The Centennial Exhibition of 1876

Philadelphia, PA
1865: Civil War Ends

1865-66: Reconstruction begins

1870: Idea for a Centennial Exhibition, initial plans

May 1876: Centennial Exhibition Opening Ceremonies

1873: Panic of 1873, sets back plans for Exhibition

Nov. 1876: Centennial Exhibition closes
Philadelphia: The Great Experiment—“The Flood Gates Open (1865-1876)”: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g09kxaqoYxo
Civil War and Reconstruction

Civil War:
- Uncompromising differences between the free and slave states over the power of the national government to prohibit slavery in the territories that had not yet become states led to war.
- Northern victory in the war preserved the United States as one nation and ended the institution of slavery that had divided the country from its beginning.

Reconstruction:
- Implemented by Congress, in 1866, Reconstruction was aimed at:
  - Reorganizing the Southern states and readmitting them into the Union,
  - Defining the means by which whites and blacks could live together in a non-slave society.
- The South saw Reconstruction as a humiliating and did not welcome it.
World’s Fair Idea and Panic of 1873

World’s Fair:

- Idea for world’s fair first presented in 1866 by professor John Campbell of Indiana to his mayor,
- In 1871, city and state successfully petitioned Congress to authorize exhibition and set up commission to oversee implementation,
- The legislation explicitly excluded federal funding

Panic of 1873:

- First global depression brought about by industrial capitalism,
- Began a regular pattern of boom and bust cycles that continue to this day,
- The effects of the downturn were severe and, in 1873, unexpected,
- Influenced the Centennial Exhibition planning and fundraising.
Question: How did these events influence the world’s fair idea in Philadelphia?
Relating to Primary Sources
“There is no such word as fail”

“Philadelphia demonstrated conclusively last night that the Centennial should by no possibility fail from a lack of support on her part. She has done much to further the good work, and is determined to duplicate her efforts as well as contributions in order to insure success.”

What does this news article tell us about Philadelphians, the Panic of 1873, and the Centennial Exhibition plan?
Philadelphia’s Grand Exhibition

Watch Philadelphia create the Exhibition:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JPWbOfHSaFY
You’re Invited!

**Experience** the Centennial Exhibition of 1876!

*What do these primary sources tell you about the Centennial Exhibition? Make a list of observations about these materials, and then discuss them as a class.*
Guided Questions

● What *types* of sources are in this collection?
● Why is it helpful to have more than one type of source?
● What can you learn about the Centennial from these sources?
● Who was the audience of these sources?
● What can’t you learn from these sources?
What can we learn through these sources about average Americans?
Not Fair for Everyone

While the Centennial Exhibition featured new technologies, elaborate exhibits, and millions of visitors, did this fair celebrate all Americans?

Who could go to the Exhibition?
Odd requests to exhibit—letters sent to Committee to send oddities to Centennial Exhibition:

“Dear Sir:-- I have in Possession Georg Washingtons mother Lamentation in Ancient and Large print when he Died. I have Learned such relics is wanted when the Centenial Come off I would Like for you to Let me heare whither it would be worth Any thing And what it is worth. If you want to know Any thing more write and Let me heare from you if it will Be worth Any thing and it not you may not put your self to Any trouble. “

Why do you think this request was sent? Why to the newspaper? What do you notice about the language?
Odd requests to exhibit—letters sent to Committee to send oddities to Centennial Exhibition:

“Dear Sir:—Having Taken the privilege to Enform You that I hav in My Posesion A Child Which I think Is A Wonder TO the World the Childs Head Measures Around the Top Part of its Head Four feet and Three Intches from the Head Arund the Chin Three feet the Child Can Talk And is Perfect Every Way Else Several has Ben to See it and they say that they Never Saw Sutch A thing Before Dear Sir—“

Why do you think this request was sent? Why to the newspaper? What do you notice about the language?
Wrap-Up

- Why are world's fair's important to study?
- What can we learn from these types of events?
- What should be studied further?
- Why is the Centennial Exhibition important to Philadelphia’s history?