

N. Y. BOTANICAL GARDEN ~ BRONX

Rock Garden D

*Take East Side El to
Bronx Park station*

"Hey, Mom! The
calf is eating
the campanula
cochlearifolia!"

SEE
NEW
YORK
FIRST

Past
Exhibition

ROSE
ROSE

From the Bronx to the Battery

The Subway Sun

April 24–November 2, 2025

The Interborough Rapid Transit Company (IRT) opened New York City's original underground subway line in October 1904. While the city was one of the most diverse in the country, before the introduction of the subway, most New Yorkers were not in regular contact with people outside their own neighborhoods. Initially extending from the Bronx to Lower Manhattan (with service to Brooklyn beginning in 1908) and forming part of the wider transit system, the convenient and affordable IRT encouraged riders to travel beyond their communities for both work and leisure. In order to entice people to regularly use the subway, the IRT printed two in-car poster campaigns, *The Elevated Express* and *The Subway Sun*, that highlighted each borough's unique attractions. Of these, *The Subway Sun* was especially successful.

The Subway Sun first appeared in 1918 as a series of weekly advertisements promoting the IRT. In the early years, the advertisements were text heavy, read much like a newspaper, and featured minimal illustrations. They typically emphasized codes of conduct, service announcements, and operating costs. Within a few years, the posters also began to advertise notable locations throughout the Bronx, Manhattan, Brooklyn, Queens, and Staten Island that New Yorkers and tourists might want to visit, thereby increasing use of the system. One of the campaign's original slogans was "Ride on the 'L' and See New York." This was eventually shortened to "See New York First" and often appeared in an emblem or banner alongside the central design.

The posters in this exhibition were designed between 1937 and 1939 by illustrator and type designer Fred Cooper, who created the unified look of *The Subway Sun* throughout the 1930s and 1940s. Already an established cartoonist, he brought his signature “cartoonettes” and special lettering to enticing images of the vast and multifaceted city. The typeface at the top of each advertisement mimics the Gothic style of the masthead of the popular New York daily newspaper, *The Sun*. The messages in the boxes on each side of the title, “Our Men Know Their Jobs” and “The Safest Railroad in the World” are intended to reassure riders who were hesitant to travel underground. Cooper noted that the cartoons were most effective when they were a solid mix of good humor and knowledge of the subject matter, and his mastery of both of these are evident in his designs for *The Subway Sun*.

All posters in this exhibition are part of the Poster House Permanent Collection.

Whenever feasible, Poster House reuses materials from previous shows to drive sustainable practice.

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Visit the Van Cortlandt Mansion, 1938

Fred Cooper (1883–1962)

Poster House Permanent Collection

- In this poster, Cooper promotes the Van Cortlandt Mansion, a historic home located in the Bronx known to have served as headquarters for both Loyalists and Patriots during the American Revolution.
- While the property remained with the Van Cortlandt family until the 1870s, the New Parks Act of 1884 allowed the New York City government to seize the land through eminent domain. It turned the building into a historic tourist attraction as part of Van Cortlandt Park, one that still welcomes visitors today by way of the same IRT lines.
- The design depicts the two-and-a-half story Georgian mansion being visited by throngs of enthusiastic visitors. One such patron exclaims “the old spirit still pervades the place”—a humorous reference to the ghostly figure hovering over the building at the left, most likely meant to be the British Captain Rowe who died in the house from a battle injury and supposedly still haunts its halls.

