BEFORE the depression, when there were two chickens in every pot, twin cars in each garage and silk socks and stockings for mill hands as well as millionaires, F. Scott Fitzgerald, the chronicler of the Jazz Age, wrote a story called The Great Gatsby. It was a gaudy tale about a racketeer who tried to break into North Shore Long Island society in order to be near a woman with whom he had enjoyed a fleeting romance. The main scenes of action were on an estate where Gatsby’s prodigal hospitality was enjoyed by hundreds who did not even know his name, and at a filling station in the Corona dumps, through which the Long Island trains passed on their way to greener pastures.

Fitzgerald’s description of the dump as it was then cannot be improved on even by those of us who knew not only its threatening and depressing outward appearance but even its exact chemical and physical properties, its unsavory history and the mountainous labors required to take it away. Says Fitzgerald:

About halfway between West Egg and New York the motor road hastily joins the railroad and runs beside it for a quarter of a mile, so as to shrink away from a certain desolate area of land. This is a valley of ashes—a fantastic farm where ashes grow like wheat into ridges and hills and grotesque gardens; where ashes take the forms of houses and chimneys and rising smoke, and finally, with a transcendent effort, of ash-gray men, who move dimly and already crumbling through the powdery air. Occasionally a line of gray cars creeps along an invisible track, gives out a ghastly creak and comes to rest; and immediately the ash-gray men swarm up with leaden spades and stir up an impenetrable cloud, which screen their obscure operations from your sight…

The valley of ashes is bounded on one side by a small foul river, and, when the drawbridge is up to let barges through, the passengers on waiting trains can stare at the dismal scene for as long as half an hour.

It is not my object to retell Fitzgerald’s story; though it remains a good yarn even after the depression has leveled off the moraine of gold deposited on the North Shore in the delirious 20’s. My story is that of how the Corona dump was leveled to make a site for a world’s fair and to pave the way for the great Flushing Meadow Park which will replace the fair.

Other expositions in this country have left permanent civic improvements behind them. It has been the rule to dredge waterways, fill in swamps and reclaim land for future park use as well as for the fair itself. Municipal parks have usually been the residuary legatees.

What distinguishes the Flushing-meadow reclamation for the New York World’s Fair of 1939 from its predecessors is not only the huge scale of operations but the fact that the
entire permanent civic improvement has been planned in advance, written into law and cemented by a bonding contract. Everything, so far as humanly possible, has been anticipated. There will be nothing to fight about when the fair is over. There will be no squabbles about obligations of the fair to the city, no questions as to what the city will inherit and no arguments as to what is temporary and what is permanent. In this respect we have taken the lessons of other American fairs to heart.

The Philadelphia Centennial Exhibition of 1876 was held in an undeveloped part of the existing Fairmount Park and involved reclamation and improvement of this area. Horticultural Hall and Memorial Hall are landmarks of Philadelphia today. The Sesquicentennial Exhibition of Philadelphia in 1926 left behind as a permanent civic contribution only a stadium which, unfortunately, has been a white elephant.

The planners of the Chicago World's Columbian Exposition of 1893 brought Athens, Rome and the Renaissance to Chicago, and from there the gospel spread like wildfire over the surrounding towns and prairies. Modernists today scoff at this evangelism. Much that was fine spread like wildfire over the surrounding towns and prairies. Modernists today scoff at this evangelism. Much that was fine.

In 1932 a new era began. Home enthusiasts, who had for years been planning park and parkway improvements in the metropolis, got around to locating a connection between the new Triborough Bridge and the parkway system of Eastern Long Island. The route led inevitably along Flushing Bay, through the Flushing meadow and the middle of the Corona dump. This was the logical place for it, but only on the assumption that there was to be a general reclamation of the entire surrounding area. The state was to build the parkway and the city to acquire the land. It was found that the city already owned patches of the meadow where water-supply wells had been sunk and sealed for future use. Negotiations had been started to end dumping and to buy out the Brooklyn ash-disposal company. It was necessary to conclude complicated negotiations to buy the dump, pay for disposal plants which the company had put up for the city, and to settle for equipment.

