

Brooklyn Museum

Teacher Resource Packet

Healing the Wounds of War: The Brooklyn Sanitary Fair of 1864

January 29–October 17, 2010



Healing the Wounds of War

The Brooklyn Sanitary Fair of 1864



Thomas Nast (American, 1840–1903). *U.S. Sanitary Commission: Our Heroines*, from *Harper's Weekly*, April 19, 1864. Reproduction of engraving. Brooklyn Museum Library Collection

About the Exhibition

Healing the Wounds of War: The Brooklyn Sanitary Fair of 1864 presents a selection of artworks and historical objects celebrating the contributions of women to the Sanitary Movement during the Civil War (1861–65). The focal point of the exhibition is a rare doll from the Brooklyn Museum's collection that was sold at the Brooklyn Sanitary Fair, along with its elaborate wardrobe made by a dressmaker named Eliza Lefferts. Additional highlights of the exhibition include engravings by Winslow Homer and others illustrating the role of women during wartime (see illustration above) and a rare autograph book compiled by the prominent Brooklynite Gertrude Lefferts Vanderbilt on loan from the Brooklyn Historical Society.

Healing the Wounds of War is presented in the Herstory Gallery of the Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art—a space dedicated to exhibitions that elaborate on the lives and histories of the 1,038 women named in Judy Chicago's *The Dinner Party*, permanently installed in the adjacent gallery. Dr. Elizabeth Blackwell, the first female doctor to graduate from a medical college in the United States and an important participant in the Sanitary Movement, is one of the women commemorated in *The Dinner Party*.

What Is a Sanitary Fair?

During the Civil War, fairs were organized by local charities and women's organizations in coordination with the United States Sanitary Commission to raise money for clothing, food, medical supplies, and other provisions for the Union army. The highly successful Brooklyn Sanitary Fair, hosted at the Brooklyn Academy of Music (then located on Montague Street), raised funds through special events such as the Calico Ball and ongoing attractions including moving dioramas (a precursor to the movies), live music, a soda bar, a Museum of Arts, Relics, and Curiosities, and an auction featuring everything from toys to furniture.

How Did Women Support the Union Army?

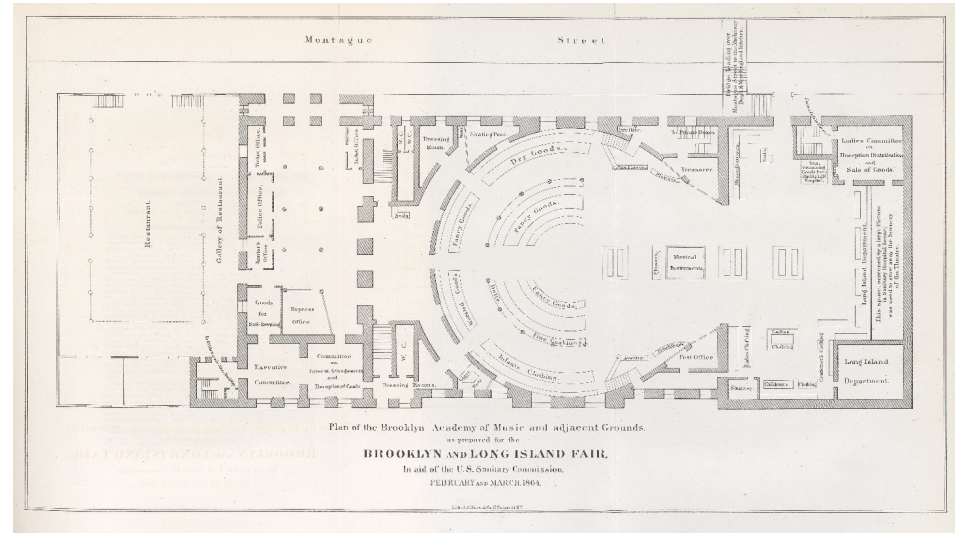
From sewing shirts and socks for soldiers to serving as nurses on the front lines, women took an active role in the war effort. In 1861 the Women's Central Association of Relief (WCAR), a group of more than four thousand women, met at Cooper Union to discuss opportunities to strengthen support for Union troops. Inspired by the British Sanitary Commission, established by the famed nurse Florence Nightingale to improve sanitation and hygiene standards for soldiers and veterans of the Crimean War (1853–56), the WCAR set the development of an American organization in motion. Although the U.S. Sanitary Commission was headed by men, most of its work was accomplished by thousands of women volunteers. Events such as the Brooklyn Sanitary Fair provided a significant opportunity for civic-minded women to contribute their time and talents to the cause.



