

# Jack and the 1933 World's Fair

*by Joseph D. Kubal, Mayslake Research Volunteer*

The Chicago World's Fair of 1933 (aka the Century of Progress) was a vast undertaking. The spectacular event needed funding, and Stuyvesant "Jack" Peabody was there to lend his time, knowledge and business expertise.

On Sept. 12, 1928, Peabody, then president of the Peabody Coal Company and the Consumers Company, accepted the chairmanship of the fair's enrollment committee. Fair president Rufus C. Dawes made it official the following day in a published announcement in the Chicago Tribune. (Peabody would play a role in the fair regardless with Peabody Coal as an exhibitor.)

Under Peabody, the enrollment committee created the Chicago World's Fair Legion. Funding for the fair could only come from private donations, so the legion was one of many drives designed to raise money. To attract public support, the committee promoted the legion through a door-to-door campaign designed to be analogous to World War I Liberty Loan drives. For a \$5 fee, members received a coupon book containing 10 complimentary tickets to the fair, a membership certificate and printed fair brochures. In reality, the program was promoting advanced ticket sales.



Chicago World's Fair Legion souvenir tickets

"The souvenir general admission tickets contained in this book are presented with the appreciation of the president and his associates."

One proposal concerning the enrollment drive, which became known as "The Peabody Plan," stated the plan's purpose was four-fold:

1. To sell the people of the Chicago area the idea of the World's Fair
2. To create popular enthusiasm for the enterprise before an attempt is made to create enthusiasm elsewhere
3. To secure a cash contribution as evidence of interest for personal membership in the enterprise
4. To give publicity among the people on the program of the fair

At first, support for the fair was lackluster due in part to some of Chicago's elite, such as William Wrigley Jr., founder of the William Wrigley Jr. Company of chewing-gum fame, and William R. Abbott, president of Illinois Bell Telephone Company. Wrigley and Abbot disapproved of the entire endeavor, predicting in February 1929 that the fair would be "the biggest fiasco ever occurring in Chicago."

The failure of the 1926 Philadelphia Sesquicentennial Exposition and the ensuing Great Depression also contributed to the sluggish pace of donations. Still, between September 1928 and May 1929, Peabody's Chicago World's Fair Legion managed to enroll over 140,000 Chicagoans.

The Peabody Plan bolstered enrollment by targeting specific audiences, including 55 divisions of industry — engineering, restaurants, etc. — and organizations representing different ethnic groups. For each, the Chicago World's Fair Legion designed a committee to promote the fair. Within each division, individual companies designated employees to promote the fair within their organizations. The committees also developed a deferred payment plan, where supporters could pay the \$5 enrollment fee by making 50-cent payments over a course of 10 weeks.

Another idea put forward in the plan was a program called "September Nights," a series of grand affairs that would be held at Soldier Field featuring Al Jolson, Jack Dempsey, Charles Lindbergh, Douglas Fairbanks and other celebrities. The series would conclude with an "all-Chicago" night marking the end of the enrollment.

Peabody retired as chairman of the committee on May 27, 1929, and was succeeded by Major L. R. Lohr of the U.S. Army Engineering Corps. It was purported that Peabody resigned because of personal business conflicts, but there may have been other issues as well. As Rufus Dawes proclaimed in the Chicago Tribune:

"Stuyvesant [Jack] Peabody now withdraws from active direction of the work. This does not mean that Mr. Peabody has 'resigned' from the World's Fair, as has been suggested. That part of the work which called for his personal attention has been finished and our trustees feel it would be an imposition to urge him to carry on with the task any longer."



Left to right: Elmer Rich, Rufus Dawes and Stuyvesant "Jack" Peabody

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