A Haven of Imagination and Charm

by Clifford W. Zink
After Governor Robert B. Meyner signed a bill in May 1960 authorizing the New Jersey Tercentenary Commission to participate in the 1964–1965 New York World’s Fair, he met with Robert Moses, the Fair’s president, and secured a “choice” two-acre site in the Federal and State Area next to the 12-story stainless steel Unisphere, the New York State Pavilion, and the New York City Pavilion.

For the 1939–1940 New York World’s Fair, New Jersey had erected a 15,000 square foot replica of the Old Barracks in Trenton to celebrate the State’s Colonial history, but showcasing the State “as an inspiring example of American progress” for its 300th anniversary would require an inspirational Tercentenary Pavilion. To design it, Commission Chairman Paul L. Troast and Executive Director David S. Davies departed from the standard practice of hiring an architect and decided to hold a “Jersey at the Fair” architectural competition open to all architects licensed in New Jersey. They enlisted the New Jersey Chapter of the American Institute of Architects to formulate competition rules according to A.I.A guidelines, and they engaged Sherley W. Morgan, emeritus director of the Princeton University School of Architecture and former secretary of the State Board of Architects, to oversee the competition.

By the February 1, 1961 deadline 115 architects and teams submitted anonymous entries for the initial open competition, which Adolph Scrimenti, the President of the New Jersey Chapter, characterized as “a preliminary search for ideas.” Of those 115 entries, the 37 numbered submission boards extant in the State Archives’ Tercentenary files present a smorgasbord of early 1960s design, with lots of grid patterns, hexagons, triangles, and canopies. Several feature Space Age designs and some look like 1960s churches or synagogues. Many display new structural forms of concrete, steel, plastic and other materials. Five of the 37 have suspended roofs or masts held up with wire rope cables, reflecting innovations in suspended structures and the popularity of the 350 foot-span “bicycle-wheel” suspended roof in Edward Durrell Stone’s American Pavilion at the 1958 Brussels World’s Fair.

One of the Tercentenary Pavilion entries featured an “Exhibition Hall ‘Tent’ of Aluminum Flagpoles, Steel Cables, Concrete Buttresses . . . intended to convey the open, festive purpose of the structure and appropriate to the home state of John A. Roebling.” The John A. Roebling’s Sons Company of Trenton developed prestressed wire rope in the 1930s for the construction of the cables on the George Washington Bridge and the Golden Gate Bridge. Prestressing greatly reduced the stretch in wire ropes when they were put into use. After the Colorado Fuel & Iron Company (CF&I) took over the Roebling Company in 1953, Blair Birdsall, the Chief Engineer of CF&I’s Roebling Bridge Division, developed the use of prestressed wire rope for suspended roofs.
Professor Morgan organized a jury of three architects headed by Robert McLaughlin, director of the Princeton University School of Architecture, to review the 115 Pavilion design entries, and, at a meeting in Newark, the jury selected 34 for “further consideration.” After selecting 15 of these “by secret ballot” for “full discussion,” they picked four finalists. In announcing the four finalists with Robert Moses at the World’s Fair, Governor Meyner said “New Jersey was the first of the 50 states to ask for space at the Fair. Thanks to Robert Moses, we were the first to be allotted space, and we are the first to get down to the business of designing an exhibit.” The Governor acknowledged the honorable mention awarded to five entries, noting “the vigor of New Jersey’s architects is symptomatic of the vigor of our state.”

The four finalists were Philip Sheridan Collins of Princeton; John Diehl of Princeton; a team of Bernard Grad of Elberon, Harry Mehler of Kearny, and Frank Grad & Sons of Newark; and George McDowell of Montclair. In describing the entries the Governor said “Mr. Collins arranged all desired elements under a single soaring spiral [Fig. 1], Mr. Diehl contrasted a tent-like auditorium with an attractive exhibition court, Mr. Grad stressed an open assembly shelter in the center with exhibition space on the perimeter, and Mr. McDowell featured an unusual and effective ‘arena’ for spectators, which permitted easy expansion on all sides. All used basic geometrical forms to enclose interesting spaces significant to the theme—People, Purpose, Progress.”