An agreement was made. Construction on the parkway began. But the

(Continued on Page 72)
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THE SATURDAY EVENING POST

FROM DUMP TO GLORY

(Continued from Page 13)

The Fair idea took hold. A corporation was formed to finance it. Flushing meadow was picked as the location.

There has been no sign of the money in any co-operation from the Park Corporation. Some were actuated by national considerations. Others, primarily interested in sight-seeing and their friends and admirers. There was no crowding at the museums. The older Indian looked grave, then expression blank; one would not want to anger a young man like horse tamer. Jenny went into the logs. With his thumb in his belt again, swagaring just a little and listening to the jingle of his spurs, he walked through the crowd. Presently he came upon footprints to the right, and hands full of winnings, his own and horse tamer's.

"I have some cash for you, nephew," he said.

state work was limited strictly to work within an ordinary parkway right of way. The artery was, therefore, driven through the dump in the form of a chute, with great mountains of ash and refuse on each side. As the official primary responsibility for this work, both to the city and state, I never liked the idea of attempting to landscape these two mountains, nor was there anything very pleasant about the future prospects along this parkway. Obviously, the only answer was to acquire all the meadow and to clean up the bay and banks of the park in this area. The arguments for such action were impressive. The Flushing meadow was almost the last geographical and population center of the city, made opportunity to restore 1,200 acres of land and an immense bay in the very heart of the meadow, something to strike the imagination. That there was no sign of the money in the offing. There were more pressing projects making demands on the taxpayers.

The Battle of the Meadow

Just at this time, a group of prominent citizens became interested in the holding of a world's fair in New York City in 1893. Led by Mr. George T. McAneny, a former city official and head of the Regional Park Association, they came to me to discuss a location for the fair, and said that several people had suggested the Flushing meadow as one possibility. I welcomed them with open arms. The fair was the obvious and natural occupation of the meadow. I told the fair enthusiasts that the Flushing meadow was the only place in New York where they could get any co-operation from the Park Department while I was its head.

There were, of course, those who were unimpressed by the arguments for locating the fair in the Flushing meadow. Some were actuated by neighborhood pride or more intimate personal connections, and further, a more formidable opposition, were honestly appalled by the selection of a site which had been so despised by the public, especially as most of its offices and lawns there. These critics talked also about the depth of mud in the meadow, length of miles which would have to be used to make the site usable and attractive. They raised questions as to transportation by subway, railroad, motor cars, and the like.

The proponents of the Flushing meadow site, however, talked them down. The fair idea took hold. A corporation was formed to finance it. City and state agreed to co-operate, and which brings business to the city and helps to overcome the latent feeling against New York shared, for no very good reason, too many people in other parts of the country.

It was, I believe, Thomas B. Reed, the late speaker of the House of Representatives, who, in answer to a question about this antipathy toward New York, remarked that when he was once going through the Brown-stone and brick fronts, he could not help sharing this feeling himself, and added that he guessed, after all, it was just prejudice.

The Trouble was und an immense bay in the very heart und establish a great city park in this area. The only answer was to acquire all the meadow and to clean up the bay and banks of the park in this area. The arguments for such action were impressive. The Flushing meadow was almost the last geographical and population center of the city, made opportunity to restore 1,200 acres of land and an immense bay in the very heart of the meadow, something to strike the imagination. That there was no sign of the money in the offing. There were more pressing projects making demands on the taxpayers.

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THE SATURDAY EVENING POST
January 15, 1938

mayor that the governing body of the city through the Park Commissioner. Water supply will be obtained free by the fair, if the pipes are laid out with the necessary water main into the ultimate park plan. The fair sewage will be disposed of by the city on the same basis; lighting conduits and fixtures are to be handled in to the ultimate park plan. The old borough asphalt plant was scraped and a new one constructed at the mouth of the Flushing River, away from the new bridge and under and over passes were constructed to carry the main arteries across the fair, so as to separate traffic from the fair area, which is safe for pedestrians. A new bridge with three and one half miles of approaches over the East River from Old Ferry was completed promptly in time. The city of Queens, was started by the Triborough Bridge Authority in connection with the fair.