Unknown artist. *Brooklyn Sanitary Fair, 1864: View of the Academy of Music as Seen from the Dress Circle*, from *The Manual of the Common Council of the City of Brooklyn*, compiled by Henry McCloskey (Brooklyn: The Council, 1864). Lithograph by A. Brown and Co., New York. Brooklyn Museum, Bequest of Samuel E. Haslett, 22.1910

Description of Brooklyn Sanitary Fair, 1864: View of the Academy of Music as Seen from the Dress Circle

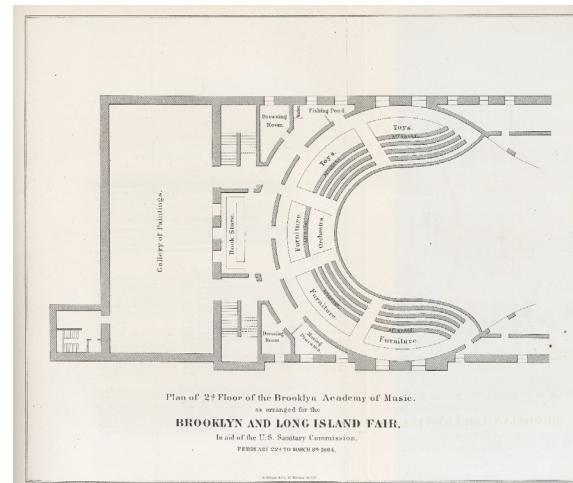
This interior view of the Brooklyn Academy of Music from 1864 depicts the space as it appeared from the second-story balcony during the Brooklyn Sanitary Fair. Seated on red fabric chairs, guests peer over the balcony to observe the events below. On the lower level, figures surround draped tables that display a range of goods. Above the tables red, white, and blue swags meet in the middle of the high ceiling accented by a suspended sculpture of an eagle. In the background, at the center of the composition, a white tent with two occupied beds rests next to a flag and several standing figures wearing blue uniforms and hats.



Plan of lower level, from *History of the Brooklyn and Long Island Fair, February 22, 1864*, Prepared and published by authority of the Executive Committee (Brooklyn: The Union, Steam Presses, 1864). Brooklyn Museum Library Special Collections, E632 B79

Description of the Floor Plan from *History of the Brooklyn and Long Island Fair*

The floor plan of the Brooklyn Academy of Music reflects the site as it was arranged for the Brooklyn Sanitary Fair. On the bottom level space is designated for sale items (clothing, jewelry, flowers, dry goods, dolls, yarn goods, and glassware), fair attractions (a skating pond, soda fountain, and post office), and staff (janitors, police, ticket takers, and the Executive Committee). On the top level space is provided for a gallery of painting, a bookstore, a fishing pond, a moving diorama, and displays of furniture and toys.



Plan of upper level, from *History of the Brooklyn and Long Island Fair, February 22, 1864*, Prepared and published by authority of the Executive Committee (Brooklyn: The Union, Steam Presses, 1864). Brooklyn Museum Library Special Collections, E632 B79

Questions for Viewing Images of the Brooklyn Sanitary Fair

The following questions can be posed in large or small-group conversation or used as entry points for written work.

Before viewing the images, close your eyes and imagine a fair. What do you see? What sounds do you hear? What smells are in the air? What things are there to do?

Take a moment to look closely at the images. How is this fair similar to the one you imagined? How is it different?

This fair took place at the Brooklyn Academy of Music in 1864. What changes would we need to make to transform this into a scene from today?