One of the entries not selected noted in its statement, “[a] famous architectural critic said that a building designed first and foremost for exhibits is to be opened up by glass and gardens to avoid the uncompromising exterior of the solid box. It should be an area of different levels, part open, part closed, part building, part exhibit, full of surprises and changes of atmosphere.”

Alfred Stern, a consultant on the 1962 Seattle World’s Fair and on several New York World’s Fair pavilions, described “successful Fair architecture” for the Tercentenary Commissioners in May 1961:

\[\text{The building must be unique in form and easily recognizable. It is good if people can identify it by a single characteristic. . . .}\]

\[\text{The Fair presents an opportunity to work in experimental architectural forms which are not used in commercial architecture. . . .}\]

\[\text{The building must be as much an exhibit as anything in it. There should be a use of new structural systems as well as new materials and textures. . . .}\]
In keeping with an appropriate image of New Jersey there must be a light airy quality and a great deal of landscaping and reflecting pools . . . The building must have areas in which people can rest and relax . . . The exhibit must have changing features and special events that provide a new source of promotion and repeat attendance.

A “Suggested Theme for the New Jersey Pavilion,” developed by the Commission that summer, envisioned a family entering over “a bridge crossing a stream that flows along the foot of the New Jersey exhibit area . . . The family finds itself in a garden, throughout which are scattered 21 pavilions . . . each perhaps 30 feet square. In the center of the exhibit area there is a special event stage with theatre-in-the-round seating for 500 people . . . The garden must be lush and interesting and fresh and look at first glance like a good place to be for a few moments.”

For the second stage of the Tercentenary Architectural Competition, Professor Morgan noted in December 1961 that the space for “The New Jersey exhibit . . . is immediately adjacent to the Fair’s Theme Center, and therefore is assured of attention by nearly all who visit the Fair. The use of this space in relation to its prominent position should be carefully considered.” The design requirements included: “Area for pageantry, folk dancing, and other live performing arts; Seating for 500, capable of being increased for occasional overflow audiences; Exhibit space protected from the weather; and Places to rest and withdraw from the aggressions of the Fair.” The Pavilion budget was $1 million, including “all buildings, landscaping and other physical improvements to the site,” and the four finalists would each receive $1,000 for their submissions.

When Richard J. Hughes became Governor of New Jersey on January 16, 1962, he embraced the planning underway for the Tercentenary and the Pavilion. Mason Gross, the President of Rutgers University, chaired the five-man Jury of Award for the Pavilion’s final design competition, and on February 10th at the Nassau Inn in Princeton, the Jury “unanimously selected by secret ballot on its first vote the design of Philip Sheridan Collins, of Princeton” (Fig. 2). Gross reported that “The jury particularly noted the design’s unity of concept, it’s distinctive accent achieved as part of the design, and its ‘fair’ atmosphere. The Jury was impressed by the interior garden, protected from the outside, the open view from all sides, the flexibility of both the performing arts and the exhibit areas, and the pavilion’s inviting entrance from the Unisphere side” (Figs. 3–6).

Richard Cripps, a landscape architect from Lambertville, designed the Pavilion’s landscaping, and Norman J. Sollenberger, Collins’ former engineering professor at Princeton and a practicing engineer, provided the structural engineering (Fig. 7).
Figure 3: Tercentenary Pavilion Plan, 1961, HDR Inc. “The plan consists of 21 exhibit pavilions arranged about a central theater and four interior gardens... The exhibit platforms spring from a continuous reflecting pool, which will serve to mirror the rhythms of the pavilions and the nocturnal brilliance of the fair, as well as to create a barrier between the exterior promenades and interior gardens... At several points the visitor may descend from the exhibit platforms to the interior gardens, to rest and relax at tables set among planting areas and small ornamental shade trees, before returning to the exhibits or to the Fair... The central performing arts area consists of four raised platforms, or 'village squares.' These will be used for pageants and shows of all kinds by performing groups from New Jersey.”

Philip Sheridan Collins

Figure 4: Tercentenary Pavilion Model, 1961, N.J. State Archives. “We have sought a design which will be open and festive, gay and exciting, inviting to the public, and representative of the vigorous spirit and progressive outlook of our State... Thirty new shade trees have been integrated with the existing elms on the front portion of the site to form wide shaded allees through which the visitor approaches the pavilion. The visitor will catch glimpses of the platforms and roofs through the trees, and will be attracted from afar off by the booms thrusting into the sky above them. At night the tops of the booms will be illuminated from below.”

