

Meet Me at the Gooderham Fountain



Gooderham Fountain, ca. 1911

CTA

Once again, it's time for the Ex, the world's largest annual fair.

The Canadian National Exhibition started as the Toronto Industrial Exhibition in September 1879, a grand agricultural fair with urban pretensions. Agricultural exhibitions and competitions outnumbered industrial activities at the new waterfront grounds. Massey Harris – the largest manufacturer of agricultural instruments in the British Empire – was among the local industries racking up prizes and hawking wares to fair-bound farmers.

It appears, however, that Gooderham & Worts did *not* exhibit or advertise their products, despite their obvious success a year earlier in Europe where they had won a gold medal at the 1878 Paris World's Fair (For many years, bottles of G&W bore the Paris, and an 1885 Antwerp, seal of approval.) No such competition was available in provincial Toronto. Whether this was because Fair organizers were simply uninterested or were morally opposed to the demon whisky, G&W – the largest distillery in the world – was offered no competition. It suffered little from the shunning ... and fair-weary farmers undoubtedly enjoyed the odd dram at local watering holes.

Around 1904, the exhibition became informally known as the Canadian National Exhibition and in 1912 that name was legally adopted. During this

formative period, Beaux-Arts architect, George W. Gouinlock, was hired to revamp the fair site. Strongly influenced by Daniel Burnham's monumental 1893 Columbian Exhibition in Chicago, Gouinlock designed Canada's own "white city": neo-classical exhibition buildings, arranged around a Grand Plaza ... that remained without a central focus until 1911 when the Gooderham Fountain first gushed. The fountain was probably designed by Gouinlock and was opened during George H. Gooderham's final year as President of the Ex. Thereafter, it became a popular meeting place, both day and night, until it was replaced by the Princess Margaret Fountain in 1958.

Over the years, other changes have come to the Ex. Just how many is nicely illustrated by Gordon V. Thompson's 1915 "Take Me to Toronto Fair." Written during the mounting horror of the Great War, Thompson's sweet melody and lyrics hark back to a nostalgic time when lemonade-sipping Auntie Jane and Uncle Joe ventured down to enjoy the "cows and pigs and churns and rigs, and clowns there by the score!" Enjoy the music, while you savour the lyrics. [To hear the music, click on <http://www.kluetek.com/music/index.htm>]

Auntie Jane and Uncle Joe, sequester'd from the sun,
Enjoy a little quiet rest, when farming toil is done.
"Now, Joseph dear, the crop is here, you've worked most awful
long,
It's time for play, so let's go 'way: just listen to my song --
"Take me to old Toronto, I want to see the fair!
Tell the conductor-man for sure to stop his train right there!
Brightly the lights are shining, driving away all care!
Rockets are gleaming, banners streaming, down at Toronto
Fair."

"Jennie mine, you've struck it right, and to the fair we'll go.
Tho' nigh ten years since I was there, I can't forget that show!
They've cows and pigs and churns and rigs, and clowns there
by the score!
We'll take the trip, so pack the grip, let's sing that song some
more! --"

Many thanks to Dr Arthur Zimmerman for alerting me to the music, and to Earl Rosen for permission to share the recording. Other sources include the *Canadian Encyclopedia*, which identifies the CNE as the world's largest annual fair.

Apologies to Douglas Worts and Deb McKinley. The following paragraph was inadvertently dropped from last week's heritage snippet, "Residential Roots: J. W. Worts":

Many thanks to Douglas Worts, Deb McKinley and "Clara's Girls" for sharing Worts family photographs, letters, and memorabilia. Other sources include the 1861 Census, 1880 Goad's map, and Steve Otto's 1994 *Inventory of Archival Resources* report.

Please send your comments or questions to Manager of Heritage Services, Sally Gibson, sg@thedistillerydistrict.com