



Odyssey : the Montana Centennial Train, 1964-1965
by Dennis Robert Seibel

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science in
History

Montana State University

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Abstract:

Montana has never suffered from "overexposure" as it relates to publicity. In 1964, a unique effort occurred as part of the state's territorial centennial celebration in an attempt to increase the number of visitors to the state. This paper studies that event, including the organizers, the goals, and the results of the promotion. Conclusions from this study might better direct future state promotion.

Created by state boosters, the Montana Territorial Centennial Train of 1964-1965 became the focal point of the entire state's centennial celebration. With its 16-city tour and two-season stay at the New York World's Fair, the train provided the state with media exposure and publicity that would be felt for many years.

During its early decades, Montana Territory would make the news only because it provided rich claims of gold and silver to a lucky few prospectors. Copper baron William A. Clark represented the territory at America's first international exposition in Philadelphia in 1876. Fourteen years later, Montana made its world's fair debut at Chicago's Columbian Exposition. The promotion was deemed a success and world's fairs seemed a good tool for selling the state to the outside world.

In 1964, organizer Howard Kelsey wanted to promote awareness of Montana by taking the state to the people via a train loaded with 300 Montanans who would serve as ambassadors for the state. The project soon grew in complexity such that it required state government involvement of administrative and financial assistance. To add to Kelsey's frustration of organization, the train became a political issue during the gubernatorial election year of 1964. But as each problem was solved, and the train rolled across the country, it came to be seen as a controversial promotion for the state. This paper provides evidence that indicates the promotion was successful, that it accomplished its objective of bringing people into the state.

This study was accomplished by interviewing organizers and participants, studying newspaper articles of the time, and combing the Historical Society archives in Helena, Montana.

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APPROVAL

of a thesis submitted by

Dennis Robert Seibel

This thesis has been read by each member of the graduate committee and has been found to be satisfactory regarding content, English usage, format, citations, bibliographic style, and consistency, and is ready for submission to the College of Graduate Studies.

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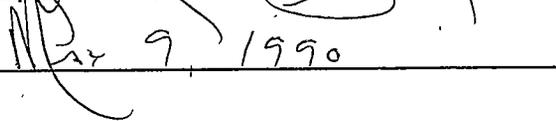
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Date

A handwritten date "May 9, 1990" written in black ink over a horizontal line.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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ABSTRACT

Montana has never suffered from "overexposure" as it relates to publicity. In 1964, a unique effort occurred as part of the state's territorial centennial celebration in an attempt to increase the number of visitors to the state. This paper studies that event, including the organizers, the goals, and the results of the promotion. Conclusions from this study might better direct future state promotion.

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CHAPTER 1

THE MONTANA CENTENNIAL TRAIN

Limelight flooded Montana's stage. For 18 months newspaper reporters across the country chronicled the odyssey of the Montana Territorial Centennial Train. Beginning with its tour of Montana in February 1964, through its national tour in April, and ultimately to Flushing Meadows, New York, where the train became the Montana Pavilion at the New York World's Fair, beaming its 300 foot-long sign "Montana the Big Sky Country" to 200,000 Long Island commuters every day for some 18 months, the train informed thousands of people about the state of Montana. Train executive summaries tallied that more than one million people visited the state while the train toured the eastern United States, and that more than three million people toured the pavilion site at the New York World's Fair during 1964 and 1965.

Governor Tim Babcock observed that Montana had entered the big leagues of promotion, adding that "this could very well be the greatest effort put forth by the Treasure State to acquaint the rest of the world with the Big Sky Country."¹ He even called an evening banquet of Montanans in New York City the state's finest hour. Babcock praised the work of the train's organizers and promoters and hoped that the train's success in advertising the

state would vault the tourist business to new heights during his administration. Neither, of course, did this event hurt his cause during the gubernatorial campaign.

In its 75-year history as a state, Montana had not been promoted to the extent demonstrated in 1964 by the Montana Centennial Train. Promotional attempts to attract new residents, even during the formative years as a United States territory, did not reach as many people as did the train during its two-year life span. An interstate train traveling from town to town with displays, history, and murals depicting the state had no precedent even at a national level. Undaunted, the organizers proceeded as if no problem was insurmountable. Their optimism abounded. The published objective of the Centennial Train was to "promote Montana's potential as an ideal vacation land and as a state where the Old West flavor still remains."² Even before the train wheels rolled East, state newspapers rallied behind the cause. On February 22, 1964, five weeks before the national tour began, an editorial in the *Billings (Montana) Gazette* encouraged the "spectacular effort" of the train: "Let's remember one thing: tourists visit us, bring their money and spend it. They don't cut down trees or dig holes, they leave their money and return home." By itself, that statement seems a bit crass, but Montana already had felt the need to import dollars to feed the local economy. The author of the editorial wanted to make a connection that made sense to rural Montanans.

Referring to the investment in the train and the tour, the author argued, "It's like a good wheat, beet, or calf crop. It's good business. Let's not muff it."³

Tourism was expected to "develop an extra \$50 million" for the state during 1964. In addition, the Centennial Train was predicted to turn a profit for the state. State Advertising Director Orvin Fjare remarked that he had "every reason to believe that the train (tour) will benefit the state by \$500,000" by the end of its stay at the New York World's Fair.⁴

But these early dreams of grandeur turned sour. The "extra \$50 million" amounted to a grand overstatement by the boosters, and the \$500,000 anticipated profit failed to materialize. Still, the promotion should be deemed a success. The word "Montana" and information about its Centennial Train reached between 5 and 75 million persons. Newspapers along the train route had circulations totaling in excess of 75 million. An NBC broadcast of the send-off of the train in April 1964 reached additional millions of persons across the country. But these are nebulous figures. The number of persons that actually read about Montana is not necessarily the circulation number, while the number who witnessed the send-off on national television cannot be ascertained. More than one newspaperman was impressed with the concept. H.T. Fitzgerald, travel editor for the *St. Louis Post Dispatch*, wrote that in his 34 years on the travel desk, "the Centennial Train is the most outstanding state promotion I have ever seen."⁵ Richard W. Vessey wrote in the *Wisconsin State Journal* on May 3, 1964, "The happy people from the Land

of the Big Sky proved to their eastern friends that they are no slouches at show biz."⁶

Montana newspapers were equally kind. On the day the train returned to Billings after its 16-city tour, a *Missoulian* [*Missoula, Montana*] editorial stated, "It would be impossible to tally the advertising value of the Centennial Train, but the value is there and its effects will be felt by the economy of this state for many years." Even as the train wheels slowed to a halt in Billings, the author sensed a successful promotion: "They lined the streets when the parade went by, they saw Montana on their TV sets, they heard Montana on their radios, they talked Montana at the banquets, they read Montana in their newspapers." At the same time, the editor perceived another reality: "We probably won't see anything like it again."⁷

Twenty-five years later, Tim Babcock reaffirmed the same prophecy. At his home in Helena, during an interview for a film about the train, he stated that the complexities of rail travel, the demise of passenger service, and the prohibitive cost of assembling a train would preclude a repeat performance of a national tour to advertise the state. But "there must be other ideas that can be used," he continued, "and should be used to benefit the state."⁸

Montana, 100 years after being designated a United States territory in 1864, had never experienced that dreaded Hollywood term of "overexposure." During its early decades, Montana Territory seemed destined to make the news only because it provided rich claims of gold and silver to a lucky few

prospectors. But this lottery attracted tens of thousands of miners, most of whom only eked out a living. Many ricocheted off the gold fields to farm and ranch in fertile valleys like the Gallatin. By the end of the first hundred years, mining and agriculture still ranked first and second on the state's list of industries.

By 1964, tourism had risen to third place on the state's scale of industries, although it constantly competed with the timber business. Tourism, though, escaped a refined definition. Just how much money visitors brought into the state was nebulous. Methods for determining how much gasoline they purchased, how many restaurant meals they ate, how many trinkets they bought as souvenirs amounted to only rough estimates. Yet even the estimates indicated that the industry was significant, fueling the economy with over \$150 million by 1962.⁹ But interest in this third-ranked industry lacked enthusiasm. For example, responsibility for state advertising fell within the scope of the Highway Department, hardly an environment of promotional creativity.

Officials published road maps featuring a cover of a Charles Russell pastel and a generic statement of welcome signed by the governor. Other brochures featured a spouting Old Faithful, a proud feature of the state of Wyoming. And, of course, a picture of the desolate and sage-covered battlefield where Custer made his "last stand" always found its way into print.