Philip Sheridan Collins
**Figure 5:** Tercentenary Pavilion Cross Section, 1961, HDR, Inc. “Roofs over each platform and over the theater are suspended from twelve tapered masts, or booms, grouped in clusters of four. The roofs will appear to float over the platforms, since the only connection between the two will be corner tie-down cables 1/2-inch in diameter. Rainwater from the roofs will be led to the surrounding pool.” *Philip Sheridan Collins*

**Figure 6:** Tercentenary Pavilion Model Entrance, 1961, N.J. State Archives. “Landscaping of the approach area is treated on a large-scale, to establish a contrast with the intimate gardens within the complex. The visitor emerges from the trees and enters the building across an open paved island.” *Philip Sheridan Collins*

In announcing the award on March 3, Governor Hughes said:

*Although we can understand the disappointment of the other finalists, all of us must applaud the boost that this competition is giving to the career of a bright young New Jersey architect.*

*I think that each of us can see the symbolism of Mr. Collins’ exciting design. Twenty-one display areas representing our counties, are surrounded by reflecting pools, just as our state is bounded by water on three sides. And certainly visitors to the World’s Fair will be drawn to the New Jersey Tercentenary Pavilion by the 80-foot boom’s from which the Pavilion’s roofs are suspended.*

*With its interior gardens and performing arts center, and it’s central location at the Fair, the Pavilion will become the Fair’s meeting place. “Meet me in the garden at the New Jersey Pavilion,” may well become the family password for Jerseymen and non-Jerseymen alike.*
While Collins, Sollenberger, and Cripps worked on the contract documents that spring, New York Governor Nelson A. Rockefeller chose the prominent New York architect, Philip Johnson, to design the New York State Pavilion at the World’s Fair. Johnson’s design included a Theaterama for a 360-degree film of New York State, three towers with the tallest at 226 feet, and a 250 ft. x 320 ft. elliptical Tent of Tomorrow (Fig. 8). Johnson engaged the prominent Russian-born and Cornell-trained engineer Lev Zetlin for the New York State Pavilion’s structural engineering. Of the 18 states represented at the World’s Fair, New York spent the most money—$12 million—building its Pavilion. It was the Fair’s tallest structure, and its observation decks provided fine views of the adjacent New Jersey Pavilion and the Unisphere.

The New Jersey Legislature allotted $500,000 for its World’s Fair exhibit, and the Tercentenary Commission launched the Fund for the New Jersey Tercentenary Pavilion in 1961 to raise the rest of the $1.1 million construction and exhibit budget (Fig. 9). Lee H. Bristol, Chairman of Bristol-Myers and of the Council of Industrial Executives, chaired the Fund and provided office space for it at his company’s headquarters at 630 Fifth Avenue in New York. Governor Hughes’ office highlighted the unique opportunity:

> New Jersey’s pavilion will stand at the center of the Fair, immediately adjacent to the Unisphere. There the world will learn that New Jersey is a good place in which to live, invest and grow. There New Jersey will be identified in the minds of visitors with industrial diversity, recreation, first-rate education, research, manufacturing, good transportation, water resources, capital investment, skilled labor, Rutgers, Princeton, and others, space-age technology, electronics, center of the world’s richest market, people, purpose, progress. Your help is needed. Invest in New Jersey at the World’s Fair.

To develop the Pavilion’s exhibit plan, the Commission engaged the industrial design firm of Peter Quay Yang Associates of New York. While the initial plan was for each of the 21 platforms to represent one county, that proved unworkable, as some counties would have much more to exhibit than others, and some themes like agriculture would be repetitive. Instead, the design firm developed a common theme:

> To present the story of a dynamic state: it’s achievements, past and future; it’s contributions to the nation and to the world; and to promote trade and tourism. These aims should be achieved with a soft sell technique. The story must be presented in human terms and in an amusing manner wherever possible. The overriding theme will be

