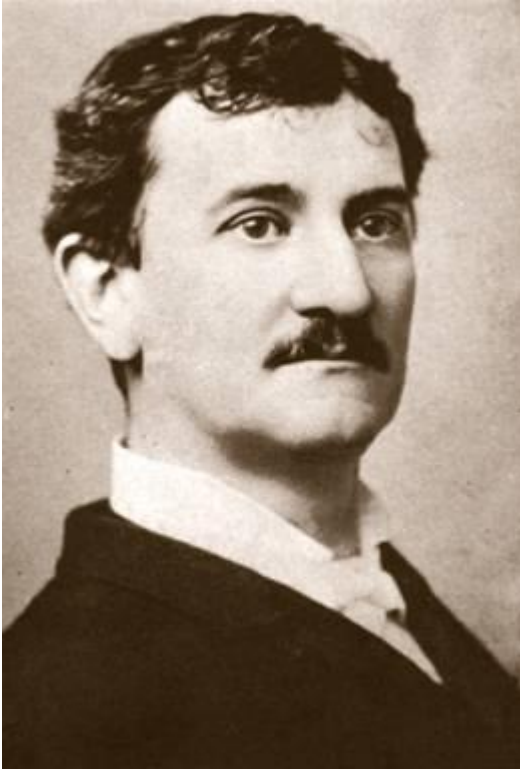


SPECTACULAR by JOEL S. DRYER
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James Morrison Steele MacKaye
(1842-1894)

James Morrison Steele MacKaye [mu kee], known generally as Steele MacKaye, is likely the greatest unknown theater inventor, impresario, and playwright ever. He is known today only among theater historians and intellectuals, and then generally only by the name of his most famous plays, which are never performed. The brief irony of this man's life is that while he has had a lasting and major impact on contemporary theater, very little of his career has been dissected with any scholarly depth. Voluminous MacKaye archival materials lie steady at the Dartmouth College Library, all 118 boxes and 138 lineal feet of them, just shy of half a football field in length. Those of the entire MacKaye family comprise some 222 boxes! Two of his closest friends were Thomas Edison and Oscar Wilde. Edison said in a letter to MacKaye's son, "He was possessed of great imaginative power, together with an abnormal energy, ever seeking new worlds to conquer." It was Wilde who told him, "You and I can conquer the world, why not, let's do it."

I came to be interested in MacKaye through research into artists of Chicago who had participated in his greatest project, the Spectatorium, designed for the Chicago World's Fair of 1893, which by all accounts, was indeed "Spectacular." MacKay himself was early on interested in a career in painting having studied with American master William Morris Hunt and French master Constant Troyon.

MacKaye was of a proud and successful Scottish family who had settled in Argyle, New York. His father, Colonel James MacKaye, after training in law as well as teaching mathematics, became a junior partner in a law practice with future president Millard Fillmore. The Colonel organized several express companies, including Wells Fargo. Upon the popularization of the telegraph he was instrumental in founding American Telegraph Company, and was noted as one of the wealthiest citizens of Buffalo. He later became intimate with President Lincoln and heavily involved in the emancipation proclamation. *New York World* editor John Cockerill claimed Colonel MacKaye was one of the most "heroic figures of his age." Mind you this was a respectable newspaper owned by Joseph Pulitzer.

The Colonel's wife, Emily Benton Steele, had arrived in Buffalo through her brother Oliver, who was the founder and President of the Buffalo Academy of Fine Arts, the now parent organization of the substantial Albright-Knox Art Gallery. Emily and the Colonel were married at a friend's mansion in Belmont. Back in Buffalo the Colonel built for his wife a castle that in the 1837 actually became known as "The Castle" from which the Colonel and his privately financed troops aided Canadians across the border in their rebellion against the British. The Federal government purchased The Castle and it became Fort Porter. Under such illustrious circumstances was Steele MacKaye born in 1842.

Among Steele's childhood friends was his cousin Winslow Homer, later considered by many to be the greatest American painter ever. Steele was an overly energetic boy who took a quick love for his Native American neighbors and the countryside where he rambled. When his mother died he was sent off to live with an Aunt. His father continued in telegraph enterprises and was close friends to painter, and telegraph inventor, Samuel Morse. The Colonel built a summer mansion in Newport, and remarried in 1853. By now he had become warm friends of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow and was as well an avid patron of the arts. He became active in the Abolition movement, an ardent stance he would pass on

to his son Steele. Moving to New York City the Colonel became one of the financial patrons of the National Academy of Design, where his friend Samuel Morse was the first president. He also founded the second Unitarian Church in Brooklyn and installed its first minister, salary included, Samuel Longfellow, brother of Henry. By this time, Steele had come to live once again with his father.