Information available to the Centennial Train promoters on tourism seems primitive when compared to the data obtained from the survey-riddled traveler today. Yet, reaction to the museum carried by the Centennial Train certainly lends evidence when looking for the answer. Charles M. Guthrie, brother of Montana's A.B. Guthrie, lived in Minneapolis when the train came to town in early May 1964. At first, he wrote, he felt no compulsion to see relics or pictures from his old home state encased in the compact confines of a Pullman car. But his wife continued to suggest a visit and he finally agreed. Apparently the museum refreshed his sensitivity toward Montana. "Those who behold Montana's mountain majesty and sweep of plain for the first time will feel cheated for not having made the trip sooner."¹⁰

While Guthrie defined the lure of scenery, the train struck another nerve of the potential tourist: the Old West. The train provided an 80-foot Pullman car packed with artifacts, pictures, and information about the West of yesteryear. By 1964, this West had received a good deal of attention from the American public, although the theme was in decline. Eight of television's prime-time shows were westerns, and *Bonanza* reigned number one from 1964 through 1967. Earlier, in the 1958-1959 season, 31 westerns rode the prime-time into American living rooms.¹¹ Still, the West seemed a part of American psychic need. Neil Morgan wrote in the *San Diego Union* on May 10, 1964, his feeling about the train's attraction: "Much of the charm of this country is that it will not forget the past."¹²

Organized by promotion amateurs, the Centennial Train served to identify several reasons why people vacation "out west." This, in fact, became a byproduct of the formal purposes and objectives set forth by the organizers:

- (1) To prove to ourselves that Montana can be more than a 'bridge state.'
- (2) To capitalize on the fact that the 'Old West' is not dead. This has tremendous nation-wide appeal.
- (3) The Centennial Commission feels an obligation in developing our great travel potential. Most Montanans jealously guard our wide-open spaces and sparse populations. We wish not to change this -- we want tourists to come, spend time and money, and leave.¹³

The reference to a "bridge state" indicates that travelers often used Montana only as a highway bridge to get to the other side. The Highway Department geared up in 1962 to capitalize on the millions thought to be bridging the state on their way to the Seattle World's Fair. Two years later the concept changed into dead-ending tourists within the state and, as tactfully put in the objectives, mildly fleecing them.

This defined the problem: Montana was not a destination state. Tourists headed for other places while Montana created a traveling inconvenience, a nuisance to be crossed with all haste, but one that required a full tank of gas to do even that. The Centennial Train became the organizers' answer to the state's problem of being merely a link between other parts of the country sought out by tourists.

The train, while on its tour and at the New York World's Fair, reached millions of people, but Montana did not become the immediate goal of every

tourist seeking a getaway. Follow-up studies to determine possible effects on the tourism industry were never undertaken. Bits of information are available, however, from which to draw some conclusions. Comments from those who visited the train or pavilion indicate the sense of value the event provided in reaching for its goals.

By 1964, the year of the Centennial Train and the one-hundredth anniversary of Montana Territory, the state had already been subjected to several phases of promotion -- all motivated to get people to the state and to keep them there. But what was missing then, and perhaps still is today, was a focus on what people really sought from a visit to the West. If the answer to that question became apparent, then the thrust of promotion could be directed toward that end.

End Notes

¹"Governor Christens Centennial Train," Great Falls [Montana] Tribune, 22 February 1964: 1.

²"Purposes and Objectives," Document of the Centennial Train Committee, personal collection of Howard Kelsey, Gallatin Gateway, MT, Photocopy, 1964, p. 2.

³Dale C. Hawkins, "Centennial Train: A Spectacular Effort to Interest Nation in Resources of Montana," guest editorial, Billings [Montana] Gazette, 22 February 1964: 4.

⁴J.D. Holmes, "Train Will Benefit State," Bozeman [Montana] Daily Chronicle, 28 August 1964: 1.

⁵"Dinner in Nation's Capital Will Be Highlight of Centennial Train Itinerary," editorial, Helena [Montana] Independent Record, 24 October 1963: 2.

⁶Richard W. Vessey, "Montanans Know Show Biz," Wisconsin State Journal [Milwaukee], 3 May 1964: 4.

⁷"We Salute Montana's Train," editorial, The Missoulian [Missoula, Montana], 5 May 1964: 4.

⁸Tim Babcock, personal interview with author, Helena, MT, 17 October 1988.

⁹"Tourism in Montana Shows Promising Gain," Bozeman [Montana] Daily Chronicle, 19 September 1965: 1. (Note: Agriculture ranked first at \$431 million and the mineral industry second at \$182 million.)

¹⁰"Montana Train Arrives in Minneapolis," Minneapolis [Minnesota] Tribune, 5 May 1964: 3.

¹¹Robert G. Athearn, The Mythic West in Twentieth Century America (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1986), 183.

¹²Neil Morgan, "The Hot Air of Politics Thaws the Snow in Big Sky Country," San Diego [California] Union, 10 May 1964: 1.

¹³"Purposes and Objectives," p. 2.

CHAPTER 2

EARLY MONTANA PROMOTION

A century before the Montana Centennial Train, even before the ink dried on the act creating the new Montana Territory, promotion of the land had commenced. By 1862, prospectors were following the scent of gold to Gold Creek, Alder Gulch, Bannack, and Virginia City. The news of plentiful placer color brought miners from Nevada, Colorado, and California into land known as Idaho Territory. The years of being placer-gold king, the decades of having the earth's richest copper-filled hill, the years of providing free land to homesteaders and inexpensive energy to the nation, had all brought great notoriety to the land. During the boom times, moneyed men often spoke of Montana, invested in Montana, and exploited its bounty. These were the times the dreamers and the destitute and the jobless came to reap the plentiful harvest of employment and money.

But boom times always bolted. Saddle bags and pickup trucks received their loads with the same haste to exit as befit their arrival. The gold suddenly became mud, the copper hill became a crater. Homesteaders often found they could not make half a living with twice the land. The tune still played as

late as the 1980's. Oilers erected rigs just in time to watch the market go bust. Even prospecting for the nation's energy supply lacked longevity.

For over a century, Montana's popularity bobbed like a cork on a trout stream. First as territory and then as state, Montana would gain renown because of discoveries of its natural resources, then fade into obscurity, only to repeat the process again. The effect was devastating to those who remained after a boom-that-went-bust. Bernard DeVoto captured the process when he wrote, "From 1860 on the western mountains have poured into the national wealth an unending stream of gold and silver and copper, a stream which was one of the basic forces in the national expansion." But the stream, according to DeVoto, "has not made the West wealthy. It has, to be brief, made the East wealthy."¹ Montana provided a major tributary to that stream of wealth to the East.

One exception to the boom-and-bust cycle that Montana has endured for over 125 years exists: tourism. Tourism as an industry is not as old as the greed for gold or the lust for land. In fact, stretching its age to 100 years is perhaps an exaggeration. Yet, like gold, silver, and copper, it has helped keep the state alive in times of need.

Tourism has never been a glamour industry for Montana. Heroes do not exist. Scientists do not discover new tourists as they might strains of wheat or breed of cattle. Defining the industry has been a difficult and inexact task. Yet tourism is touted as one of the economically stable industries in the

state. Its puzzle consists of many pieces: service stations, restaurants, resorts, gift shops, taverns, and super markets only begin the list of businesses that benefit from the industry, according to the Office of Information Services for Montana. Tourism certainly has had its ups and downs, but the needle on the Richter Scale measures lower in comparison to other industries.

Still, crucial problems exist. The competition in attracting tourists is fierce; 50 states are involved nationally, and dozens of countries compete for international travelers. "Montana is a long way from populated areas," noted John Wilson, head of Montana's Travel Promotion Bureau. "Transportation cost is a major portion of a vacation to Montana whether you drive or ride the plane, train, or bus." Hence, he noted, when the costs of fuels increase, travelers tend to stay closer to home. The magnetism of Montana's mountains, canyons, and lakes does not attach itself to the belt buckles of out-of-staters at any cost. Wilson's bureau adapts by changing strategy: "When oil prices go up, we concentrate marketing regionally. You have to play the hand dealt you."² Still, not discounting Wilson's statement, proper marketing can play an important role.

The Centennial Train, designed as a marketing tool for the state, was a major attempt to attract visitors to the state. But the train was not the first attempt to draw attention to Montana.

