

WALTER ARNOLD'S EXPOSITIONS

By Scot Dahms

The first annual New York City Sportsmen Show was held in 1894 with a similar show being held in Boston. The show hired Maine guides and proprietors of many of the developing sporting camps. The display often included a full log cabin along with pictures and taxidermy work including large fish and animals.

On October 7, 1938, Albert G. Rau, General Manager, contacted Walter Arnold about setting up a Trapper's exhibit. Rau had noticed Walter sold lures in a sporting magazine. He asked about including some skins

on stretchers hung up against a rough building. He also wanted someone in attendance to talk about trapping. Rau thought Walter would know of a trapper to do this.

Walter responded saying he was interested and had years of guiding experience. Walter also provided a list of references including A.H. Bartlett from Dover-Foxcroft who handled Walter's fur, Burton N. Packard who employed him as a guide and a few other references he had guided for years. Walter also let him know he banked at Guilford Trust Bank. One unique comment

follows. "I am 45 and with good habits and am sure you will not find me drunk under the counter."

Rau personally interviewed Walter for the show at the Augusta House in Boston on November 22, 1938. After that, he interviewed George Stobie, who was the Maine Fish and Game Commissioner. Stobie agreed to have the trapping exhibit be part of the State of Maine exhibit. Stobie agreed to send a truck to pick up Walter's exhibit, so Walter did not need to transport it himself. Walter asked for \$125 to do both shows.

In the winter of 1939, 1940 and

1942, Walter furnished a log cabin and trappers exhibit at the New England Sportsmen and Boat Show in Boston and the National Sportsmen Show in New York at the Grand Central Palace. He hosted the New York exhibit with Paul Belford.

For the log cabin, Walter numbered the logs, so it could be taken down and put back together quickly. He took everything needed to make a camp including small trees, leaves, and moss. The cabin had a bough bed, wash boiler stove, camp dishes and fur pelts. He had a twenty-five-foot space to work in.

The camps belonged to the show as they paid Walter for all his work. At the end of the New York show, the camp was sold and twice Walter went with the camp to set it up permanently for the new owner.

Walter spoke at clubs, got into news reels, and into the New York Times with a picture each year. Walter found it was an honor among the exhibitors to make the Times.

In 1939, the Campbell-Fairbanks Expositions, Inc planned four major shows. These included the New England Sportsmen's and Boat Show in Boston and the National Sportsmen's Show in New York City.


At the Boston show, a local radio personality, Marjorie Mills, made a broadcast on several radio stations including in Boston, Worcester, Hartford, Bridgeport, Providence, Bangor, and Portland. She included the following in her broadcast.

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for next fall, you who have camps and cottages on the shores of New England lakes and like to leave canned goods on hand for winter visits. Walter Arnold, the trapper from Guilford, Me., at the Sportsman Show wrote us how they keep canned foods available all winter in far flung trapper's cabins in the woods. All freezables are placed in a strong burlap bag and sunk to the bottom of a spring or well below the ice in a stream or pond. Nothing can freeze unless the water does. "The temperature went as low as fifty-one degrees below zero a few years ago," he writes, "yet none of our supplies were ever frozen."

She also commented about the candle holders that were made by the trappers. Walter sent her the one exhibited at the Boston and New York shows. She sent him a letter on 22 March thanking

him for it.

"You know I have a cottage down at Owl's Head (Rockland) Maine where I spend a good deal of time during the summer months and the lantern is going to have a place of honor in the cottage. We have a lot of visitors there too and I will be pretty proud to tell them this is the lantern that was exhibited at the Boston and New York shows."

In the February 19, 1939 issue of the New York Times, there is a short article titled "Guide Talks Like Professor."

"Walter Arnold, a guide from way up in the Maine woods, is in charge of that state's exhibit, and he has a little cabin right next to the beaver pond. He will invite you in to sit a spell and he will talk. Inside his cabin the illusion is complete, but Arnold himself does not seem like a guide. He speaks

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in a deep voice, slowly and with dignity. If you divested him of his

first place, he declared today, the traps do not cause the animals any

knows plenty about hunting and fishing and that sort of thing.”

Walter and the cabin were stationed on one side of a small indoor pond with live Canada geese, fish and four beavers. On the other side was the travel information booth.

In the February 22, 1939 issue of the New York Sun, an article titled “Maine Boasts of Ambitious Sport Display: Beavers’ Drawing Power is Great, but Trapper’s Talk Has Pull” discussed the display and Walter in detail. It said Walter was the exhibit’s chief attraction. Antitrappers visited the exhibit as well. The reporter’s observations of those interactions follow.

“Walter, incidentally, has little patience with persons who think all trappers are villains for capturing animals and who often say they wished the trappers would get caught in their own traps. In the

ethically right. He illustrated the springing of a steel trap with his bare fingers. It left no trace of injury on his hand and caused no grimace. A reporter tried it with the same effect.”

The cabin at the New York Show was sold to a man at Sands Point, Long Island, New York. After the New York Show was over, he sold the pelts used at the show to M. Itzkoff & Sons of New York City.

In June, 1939, Walter and Rau started talking about the next show in 1940. Rau asked if Walter could enlarge it and show more furs of various kinds. Walter did not think it would be tough to improve upon the previous show. The cabin would be arranged differently, and he planned on having twenty-five red fox furs there as “the ladies showed more interest in these than any other furs last winter.”

Walter discussed having a more complete outfit of items including a trapper in his cabin. The previous year, a person asked Walter where his toothbrush was located.