What do you notice about the fair decorations (colors, symbols, and so on)? What might this tell us about the event?

What special attractions does this fair have? What clues support your answer?

If you attended this fair, how would you spend your time?

Planning and hosting such a large and dynamic fair required the support and expertise of hundreds of volunteers. What areas did the organizers include on the floor plan to ensure that the fair ran smoothly?

This fair was created to raise money for Union troops during the Civil War. Volunteers donated a broad range of goods to sell. What kinds of items were available for purchase? How do these items compare to products at fairs today?

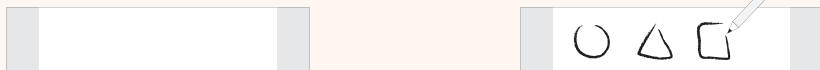
Activities

Moving Dioramas

A popular attraction at the Brooklyn Sanitary Fair was the presentation of moving dioramas (a forerunner of the movies). The dioramas allowed guests to experience virtual trips to places such as Niagara Falls and scenes of the war. To achieve a sense of movement, long painted scrolls, attached to vertical rollers, were wound from one side of the stage to another—often to the accompaniment of music or narration.

To produce your own moving diorama:

1. Depict a story (from left to right) on a long strip of paper using pencils, markers, or paint. Leave several inches blank at both ends.



2. Tape each end of the paper to a support (i.e. a pencil or dowel).

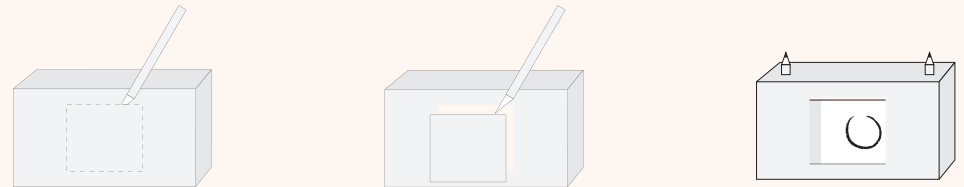


3. Wind the paper around the support on the right-hand side until you reach the end of the sheet.



4. Working with a partner, practice animating the drawing in this way: as one partner unwinds the scroll at the right support, the other rewinds the scroll at the left.

Tip: Creating a “theater” out of a shoe box can help ease this process. To proceed, cut out a rectangular opening on the bottom of the box (make sure the height of the opening is smaller than the height of your scroll). Poke holes through the side of the box and insert your supports. Once the supports are in place, load the paper as described in step 3.



5. Develop a script, sound effects, or musical selection to accompany the illustrated story.

6. Present your creation to your peers.

Strength in Numbers

To create the Brooklyn Sanitary Fair, members of the community came together to address a challenge their community was facing. What challenges does your community face today? As a class, select one challenge you would like to address.

What are the sources of the problem?

Who is affected? How?

What is already being done to address this issue? How can your class help effect change?

Create a plan to effect change.

Put the plan into action.

Consider opportunities to develop the plan through cooperation with other classes or families in your school community.

Provide time for reflection and refinement. Share your challenges and successes.



Unknown European or American maker (doll). Eliza J. Lefferts (American, 1831–1867) (doll's wardrobe). *Doll and Wardrobe, Sanitary Fair (detail), 1864*. Cotton, painted porcelain, human hair, horsehair (doll); cotton, linen, silk, leather, metal (clothing and accessories); 17 x 10 x 2 1/4 in. (43.2 x 25.4 x 5.7 cm). Brooklyn Museum, Gift of Mrs. Ira B. Downs, 24.311

Description of *Doll and Wardrobe, Sanitary Fair, 1864*

The female doll, measuring approximately twelve inches tall, wears a yellow dress accented with teal bands and black lace and velvet trim. On the top of the dress, four diagonal darts form the shape of a V from the bust to the center of the waistband. The tightly gathered pleats, just below the waistband, create fullness in the skirt. Leather gloves cover the forearms and hands, while black laced boots and cream socks with pink trim adorn the feet. The manufactured porcelain head, complete with rouged cheeks and thin painted lines capturing the facial features, attaches to a cotton body. The doll's brown hair is wound in circles and pinned into place just above each ear. An array of clothing including everything from accessories and undergarments to coats surrounds the figure. A small toiletry set (shown to the right of the figure) contains items such as scissors, combs, hairpins, and soap.