The Northern Pacific Railroad, in its late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century effort to move people and freight over its completed link, rushed to

build a promotional rail car. Designed to attract those chasing free land, this rolling commercial extolled the natural resources the land could provide along its rails. The words "Timber," "Farming," "Fruits," and "Coal and Iron" appeared in large letters on the car's exterior, advertising the variety of opportunities in the vast ocean of land.³

William A. Clark represented Montana Territory at America's first international exposition in Philadelphia in 1876. Motivated by commerce, Clark orated about the great promise of the nation's new territory.

Fourteen years later, Montana made its world's fair debut at Chicago's Columbian Exposition. Fifteen months after statehood, the legislature appropriated \$50,000 for an exhibit building of 7,000 square feet. Walter M. Bickford of Missoula began a newspaper campaign to generate public involvement in this Montana exhibit. He wrote several articles each week promoting the effort. These articles appeared in nearly every state newspaper.⁴

The primary purpose of this exhibit was to coax people to come to Montana to live. The budding frontier needed shopkeepers, teachers, preacher, doctors, and lawyers in particular. Exhibit promoters formed a Montana Board of World's Fair Managers to determine how best to carry out their goal. Several members of this board went to Chicago only to learn that the federal government and other states preparing exhibits were investing many times the Montana budget. Perhaps embarrassed, and not wanting to

appear stingy, the men returned to Montana convinced that the state desperately needed a "gimmick" to attract public attention at the fair.

This gimmick grew to be a nine-foot statue of the figure of Justice (without the blindfold) cast in solid Montana silver. Former governor Samuel T. Hauser and mining magnate William A. Clark each agreed to loan 12,000 ounces of silver to fill the huge mold.⁵ Historian Robert Rydell defined the motivation for most organizers of fairs: "The promoters of these extravaganzas attempted to boost the economic development of the cities and regions in which they were held as well as to advance the material growth of the country at large."⁶ The same could be said for promoters of exhibits. Yet Rydell described another layer of motivation: "On another level, exposition promoters also saw the fairs as vehicles for maintaining, or raising, their own status as regional or national leaders and for winning broad acceptance across class lines for their priorities and their decision-making authority."⁷ Later that same decade, Clark proved that nothing short of a U.S. Senate seat would stop his effort to gain broad acceptance, even if he had to buy it.

Montanans initially seemed disgruntled that a silver statue was to be the highlight of the state's exhibit at an international exposition.⁸ But attitudes began to change on May 30, 1893, the day the statue was unveiled. Then the compliments started flowing and the state's pride seemed to surge. The *Butte Miner* claimed, "The statue is a success despite the abuse and insane ridicule to which it has been subjected by some of the Montana papers."⁹

The Associated Press labeled the statue a "unique exhibit."¹⁰ Commissioner Walter Bickford stated, "We could not get the same amount of advertising for the state of Montana for a million dollars in cash."¹¹ Promotion had grown roots. Rating the success of this commercial is probably impossible. People did move to Montana; between 1890 and 1900, the population grew from 132,000 to 243,000. But no one will ever know the impetus provided by the silver statue.

Not until 1915 did the Montana legislature again appropriate money for a pavilion at an international exposition. And for the second time, \$50,000 seemed the magic number to finance the effort. But this time that stone had to kill two birds: pavilions were built at the Panama-Pacific International Exposition in San Francisco and at the Panama-California Exposition in San Diego. The *Billings Gazette* thought the money well spent: "Gratification will be general throughout the state over the action," and "The Treasure State should be represented by displays commensurate with its resources and opportunities."¹² In fact, the legislative act authorizing the expense stated the purpose clearly as "exploiting the Arts, Industries, Resources, Manufactures and Products of the soil, ranges, mines and forests of the State of Montana."¹³ Just what the legislature meant by the term "exploiting" remains a mystery. Perhaps it meant an innocuous "presentation" of the variety of life in Montana. More likely, it meant the "selling" of those possibilities to attract people into the state permanently. This indeed established a precedent: World fairs seemed a good tool for selling the state to the outside world.

End Notes

¹Bernard Devoto, "The West: A Plundered Province," Harper's Monthly Magazine, August 1934: 358.

²Rusty H. Pope [quoting John Wilson], "Tourism '89: The Big Picture," Montana Magazine, January-February 1989: 35.

³A picture of the Northern Pacific's promotional car appears in Charles R. Woods, The Northern Pacific: Main Street of the Northwest (Seattle, WA: Superior Publishing Co., 1968), 38.

⁴Dave Walter, "Montana's Silver Lady: Curvaceous Heroine of the Columbian Exposition," Montana Magazine, March-April 1986: 68-73.

⁵*Ibid.*, p. 69.

⁶Robert Rydell, All the World's a Fair: Visions of Empire at American International Expositions, 1876-1916 (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 2.

⁷*Ibid.*, p. 235.

⁸Walter, p. 71.

⁹*Ibid.*

¹⁰*Ibid.*

¹¹*Ibid.*, p. 72.

¹²Editorial, Billings [Montana] Gazette, 20 January 1915: 2.

¹³Laws, Resolutions and Memorials of the State of Montana, passed by the 14th Regular Session of the Legislative Assembly, Helena, 4 January - 4 March 1915; House Bill 5, Montana Historical Society Archives, Helena, MT.

CHAPTER 3

TRAIN BEGINNINGS

One hundred years after being designated as a territory, Montanans continued to plot schemes to attract outsiders. To many, the land remained a mystery. Most of Montana had been a nebulous portion of the Louisiana Purchase.

Even President Abraham Lincoln knew little of the new territory he authorized when he signed the Organic Act on May 26, 1864. Six decades had passed since the time the first European sightseers, led by two famous captains, penned a description of the future territory, but still only a few citizens living in the United States knew much more than that someone had discovered gold and perhaps a rush was on out there. Preoccupied with a split nation, Lincoln had scant time to devote to far-western territorial matters.

Seventy-five years after statehood, Montana remained a vague and remote location in the minds of most Americans. Dude ranch operator Howard Kelsey, living south of Bozeman, sensed this lack of awareness. While at a travel convention in 1961, Kelsey overheard the following: "On a question that was asked, 'Where is Montana?' -- somebody else said, 'North

of Omaha."¹ Kelsey had a vested interest in tutoring the nation as to the whereabouts of the state, and he took on the task to do just that.

For 15 years, Kelsey had catered to "dudes" and had acquired a sense of the required magical atmosphere they sought. Robert Athearn wrote, "In the affluent society after 1945, families had money to chase all sorts of fantasies, and the West contained the stuff of dreams -- exotic natives, magnificent backdrops, a John Ford Movie that any one could star in."² Kelsey's fundamental problem involved encouraging families to chase those fantasies into Montana and come to rest at his ranch. Athearn summed the motivation: "The theory was that the outstretched hand of western hospitality would come back filled with money that would be placed there by appreciative visitors. As one writer put it, to reap them, you had to get them; and to get them, you had to advertise."³

To advertise, indeed, was the crux of Kelsey's idea. He envisioned a traveling exhibit, a train, that would tour some of the country's larger cities, filled with displays of Montana history, wildlife, industry and salted with some elusive Western myths. No stranger to the benefits of promotion, Kelsey, in his first job after obtaining a degree in mechanical engineering from Montana State College in 1935, had worked as sales manager for the John Deere Company covering the state of Montana.

