**New Zealand International Exhibition, Christchurch, 1906**

The government and tourist initiatives that shaped New Zealand's international displays were in evidence at the Christchurch exhibition of 1906–7. Premier Richard Seddon was the prime mover, and the government paid for the exhibition held on 5.7 hectares in Hagley Park. Seddon saw the fair as demonstrating that New Zealand was a great country.

To encourage tourism, there was a large fernery, a geyserland in miniature, walls displaying stuffed game and photographs and paintings of beautiful New Zealand. A Māori pā, featuring Māori wearing traditional clothing, was located beside 'Wonderland' amusement park, with a water chute, helter-skelter and side shows.

The government was represented by displays from no fewer than 13 departments. The Department of Labour court showed off New Zealand's role as the 'social laboratory of the world', by contrasting New Zealand-made goods with those produced in British sweatshops.

The exhibition also showed off the country's material progress, with arches of wheat, piles of corn and bags of kauri gum. There was an art gallery, a major British art display and a concert chamber that hosted both a professional orchestra directed by Alfred Hill and the Besses o’ th’ Barn band from Manchester. There were contributions from Britain, Canada, Fiji and Australia.

Almost 2 million people visited the fair (twice the national population at that time) during its six months.

**New Zealand and South Seas International Exhibition, Dunedin, 1925–26**

Following the Christchurch fair there were smaller industrial shows – a Coronation Exhibition in Wellington in 1911; an Industrial, Agricultural and Mining Exhibition in Auckland in 1913–14; a British and Intercolonial Exhibition in Hokitika in 1923–24; and an annual Dominion Industrial Exhibition held in Christchurch in 1922, Auckland in 1923 and Wellington in 1925.

Dunedin’s New Zealand and South Seas International Exhibition, which began in 1925, was on a different scale. Promoted by the Otago Expansion League in response to the population and economic drift north, it was funded by a company that offered 100,000 £1 shares, and a £50,000 government subsidy. The location was reclaimed from Lake Logan, and Edmund Anscome, the architect, designed seven pavilions linked by covered walkways around a grand court of reflecting pools leading to the domed Festival Hall. There was an art gallery, a fernery (with a waterfall and streams) and an amusement area with seven major rides, notably the scenic railroad and the fun factory with a large comic-face entrance.

The themes of the exhibition were:

- the manifestation of the British Empire's size and strength, reflected in displays by British government and industry, Australia, Canada and Fiji
- the progress achieved by New Zealand’s European pioneers
- New Zealand-made goods displayed in the 1.2-hectare New Zealand manufactures pavilion
- the role of the New Zealand government, which showed off the work of 15 departments.

There was an education court, a women's court and a motor pavilion. More than 250,000 people visited the show, making it the most popular in New Zealand history.
New Zealand Centennial Exhibition, Wellington, 1939–40

Set on a 22.5-hectare site in Rongotai, the centennial fair was designed to mark New Zealand’s centennial by illustrating the progress of the country, rather than to sell goods. A huge frieze at the base of the 46-metre-high tower illustrated this, as did large statues of a pioneer man and woman. The art deco lines of Edmund Anscombe’s design of the exhibition buildings, richly illuminated in colour by electricity, suggested an exciting future.

The fair was organised by a limited liability company; but the government gave a £50,000 grant and several loans. The government court, with 26 departments, evoked a progressive benevolent welfare state complete with a talking robot, Dr Well-and-Strong.

Exhibition numbers
The Centennial Exhibition buildings required 7,080 cubic metres of timber, 60,387 square metres of asbestos, 310 tons of nails, 200,000 bolts, 5,674 square metres of glass, 68,191 litres of paint, 37,000 lights and 3,994 kilometres of wiring. In all, 2,641,043 people visited.

There was a dominion court, with a massive diorama of the country, and women’s and Māori courts. Britain and Australia had their own buildings.

Playland, the amusement park, was popular, with the Cyclone roller coaster, the Crazy House and the Laughing Sailor particular highlights. The outbreak of war affected attendance, which, at just over 2.6 million, was lower than the 1925–26 Dunedin exhibition.

Later exhibitions
The Centennial Exhibition inspired Otago (in 1948), Canterbury (in 1950), Southland (in 1956) and Marlborough (in 1959) to put on provincial centenary industrial fairs. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, as the country encouraged domestic production, Christchurch and Wellington, with their industries fairs, had annual displays of manufactured goods.

In 1990 Sesqui, the celebration of New Zealand’s sesquicentennial (150th anniversary) was a strikingly unsuccessful attempt to hold a modern celebratory exhibition and amusement fair. It closed after a few weeks. The era of the New Zealand fair was over.

Footnotes:

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