Despite the steady march of influential artists and writers through the MacKaye household, an uncle who was head of one of the country's leading art academies, a father who was a marked patron of the fine arts, and friends Steele had made with young Henry James, Winslow Homer, and others, and with little thought to what influence this might have on his son Steele, the Colonel had in mind military school as the place for a young boy of fourteen and enrolled him at Roe's Military Academy at Cornwall-on-Hudson, then a competing school to West Point.

A boy who was reared in the open spaces and whose head was filled with romantic notions due to his particular upbringing was ill suited for the regimented life of the regiment. He lasted about two years, though, and after stealing away from the school in a canoe he employed himself at a telegraph office with his knowledge of the code invented by family friend Samuel Morse. A worried father found his son, the two were reconciled, and they sailed with sisters in tow for Paris in 1858 where Steele entered the prestigious Ecole des Beaux Arts to study with the great French masters, including Thomas Couture. He also studied his thespian love at Theatre Français. A family story recounts the then sixteen year old Steele was taken by his father to the bank in Paris whereupon the banker was instructed to honor all credits of the son with no regard to amount. It was from this the teenager grew into a man with little regard and less command of money.

Steele spent two years studying at the Ecole and returned to open a studio on 8th Street in New York painting and then teaching art at a nearby school. Up to this point in his life he had become friendly with a wealth of literary and oratory minds including Henry David Thoreau, Walt Whitman, Horace Greeley, Henry Alden of Harper's, and Wendell Phillips. And without doubt these influential minds gave Steele the idealism to practice the theater arts and to try his hand at writing. A review of his personally imposed schedule for 1861, at the age of nineteen, included four hours for painting, two hours for dramatic

exercise, and twenty minutes each for exercise of the voice, body and emotional expressions.

In 1862 Steele became acquainted with Jennie Spring whose parents were ardent Abolitionists and frequent visitors to the MacKaye household. Steele likewise had become a regular in their house and acted parts in many private plays held as entertainments. By now the Civil War was raging and Steele enlisted as a private in the prestigious and formidable 7th Regiment Army. Within weeks, he and Jennie were married, she nineteen and he twenty. Military life at times was filled with drudgery and to pass the time the soldiers built a stage to put on performances, which found Steele a ready participant.

Upon taking ill he mustered out and then set off to paint in Maine with noted American artist George Inness. When they returned Steele re-enlisted, this time as an officer and rose to the rank of Major. During these war times, his father the Colonel was on intimate terms with President Lincoln. The Colonel's archived letters discuss progress in Lincoln's ideas of emancipation. The Colonel had been charged by the president to make frequent studies of life among the Negroes in the South through his various contacts. There is little doubt the influence the Colonel had upon Lincoln in formulating the President's most famous act, a reality that today is lost among Lincoln scholars, and would be worthy of further study.

As Major Steele MacKaye carried on his duties in soldiering he was taken ill with malaria and again joined ranks as a civilian. Sometime around 1863 and 1864 after the birth of a son, he was divorced from his first wife, amicably so. Soon after in 1865 he was wed to Mary Medbury, a direct descendant through her father of Roger Williams founder of the colony Rhode Island. He had met Mary through his first wife, who had taken strongly fond of the young woman. After the re-alignment of marriages, the three remained life-long friends. Upon his second marriage he and his young bride headed to Paris, where Steele had been charged by a New York bank to purchase paintings on behalf of clients thirsty for European art. In Paris he took the opportunity to further his own painting education by studying with French Master Jean-Léon Gérôme. Steele became intimately familiar with the leading artists of Paris, who were equally thirsty to find new markets none more so than Americans with vast fresh wealth.

However, one of young MacKaye's worst attributes was his short attention span, something he was able to come to grips with later in life. No sooner had he returned to New York in 1866 as the *exclusive* sales agent for a group of French painters including already famous Théodore Rousseau and Gustave Moureau, than he threw off the considerable contract to focus on an invention he had stumbled upon, known as photo sculpture. In this technique a photo was taken, which was then translated by machinery into a sculpture of clay that could be cast in bronze. His father's friend General Grant was the first subject. For a variety of reasons the venture failed.