Kelsey presented his ambitious proposal to his long-time friend, W.E. "Uppy" Upshaw, chairman of the newly-formed Montana Territorial

Commission, which was charged with planning a celebration commemorating the one-hundredth anniversary of Montana Territory. Prior to his appointment by the 1961 legislature as chairman, Upshaw worked for nearly a year laying plans for the upcoming centennial. Upshaw immediately incorporated Kelsey's idea of a traveling Montana exhibit into his array of projects. He asked Kelsey to present the concept to the commission in early 1961. At this meeting, Kelsey described his thoughts about an 18 or 20 "car specially decorated train" traveling across the country to New York and Washington, D.C.⁴ The minutes of this meeting do not record the reactions of the commission members, but Upshaw later wrote that Kelsey "was promptly named chairman of the Centennial Train Committee."⁵ In fact, Kelsey worked independently during the next two years, creating his train before the commission authorized the separate train committee in February 1963.⁶

Throughout 1962 Kelsey reported periodically to the commission on progress of his newly christened Centennial Train. He headed the project, but not by default. At the executive committee session in March 1962, Upshaw mentioned "the matter of the special exhibition train traveling as far east as New York," and he noted that Kelsey was "well qualified to head this."⁷

In January 1961, the first month of the thirty-seventh Montana Legislature, eight members of the House introduced House Bill 327 to create the Montana Territorial Centennial Commission, "authorized and empowered to make plans for the proper observance and celebration" of this centennial. Included in the

bill was the request for a \$25,000 appropriation to give the commission operating funds for planning and travel expenses until the next legislative session in 1963. At a House Appropriations Committee in early February, one co-sponsor of the bill, Thomas Haines, spoke against passage. His motivation is unclear since the record does not note his objections. Newspaper coverage at the time told of financial woes for the state, which may well have been Haines' reason to speak against passage. His motion killed House Bill 327 in committee.⁸

Other legislators as well were determined to press the bill forward. Both the House and Senate passed resolutions creating the Centennial Commission. Although the Appropriations Committee refused to appropriate money for its plans, the commission persisted under its own momentum. The first volunteers asked for others from across the state to join the effort. Upshaw would later write that members were selected as being "prominent and especially qualified citizens -- dedicated men and women, alike, who have respect for their heritage and love for their state."⁹

Commission members came from diverse backgrounds; stockmen, car dealers, clergy, newspaper reporters, lawyers, business owners, and professors were all represented. The members met monthly at various locations throughout the state to plan activities for 1964.

Howard Kelsey gave a lengthy report of the train-planning during a November 1962 commission meeting. By this time, an itinerary had been

worked out for stops the train would make during its tour, with scheduled departure set for April 5, 1964, from Billings. William Potter, an executive vice-president of the New York World's Fair, offered to give the train and the state of Montana lease-free space on the fair grounds. Two months earlier, Upshaw had traveled to New York to meet with Potter and to confirm what seemed like an offer too generous to refuse. Coincidentally, the itinerary had the train pulling into New York City on the opening day of the fair. Learning this, Potter scheduled Montana Day to be the third day of the fair, following United States Day (opening day) and New York State Day. Kelsey reported, "I don't know whether they followed our schedule -- I know we didn't follow their schedule."¹⁰

Potter's generosity stemmed from several circumstances. First, there was a long, narrow strip along the fair's edge that remained unleased and could fit few pavilions -- except for a train. Second, while working for the Army Corps of Engineers, putting finishing touches on the Fort Peck Dam, Potter had acquired a fondness for Montana. The title of "General" stuck with him throughout the rest of his career, including all his contacts in Montana. General Potter, then, was instrumental in creating Montana's first world's fair pavilion since 1915.

At the November 1962 meeting, Kelsey defined the purpose of the train tour and pavilion: "The purpose of the train is to bring outside people into Montana. We want them to spend some time and get the hell out. We like

to have people come in, but we are jealous of what we have and masses of people might spoil it."¹¹ The train cars were still to be acquired, Kelsey hoped, with the help of the Bureau of Railroads. He estimated the cost of the 30-day tour at \$224,000. He also mentioned potential sources of money, including Montana outfitters and dude ranchers and the Montana Chambers of Commerce.

Kelsey presented an idea that would become a thorn in his side for half a decade to follow. He approached the state Fish and Game Department about some "diversion of funds" from a "predatory fund" to the proposed Centennial Train display of Montana wildlife.¹² Kelsey explained that for years the department had put certain levies into this predatory fund, which was used to finance the trapping of such predators as wolves that proved a danger to livestock. But, according to Kelsey, trappers were "getting martens, bears, game birds, everything."¹³ He suggested that the department use the fund instead to promote Montana's wildlife and big-game hunting opportunities through a special display-car on the train. He argued that this could increase the sale of out-of-state hunting licenses, a better investment than paying bounties for questionable predators. He added that "the department seemed amenable to spend this fund for this purpose."¹⁴

To appease the ranchers who were losing sheep to wolves and would lose more if the bounty were discontinued, Kelsey argued that "there is an insurance company who will write an entire premium of insuring all the sheep

in the state of Montana for \$75,000."¹⁵ Even though he knew many ranchers would not be enthusiastic about the plan, Kelsey asked the department to transfer \$69,000 to the train fund to finance a wildlife display.¹⁶ The department did eventually "loan" Kelsey's organization \$50,000, a loan which would never be repaid and would create political problems for Babcock's administration for the next five years.

The thirty-eighth Montana legislative session commenced in January 1963. Shortly after the gavel fell, two legislators introduced House Bill 322 to fund the Territorial Centennial Commission with \$200,000. When both the House and the Senate passed the bill with little debate, Governor Babcock signed it into law in early March.

For Upshaw, however, the blessings seemed mixed. He had asked for \$400,000, stating that "before we set our budget, we called in experts to help draft a master plan. It was their opinion that \$400,000 would be needed to stage a centennial celebration which would do justice to this historic event."¹⁷ But the state's coffers were not flush in 1963, and half the request seemed an easy compromise.

The *Helena Independent Record*, on February 20, supported HB-322 in an editorial stating:

There is no question but what the Treasure State should celebrate its territorial birthday in a big way. It should be made clear that the Montana Territorial Centennial Commission is not asking the state to spend \$200,000. The commission has every reason to believe that the major part of

any appropriation would be reimbursable . . . the state merely would be loaning the money to the commission.¹⁸

In fact, no wording in the bill alluded to "loaning" the money to the commission, although opponents fostered that notion until 1966, the year the books of the centennial were officially closed. For the time being, the commission felt some comfort knowing that the legislature had decided that planning for the Territorial Centennial could proceed since it was backed by at least moderate funds. Kelsey's train project managed to tap that account for \$85,000.

The Centennial Train began receiving a great deal of attention by mid-1963. Kelsey used newspaper coverage to solicit Montanans to make reservations for the planned 30-day tour, including stops in 16 cities, at a cost of \$500 per person. Kelsey's assistant director, Jack Hume, recorded the reservations, which filled his book by June. Hume then began a standby list to ensure replacements in case of cancellations. Although the revenue from reservations was not yet bankable (few paid more than a small deposit in advance), the Train Committee counted on at least \$110,000 from the passengers on the tours.¹⁹

Jack Hume had known Kelsey for a number of years. Hume owned and operated the Lone Mountain Guest Ranch in Gallatin Canyon, 20 miles north of Kelsey's Nine Quarter Circle Ranch. In 1962, Hume sold the ranch, and by 1963 he was working as Kelsey's assistant. Like Kelsey, Hume felt the need for Montana promotion to attract visitors.

In May 1963, Kelsey moved closer to solving one of the promotion's major dilemmas when a West Virginia official suggested that he consider purchasing seven Pullman cars being used as part of that state's centennial. Kelsey favored this idea rather than leasing cars from various railways. He realized West Virginia would need to solicit bids, but he hoped \$24,000 would win the right to the title to be awarded in October.

Meanwhile, other problems loomed. In September the Centennial Commission balked at the increasing size and scope of the train promotion. At its monthly meeting, Robert Corette of the Executive Committee said, "This is more an advertising campaign for Montana than a centennial celebration," suggesting a reassessment of the event. Other Executive Committee members continued to push the project forward, but they recommended a change in ultimate responsibility for the train organization.²⁰ With the increasing complexities of acquiring railroad cars, planning a pavilion at the New York World's Fair which would last two years, and increasing financial needs, the Centennial Commission authorized that the entire project be turned over to the State Advertising Board. Before washing its hands of the project, however, the commission voted to appropriate \$85,000 of its budget toward the needs of the Centennial Train.²¹

After weeks of negotiation, and with Kelsey's prodding, the state bid \$40,000 for West Virginia's train cars, asking for terms of \$10,000 down with the balance payable over the next year. As the only bidder, Montana soon

became the owner of seven Pullman train cars. With two months to go before the centennial year began, Kelsey had a train, a passenger list, an itinerary, and \$300,000 of the \$500,000 projected needs. However, he had not been idly waiting for all this to happen.

End Notes

¹Howard Kelsey, personal interview with author, Gallatin Gateway, MT, 17 August 1988.

²Robert G. Athearn, The Mythic West in Twentieth-Century America (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1986), 207.

³*ibid.*, p. 149.

⁴"Minutes of the Montana Territorial Centennial Commission," 13 January 1961, Box Group 74, Box 1, Montana Historical Society Archives, Helena, MT. [Note: Hereafter cited as "Minutes of the Montana Territorial Centennial Commission."]

