

## **The Wonders of Electricity Exhibition**

**MSOE AC 28**

**1926 - 1950**

**0.4 Cubic Feet**

**Repository:** MSOE Archives

**Abstract:** The Wonders of Electricity exhibition is documented in this collection through a large percentage of visual materials—promotional pamphlets and photographs.

**Biography:** The Wonders of Electricity Exhibition was a demonstration put on by the Milwaukee School of Engineering (MSOE) from the mid-1920s to 1950. The show strived to both entertain and educate crowds with electrically-themed experiments. It was featured at the Chicago World's Fair in 1935 and the Wisconsin Centennial State Fair in 1948. The show also travelled to multiple other events and locations around the United States.

**Additional Background Information:** After a visit to the *Century of Progress* Chicago World's Fair in 1934, School of Engineering of Milwaukee founder and president, Oscar Werwath, spoke with fair officials about bringing his student-created "Wonders of Modern Electricity" show to the exhibition. The show had been gaining local popularity for several years and he saw it as both an educational opportunity for fair-goers, and a chance to reach more prospective students. World's Fair officials agreed, provided an exhibition hall, and by 1935, the show was entertaining thousands of people a day.

Through the years, the show was a staple exhibition at many events, such as the Milwaukee Midsummer Festival and the Wisconsin State Fair. A travelling incarnation of *Wonders of Electricity* also existed, which in the late 1940s travelled as far as Florida, and performed for Harvard Alumni. Documentation for the show ends abruptly in 1950, probably due to a change in school administration a few years earlier.

The *Wonders of Electricity* generally included ten to twelve demonstrations of chemistry and electricity, all of which were then explained in easy-to-understand language. Often these shows also included demonstrations the newest technologies and electronics. Basic principles of mechanical television were demonstrated through use of a stroboscope, and radio waves were used to remotely raise a flag on a flag pole. Black light wowed crowds as it revealed colors not visible by the naked eye, and items frozen with dry ice were shattered.

A Tesla coil (actual voltage for it varies from document to document); capable of producing a spark twelve feet long was undoubtedly one of the biggest draws of the show. Other experiments included breaking water into its components and exploding the oxygen, showing 25 horses-worth of electricity via light and sound on a Franklin plate, and various demonstrations with an

electromagnet. A typed transcript of one of the later versions of the show can be found within the collection.

For over thirty years, the *Wonders of Electricity* demonstrations served as educational entertainment, a vehicle for promoting MSOE outside the Milwaukee area, and a catalyst for partnerships between the school and local companies.

**Scope and Content Note:** This collection contains memorabilia, promotional materials, photographs, planning documents, and correspondence related to the *Wonders of Electricity* exhibition.

**Arrangement:** This collection is arranged chronologically. *Wonders of Electricity* is abbreviated as WoE in folder titles where necessary.

### **Administrative Information:**

**Restrictions:** There are no access restrictions on the materials, and the collection is open to all members of the public in accordance with state law. However, the researcher assumes full responsibility with the state laws of libel, privacy, and copyright which may be involved with the use of this collection (Wisconsin Statutes 19.21-19.39)

**Acquisition Information:** Unknown acquisition.

**Processing Note:** Processed by Lindsay Bastian in August 2013.

### **Contents List:**

Box	Folder	
	1	1 Program of Electrical Exhibition (Predecessor to WoE), 1926
	1	2 "Modern Electricity" Lecture (Predecessor to WoE), circa 1930
AC 4	Box 4	Photograph of Electrical Exhibition Stage (Predecessor to WoE), circa 1932 [NOT in BOX]
	1	3 Program, Lectures Number One (1) and Two (2), circa 1932
	1	4 Promotional Materials, Chicago World's Fair Exhibition, 1935
	1	5 Photograph of Oscar Werwath and "Electrical Demonstration" Van, circa 1935
	1	6 Publicity and Press Releases for Electrical Demonstrations, 1936
	1	7 Milwaukee Mid-Summer Festival, 1938, 1939
	1	8 Complete Lecture Notes, circa 1941-1943
	1	9 Cavalcade of Culture Exhibition Schedule, 1946
	1	10 Correspondence, re: Wonders of Electricity, 1947-1948
	1	11 Industrial Wisconsin's Engineering Exposition Exhibitors, 1948

- 1 12 MSOE Promotion Booth at Wisconsin Centennial, 1948
- 1 13 Newsclippings re: Wonders of Electricity Exhibition, 1948
- 1 14 Programming and Promotion of WoE at Centennial State Fair, 1948
- 1 15 Promotional Handouts for Centennial State Fair, 1948
- 1 16 Wisconsin Centennial State Fair WoE Presentation Photographs, 1948
- 1 17 The Wisconsin Century Book (Souvenir Magazine), 1948
- 1 18 "Wonders of Electricity Program" Flyer, 1948
- 1 19 Exhibit Schedule, 1949-1950
- 1 20 Photographs of WoE Presentation at Wisconsin State Fair, 1950
- 1 21 "Pageant of Electro-Magic" Leaflet Flyer, 1950