Two years later in 1868 Steele decided it was time to break free of the financial bonds of his father. This was a point in life when he focused entirely upon painting and was among an illustrious group of "Hudson River School" artists meeting with considerable success among American patrons.

Apparently however the Colonel couldn't live without his son and daughter-in-law who had added a second and third son. He sent for them to join him in Paris, appealing to Steele's desire to further his interest in theatrical matters, and exclaiming Paris was where real theater was performed. In France Steele met François Delsarte. They formed a friendship that would change the life of the now twenty-seven year old MacKaye.

Delsarte was interested in enhancing theatrical performance through pose and gesture, governed by natural laws of the body and its movement. He studied and recorded aspects of human gesture in everyday life, recording thousands of gestures, each identified with specific descriptions of their time, motion, space and meaning. His system described three major zones in the body including the head, trunk, and the limbs. Further subdivisions were identified toward refining subtleties of gesture. The Delsarte method sought to develop control, grace, and poise in order to enhance physical expression of emotions in connection with speech and thought. Later, "gymnastic" elements were added to develop strength, coordination, and flexibility. Followers of Delsarte danced or recited poetry while performing related gestures. Delsarte's ideas were revolutionary and MacKaye was his most ardent pupil. Upon outbreak of the Prussian War in 1870, MacKaye removed to London and then returned to New York in 1871, but not before arranging a 2,000 Franc stipend to the now destitute Delsarte.

Back in New York with an invigorated interest in theater MacKaye came to meet the actor Edwin Forrest on a trip to Boston. Forrest was the first truly famous and great actor in the U. S. Early in his career he had become the most highly paid performer in the country. His acting fame and powerful performances led to sold-out theaters in city after city. Now some forty years later, Forrest was a highly regarded figure, and possessed a well known reputation among international patrons and critics. He took keen interest in Delsarte's concepts through MacKaye, who was not only the leading expert but a champion of the new form of the art. Forrest contacted his friend the governor of Massachusetts and from that the enthusiasm to bring MacKaye to Boston to give an animated lecture blossomed. Eighteen of Boston's leading men signed a letter to MacKaye urging his presence in their city.

The lecture was a smashing success. The twenty-nine year old thespian awoke the next morning to find he was famous. After several more lectures in Boston, including one at Harvard, he was invited by the Lotos Club of New York to a tour of Manhattan and Brooklyn beginning at their clubhouse. His Boston fame preceding arrival, MacKaye became instantly celebrated and was hailed by men of the arts, literature, science, education and drama as well as lauded by all of the critics. That same year, 1871, Delsarte died, destitute. It was now left to MacKaye to carry on the rapidly popularized method of elocution in study and execution as well as espousing the concepts to an international audience. A May *Atlantic Monthly* issue furthered the cause by presenting detailed analysis of the Delsarte method and Delsarte the deceased genius. There was no audience for Delsarte's concepts during his lifetime and it was MacKaye who would make the system of theatrical delivery popular and would significantly improve upon it to where it could be called something of his own invention. A humble man, MacKaye always felt he was merely paying homage to his master and never sought credit for the Delsarte system.

MacKaye quickly made the transition from the role of actor to that of stage director. In 1871 he directed a performance that had a months run at the Boston Museum. He now came into contact with theater managers on Broadway in New York, which led to his agreement to renovate and take over the old Apollo Hall, which he renamed St. James Theater. He opened the theater with two plays of his own. While the theater was initially full, reviews were mixed. Now near penniless again, MacKaye at the bidding of his father

sailed once again to Paris where he studied at the conservatory and continued to hone his skills on the stage.

Now sufficiently skilled and more thoroughly educated MacKaye headed for London where in 1873 he became the first American to play Hamlet; to a sold out performance no less. Following performances saw crowds waiting for three hours just to enter the theater. Reviews were highly favorable and word traveled back across the ocean to an informed New York smart set. MacKaye was now famous for both his stage theories and execution.