⁵L.W. Upshaw, "An Idea That Grew to Fantastic Proportions. . .," in Montana Centennial Train and World's Fair Exhibit, Pamphlet (Bozeman, MT: Montana Centennial Train and World's Fair Committee, 1963), p. 5.

⁶"Minutes of the Montana Territorial Centennial Commission," 11 February 1963, Box Group 74, Box 1.

⁷"Minutes of the Montana Territorial Centennial Commission," 3 March 1962, Box Group 74, Box 1.

⁸"Minutes of the House Appropriations Committee," 4 February 1961, Box Group 12, Box 1, Montana Historical Society Archives, Helena, MT.

⁹L.W. Upshaw, "The Montana Territorial Centennial Commission," Montana: The Big Sky Country, ed. Michael Stephen Kennedy (Butte, MT: Ashton Printing, 1964), 47. By early 1962, 37 members were listed on the letterhead of the Commission, but only one was female. By 1964, of 72 members, only three were women. While Upshaw used the word "alike," he clearly did not mean "equally."

¹⁰"Minutes of the Montana Territorial Centennial Commission," 30 November 1962, Box Group 74, Box 1, p. 21.

¹¹*ibid.*, p. 22.

¹²ibid., p. 23.

¹³ibid., p. 24.

¹⁴ibid.

¹⁵ibid.

¹⁶ibid.

¹⁷"Minutes of the Montana Territorial Centennial Commission," 25 March 1963, Box Group 74, Box 1.

¹⁸"One Chance in 100 Years," editorial, Helena [Montana] Independent Record, 20 February 1963: 4.

¹⁹"Minutes of the Montana Territorial Centennial Commission," 10 September 1963, Box Group 74, Box 1.

²⁰ibid.

²¹ibid.

CHAPTER 4

THE TOUR

Even as the pieces of the train puzzle began to interlock, the jigsaw remained far from assembled. Throughout 1963, an optimistic Howard Kelsey pulled together the other requisite features of the Territorial Centennial Train.

Kelsey seemed undaunted by the increasing scope of the promotion. The event grew from 35 ranch couples, a few horses, and amateur talent into a contingent of 300 persons, 75 horses, and numerous wagons for the parades planned at each stop. The number of railroad cars required to carry the total load grew well beyond the seven purchased from West Virginia. Kelsey then leased 14 Pullman sleepers just to house the traveling Montanans. The train finally featured 25 cars, which included a power-generation car, three horse parlors, a club car, a lounge car, and a service personnel car.

Three of the cars purchased from West Virginia were to house the actual exhibits which would be open to the public. These cars were retrofit in the rail yards of Laurel. Mike Kennedy of the Montana Historical Society offered designs for the exhibit cases. Kelsey had been busy locating the relics and

artifacts that would comprise the museum, and he found a substantial and convenient source in John and Stella Foote of Billings.

The Footes were noted for their collection of Western art and exhibit cases lined with relics of the Custer Battlefield, Buffalo Bill, Calamity Jane, and personal antiques. Kelsey queried John Foote about the availability of the cases and received a letter from Foote in June 1963 stating Foote's willingness to lease 22 cases from April 1964 until November 1965 for \$20,000. Kelsey responded in July that space limited the number of cases to 14, and he offered \$15,000 for the same duration. The deal was struck by August.¹

Kelsey's committee had also envisioned that each train car should carry huge paintings depicting Montana's history, recreation, and industry. The committee approached noted artist Lyman A. Rice of Billings to paint the estimated 136 murals that would drape the exterior of the train. Jack Hume suggested to the Montana Highway Department that, since this train would be seen by many thousands of people, this should be considered state promotion (a function of the department). He asked that the necessary high density plywood be donated for the project. Officials agreed and purchased the 498 sheets of wood, each measuring four feet by eight feet.²

Rice drafted a list of possible scenes and presented them to the train committee in early 1963, which selected the required number and returned the list to Rice. Eight months later, and with the aid of artist Duane "Bud" Wert of Michigan, whom Rice commissioned, some 14,000 square feet

of plywood had been painted and were ready to be attached to the train cars.³

The horse parlor cars were readied in Laurel as well. Each car was designed to carry 25 horses on the ride across the country. Kelsey, of course, had to contend with carrying the estimated 17 tons of food that would be consumed by the horses. Kelsey again displayed a keen sense of promotion by consulting the Ralston Purina Company, who were persuaded to study the problem. Soon the company came back with the proposed solution: they would manufacture and supply horse pellets, a first by the company, for the entire herd.⁴

As the more immediate concerns were conquered, the challenge of designing, building, and staffing the pavilion site at the New York World's Fair loomed. Neither Kelsey nor Jack Hume had time to devote to that impending project. In August 1963, Kelsey hired Ott Tschache, also of Bozeman, to take on the pavilion task. At 43, Tschache had been involved in the hardware business, in mobile home sales, and as a fencing contractor. He had recently completed a term as head of Bozeman's Chamber of Commerce and a 12-year stint with the State Advertising Board.

Meanwhile, Kelsey and Hume continued to ferret out sources of money. Ranch brands, made from Butte copper, were sold to Montana ranchers as a promotional ploy. The brands were then attached between the murals to the exterior of the train cars, in between the murals. Also, companies could

"buy" whole murals and have their names stretched across 16 feet of a Rice painting for \$5,000. At the same time, Kelsey wanted to make the museum free to the public by covering expenses with these other schemes. At a committee meeting in Helena in September 1963, he stated that there should be no charge to board the train and view the exhibits at any of the stops along the tour. The minutes of the meeting do not identify the speaker who asked the question, "How are we going to keep the trash out of the train if it is free?" Kelsey then suggested that a mailing precede the tour inviting former Montanans to be guests of the train, while charging others to tour. This was determined to be a difficult procedure and eventually an admission charge of 50 cents was established for persons over 12 years of age.⁵

By the time West Virginia sold the train to Montana, the northern state's planning effort seemed to impress the southerners. In Point Pleasant, the newspaper mentioned the sale of the train on October 20, 1963: "Montana, it would appear, is going to get a great deal more mileage -- both factually and figuratively -- out of the Centennial Train than did West Virginia."⁶

Meanwhile, Ott Tschache commenced designing and building the pavilion at the World's Fair site. Tschache, forced to play catch-up, raced against an April 22, 1964 opening day deadline. His task bordered on the impossible. The site stretched 584 feet, ranging in width from 60 to 72 feet. Although the train eventually would provide the backdrop as well as the main attraction of the museum, an entry display building, boardwalks, storage and office space,

and a building to house nickelodeons needed to be built. Proceeding without a budget, Tschache acquired the necessary lumber from Montana mills as contributions. But New York prices overwhelmed Tschache's estimates to complete the site. He thought \$59,000 would do the job. The final tab summed just over \$132,000.⁷

One bright spot in the project appeared quite by accident. An early design of the pavilion provided for a large circular fishpond near the center of the site. With the cost overruns pouring in, Tschache realized the impracticality of the pond, which would require substantial construction, filters, safety considerations, as well as high-priced New York water. He asked fair officials for ideas and soon leased the area to a national brewery for \$40,000.⁸ Word of this switch did not sit well with John Melcher, the Democratic state senator from Rosebud County. Calling the money from the Fish and Game Department "improperly allocated," he was further angered to note that the "\$18,269 to build a fishpond was not spent for that purpose," and that the Senate Judiciary Committee "never received a correct voucher to show in what manner the funds were actually spent."⁹ Perhaps this was true, but neither Tschache nor Kelsey were short of money-demands that needed attention.

The centennial year began as the train committee scheduled a Montana tour of the traveling museum for February. Twenty-one towns were chosen by the committee as stops for the intrastate tour. The month lived up to its

reputation and provided cool reception for the train's visitors throughout the trip. Despite this, 40,000 people were tallied as entering the museum.¹⁰

The departure date for the national tour arrived and the train's 300 Montana passengers gathered in Billings for the send-off on Sunday morning, April 5, 1964. The morning parade downtown became a rehearsal for the 16 parades that would follow during the month-long odyssey. By noon, the wheels of the 25-car Centennial Train began to roll on steel rails headed for Omaha, Nebraska.