About *Doll and Wardrobe, Sanitary Fair, 1864*

This doll and her wardrobe were created by Eliza Jones Lefferts (1831–1867), a talented dressmaker, for the Brooklyn Sanitary Fair. Although the purchase price of the doll is unknown, reports indicate that more than \$400,000 (equal to over \$4 million by today's standards) was generated over the course of the fair. The toiletry set that accompanies the doll reinforces the United States Sanitary Commission's dedication to improving sanitary and personal hygiene standards.

Activity

Individuals in Action

Most of the goods and human resources needed to support the Brooklyn Sanitary Fair were offered as donations by talented volunteers. As a dressmaker, Eliza Lefferts was skilled in sewing and had easy access to fabric, needles, and trim. The creation of a doll and wardrobe to be sold at the fair was a valuable way she could support Union soldiers and veterans.

Imagine the daily operations of the Brooklyn Sanitary Fair. Create a list of the skills needed to ensure the event was a success (consider everything from the range of goods and attractions presented to the logistics of organizing the event).

What special talents do you have?

If you were a volunteer at the Brooklyn Sanitary Fair, what role (or task) would best match your strengths?

What are some ways individuals raise awareness or money for causes they support today?

What causes do you believe in? Choose one area you would like to focus on.

Research ways you can contribute your time and talents to support your beliefs.

Select one action you will take to support this cause.

Resources

<http://www.brooklynpubliclibrary.org/civilwar/>

This Web resource, produced by the Brooklyn Public Library – Brooklyn Collection in 2004, includes a selection of primary documents exploring women's lives during the Civil War era. Corresponding lesson plans, including several highlighting the Brooklyn Sanitary Fair, explore strategies for engaging students in document-based investigations.

<http://www.serve.gov/>

This government-supported Web site provides access to thousands of volunteer opportunities across the United States. Using the search engine, visitors can find opportunities that match their interests and geographic location.

http://www.prospectpark.org/education/teachers/school_programs_lefferts

Learn more about opportunities to visit the home of Eliza Jones Lefferts. The Historic Lefferts House, in Prospect Park offers programming for students and professional development workshops for K–12 educators.

http://www.brooklynmuseum.org/leascfa/dinner_party/home.php

This Web site, featuring *The Dinner Party* by Judy Chicago (a multimedia work on view in the Brooklyn Museums' Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art), celebrates the contributions of 1,038 women. Elizabeth Blackwell, co-founder of the Women's Central Association of Relief, is among the women represented. The site includes images of the installation, background information about each woman, and suggested primary and secondary sources.

The exhibition *Healing the Wounds of War: The Brooklyn Sanitary Fair of 1864* is organized by Catherine J. Morris, Curator of the Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art, Brooklyn Museum.

Cover: Detail of *Brooklyn Sanitary Fair, 1864: View of the Academy of Music as Seen from the Dress Circle* (pp. 3, 7)

