

The World of Tomorrow

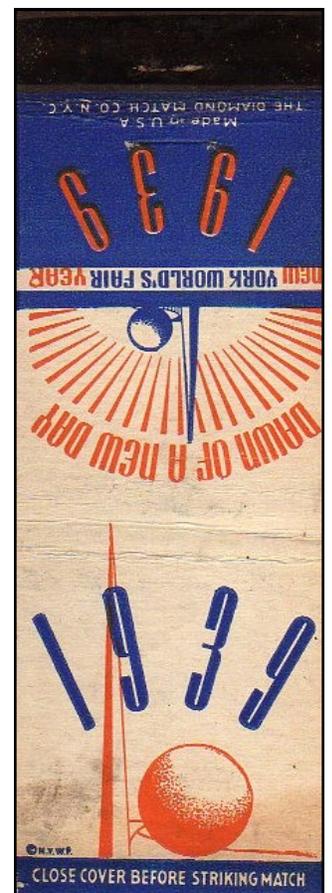
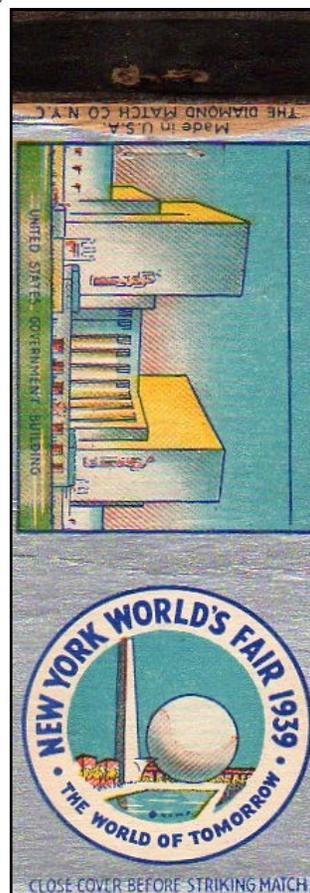
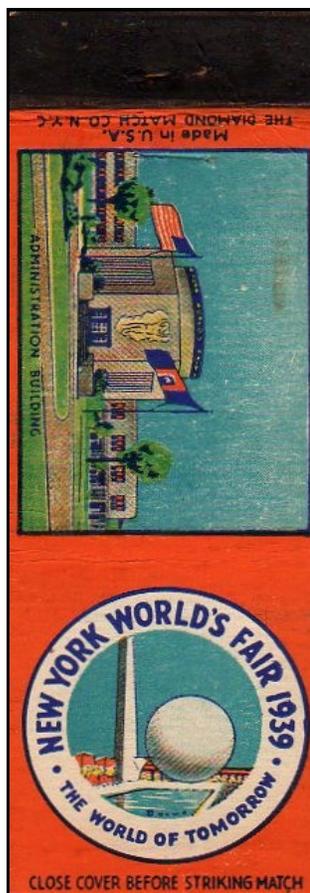
by
Stuart Bergman

Next year, New Yorkers, along with many matchcover collectors, will celebrate the 60th anniversary of the New York World's Fair of 1939-1940. Though there were many people collecting matchcovers before 1939, the New York World's Fair of 1939-1940 is generally considered to be the birthplace of the hobby. The group of men who scrounged matchbooks at the fair became the nucleus for RMS and other hobby clubs of this century.

Chicago's World's Fair, "A Century of Progress" (1933-34), California's Exposition of 1935-36, and the Texas Centennial Exposition of 1936—all produced beautiful matchbook sets. These sets became collector's items instantly, but it was the New York fair which spawned the greatest number of matchcovers for any event in History.

The beauty of the printer's art in producing matchbooks for the New York World's Fair was outstanding and acted as an incentive for collectors to save these beautiful examples of art and history. Matches were made in 10-strikes, 30-strikes, 40-strikes, Giant Features, "Owname," Midgets—and these joined the 20-strikes, which, up to then, had been the almost exclusive size of matchbooks since their beginning in 1892.

A few



statistics and facts about the greatest fair of the decade, “The World of Tomorrow.” The main purpose of the fair was to improve the economy of New York City, which was still suffering from the Depression of 1929. The opening coincided with the 150th anniversary of George Washington’s inaugural as the first President of the United States. The fair was built on 1,216 acres in Flushing Meadow, Queens. There were 65 miles of paved streets and footpaths. Thirty-three states and fifty-eight nations were represented with buildings or pavilions. The most spectacular was that of Soviet Russia, but it was removed for the 1940 season, due to World War II. The theme center of the fair was the 700-foot “Trylon” and the 200-foot globe, “Perisphere.”

RCA introduced television at the fair by “broadcasting” an address by Franklin D. Roosevelt, the first TV address by a president. Westinghouse buried a time capsule to be opened in 6939 AD. General Motors’ “Futurama” attendance averaged 28,000 visitors per day, and Billy Rose’s “Acquacade” thrilled eight million visitors in its two year run.

The fair had such an impact, *Life* magazine came out with predictions of the “World of Tomorrow” for the 1960s. Here are just some:

1. Americans don’t care much for possessions.
2. When they take their two-month vacations, they will drive to the great national parks on express high-ways.
3. Cars will be shaped like tear-drops, powered by rear-engines; they will be air-conditioned inside and cost as little as \$200.
4. More land surface will be in forests and parks.
5. Nearly everyone will be a high school graduate.

.....They missed on a few!

There were souvenirs from Frank Buck’s “Jungleland,” GM’s “Futurama,” the Heinz “Dome,” AC Sparkplugs, Planter’s Nut Co., the G.E. Building, Bordon’s, the Soviet Pavilion, premium ham from Swift’s, and milk bottle pins from Sheffield Farms. Some of these souvenirs were given away, while others were sold for a few cents, but matchbooks were the most plentiful and were given away by the millions.

Though almost 45 million people attended the fair, its backers lost 18.7 million dollars, victims of poor timing. Still, observers have noted that this was the last truly great World’s Fair. Among other things, its amusement parks and rides inspired Walt Disney to create Disneyland. During World War II, the Trylon and Perisphere were torn down and sold for scrap.

If Fairs and Expositions are not one of your categories, it’s not too late to start collecting them. RMS Librarian John Williams lists the 1939-40 New York World’s Fair issues—509 matchcovers known so far.