Kelsey soon encountered a problem that the experienced dude rancher could not have anticipated. Beginning the first evening, the passengers were able to partake in a free cocktail hour in the lounge car. Kelsey had made a pitch to a representative of Yellowstone Distilleries, had explained the great promotional effort the train afforded, and had asked for a contribution of the well-known whiskey to provide a moment of relaxation for the busy travelers. When asked how much he needed, Kelsey stated he really did not know. The representative suggested 50 cases. Kelsey swallowed and said, "That seems like a good amount."¹¹

Word leaked to the chairman of the Montana Liquor Control Board, Walter Morris. He immediately denied a request to place the liquor on board the train, but added, "Of course, we have no jurisdiction over what happens outside the state."¹² The 50 cases of liquor were placed on board just after the train crossed the border in Wyoming. Kelsey realized that Yellowstone

Distilleries would take political heat if that company became the only one to provide complimentary liquor for the trip. Working from contacts provided by the Yellowstone representative, Kelsey contacted "six or seven" other distilleries seeking additional promotional liquor. Kelsey stated that each one agreed to provide spirits along the way. In fact, the cases of free liquor became too frequent. But refusing the refreshment was not considered an option. Kelsey and Jack Hume worked out a strategy: use the liquor to barter with the restaurants where the banquets were scheduled. Hume would ask how much the facility would charge for the dinner, receive an answer, and respond with "How much in liquor?" Various deals were negotiated, at a savings of several hundred thousand dollars, according to Kelsey.¹³

In a *Helena Independent Record* article on May 24, 1964, Kelsey stated that "Free liquor was served only during happy hour. There were no abuses and it was well handled." But in the same article, liquor board member Ashton Jones noted, "No wonder there was so much sickness among the passengers." Associated Press reporter Dave Beeder wrote that he received an anonymous letter stating that the "trip was a drunken orgy," although Beeder did not publish the story because the author could not be identified. In answer to the accusation of sickness on the train, Drs. Van Kirke Nelson and Steward Olson, passengers on the train, listed the following afflictions when the train returned: 30 cases of flu, three of pneumonia, three broken bones, one ingrown toenail, and one congestive heart failure.¹⁴ There is no

evidence that heavy drinking led to any of those conditions. Indeed, the high incidence of flu could be more plausibly explained by rapid changes in weather, diet, and the close living quarters rather than by the consumption of spirits.

Buford Kratz of Absarokee, Montana, wrote a letter to the editor of the *Billings Gazette* on June 7, 1964, providing his opinion of the magnitude of the problem:

My guess is that there were not over 75 drinkers out of the 300 of us. The first 10 to 15 days of the trip, the club car was monopolized by 25 to 40 of our group. Then it was arranged if you wanted a drink at the 'Happy Hour' you would go in one end of the car and out the other. This helped, but quite a few made the circle a number of times. To the people we contacted it could of [sic] left the impression we are a whiskey drinking bunch of people.

Still, the riders played it straight while in Montana, according to Tony Culum, who acted as bartender throughout the trip. "We went out of the state dry, and we came back dry."¹⁵

After Omaha came Kansas City, St. Louis, Louisville, Cincinnati, and Charleston. On April 16, the wheels ground to a halt in Washington, D.C., the seventh stop, where the Montana contingent experienced several unique events. As usual at each urban stop, the group staged a downtown parade followed by museum hours for the public and a banquet that night. In Washington, broadcaster and native Montanan Chet Huntley acted as master of ceremonies during the evening dinner. Montana Senators Mike Mansfield

and Lee Metcalf, Representative James Battin, actress Myrna Loy, and a host of other Montana celebrities also illuminated the evening.

To the surprise of all, President Lyndon B. Johnson entered the Sheraton Park Hotel ballroom. When the applause died, Johnson praised the state's celebration and talented natives. He added, "I am pleased that such a splendid, virile young man as your Governor Tim Babcock heads your state government. Governor Babcock has shown great wisdom in choosing his people and in choosing his state. I wish to God he had shown as much wisdom in choosing his party."¹⁶

Following Baltimore and Philadelphia, New York City became the train's tenth stop. The cars would not fit through the underwater tunnels and had to be ferried from New Jersey to Long Island, the site of the world's fair. The Montanans participated in opening day parades and activities at the fair, then prepared for the banquet the next evening at the Commodore Hotel in downtown Manhattan. As in Washington, celebrities highlighted the event. An added feature centered around Monty Montana, Jr. and his horse, as both performed in the ballroom, to the delight of the 900 folks attending.

"Montana Day" followed opening day (April 22) and "New York State Day" at the fair. The cars were positioned along Tschache's nearly completed pavilion. The displays were opened to the public, but the personnel commenced preparation to depart the Big Apple the night of April 24.

After six more stops, culminating in Minneapolis, the train rolled westward toward its origin, coming to rest in Billings exactly one month after beginning the tour. *Billings Gazette* columnist Addison Bragg, who accompanied the train for two weeks, wrote a series of articles detailing the living conditions of the 300 persons who made the month-long journey. He suggested an award for the veteran "who keeps the tradition of the train alive by going without a bath or shower for at least one week in every year."¹⁷ He made clear the comforts of the trip: "The 75 horses who made the trip had a more peaceful schedule than did most passengers . . . and they were able to stand up without bumping their heads."¹⁸

As Howard Kelsey's burden began to ease with the tour's homecoming, Ott Tschache's ordeal had just begun.

End Notes

¹John Foote letters to Howard Kelsey, June-October 1963, Box Group 74, Box 1, Folder 14, Montana Historical Society Archives, Helena, MT.

²Howard Kelsey, Gallatin Gateway, MT, personal scrapbook. The Highway Department estimated the value of the plywood at \$30,000.

³Ibid.

⁴Howard Kelsey, personal interview with author, Gallatin Gateway, MT, 17 August 1988.

⁵"Minutes of the Centennial Train Committee," 10 September 1963, Box Group 74, Box 1, Montana Historical Society Archives, Helena, MT.

⁶"Montana Buys Centennial Train," Point Pleasant [Virginia] Register, 20 October 1963: 1.

⁷Thomas E. Mooney, "Centennial Train--Dollar Sign Answer," The Billings [Montana] Gazette, 13 December 1964: 1.

⁸Ott and Ellen Tschache, Bozeman, MT, personal scrapbook.

⁹"Fish and Game Tie to Centennial Lashed," The Billings [Montana] Gazette, 6 March 1965: 1.

¹⁰Centennial Train Fact Sheet (listing towns visited and attendance), 1964, Box Group 74, Box 2, Montana Historical Society Archives, Helena, MT.

¹¹Howard Kelsey, personal interview with author, 17 August 1988.

¹²"Kelsey Answers 'Party' Charges," Helena [Montana] Independent Record, 24 May 1964: 1.

¹³Howard Kelsey, personal interview with author, 17 August 1988.

¹⁴Dr. Steward Olson memo to Howard Kelsey, n.d., private collection of Howard Kelsey, Gallatin Gateway, MT.

¹⁵"Kelsey Answers 'Party' Charges."

¹⁶"LBJ Says Howdy, Montana," The Billings [Montana] Gazette, 18 April 1964: 1.

¹⁷Addison Bragg, "Centennial Train Gang Rides Again," The Billings [Montana] Gazette, 6 May 1964: 1.

¹⁸ibid.

CHAPTER 5

THE PAVILION

Rain poured down on the Montana Pavilion the day before opening-day crowds flooded the fairgrounds. Ott Tschache's crew managed to nail 85,000 board-feet of lumber into the necessary structures in time for the opening. But the rain dampened his enthusiasm. Several inches of mud lined the wide-open spaces of the pavilion and forecasters predicted more rain in the days ahead. Tschache had hoped the sodded areas of the site would hold up to the traffic of the fair season, but tractors, trucks, and rain had created a bog. Stymied, Tschache ordered the full pavilion, every inch of mud, to be paved with asphalt. He contracted with an available company, who finished the next morning within minutes of gate time. He later wrote that the asphalt was still warm as visitors stepped foot on it.¹

Although "Montana Day" proved to be a success, disappointment followed shortly after sunset when the seven train cars were hitched to a locomotive which began their long trek westward to Montana. Tschache could only wait for the return of his main attraction a fortnight later.

The three horse parlor cars were refit as merchandise and souvenir shops, one Pullman was cleaned for use by the pavilion staff, and, together

with the three display and museum cars, even cars were back at the fair by late May.