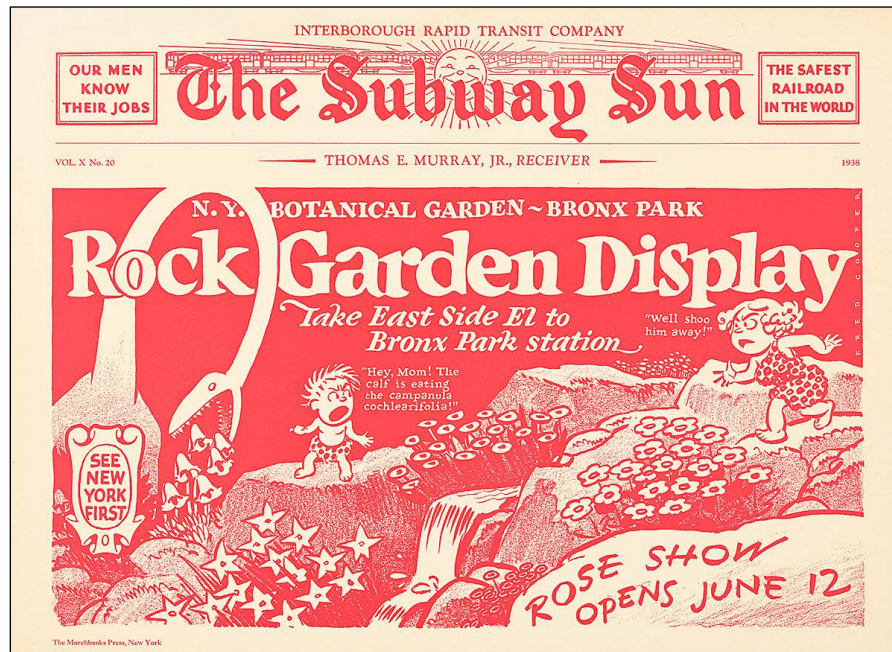


Jaunts for Hikers, 1938

Fred Cooper (1883–1962)

Poster House Permanent Collection

- This edition of *The Subway Sun* advertises three distinct Bronx Park locations, originally used as farmland, that were ideal for outdoor recreation. The design highlights various hiking routes along Bronx Park with accompanying directions for the subway journey to each place. The hikers of all ages and sizes shown here emphasize that the park and subway system are accessible to everyone.
- The New Parks Act of 1884 allowed for the creation of the Bronx Park system, consisting of Van Cortlandt Park, Pelham Bay Park, Crotona Park, Pelham Parkway, and Mosholu Parkway, all of which remain popular destinations for outdoor activities.
- Cooper was well-known and celebrated for his distinctive style of lettering, particularly his use of lowercase in display text as seen in the headline for this issue of *The Subway Sun*.



N.Y. Botanical Garden/ Rock Garden Display, 1938

Fred Cooper (1883–1962)

Poster House Permanent Collection

- The New York Botanical Garden was established in 1891 to advance botanical knowledge and science, and opened to the public in 1900. The Rock Garden, displaying plants and flowers from the rocky and mountainous regions of the world, was added in 1930.
- Bronx Park station opened in 1904 to provide direct service to both Bronx Park and the New York Botanical Garden. It served as a terminal for the Third Avenue El, allowing riders to overlook hundreds of acres of protected land from the elevated train line.
- This poster depicts an interaction between a Stone Age mother and son in which a small brachiosaurus prepares to take a bite of *Campanula cochlearifolia*, delicate blue flowers commonly known as fairy bells or fairy thimbles. This humorous scene emphasizes the great age of the plant species in the Rock Garden.



Cool Off at Orchard Beach, 1937

Fred Cooper (1883–1962)

Poster House Permanent Collection

- When Robert Moses became the city's Park Commissioner in 1934, he set out to expand infrastructure and prioritize urban development. One of his projects was Orchard Beach in the Bronx, dubbed the Riviera of New York City. In June 1937, Orchard Beach officially opened as a complete recreational site offering the amusements listed here.
- In order to create this new seaside oasis, the existing colony known as Tent City had to be cleared, ending the traditional use of the area by middle-class campers (many of them European immigrants) who rented wooden structures from which they made seasonal canvas tents. Permit holders unsuccessfully sued the city—a loss that contributed to the continuing displacement of communities in the name of urban development under Robert Moses.
- This poster directs the rider to take the IRT East Side Line (also known as the IRT Lexington Avenue Line, today's 4/5/6 trains) to the BX12 or BX29 buses. Before the extension of the subway to Pelham Bay Park in 1920, the only public railway transit near Orchard Beach and its neighboring communities was the Pelham Park and City Island monorail that operated from 1910 to 1914.