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**Figure 7:** Norman Sollenberger, c1980.
An “Educator’s Educator,” Sollenberger was the Chairman of Civil Engineering at Princeton University and a practicing engineer when Philip Collins enlisted him in 1961 to do the complicated structural engineering for his Tercentenary Pavilion submission. Sollenberger was born in Kansas in 1912, and earned engineering degrees at Kansas State University. He taught at Princeton from 1941-1945, and then worked for the John A. Roebling’s Sons Company in Trenton, where he collaborated with Blair Birdsall and Charles Sunderland, the Chief Roebling Bridge Engineer at that time, on two innovative cable-truss suspension bridges - the 1946 Lumberville Bridge over the Delaware River and the 1952 San Marcos Bridge in El Salvador. Sollenberger returned to teaching at Princeton in 1952, where, as Philip Collins recently recalled, “he had the frustrating task of trying to teach structural engineering to architectural students.”
diversity. The visitor should leave with a feeling that this is a dynamic state—but one which is human, amusing, diverse.

Hosting the groundbreaking of the Pavilion on May 27, 1963 (Figs. 10–11), Governor Hughes told the crowd:

One of the most exciting aspects of the New Jersey Tercentenary exhibit at the Fair is that young Jerseymen who will staff it will each be bilingual. This is fitting. New Jersey has been a melting pot for three centuries and has profited by many infusions of good men from many lands. As a salute to our heritage and as a service to visitors from nations where New Jersey has drawn its strength, New Jersey will have available at its Tercentenary Pavilion persons who can speak the languages of the world.

“Peace through understanding” is the theme of the Fair. New Jersey understands this theme; we continue to profit from the flow of people from throughout the nation and the world. We welcome these new Jerseymen. We want to tell them so in their own tongues when they visit the Tercentenary Pavilion at the Fair.

Figure 8: "New York State Raises the Roof," Architectural Record, February 1964. Designed by Philip Johnson and Lev Zetlin, the Tent of Tomorrow's "bicycle wheel" suspended roof took inspiration from Edward Durrell Stone's American Pavilion at the 1958 Brussels World's Fair. The Roebling Bridge Division of C&I in Trenton fabricated the 90 2½" prestressed wire rope cables and connections for the roof, the largest in the world at the time, and they remain in place today as New York City officials and preservationists debate the future of this National Register site.

Figure 9: Tercentenary Pavilion Brochure, 1963, N.J. State Archives. Governor Hughes helped the Commission raise funds with a traveling Pavilion model and plans.
As construction of the Pavilion proceeded, a tragic accident occurred on September 5, 1963 when one of the mast clusters being erected fell and brought down two of the other three. Several workers were injured and one was killed. An engineering firm hired by the State to investigate the accident concluded that the temporary guys used to secure the masts during erection were inadequate. After reviewing construction procedures, the Commission, the design team, and the contractors proceeded, and by the snowy winter of 1964 the main structural work was

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**Figure 10:** Tercentenary Pavilion Groundbreaking Cake, May 27, 1963, N.J. State Archives. Student bakers from the Bergen County Vocational Technical School in Hackensack baked the cake with a frosting model of the Pavilion on top. Governor Richard J. Hughes, left, used a Revolutionary War saber from the Battle of Trenton to cut the cake with General William Potter, Executive Vice President of the World’s Fair, Mrs. Hughes, and Paul Troast, Chairman of the Tercentenary Commission.

**Figure 11:** New Jersey Tercentenary Pavilion Groundbreaking Brochure, May 27, 1963, N.J. State Archives.
complete (Fig. 12). In anticipation of the spring opening, the Commission prepared a brochure featuring the Pavilion and highlighting the people, geography, and amenities in each of the State’s 21 counties (Fig. 13).

On opening day, April 22nd, more than 90,000 people attended the Fair, and President Lyndon B. Johnson told the opening assembly, “This Fair shows us what man at his most creative and constructive is capable of doing.” Although some of the exhibits in the New Jersey Pavilion were still being finished, visitors got to see the creative work of its architects, engineers, and builders for the first time (Figs. 14 & 15). Visitors were impressed, reporters noted, with the Pavilion’s “unique open design” and “inviting central courtyard,” and called it “a beautiful place,” “most unusual,” “a beautiful integration.” “New Jersey’s Pavilion,” one visitor suggested, “makes the only original architectural contribution to the Fair.”