From the outset, Tschache shaped the operation of the pavilion to be self-supporting. The tour had been relatively short term, and people paid for the privilege of staging parades, feeding and cleaning horses, and rarely getting a full night's rest. At the fair, the commitment stretched ahead into two six-month seasons, and New York living expenses cut deeply into volunteerism. While he hired a few people to staff the office and act as department managers, Tschache placed advertisements in Montana papers seeking volunteers to spend two weeks at the Montana Pavilion to help with daily chores in return for room and board. The ploy succeeded. During the 1964 season, 36 of 90 staff members worked for meals and a bed. Tschache rented a large house, within walking distance of the fair, which the majority of the staff called home. Only male workers slept on the Pullman car at the pavilion.

Sleeping on the fairgrounds was only one of several concessions made by the World's Fair officials for Montana. The 300-foot pavilion sign boasting in large red letters, "Montana The Big Sky Country," exceeded by far the sign regulations dictated for the fair. When the Montana Centennial Band arrived at the pavilion, the entire group received permission to march throughout the fair, a courtesy extended to no others.²

With a projected 40 million persons for the 1964 season, fair officials suggested that the Big Sky state could anticipate some 20,000 people per day to pay a 50-cent fee to see an Old West museum. If true, the pavilion would unquestionably be self-supporting. But Kelsey sensed exaggeration and tempered the estimate to 3,000 people per day. Yet for the season, this lower estimate would still represent a revenue of \$260,000. With a controlled overhead, profit seemed inevitable.³ Indeed, the June figures released by Kelsey in August listed a tidy profit of \$23,400, and Kelsey predicted a monthly net of \$15,000 to \$20,000.⁴

Even before Kelsey's announcement, however, Tschache realized the numbers were amiss. At mid-season, July 20, only 13.5 million persons had paid to enter the World's Fair. At best, this was two-thirds of the expected count.⁵ Montana visitors averaged only one-third of even Kelsey's tempered estimates, or 1,000 per day. By season's end, October 15, 187,472 persons had paid to enter the museum, 100,000 fewer than expected. In August, Tschache raised the museum fee to one dollar to stem the losses.⁶

Meanwhile, the Montana exhibit received excellent reviews from the press. *Time Magazine* rated the museum as one of the fair's best state exhibits. The *New York Daily Telegram* featured full-page coverage, including five pictures and a description of the Montana Pavilion.⁷ William Potter, Executive Vice President of the World's Fair, considered the state's effort remarkable: "To say the fair is proud of Montana would be a real understatement. The spirit

of enthusiasm, organizational ability, cooperation and professional handling of every event crowded into your visit deserves all kinds of accolades." Even Robert Moses, president of the fair, said, "The state of Montana should feel proud in possessing one of the few 'real' typically-Americana exhibits at the fair."⁸

But as these compliments were read literally across the country, simmering financial problems began to boil. The *Butte Standard-Post* ran an editorial on August 6, 1964 that hammered Kelsey for providing neither an accounting of the train tour finances nor a summary of the first three months at the fair. The editorial expressed doubt as to whether the Train Committee would be able to repay the money provided by the Centennial Commission and the Fish and Game Department. Referring to a statement by Governor Babcock that "Montana will reap benefits from this venture for years to come," the author of the editorial wrote that "the taxpayers will not wait for years for a satisfactory financial accounting. You can bet the Republican administration's critics in the opposing party will want to know how many fares were paid."

The November gubernatorial election loomed, and Kelsey did not want Babcock to suffer because of the train's financial situation. Kelsey invited William Potter to return to Montana to praise the state's pavilion and the expected benefits for the state. Potter obliged, speaking to groups in Great Falls, Glasgow, and Wolf Point. The state press reported his comments: "I cannot overemphasize the success and popularity of the Montana Pavilion

and the wonderful job it's doing in telling the dramatic story of the American West." He concluded by suggesting the wisdom of the promotion: "With vacations getting longer and with people having more money, Montana couldn't have made a better investment in tourist travel than its unusual presentation."⁹

Opposing Babcock in the election was Democrat Roland R. Renne, president of Montana State College in Bozeman. The topic of train finances seemed hot enough to throw at his foe. Speaking in Havre, Renne mentioned that the area was once the hangout of the train-robber Kid Curry, but "today we may be witnessing the greatest train robbery of them all." Renne called for an immediate audit of the "tangled and concealed" books of the train, and then called Babcock a part-time governor.¹⁰ While campaigning in Red Lodge, Babcock replied that Renne was "a part-time college president," offering Montanans "no assurance that he would be no more than a part-time chief executive."¹¹

John C. Sheehy, a Democratic candidate for state legislator, also entered the fray. He accused Babcock of "playing 'I've Got a Secret' with public monies." He referred to the \$200,000 appropriated for the Centennial celebration, of which the Train Committee received \$85,000. "On the face of it," he stated, "we can conclude the \$200,000 is gone, the \$50,000 borrowed from the Fish and Game Department is gone, and the daily operating profit, if there was one from the Centennial Train, is gone." His summation of these

amounts suddenly inflated as he added, "We seem to be talking about one million dollars in funds for which there is no accounting."¹²

Howard Kelsey responded to these growing attacks by writing a letter to the state's newspapers. "Back in New York, approximately 32 dedicated Montanans struggle with a pinched budget and a limited meal ticket to do an unselfish publicity job for the state. While back home Dr. Renne tries to make political hay and discredit the Centennial Train. By asinine ridicule, he attempts to reduce the sublime to the ridiculous." The MSC graduate capped his letter by writing, "Dr. Renne should go back to college and take a refresher course in arithmetic or better yet, go to the source for his information, not his misinformed rumor mongers."¹³ Responding to Renne's request for an audit, Kelsey agreed but asked that it be financed by Democrats "as their contribution to the state." Kelsey insisted Renne would find "no skeletons in the closet," and further that it would prove the merits of the promotion. Kelsey wrote in closing, "Apparently Dr. Renne is not interested in the future of Montana and will not be spending much time here."¹⁴

As the fair rolled to a mid-October closing, the financial problems surfaced for public scrutiny. The balance sheet showed liabilities totaling \$153,551, and revenues were less than half of the original expectations.¹⁵ Profits from the sale of merchandise were \$1,500 per day less than anticipated.¹⁶ Governor Babcock led the effort to raise funds to keep the Montana Pavilion open for another season. Rather than turning to the upcoming 1965

legislature for additional funding, Babcock made a personal appeal to banks for non-interest loans, and to industry and business for donations. "I have no qualms about asking industry for help," he stated, since "The New York exhibit is the greatest advertisement of Montana in its one-hundred year history."¹⁷

The political issue of the Centennial Train did not topple the Babcock administration, but the victory win over Renne was close. Babcock continued to help seek funds, and donations trickled in from individuals and businesses throughout the winter months of early 1965. Babcock's appeal produced results -- at least enough to brighten the outlook. By May, \$71,500 had been applied to the train's bills and officials made the decision to reopen the pavilion for the second season. This season had to be better.¹⁸

But barely two weeks after the fair had opened in mid-April, Ott Tschache wrote to Howard Kelsey, "Things are really rough here at the fair. We have five straight days with less than 50,000 people (at the whole fair). Last year the same five days were well over 100,000. Today being Saturday should be 250,000, but the two-o'clock count indicates 84,000. If it doesn't pick up we will be forced to close the pavilion."¹⁹ To gain support, Kelsey asked William Potter to write a letter explaining why two seasons were necessary at the fair: "The New York World's Fair was deliberately scheduled for two years because our investigations showed that the fair as a whole had to run for two seasons in order to pay out. Putting it another way, amortization for all business operations here was scheduled over a two-year period."²⁰

The daily attendance picked up by June and by season's end another 190,688 persons had viewed the exhibits aboard the Centennial Train, up only slightly from the previous year. Financially, the pavilion did better than just survive. But the second six-month season remained uneventful, and Tschache closed the museum doors the same day that the fair's main gates were locked for good. On November 15, 1965, the *Bozeman Daily Chronicle* reported that the entire \$153,551 of liabilities had been paid through contributions and small profits from pavilion operations.