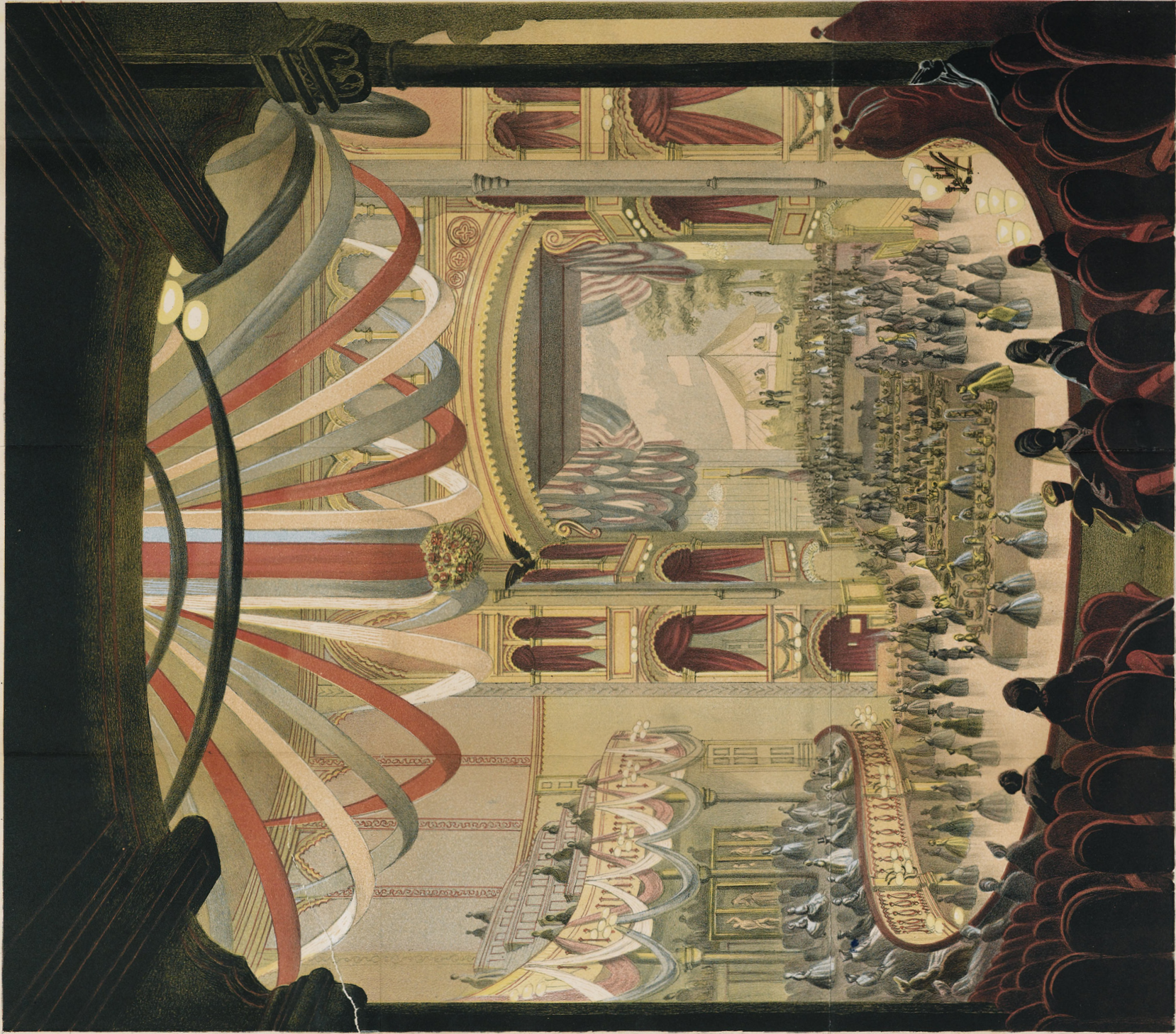
Pp. 8–9: Plan of lower level from *History of the Brooklyn and Long Island Fair, February 22, 1864* (p. 3)