On the Pavilion’s first platform, visitors watched a one-minute welcoming message from Governor Hughes, and then proceeded through the exhibit platforms (Fig. 16). The second platform celebrated Community with images of children at play, family groups, and ball games, and a partly constructed house showing that “New Jersey is a good place to live.” The third platform of Transportation illustrated “People freely moving from one place to another” in the State. The fourth platform featured Recreation with a section of Atlantic City boardwalk, and the fifth platform of Tourism highlighted camping, hiking, hunting, and
fishing in New Jersey’s mountains and forests. The sixth platform’s History theme focused on the State’s contributions to the American Revolution.

The seventh platform presented a numbered gallery of Famous Jerseymen visitors had to identify, including Albert Einstein (Fig. 17), Walt Whitman, Charles Lindbergh, Woodrow Wilson, Count Basie, Thomas Paine, Jerry Lewis, Grover Cleveland, Frank Sinatra, Robert Oppenheimer, Aaron Burr, Mel Ferrer, Stephen Crane, Ernie Kovacs, John Witherspoon, Cesar Romero, James Fenimore Cooper, Admiral Halsey, Samuel Morse, Joyce Kilmer, Wally Schirra, and John A. Roebling. Famous Jerseywomen were represented by Dorothy Parker, Eva Marie Sainte, Connie Francis, Sandra Dee, Dorothy Kirsten, Joan Bennett, and Clara Barton. The most famous Jerseyman, Thomas Alva Edison, had the entire eighth platform, where visitors could inspect a scale model of his “Black Maria” movie studio in West Orange, and watch clips from three of his early movies.
The ninth platform highlighted Historic Industry, including Paterson, pottery, mining, and lumbering, and the tenth through sixteenth platforms featured current industries and their future potential: Chemicals, Glass Making (with demonstrations), Pharmaceuticals (New Jersey as the “medicine chest of the nation”), Food Processing (with a popular chick hatchery), Petroleum (Fig. 18), Ship Building (including wood carving demonstrations), and Business and Finance (showing “money as a means to an end: homes, schools, factories, automobiles”). The seventeenth platform showcased New Jersey as “the Research center of the nation” with a film and photographs of “leading research laboratories”—R.C.A., Bell Labs, Fort Monmouth, I.T.T., and Forrestal Labs—and a Tiros weather satellite.

The eighteenth platform highlighted the role of Education in “building a better New Jersey and a better nation” with images of Princeton, Rutgers, the Institute for Advanced Study, and other educational institutions. The nineteenth platform featured Cultural Aspects of New Jersey with changing exhibits of art, including the work of Ben Shawn.
**Figure 16:** Tercentenary Pavilion Exhibit Platform, 1964. Each of the 26 ft.-square exhibit platforms was open on four sides and protected by a floating canopy suspended from the masts above. Short bridges and stairways connected the platforms at varying levels, and several had stairs directly to the central courtyard. *HDR, Inc.*

**Figure 17:** Tercentenary Pavilion Famous Jerseymen Exhibit, 1964, N.J. State Archives. Albert Einstein, Sandra Dee, and Frank Sinatra were among the easiest celebrities for visitors to recognize.

**Figure 18:** Tercentenary Pavilion Petroleum Exhibit, 1964, N.J. State Archives. This platform featured refineries and a 1912 Mercer Raceabout, manufactured by the Mercer Automobile Company of Trenton, founded by the Roebling and Kuser families. Loaned by Myron Darby, a descendant of John A. Roebling, the 2012 Raceabout, symbolized "Trenton Makes - The World Takes," according to *Trenton Magazine*, and was "an outstanding example of New Jersey's contribution to the automotive industry." Positioned on top of New Jersey asphalt paving, the Raceabout was a popular display at the Pavilion.
The twentieth platform focused on Potential ("the New Jersey of the Future"), including "the vast, untapped resources of the meadowlands and how they can be reclaimed for industry." The twenty-first platform featured a Behavior Quotient computer into which visitors could enter their preferences for a variety of leisure activities and find out how theirs compared to national preferences and to those of people like themselves.