The train returned to its native state and all exhibits were dismantled. The now-empty rail cars were shuttled onto an out-of-the-way siding in the Laurel yards. Concern and criticism then switched to the \$50,000 loan the Fish and Game Department had advanced to the train. In February 1966, that department gave notice that it was calling in its loan. Fish and Game commissioners met with assistant train director Jack Hume early that month. Hume explained that the bank accounts were nearly bare, that repayment would have to come out of the sale of the train-cars. He revealed that he had inquiries about the train from three states. He told each that Montana had \$82,000 invested in the rolling asset and he invited offers. Receiving none, Hume asked if the department would like the train. Commissioner John Hanson replied, "We'd rather have our money."²¹ Ten days later, Democratic State Chairman Fred Barrett called for an official audit of the full set of train records. He complained of "highly contradictory statements" by Jack Hume

regarding finances. Barrett said, "Last fall Hume was telling us the financial report would surprise a lot of people. It most certainly has."²²

A week later, on February 23, Hume presented a final financial report to the committee at a meeting in Helena. Prepared by the State Highway Department, the figures listed cash on hand of \$11,655, seven rail cars valued at \$40,000, and furniture and fixtures worth \$1,093. However, the Fish and Game Department did not appear as a creditor.²³ Governor Babcock, also attending the meeting, felt that an audit would be an unnecessary expenditure of remaining funds, but he would order one if it would "lay to rest, once and for all, the many unfounded, untrue, and irresponsible tales about mismanagement of this great enterprise."²⁴

Two editorials appeared in quick succession in the *Montana Standard-Post* (Butte), on February 27 and March 17, urging Babcock to order an audit. "We repeat our appeal for an audit by an independent, out-of-state firm. [It] will remove the growing suspicion that the train was not always on the right track." Babcock capitulated and on April 20, 1966, ordered an audit to be paid from the remaining cash in the train account. Explaining what was clearly obvious, he said, "Regretfully, politics has crept into this."²⁵ A Bozeman firm conducted the audit but found nothing noteworthy. True, the loan from the Centennial Commission of \$85,000 remained unpaid, but the commission itself had been unable to repay its own portion (\$115,000) into

the state's coffers. Still, the state had celebrated its Territorial Centennial, and inexpensively at that.

Much was suggested as to the disposition of the seven idle train cars, though not much was done. Finally, in 1971, the cars were distributed to seven "ports of entry" where they could be used as information centers for tourists. But the state refused to fund this activity and so did six of the seven dubious "winners" of the cars. Only the car in Wibaux, at the eastern edge of the state, remains an active information center. The others are abandoned or have found a useful niche in private hands as stores or unique apartments. The state has never recovered any money from the train cars.

But recovering money from the sale of used train cars became secondary to the value the state received during 1964 and 1965.

End Notes

¹Thomas Noel, letter to Ott Tschache, n.d., private collection of Ellen Tschache, Bozeman, MT.

²William Potter, letter to Ott Tschache, 25 June 1964, private collection of Ellen Tschache, Bozeman, MT.

³"Minutes of Montana Territorial Centennial Commission," 10 September 1963, Box Group 74, Box 1, Montana Historical Society Archives, Helena, MT.

⁴Ibid.

⁵"Train Shows Profit," Great Falls [Montana] Tribune, 21 August 1964: 1.

⁶"Audit Shows More Indebtedness for Centennial Train," Bozeman [Montana] Daily Chronicle, 8 December 1964: 1.

⁷"Fairs," Time Magazine, 5 June 1964: 51; "Mementos of Montana," New York Daily Telegram, 26 June 1964: 31-32.

⁸"World's Fair Lauds Montana Day," Great Falls [Montana] Tribune, 2 May 1964: 1.

⁹"Montana Exhibit at World's Fair Will Bring Tourists, Ad Club Told," supplement, Great Falls [Montana] Tribune, 25 September 1964: 12.

¹⁰"Hot Scene in State Politics," Bozeman [Montana] Daily Chronicle, 27 September 1964.

¹¹Ibid.

¹²"Centennial Train Report Enters Political Scene," Bozeman [Montana] Daily Chronicle, 16 September 1964: 1.

¹³Howard Kelsey, editorial, Gallatin County [Montana] Tribune, 1 October 1964: 2.

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Doug Huigen, "State Banks, Businesses Asked to Bail Out Centennial Train," Montana Standard-Post, 10 September 1964: 1.

¹⁶Thomas E. Mooney, "Centennial Train--Dollar Sign Answer," The Billings [Montana] Gazette, 13 December 1964: 1.

¹⁷"Governor Heads Drive to Raise \$150,000 for Centennial Train," Helena [Montana] Independent Record, 10 September 1964: 1.

¹⁸"Train Bills Are Half Paid," The Billings [Montana] Gazette, 20 May 1965: 1.

¹⁹Ott Tschache, letter to Howard Kelsey, 8 May 1965, private collection of Howard Kelsey, Gallatin Gateway, MT.

²⁰William E. Potter, letter to Howard Kelsey, 20 May 1965, private collection of Howard Kelsey, Gallatin Gateway, MT.

²¹"Fish, Game Board Wants Its \$50,000 Returned," Helena [Montana] Independent Record, 8 February 1966: 1.

²²"Barrett Calls for Audit of State Train's Books," Great Falls [Montana] Tribune, 18 February 1966: 4.

²³"Train Report Presented," Bozeman [Montana] Daily Chronicle, 24 February 1966: 11.

²⁴ibid.

²⁵"Final Audit Is Ordered for Centennial Train," Bozeman [Montana] Daily Chronicle, 20 April 1966: 1.

CHAPTER 6

THE RESULT

Backed by little more than sheer optimism, promoters Howard Kelsey, Jack Hume, and Ott Tschache set about the task of creating a train and world's fair pavilion that boasted of Montana to the rest of the nation and beyond. Kelsey's early idea of finding about "twenty-five ranch couples and a few horses" to board several train cars for stops at a half-dozen cities was modest compared to what eventually evolved. But the event did accomplish the goal of promoting the state -- and in a big way.

Financially, of course, the train cannot be termed a money-maker. But this certainly is not a fault of organization. As Robert Rydell, an historian of world's fairs, wrote, "Expositions rarely returned a dividend."¹ They are not designed for immediate profit. Anthropologist Burton Benedict agreed: "At most world's fairs exhibitors do not sell their goods directly, as they would at other fairs, but merely display them."² The real purpose behind the Montana Centennial Train stemmed from Kelsey's hope of taking Montana to the people -- who would then return to Montana as visitors and tourists.

The question is, then, did the train reach a significant number of people on its tour and at the New York World's Fair? And from that exposure, did Montana feel an impact of additional visitors to the state?

Before the wheels of the train crossed Montana's border on its odyssey to the East, the *NBC Sunday Show* broadcast the Billings' departure to a live national audience. By the time the train made its first stop in Omaha, the press had already begun a courtship with the unique string of rail cars. At the end of the 30-day tour, with less than two full days in each of 16 cities, over 60,000 people had viewed the displays. The parades, of course, drew an even greater number. In Chicago, an estimated 150,000 persons gathered curbside to watch cowboys, horses, and wagons traverse the paved streets.³ Montana publicist Tom Judge, in a letter to Chet Dreher of the Montana Highway Department, referred to the extent of media coverage given the train during the April tour: "We had 67 TV shows in the 14 major cities the train visited. I estimate radio interviews to be about 145." Judge wrote that Kelsey had retained a clipping service that by June 1, 1964 had accumulated over 15,000 column inches of print. Based on all this, Judge concluded, "It would be safe to say that we reached over 50 million people."⁴ How accurate that truly is remains inconclusive, but Kelsey cited similar numbers in his report to the Centennial Commission. He wrote, "This iron horse-on-wheels generated free publicity to the tune of 18,000 column inches with an audience in excess

of 17 million people. The calculated over-all exposure resulted in Montana getting its travel story to approximately 61 million people."⁵

Even before the end of 1964, the train had created new optimism in the state. The *Missoulian*, in an editorial in December of that year, stated, "Of this we are sure: the Centennial Train was the best Montana promotion to ever leave its borders. Its effect on selling people to visit our great state will be felt for many years." The clincher of the editorial, however, lambasted apathetic citizens: "Where's the pioneering spirit that first populated this great state? Montana and the nation were built by people who were willing to take a chance. That same spirit can keep Montana unique and alive in this computer age."⁶

Attempts were made to place a dollar value on the amount of publicity and media coverage given the train and pavilion in the two years. although subject to a great deal of interpretation and estimation, Tom Judge thought the tour alone was worth \$5 million if comparable publicity were purchased. Ott Tschache's assistant at the fair, Thomas Noel, estimated the value of free publicity while at the fair during the first season to be "a very conservative" \$2.7 million.⁷ Whatever the numbers, there is no question the train received valuable publicity.

More tangible are figures provided by the state advertising department and the Fish and Game Department. The number of inquiries that the advertising department handled jumped by 10,000 by 1965 and again in