The Cloisters, 1938

Fred Cooper (1883–1962)

Poster House Permanent Collection

- In 1924, John D. Rockefeller bought a collection of stone carvings and artifacts owned by American sculptor George Grey Barnard with the intention of donating them to the Metropolitan Museum of Art alongside a new museum known as The Cloisters.
- Based on its elevation, relative isolation, and dramatic views of the Palisades, Fort Tryon Park was the ideal home for Rockefeller's vision. He hired landscape architect (and son of the Central Park designer) Fredrick Law Olmstead, Jr. to design the grounds. He also chose Charles Collens, designer of Manhattan's Riverside Church and an expert on the Neo-Gothic style, as the site's architect. The new museum ultimately incorporated period appropriate stonework and building elements from France for him to work with to create a medieval pastiche.
- The Cloisters opened in 1938, the year this poster was printed. To entice visitors, Cooper depicts a stylish couple stepping out of contemporary dress into medieval clothing (the man's fedora becomes a Tudor flat cap and the woman's day dress morphs into a Burgundian gown) as they approach the museum. The arcade surrounding the central garden and its eight-sided fountain wrapped in pink marble is known as the Cuxa Cloister and is the centerpiece of the museum.



Original Rooms from Rockefeller Mansion, 1938

Fred Cooper (1883–1962)

Poster House Permanent Collection

- The room featured in this poster was originally part of the four-story Worsham-Rockefeller mansion located at 4 West 54th Street (today the location of the Museum of Modern Art's sculpture garden). After the death of John D. Rockefeller in 1937, the building was slated to be torn down; however, his son, John D. Rockefeller, Jr., managed to save three of the building's interiors, two of which, a dressing room and a bedroom, he donated to the Museum of the City of New York while the third, a Moorish-style smoking room, went to the Brooklyn Museum.
- The two rooms were housed on the fifth floor of the Museum of the City of New York until a renovation in 2008 when the museum gave the dressing room to the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the bedroom, pictured in this poster, to the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts. Both of these and the one in the Brooklyn Museum remain on view.
- In 1884, John D. Rockefeller purchased the home from wealthy philanthropist Arabella Worsham who had hired an architect to design the interior of the mansion in different historical-revival styles. The one seen here reflects the Aesthetic Movement of the late 19th century that championed the notion of "Art for Art's Sake" over any moral or functional role. This is one of the few posters in the series that features photography rather than illustration.



New York's 1st World's Fair/ The Crystal Palace, 1939

Fred Cooper (1883–1962)

Poster House Permanent Collection

- In July 1853, the New York Crystal Palace opened to the public on the site of today's Bryant Park. Its cast-iron and glass building housed the Exhibition of Industry for All Nations, featuring industrial and agricultural innovations as well as fine art from around the world and was modeled on the Great Exhibition of 1851 in the specially designed Crystal Palace in Hyde Park in London. Sadly, the entire structure was destroyed by fire in 1858.
- Over the course of the 20th century, the Museum of the City of New York obtained a number of mementos from the Crystal Palace, including a piece of structural glass and various artifacts. This poster refers to the unveiling of an exhibition there dedicated to the Crystal Palace that coincided with the opening of the 1939 World's Fair in Queens. Additional marketing for this celebration is noted by the presence of the Tylon and Perisphere in the upper corners of the design.
- Cooper depicts a man and woman in stylized Victorian clothing admiring a "machine that sews," alluding to one of the modern wonders on display at the Crystal Palace in 1853. Cooper's attention to detail here is indicated by the fact that his illustration of a sewing machine might be Elias Howe's version, patented in 1846—one of several sewing machines shown at the exhibition despite Howe's ongoing legal patent battle with I. M. Singer & Co.



Free Concerts/Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1938

Fred Cooper (1883–1962)

Poster House Permanent Collection

- The Metropolitan Museum of Art (popularly known as the Met) opened at its current location on Fifth Avenue and 82nd Street in 1880 with the goal of bringing art from around the world to the American people. As New York's elite moved further uptown during this decade, Fifth Avenue developed into a residential row surrounded by parks and museums.
- Starting in 1918, the New York Symphony Society (now the New York Symphony Orchestra) began hosting an annual season of free concerts at the Met. These were tremendously popular and attended by tens of thousands of visitors.
- During the Depression, the Met offered a series of extension programs, partnering with community organizations to bring parts of its collection to the wider New York City population. These traveling exhibitions, known as Neighborhood Circulating Exhibitions, were presented in public libraries, high schools, colleges, and settlement houses. The initiative was largely successful and expanded over the course of nine years, ending in 1942.
- Cooper situates the visitors here in the Ancient Near Eastern Art gallery between two Lamassu (monumental winged lions with human heads)—some of the most prized objects in the collection. The statues were given to the Met by John D. Rockefeller in 1932, an exceptional acquisition acknowledged by one visitor's expression of awe.



