7 ran from 1 November 1906 to 15 April 1907 and was the brainchild of Richard Seddon.

Seddon was the Premier of New Zealand from 1893 until his death on 10 June 1906, just a few months before the Exhibition opened. New Zealand, in Seddon's opinion, had become under his Government, "the social laboratory of the world" and he saw the Exhibition as a means of "proclaiming New Zealand's distinctiveness and imminent greatness"¹ to the world. In the words of historian Gavin McLean, "politicians, civil servants and businessmen converted Hagley Park into a huge three-dimensional advertisement for the liberal state. Visitors walked through extensive government courts which displayed a beneficent state working in partnership with its citizens on everything from railways to beekeeping and life insurance".²

"God's Own Country"

The progress which the colony had made under a programme of Liberal reforms was a source of developing patriotic pride among New Zealanders. An emerging sense of national identity was shaped at least in part by the idea that the country was a "New World Utopia" for people seeking a better way of life. Patriotic boasts about New Zealand as a progressive and enlightened state became a stock ingredient in Liberal speech-making, especially that of Seddon who coined the phrase "God's Own Country". The Exhibition was a physical representation of that pride, a "flamboyant expression of national consciousness"³. As Acting Premier William Hall-Jones said at the closing ceremony, the Exhibition drew people together, "fostering a national spirit among our people".⁴

According to Jock Phillips, New Zealand's nationalism was expressed through a variety of displays at the Exhibition. He lists seven different aspects of the country which the government chose to emphasise, particularly in its own departmental courts: a land of abundance, beautiful New Zealand, the social laboratory of the world, the Britain of the South, a man's country, Maoriland, and a respectable people.⁵ The Exhibition was also a way of promoting New Zealand's products, and attracting capital investment and tourism.

Outpost of The Empire

Liberal nationalism retained a strongly imperial flavour. The major overseas courts were from other parts of the Empire, with the Mother Country's court especially noticeable. Polynesian courts were from those islands which also formed part of the Empire; Samoa, for example was not represented. The British and Australian courts were very popular, especially the British art exhibition. People took pride in the visit of a Royal Navy squadron and the show-stealer in the music programme was a Lancashire working-class band, Besses o' th' Barn Band.

Despite the substantial financial loss incurred by the Exhibition, it was deemed to be a success. With nearly 2 million visitors, attendance exceeded expectations. Regardless of the many columns The Press devoted to criticisms of the management and the "destruction" of the city's iconic Hagley Park, it still declared The Exhibiton a "habitual joy".⁶



Sources

- Editorial, *The Press*, 1 November 1906, p. 6
- Hamer, D. *The New Zealand liberals : the years of power, 1891-1912*.
- Phillips, J. "Exhibiting ourselves: The Exhibition and National Identity". In J.M. Thomson (Ed.), *Imperialism and colonialism : the New Zealand International Exhibition, Christchurch, 1906-07*

- Mclean, G. "The Colony commodified: Trade, progress and the real business of exhibitions". In J.M. Thomson (Ed.), *Farewell colonialism : the New Zealand International Exhibition, Christchurch, 1906-07*, page 27-38
- *The Press*, 15 April 1907, page 7

Footnotes

- [1] Philips, J. "Exhibiting ourselves: The Exhibition and National Identity". In J.M. Thomson (Ed.), *Farewell colonialism*, page 18-26
- [2] Mclean, G. "The Colony commodified: Trade, progress and the real business of exhibitions". In J.M. Thomson (Ed.), *Farewell colonialism*, page 30
- [3] Editorial, *The Press*, 1 November 1906, p. 6
- [4] Cowan, J. Official record, page 394
- [5] Philips, J. "Exhibiting ourselves: The Exhibition and National Identity". In J.M. Thomson (Ed.), *Farewell colonialism*, page 18-26
- [6] *The Press*, 15 April 1907, page 7

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