For many visitors the best part of the Tercentenary Pavilion was the central courtyard, where the four landscaped islands beautifully fulfilled Professor Sherley Morgan’s requirement of “places to rest and withdraw from the aggressions of the Fair” (Fig. 19). The four performance decks in the middle of the courtyard provided delightful areas, as Morgan had also prescribed, “for pageantry, folk dancing, and other live performing arts” (Fig. 20).

The Fair and Pavilion were open 12 hours a day, from 10 a.m. to 10 p.m., and the Commission kept the Pavilion’s courtyard animated with daily events and performances, including “pageants, band and symphony concerts, folk dances, choral recitals, and shows of every sort” (Figs. 21–23). County and local Tercentenary Committees organized week-long and day-long activities at the Pavilion, like Hudson County Week, Atlantic City Day, Hightstown High School Day, and Woodbury Rotary Day. In the 1964 season, 2 million people visited the New Jersey Pavilion, and some 15,000 students and adults performed and exhibited their work over 120 special community days. Among the 18 state pavilions at the World’s Fair, the New Jersey Pavilion attracted the second highest visitation after that of the far more grand and costly New York State Pavilion.
 Arrayed around the center of the Pavilion’s reflecting pool, each of the four performance decks was sheltered by a floating canopy and could be viewed from a variety of vantages in the courtyard and on the exhibit platforms.

The New York Chapter of the American Institute of Architects awarded Philip Collins a “Citation for Excellence in Design” for the New Jersey Pavilion, along with the architects of the Denmark, Spain, and IBM pavilions, and cited all four for “their creativity and originality.” The American Institute of Steel Construction gave Norman Sollenberger an Architectural Award of Excellence for “outstanding aesthetic design and structural steel for the New Jersey Tercentenary Pavilion.” Professional and popular articles praised the Pavilion for its “inviting fair-like character, daring structural innovation, and the richness and intimate human scale of it’s landscaping.” One critic wrote:

*The architectural daring of this State’s exhibit scores as good “modern” and good “exposition.” 21 display units with pointed roofs secured to flying masts rise from moats. Worth anyone’s investigation is the Performing Arts Garden around which everything seems to float like a contemporary, intelligently utilized Hanging Gardens of Babylon. The central area has a number of platforms on various levels where, frequently, State talent entertains. Even when there is no “attraction” there’s the balm of landscaping with leaf, flower, water, and stone. It is almost a “secret retreat” at the Fair, a fine place to ponder what remains to be seen.*
Fifty years later, the design of the New Jersey Pavilion still looks fresh, inviting, and elegant—an admirable work by a creative young architect assisted by a seasoned engineer (Fig. 24). The graceful integration of water and landscaping, plants and materials, exhibit and performance areas, architecture and engineering, still looks masterful. And the words that Bertha Epstein of Washington, D.C., wrote to Philip Collins in June 1964 still ring true:

Having just returned from a week at the world’s fair, I can’t refrain from telling you how delighted we were with the concept and design of the New Jersey State Pavilion . . . Long after the extravaganzas with their escalators, animated shows, etc. have faded from memory, the New Jersey Pavilion will be remembered as a haven of imagination and charm.

Want to hear the band? Click here: [http://youtu.be/58tC1PfSut4](http://youtu.be/58tC1PfSut4)
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*Figure 22: Tercentenary Pavilion, 1964, N.J. State Archives.* On Glen Rock Day on May 20, students square danced on two performance decks as part of a 10 a.m.-9:30 p.m. “grand scale variety show” organized by the Glen Rock Tercentenary Committee, which chartered 30 buses to bring performers and residents to the Pavilion.

*Figure 23: Tercentenary Pavilion, 1964, N.J. State Archives.* The Ramsey High School Band drew an admiring crowd in the Pavilion Courtyard on Memorial Day.
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A final note—On June 21, the State Museum will open *New Jersey on Display: World’s Fairs and the Garden State*. The exhibit will illustrate how “New Jersey promoted itself to the world,” at Worlds Fairs between 1876 and 1964, “by juxtaposing a proud image of its storied, revolutionary past as the ‘Crossroads of the American Revolution’ with displays that showcased the forward-thinking, pioneering innovations of the state’s inventors, scientists, engineers, social workers, and artisans.”