St. Patrick's Cathedral, 1938

Fred Cooper (1883–1962)

Poster House Permanent Collection

- When the doors of the new St. Patrick's Cathedral, built to replace the original structure in the Bowery (now called St. Patrick's Old Cathedral) opened in 1879, it was considered to be too far out of the "proper" city. It was large enough, however, to accommodate a rapidly expanding Catholic population and the archbishop hoped that New Yorkers would see the surrounding land as suitable for residential, commercial, and recreational purposes. His vision of an evolving metropolis would materialize the year after this poster appeared with the opening of the completed Rockefeller Center complex.
- Before the introduction of rapid transit, most New Yorkers worked and worshiped near their homes. The 50th Street station that served the cathedral was one of the original 28 subway stations that opened in 1904, promoting northward movement on the island of Manhattan and encouraging residents to join a religious community outside those in their immediate neighborhoods.
- Inspired by the Gothic architecture of Cologne Cathedral in Germany, St. Patrick's allowed New York residents who could not travel abroad to experience the Old World without leaving the city. Cooper even notes in the poster that visitors are welcome, indicating that the cathedral was a tourist attraction as much as a place of worship.

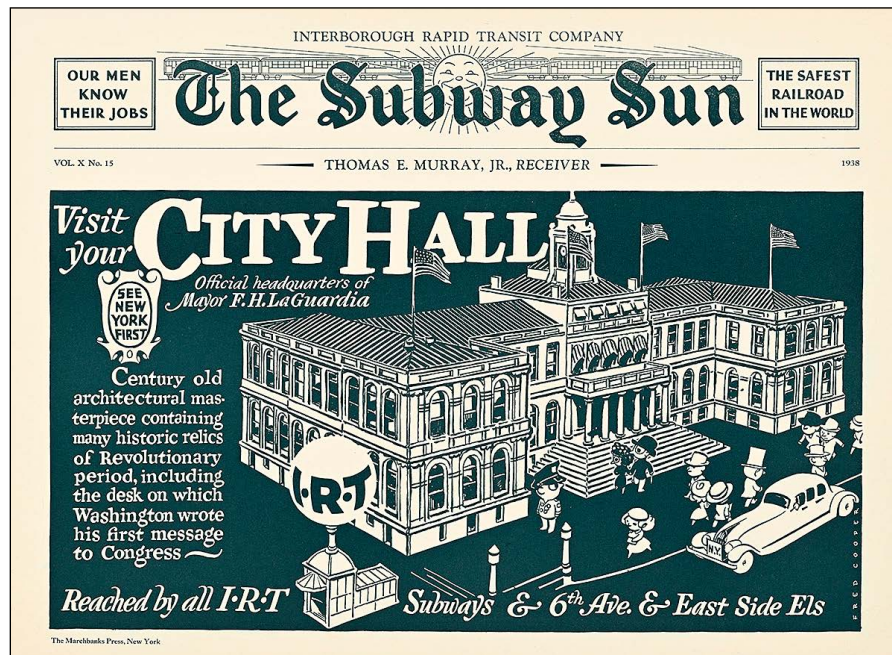


Visit Chinatown, 1938

Fred Cooper (1883–1962)