P. 10: Plan of upper level from *History of the Brooklyn and Long Island Fair, February 22, 1864* (p. 3)

P. 11: Detail of *Doll and Wardrobe, Sanitary Fair* (p. 5)

Brooklyn Museum

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www.brooklynmuseum.org



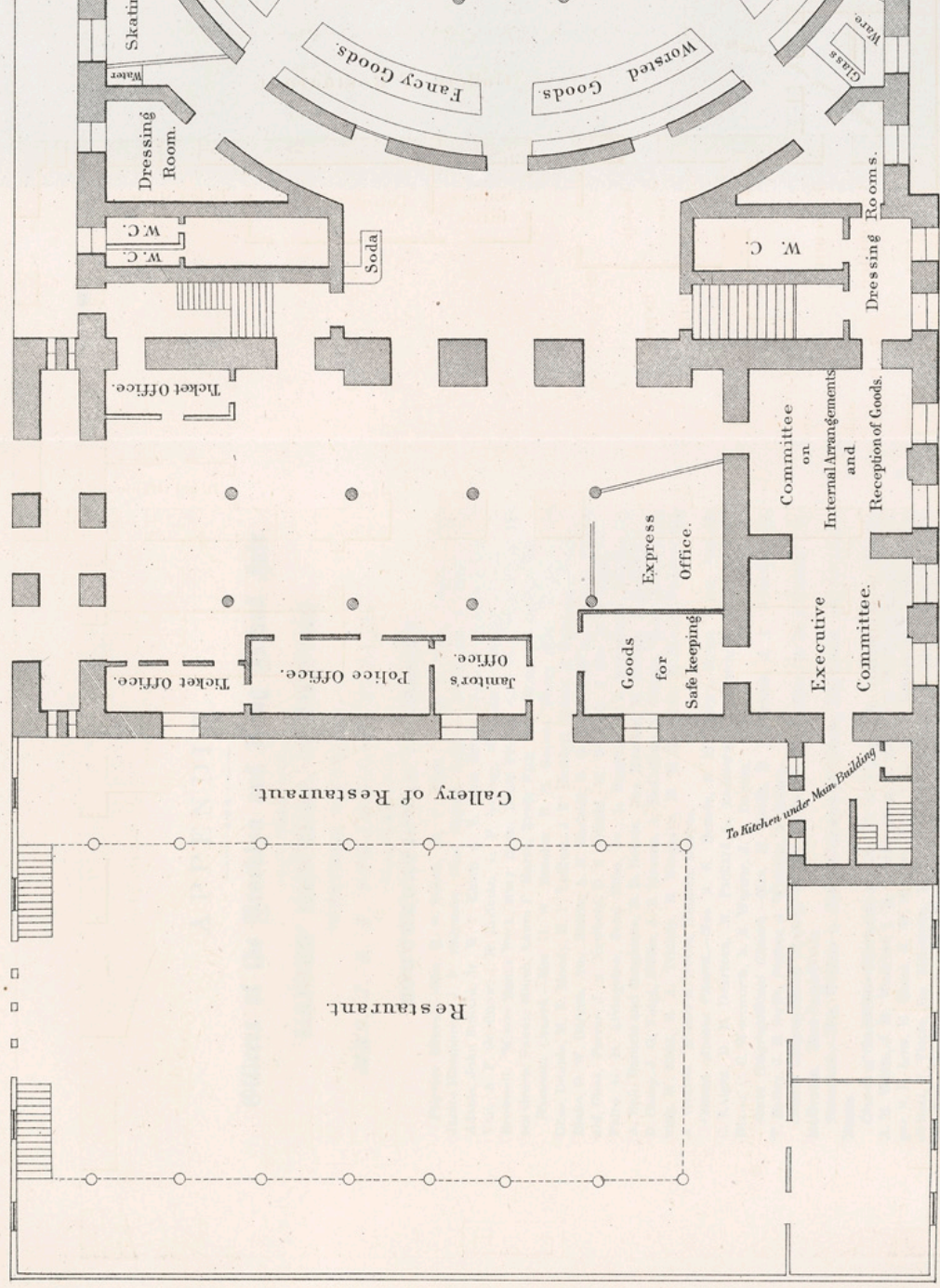
Lith. of A. Brown & Co., 47 Nassau St. N. Y.

BROOKLYN SANITARY FAIR, 1864.

INTERIOR VIEW OF THE ACADEMY OF MUSIC, AS SEEN FROM THE DRESS CIRCLE.

For Henry M. Closter's Manual of 1864.