Back in New York by 1875, MacKaye set out to write, act in, direct and manage a series of plays. After numerous productions and a growing family that included three more sons he decided it was time to run a theater again. The Fifth Avenue Hall was ill-suited to theatrical presentations when MacKaye convinced the owner to invest in his scheme to transform the place into a magnificent center of theater art complete with a lavish curtain from Louis Comfort Tiffany. MacKaye and Tiffany had become close friends while they were studying painting with George Inness. Renamed the Madison Square Theatre in 1879, MacKaye's most successful melodrama, *Hazel Kirke*, was presented in 1880. It was in this theater he invented, patented and installed overhead and indirect stage lighting, movable stages, and folding seats; all concepts that had previously been unknown to audiences. His folding seat, by the way, was issued patent number 295,261 in March 1884.

He also devised the idea to issue the audience a playbill to introduce the scenes and actors. As a playwright, he wrote or adapted thirty plays including the hit *Paul Kauvar*, also known as "Anarchy," which was set during the French Revolution, and inspired by the trial and execution of anarchists in Chicago. MacKaye was often in Chicago as he was also inventor of the traveling company that would simultaneously stage a play in multiple cities.

Hazel Kirke was hailed as the epitome of new realism, though it was the staging and the technical aspects of the production that were truly revolutionary. The scene changes and therefore the intermissions took a mere 55 seconds while the elevator MacKaye invented to the purpose changed positions so the wait between the acts was minimal, and became a selling point. The play was a romantic melodrama set in a mill. Young Hazel Kirke was promised to her father's benefactor, Squire Rodney, when she was just a girl.

Naturally she fell in love with a young handsome lad of her own age and there you have the makings of one of the greatest plays of all time. It became the most successful play ever running 486 consecutive performances, a record against which future productions were measured for the next fifty years and spawned fourteen different road companies, in addition to scores of pirated versions. Within five years the play had been staged in New York at various theaters over thirty-five hundred times, and on many days it was shown three times to clamoring audiences.

Sadly, while MacKaye profited a little from the share of receipts he profited none at all as the author of the fantastic success, as he had earlier signed those rights away to his investors to get the theater plan off the ground. MacKaye then left the theater in dispute and the play continued on without any reference to him whatsoever. In a postscript to the sub-plot, MacKaye's wife was successful in securing copyright to the play after the first had expired some thirty years later and the family was the modest beneficiary of future stagings as well as the sale of movie rights.

MacKaye now somewhat successfully set up another theater and traveling company to stage other plays he wrote. Theater fires were an ever present danger and MacKaye was probably the country's leading proponent of fire safety. One need only to think of the infamous Iroquois Theater fire in Chicago, which claimed 602 lives, to know the importance of theater safety. All of us here remember as children the common understanding of what the exclaimed words "FIRE" meant in a packed house. MacKaye devised a ten commandments for theater fire safety which were quite revolutionary at the time and included:

1. Fireproof building materials
2. Trapdoors on the roof and floors
3. Automatic fire proof curtains
4. Air tight tanks holding enough water on site to extinguish a blaze
5. Fire extinguishers on every floor
6. Axes on every floor
7. An organized fire brigade among the theater company
8. Folding seats allowing the theater to be turned into easily navigated aisles
9. Ten feet of exit room to every two hundred seats

10. Employment of the best known ventilation systems

In 1884 he purchased the Lyceum Theater and formed the first permanent school of theater, later known as the American Academy of Dramatic Art and subsequently becoming today's Columbia University School of Theater. He worked again with Louis Comfort Tiffany to execute the interior design. The following year, with the aid of Thomas Edison, MacKaye made the Lyceum the first totally electric lighted theater and then utilized the electricity to rig a system of air conditioning with ice and fans, the first air conditioning of a theater and a precursor to the air conditioning used in some buildings at the 1893 World's Fair in Chicago.

Always restless MacKaye was looking for another challenge when he met Nate Salsbury the business partner of William F. Cody – “Buffalo Bill.” The *Wild West* show was a sketchy hodgepodge reenactment of various Indian battles including Custer's Last Stand, valiant soldiers and cowboys, frightened settlers and miners. After a show in Staten Island in 1886 Cody and MacKaye determined to work together. Looking for a success but not wanting to succumb to a circus like atmosphere Cody and Salsbury hired MacKaye to stage the performance with the best theatrical coordination. MacKaye chose the only venue large enough to house the show, Madison Square Garden then located on twenty-Sixth Street. MacKaye retooled the Wild West show for the indoor season during the winter 1886/1887. MacKaye created a show titled *Dawn of Civilization*, with four acts or “epochs.” He invented elaborate special effects to transform the indoor arena into the windswept plains of the West, complete with a tornado. As quoted from the *New York Times* the show was a hit: “Buffalo Bill's new ‘Wild West’ is fairly under way in Madison-Square Garden. The performance runs along rapidly and smoothly. All the ponderous machinery used in the working of Matt Morgan's grand scenery is in perfect trim and works to a charm. The patent “hurricane raiser” – a huge and complicated apparatus that serves to send a gale of wind across the space devoted to the stage with a velocity of 60 miles an hour, and with a roar as if 100 buildings had simultaneously crashed to the ground – is a feature introduced in the cyclone on the prairie that creates a sensation nightly.”