Poster House Permanent Collection

- Chinese immigrants began settling in large numbers in New York City during the 1870s, creating their own communities along Mott, Pell, and Doyers Streets. The proliferation of Chinese societies and businesses in the area, most notably laundries and restaurants, led to the *New York Times* naming it “China Town” in an 1880 article. Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, the Chinese population there expanded, attracting tourists to Chinatown from other parts of the city.
- Uptowners who traveled downtown often had stereotypical, negative assumptions about Chinatown and its inhabitants, but they nonetheless explored its joss houses (Taoist temples or shrines), notorious opium dens, and its food. This included such “Chinese” dishes, adapted to the American palate, as Chop Suey.
- Here, Cooper avoids the cartoon style of his other designs and presents a more realistic illustration of a Chinese woman and child. Meanwhile, the dragon is a symbol of good luck and prosperity within the Chinese lunar calendar and was often used as a decorative motif on buildings, signs, and menus in the neighborhood.
- While Chinatown is still a vibrant part of Manhattan, the means of transport promoted in this poster—the Second and Third Avenue Lines, commonly known as the Second and Third Avenue Elevateds (or Els)—gradually phased out service to Manhattan to make way for the new consolidated subway system. The Second Avenue El was shut down in 1942 and the Third Avenue El in 1955.

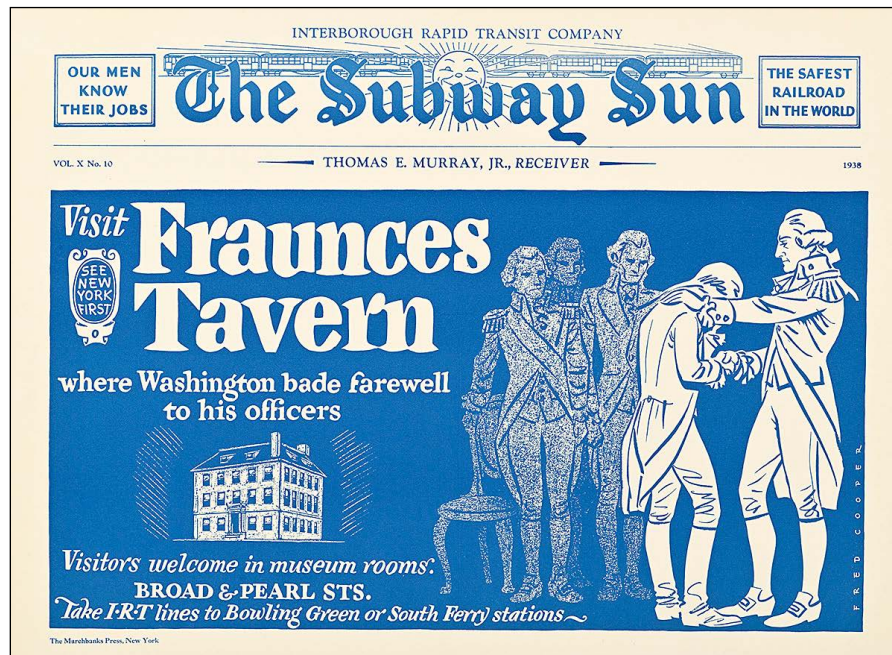


Visit Your City Hall, 1938

Fred Cooper (1883–1962)

Poster House Permanent Collection

- Today's New York City Hall opened in 1812 and is both the third location for the government building and the oldest in the country still used for its original function. The building's beautiful neoclassical architecture, reflecting French and British influences, was part of its appeal but the poster also notes that visitors could see George Washington's desk in the Governor's Room and other historic artifacts dating back to the American Revolution.
- In 1904, the original City Hall subway station opened directly beneath the building. Its lavish design, complete with glass tiles and crystal chandeliers, made a visit to the area an exciting experience the moment a rider got off the train. Unfortunately, due to the proximity of the Brooklyn Bridge station, passenger traffic through the City Hall station remained low. The station was ultimately deemed unsuitable for the new, longer train cars and was closed in 1945.



Visit Fraunces Tavern, 1938

Fred Cooper (1883–1962)

Poster House Permanent Collection

- Fraunces Tavern was named after Samuel Fraunces, who acquired the 1719 structure in 1762 and later became chief steward to the newly elected president, George Washington. The tavern, believed to be Manhattan's oldest surviving building, was a popular meeting place for members of the Sons of Liberty and other political rebels during the American Revolution.
- It remains most famous as the site of George Washington's farewell to his officers after the evacuation of the British army on December 4, 1783. Cooper's depiction of this moving scene was likely inspired by an engraving by Howard Pyle published in an 1883 edition of *Harper's Weekly*.
- The extension of the IRT immediately increased ridership into Lower Manhattan at the Bowling Green and South Ferry stations. In 1910, the platforms were extended to accommodate more train cars for local and express service. Fraunces Tavern was among the many downtown historic sites that could be reached by subway.