Montague



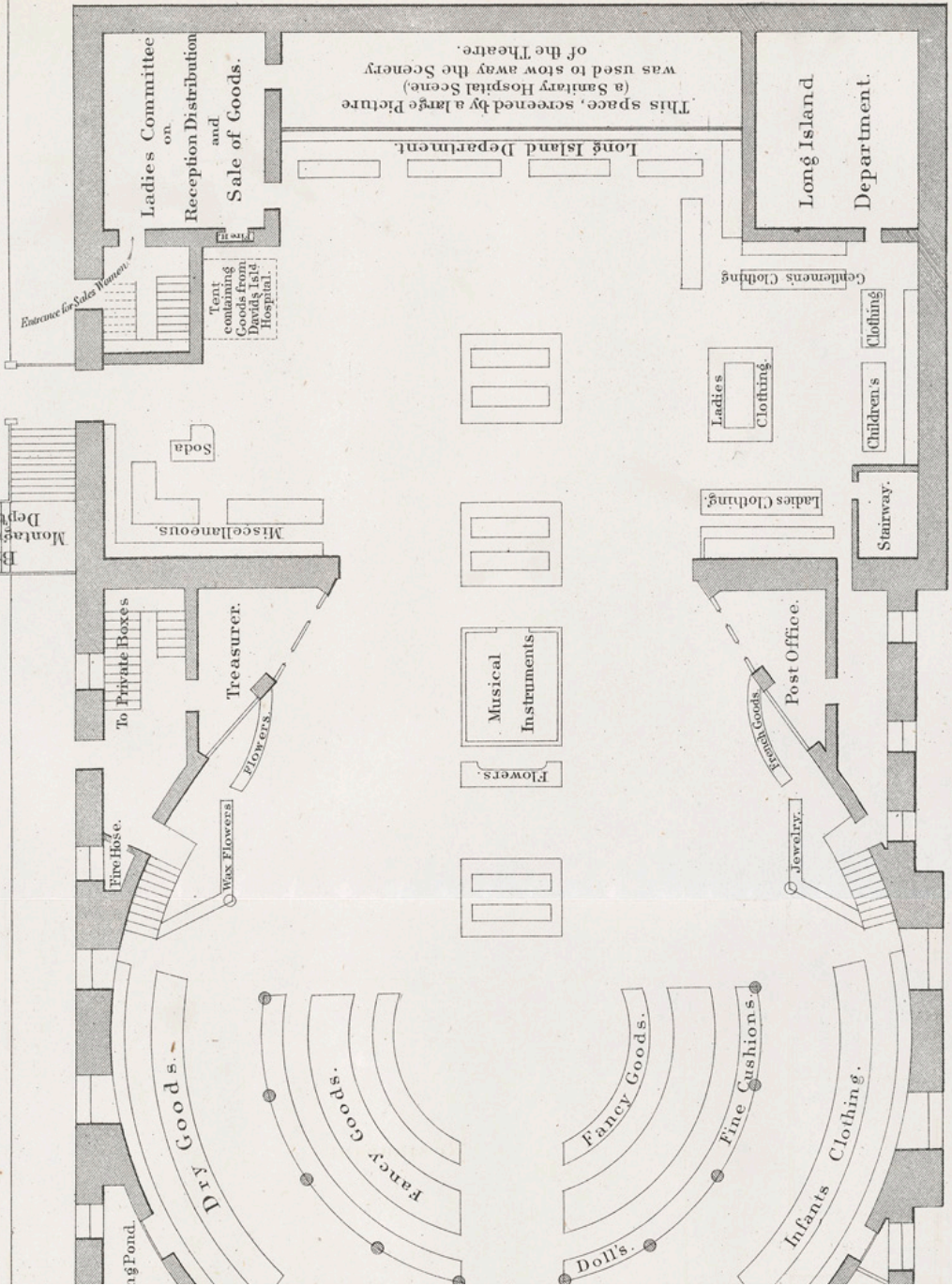
Plan of the Brooklyn Academy of
as prepared

BROOKLYN AND LO

In aid of the U.S. Sa
FEBRUARY ANT

Street.

Bridge leading over
Montague Street to the Machinery
Dept. & New England Kitchen.