The hit show ensured, MacKaye went off to stage his version of Wagner's opera *Rienzi* at the Washington Opera House. In attendance, among the Supreme Court Justices,

Senators and other dignitaries was President Grover Cleveland, who like MacKaye, hailed from Buffalo. While MacKaye was an ardent Republican owing to his ties to the party of Abraham Lincoln, and Grover was a Democrat, a rarity at the time, the two got along famously and formed a lasting relationship.

I come now to the part of the story that interested me in Steele MacKaye in the first place. Little did I know the man behind the great Spectatorium for the Columbian Exposition was such an interesting figure. The earliest accounts of his spectacular enterprise came from an application for 2 acres of ground and a concession to “erect a building completely equipped for the exhibit of all the latest inventions, machinery, and appliances, connected with electricity in its practical application to Panoramic and Dramatic Art.” In short, MacKaye proposed to create a giant painted panorama, a backdrop in the round, telling the story of the Columbus discovery of America, augmented by actors, dancers and other stage entertainers as a sort of reenactment.

MacKaye formed a corporation and issued a prospectus to raise \$500,000 for his Electric Spectacle Company. Today we have the history to know just how large was his dream. The most successful exhibit at the Columbian Exposition was George Ferris’s gigantic wheel that lofted visitors some twenty-eight stories in the sky. It took in gross receipts of \$700,000. MacKaye’s venture would have to exceed that by a good measure to earn a profit at the fair. This was mitigated by the fact he intended it to be transportable and used over and over. To begin work he moved to Chicago and took an office in the recently completed Auditorium building.

The Spectatorium was to be a large and imposing structure with seating for 12,000. Frederick Law Olmsted, head of the Board of Architects and general designer of the fairgrounds said, “This is the noblest artistic scheme I have ever heard of. It will be the crowning glory of the Fair, and all connected with it ought to feel deeply in debt to Mr. MacKaye for his creation. Such a conception deserves the place of honour on the Exposition Grounds.” At Daniel Burnham’s bidding, Charles McKim drew plans for construction that would combine the Spectatorium with the Terminal Station, a combined entrance structure to the fair. Early in the process there was too much competition for grounds within the fair proper so MacKaye and his businessmen secured lake front property between fifty-sixth and fifty-seventh on Everett, covering an entire city block.

Inside the building MacKaye made plans for a full chorus, orchestra and orators to be employed as the cyclorama painting spun to depict his play about Christopher Columbus. MacKaye expected to stage the world premier of Dvořák's now most famous Ninth Symphony, *From the New World*. An eight foot deep concrete tank under the entire stage was to be complete with wave and wind machines that would replicate any type of seas, calm or stormy. Upon this indoor sea floated Columbus's ships. The tank held over 750,000 cubic feet of water, which is in excess of five and a half million gallons. The painted ocean backdrop was over 200 feet in depth. All of the equipment was reportedly protected by ten separate patents. In short, it was to be "far more marvelous, novel, and grand and the most extraordinary theater that has ever yet been built at any time in any part of the world."

With Burnham and Olmsted's support, the first investor was rail car magnate George Pullman. Other wealthy industrialists including Lyman Gage who was to become U. S. Secretary of the Treasury, Potter Palmer, Charles Henrotin, A. C. McClurg, William LeBaron Jenny, Charles Fullerton, Peter Studebaker, Ferdinand Peck, Andrew McNally, and Marshall Field met at a dinner hosted at the Union League Club and followed his lead as investors. Noted American artist Childe Hassam executed a watercolor to render the detailed architectural plans and several other artists including Frank Russell Green and Jules Guerin helped to build a scale model, which would become MacKaye's greatest selling tool.