Welcome Visitors!//Municipal Ferry to Staten Island, 1939

Fred Cooper (1883–1962)

Poster House Permanent Collection

- In 1905, the city government took control of the New York City ferry system, including the Staten Island Ferry, building a station at Whitehall Street/South Ferry in Battery Park. Although ferries serving Staten Island were intended as commuter vessels to Manhattan, there was also an effort to attract tourists and non-residents to the borough by positioning them as sightseeing vehicles.
- By 1939—the year this poster was printed—the Ninth, Second, and Third Avenue Els connected directly to South Ferry Terminal. At the time, the fare for the Staten Island Ferry was five cents (approximately \$1.10 adjusted for inflation). In 1997, the city made the rides free.
- Cooper represents New York's flourishing maritime culture with ferries and boats packed with riders. He also depicts the Statue of Liberty, one of the city's most popular tourist attractions and one that riders could see up close from the ferry. However, as the war approached, military vessels began to fill the harbor, marking a stark contrast to this cheerful illustration.

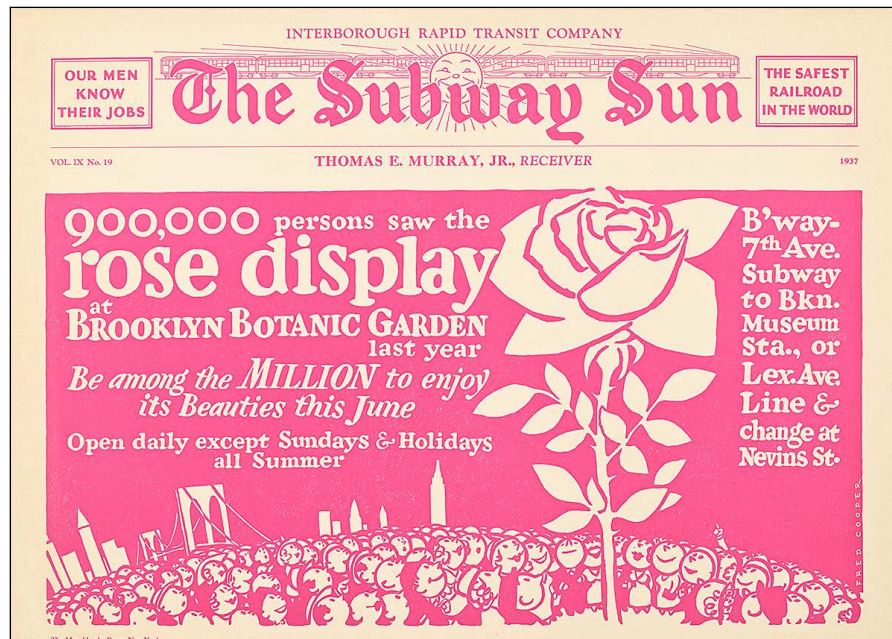


10th Biennial International Water Color Exhibition/Brooklyn Museum, 1939

Fred Cooper (1883–1962)

Poster House Permanent Collection

- The first section of the Brooklyn Museum opened in 1897, and it rapidly expanded to incorporate a wide-ranging collection of art and antiquities, including those from Japan, Switzerland, Egypt, and Germany. The 10th international watercolor biennial referred to here displayed the work of both lesser-known and established American artists as well as that of English, French, and Swiss watercolorists.
- Between 1930 and 1940, Brooklyn became the most densely inhabited New York borough, surpassing the population of Manhattan by more than a million people. The expansion of the subway into Brooklyn made this once relatively isolated location more attractive to tourists and residents who could now commute with ease between boroughs.
- Cooper's humorous image here shows a watercolor artist taking plein-air painting to an extreme level as he works while waist-deep in a pond, watched by two frogs.