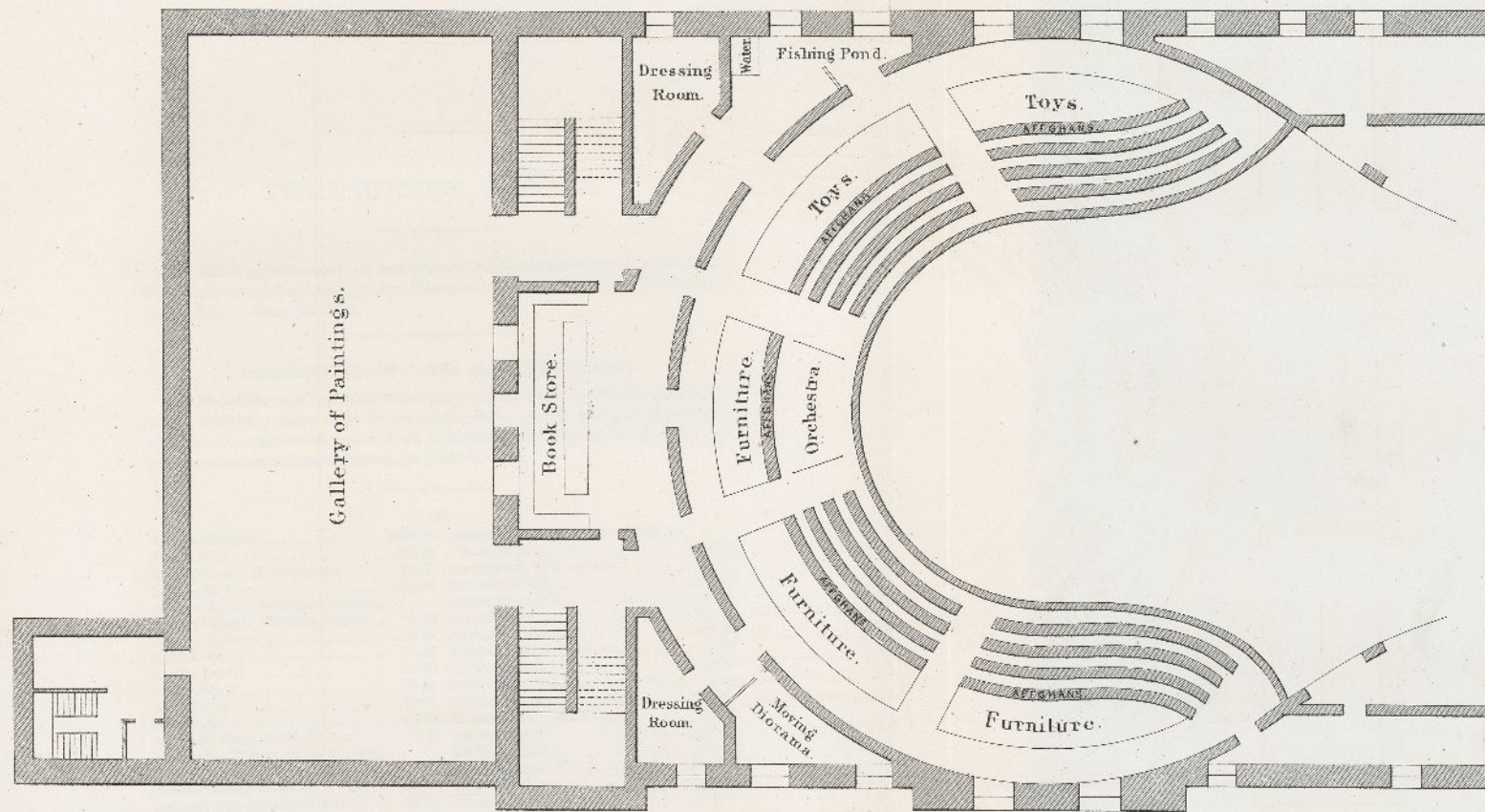
Music and adjacent Grounds,

and for the

LONG ISLAND FAIR,

Sanitary Commission,

MARCH, 1864.



Plan of 2^d Floor of the Brooklyn Academy of Music,
 as arranged for the
BROOKLYN AND LONG ISLAND FAIR,
 In aid of the U.S. Sanitary Commission,
 FEBRUARY 22^d TO MARCH 8th 1864.