By August 1892 so many men of wealth had subscribed to the stock corporation that the outside director of the company thought it prudent to publicly announce the plans in the *Chicago Times*. The headline read: "Big Thing For The Fair. Plan by which the Discovery of America will be Commemorated with a Theatrical Innovation – Promises to be the Crowning Feature of Chicago's Year of Wonders – Mr. Higginbotham Thinks It Alone Would be Enough to Draw the Crowds." With half a million dollars pledged the Columbian Celebration Company began construction of the Spectatorium on their lake front property with almost 600 feet of lake frontage. The theater, meant to be permanent, was hailed as five times the size of the Grand Opera House in Paris.

Another press account gave a very descriptive view of the spectacular entertainment that was to enthrall the throngs of visitors to the fair: "The building is being erected – half

on land and half on water – just north of the World’s Fair Grounds, between Everett Avenue and the lake. The ships of Columbus, with 50-foot masts, will appear on water, in front of the audience; 9,000 people may find comfortable seating, and in the rooms near the stage on each side, 3,000 more can find places...350 feet of the original lake will be filled in. The walls will be 150 in height, and 8 stories of the building are to reach half as high as the [crowning] dome.” Housed within was planned other money making ventures including two restaurants, one termed a “grand café.” The 100,000 square foot building would house twenty-five moveable stages requiring over six miles of railroad track to accommodate the vast production written in eight acts. Inside special lighting would give the effect of the sun rising and setting, stars gazing at the audience, an aurora borealis and a rainbow. A full compliment of weather conditions would replicate those encountered by Columbus on his journey to the new world including wind, fog, rain and storms. Not lost on MacKaye was the fact that he was creating a new art form, one which he promoted assiduously.

He hurried off to New York to meet with Bohemian peasant composer Antonin Dvořák and conductor Anton Seidl to contract them for the score and performance of a new symphony *The World Finder* or *The Great Discovery*. This was an opportunity, five months of performances three times a day, the conductor could not do without. Almost immediately the press in New York announced Seidl had signed on for the spectacular event to include 120 pieces in the orchestra and 600 voices. Another 900 actors and performers would be coordinated by MacKaye with the performance.

Naturally an endeavor on such a massive scale as this began to incur cost overruns. From the pecuniary needs of a new scale model at the cost of a staggering \$30,000 to the 2 million pound steel roof that was strong enough to hold forty fully loaded rail cars to the lighting with 100,000 foot candle power and the exact replicas of the Santa Maria, Pinta and Nina to be floated and moved indoors or the largest elevators ever to be built carrying 10,000 persons an hour to roof-gardens, galleries, restaurants, a Turkish bath and barbershop capped by a 300 foot tower that patrons would pay fifty cents to ascend, the expenses continued to mount.

Adding to the financial burden was the cataclysmic weather. Chicago experienced record low temperatures and excessive snow. At one point the large steel roof structure still under construction blew off into a heaped pile of girders on the ground two hundred feet

below. In March 1893 a worker was killed and the press reported two others were taken home to die, and several were injured as a derrick 160 feet in the air failed sending a ten ton, thirty foot beam to the ground. There were 1,500 men working on the structure at the time.

The weather proved to be a precursor to calamitous financial conditions in the United States as the spring of 1893 brought with it a great financial panic and Depression. In total \$800,000 had previously been pledged to The MacKaye Spectatorium of which \$450,000 in bonds joined with common stock in the company had been raised. Under such dire circumstances the power of the idea was significant enough that the backers went out to raise another \$150,000 in bonds, although few were sold. A recounting of progress was held at another dinner at the Union League Club. MacKaye announced he would replace his own name and rekindle the building The Chicago Spectatorium. A few days later MacKaye, who was working himself to death, was redirected to only the theatrical production and Louis Kuhns, former Chicago Commissioner of Public Works, was brought in to manage the construction and business aspects of the project.

However, the final blow was struck when it became apparent construction was too far behind to meet the opening date of the fair in May 1893. Upon this news several of the financial backers who had not yet made “good” on their pledges used the opportunity to pull their support and the project went into receivership. On June 1st, one month after the fair opened, it was announced by the *Tribune* that Chicago Title and Trust had taken over as receiver of the Columbian Celebration Company. With George Pullman at the top, the list of shareholders included almost every major businessman in Chicago. Upon failure, many of the businessmen admitted they weren’t nearly as interested in a return on their investment as they were in the civic pride of bringing such a project to fruition in their city. Lyman Gage said in the press of MacKaye, “I regard [him] as a perfectly honest and upright man, a poet and scholar, and I think this conception was one of the grandest things the world has ever had. His fault was a lack of business method only. I am especially sorry for Mr. MacKaye, who is humiliated, ruined, and in the depths of despair because of this failure.”