Part of the shows, Walter said he was only able to answer questions, but thought having more things trappers work on at the next show. Walter had many ideas including making an axe handle and fitting it into an old axe, having a broken trap to repair, and making a set of snowshoes.

The previous year he stood in front of the cabin or sat in a window which obstructed the view of those wanting to see inside

trees for a few feet on each side of the camp to have ample space to place the sawhorse, chopping block and other things. This would leave the outside walls of the cabin free so pelts and other things could be exhibited.

Other improvements would be a double layer of rough cedar splits on the roof, so it was waterproof, the use of woods moss instead of oakum for chinking, two bunks with one above the other and a wash boiler stove on the ground.

Walter also wanted a little spring of water near the cabin with a birch bark drinking cup. The cabin door would be on the left side instead of the right and a shelf would run across the end of the camp above the door on the outside for bait jars and other items.

In October, 1939, Rau wrote Walter and said there was

more interest than usual in the shows because of the issues in Europe. Some 400,000 tourists who always travel in Europe would have to stay on the North American continent. It would be a great deal for the vacation states.

Walter wrote Commissioner Stobie to see if the State of Maine would have the Trapper's exhibit inside theirs the same as the previous year. In December, Stobie wrote back and said they could not provide a spot for Walter inside the State of Maine exhibit because the Coastal people had felt slighted the year before and the space would be provided to them.

Walter requested a helper from Rau to help protect the furs from theft. He also discussed sleeping in the cabin overnight. The previous year Stobie's night watchmen had stayed in Walter's cabin. He also asked about the plumbers getting the stream set up and the electricians setting the lights correctly. Walter asked about trucks to transport the exhibit. Rau had discussed the possibility of his trucks being used.

In December, Walter had also sent a letter to the US Department of Agriculture, Bureau of Entomology and Plant Quarantine about moving the forest products outside of the regulated area. The shipment would need to be assembled. When assembled, he was to contact D.J. Frazier and let him know the material was assembled for inspection.

Walter later found the truck Rau had offered was not

allowed outside Massachusetts. He would have to make his own arrangements for transportation. Rau recommended the equipment arrive at the Mechanics Building on Wednesday, January 31.

Rau had hired an Indian to be at the shows the previous year and would be back for this show. His name was John Turner and Rau recommended Turner be Walter's assistant and sleep in the cabin at night. Turner was a

trapper and a fishing guide in the summer. He had originally been recommended by the Canadian National Railway.

In January, 1940, Walter wrote Rau and let him know the exhibit was about completed. He planned for it to leave on January 30 and arrive the morning of January 31. He was going to use a trucking company out of Bangor as they had quality trucks and insurance. Their cost was

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\$100. There was a company that would do it for \$85, but they had no New Hampshire plates.

Walter wanted twenty-five feet of frontage as he had everything to fill it up. On one side would be the trickling spring brook and a small pool. Walter had a tank made for the pool which was four feet long and two feet wide. On the other side of the cabin would be the camp yard with a sawhorse and room to work on the little jobs he had lined up as part of the exhibit. The trees would be in the background.

After the 1940 show, the cabin was sold to Art Nev Jr. Nev rebuilt the cabin at Rarnegat Bay in New Jersey.

In January, 1941, Walter was asked to provide live beavers for the March 22 to 30 show in the Public Auditorium of Cleveland, Ohio. The show was coordinated by the American and Canadian Sportsman's Shows.

Walter responded by saying he did not plan to attend any shows that winter because he was behind in his own work. He pointed out the live beavers at the Boston and New York shows were the chief attraction. He turned the letter over the Commissioner Stobie. Walter said if it were possible to work the Maine beaver into the Cleveland show, they would be the chief attraction and provide plenty of advertising for the State of Maine. Walter thought Owen Harding would be the right man for the job.

In May of 1941, Dick Reed from the Maine Development Commission said he missed Walter at the Boston and New York shows.

"They had another trapping exhibit, but many folks expressed the opinion that it could not compare with yours."

In October, 1941, Walter contacted Rau about transportation of the exhibit to Willimantic. He had contacted Fox and Ginn Inc who operated Motor Express Lines out of Bangor. They would take up to 20,000 pounds from Willimantic to the Mechanics Building in Boston for \$86. Two years before, Walter had paid \$100 for the same service.

Rau responded to Walter and said he would be paid \$125 per show, and he could also sell his book there as well. The amount of space for the exhibit would be about the same as before and all expenses would be paid by Rau.

On December 9, 1941, Walter asked Rau if the war was

going to make any changes with the shows. He said he belonged to the American Legion and had volunteered to go where needed.

Walter discussed needing assistance at the Boston show. He brought up the possibility of Bill Gourley and his wife helping with this. He said Gourley operated a fishing and hunting camp.

"Gourley had a very smart wife who spent three winters in the woods. She could set traps and skin out animals as well as any man. One or the other could help with the exhibit, and sometimes both during the show. I really think a lady trapper would be an attraction to the exhibit and if my former partner Bill is there part of the time, I am very sure he will carry on his part to perfection as he is one of the best woodsmen and trappers in Maine."

Walter attended the National Sportsmen's Show in Grand Central Palace in New York City on February 21, 1942. It started at noon and filled three floors for the exposition. Several times during each day of the event there were multiple competitions including log rolling, wood chopping, canoe tilting and fly and bait casting.

After the 1942 show, the cabin was sold to Mrs. William Lebrecht. Walter rebuilt it at Brewster, New York.

"Three years was enough of that for me, but also the Show was selling more and more advertising space and was not hiring exhibitors themselves. After all, they were running the shows to make money."

-Scot