Rose Display/Brooklyn Botanic Garden, 1937

Fred Cooper (1883–1962)

Poster House Permanent Collection

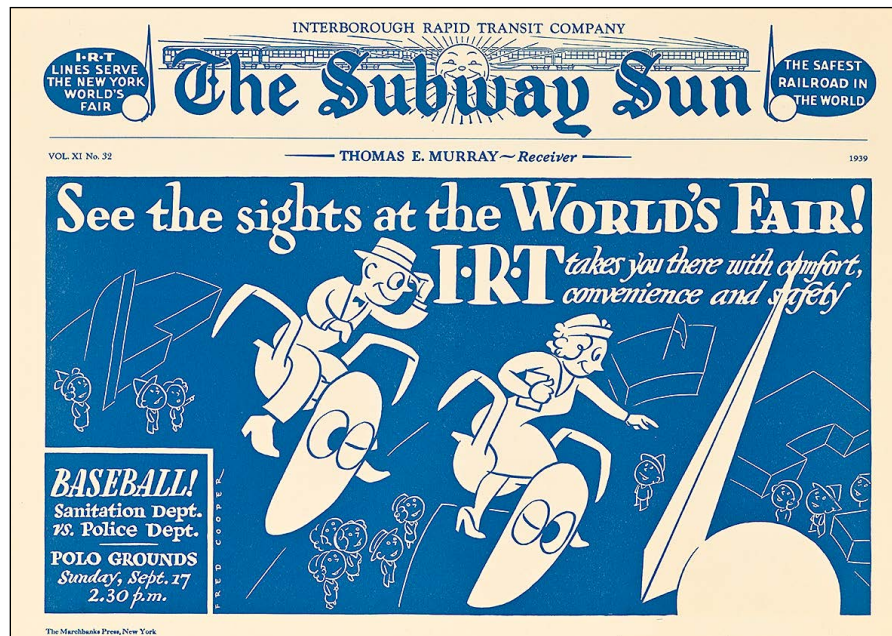
- The Cranford Rose Garden opened at the Brooklyn Botanic Garden in 1928 and remains one of the largest collections of roses in North America. Each June, visitors flock to see tens of thousands of roses in full bloom. Cooper brilliantly captures the excitement of such visits in this charming, rose-colored design featuring a solitary, giant rose amid a vast crowd of awestruck admirers.
- Some of the original roses planted for the opening of the garden are still growing there today.
- The Brooklyn Bridge and parts of the Manhattan skyline are silhouetted in the background, perhaps emphasizing the relative closeness of Manhattan to the garden due to the expanded subway line.



Don't Miss That Fair!, 1939

Fred Cooper (1883–1962)

Poster House Permanent Collection



See the Sights at the World's Fair!, 1939

Fred Cooper (1883–1962)

Poster House Permanent Collection

- Built on a former coal ash and garbage dump, the 1939 New York World's Fair in Flushing, Queens was the vision of prominent city leaders and entrepreneurs, and was intended to generate economic growth and reintroduce the city as the capital of industry.
- Before the fair, Queens residents expressed a need for more green spaces like Central Park in Manhattan, Van Cortlandt Park in the Bronx, and Prospect Park in Brooklyn. Although a grand park like these was ultimately never planned for Queens, the World's Fair grounds effectively served this purpose in the years that followed.
- In addition to the IRT, the Independent Subway System (ISS or IND) and the Brooklyn Manhattan Transit (BMT) also provided transport to the fair for millions of visitors. Even then, the IRT's Flushing Line had to be extended by 50 cars in order to handle expected traffic. Between 1915 and 1940, access to rapid transit and the World's Fair contributed to a dramatic increase in the population of Queens, which surpassed one million residents during this period.
- Cooper's two designs were intended to create excitement for the fair. One shows a grandfatherly figure reminding viewers to visit, while the other depicts two visitors flying on birds as they observe the fairground below, a play on the phrase a "bird's eye view," as one points to the Trylon and Perisphere. A box in the lower-left corner of the composition announces a baseball game between the sanitation and police departments at the Polo Grounds, an event unrelated to the World's Fair but accessible by way of the IRT Ninth Avenue Line.



Press Reviews

HYPERALLERGIC

SPECTRUM
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1

The NEW YORK GROOVE

ART IN NEW YORK CITY

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