The harsh reality was the entire project would have cost some one million dollars against which only five hundred thousand was raised. I’m sure the architects in the room

tonight can muse over the commonality of these circumstances to this very day. And of course, who else did MacKaye blame but the architect – William LeBaron Jenney – they always blame the architects, don't they?

In October the *Pittsburgh Dispatch* wrote the epitaph: “Probably never in the history of the World was so vast an amount of money expended on a structure which brought so little on a forced sale. Up to the day when work was abandoned upon the Spectatorium building, \$850,000 had been sunk in the enterprise. It was projected as the largest and grandest auditorium that the Western world had ever seen. It was sold for old junk for the sum of \$2,250.”

Antonin Dvořák's New World Symphony was premiered in New York in December 1893 with many of its components taken from his work for MacKaye's great unfinished project.

MacKaye clung to a vision of the cyclorama story and successfully raised \$50,000 to remodel the Chicago Fire Cyclorama building owned by Reed and Gross, two businessmen who specialized in cycloramas and offered to close the Fire work for MacKaye's new production. In it he installed much of his complicated machinery and inventions. In comparison the undertaking seemed Lilliputian but taken on its own it was still a complicated scheme that only he could pull off. The first performance in his new building with its likewise reduced name Scenitorium was held on February 5, 1894. MacKaye had at least gotten his artistic endeavor into the public with a fabulously scaled down production of *The World Finder*. The funds provided for this rising out of ashes came once again from George Pullman and Lyman Gage, who never lost faith in the project and realized the confluence of too many uncontrollable events, resulted in the spectacular failure of 1893. Having worked non-stop with little sleep and less food for almost two years MacKaye's failing health forced him to direct the opening seated on a chair upon the stage. Three weeks later he was dead at the age of fifty-one. A day later, the new Scenitorium Company entered receivership. Despite the fact that the chorus and other actors hadn't been paid, they voted to perform in the building during a choreographed funeral service for their beloved Mr. MacKaye. The *Tribune* provided an apt epitaph, this time for the man stating, “He was governed entirely by his imagination, and once started nothing could daunt him. He was reckless in using his own money and other people's money when once a scheme

had fashioned itself in his mind. He would work upon such a scheme with prodigious industry and with such a strain upon his nervous resources as would have broken him down long ago had it not been for his robust physique. That Steele MacKaye was thoroughly honest in his schemes no one ever will doubt. Most extraordinary of all was his power to convince others of the reality of his imaginings. The dead actor had culture, learning, imagination, hope, self-conviction, honesty, courage, eloquence, industry, everything, in fact, in his favor except practicality”

Postscript

The outpouring from illustrious persons across the country was non-stop. There was an immense response to the death of someone who had been marveled and loved alike, despite his one spectacular failure. MacKaye left a lasting legacy little appreciated today. Unfortunately, Steele MacKaye’s fame did not bring him financial security. His widow and family often retreated to a small cottage in Shirley Center, Massachusetts, where with her sister they raised the family.

His many sons went on to successes of their own including Emile Benton von Hesse MacKaye, a graduate of Harvard with a B.A. and an M. A. in the School of Forestry. He was a research forester of the U.S. Forest Service where he is credited with planning and constructing the Appalachian Trail coming to be known as the “Father” of the Trail. He later served on the regional planning staff of the Tennessee Valley Authority and on the staff of the Rural Electrification Administration.

Son Percy MacKaye was also a playwright. After attending Groton and graduating from Harvard in 1897 he married and settled into a life of teaching and lecturing on the theater. He wrote several plays including a masterpiece *The Scarecrow*, based on Nathaniel Hawthorne’s short story *Feathertop*. It later opened on Broadway in 1911 and was subsequently filmed in 1923 as *Puritan Passions* starring Glenn Hunter.

And for the business supporters, some twelve years later, the financial law-suits were just reaching the appellate court with many more years promised where they were termed “The most intricate and longest litigation ever taken through the courts of Cook County,” a fitting end to this truly spectacular enterprise.

THE END