

# ATM STORIES PODCAST – EPISODE N°5

## EXPO 67 IN MONTREAL : BNP SETS OUT TO WIN THE WEST

ARCHIVES & HISTORY DEPARTMENT

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**BNP PARIBAS**

The bank  
for a changing  
world

**ATM Stories – Always Telling More by BNP Paribas, the podcast that goes behind the scenes to bring you some little-known stories about the bank.**

**Those moments that have shaped the character and culture of a 200-year-old group, to be enjoyed anywhere and at any time!**

In this episode, we invite you on a journey across the Atlantic, to Montreal, to explore the 1967 Universal Exposition...

Montreal, the largest city in Quebec – known for the St Lawrence River, its poutine and its harsh winters – is also THE industrial and commercial capital of its region. It is a crossroads where most of North America's communication routes intersect and end.

And, to mark the centenary of the Canadian Confederation and the city's 325th anniversary, it was here that the Universal Exposition was held in 1967.

But how do you welcome so many exhibitors and visitors from all around the world? Montreal decided to place the exhibition in the centre of its emblematic St Lawrence River by undertaking a colossal works project. The Île Sainte-Hélène doubled in surface area and a brand new island, christened Île Notre-Dame, was created. This formed a 600 hectare site – just about sufficient for this phenomenal event!

One exceptional aspect of this 28th world's fair was the very particular international context in which it was held, in the midst of the Vietnam War as well as the Cold War.

And it was with a pacifist ambition and a desire to reaffirm an ideal of human solidarity that "Man and his World" was chosen as the exhibition theme, in a nod to Antoine de Saint Exupéry's memoir, "La Terre des Hommes".

This theme also reflected the 1960s emergence of popular movements for peace, hope and social justice.

Pierre Dupuy, Commissioner General of the Expo, commented optimistically on this theme:

"The world is moving towards unity"

Indeed! Since the second half of the 19th century, these exhibitions had strived to promote a promising future for humanity through technological developments. And this was truer than ever in 1967.

Technology was a central focus that year among the 90 exhibition pavilions hosted by the 62 participating nations. Scientific research, innovation, challenges of urban density, food issues linked to overpopulation, artistic creation, etc. – all themes were addressed to look to the future with optimism.

And that's not all! BNP also took part in the event, as did its predecessor, the CNEP, at the Universal Exposition in Chicago in 1893. To fully understand of the French bank's presence at the Universal Exposition in Montreal, we need only go back a few years:

The Société Financière pour le Commerce et l'Industrie – the banking ancestor of the BNCI – moved into North America in 1961, where it played a leading role in the financing of French businesses established in Quebec. It opened its first branch in Montreal in 1964, becoming the only European bank to be represented in the country. Expo 67 then provided BNP with an incredible opportunity to reinforce its national presence and visibility!

BNP was able to offer its services to visitors of Expo 67 via its subsidiary, which provided them with all practical, economic and financial information and helped them resolve investment and location issues. It also published a book for the occasion aimed at industrialists and businessmen. This gives an insight into the country's economic resources and the role of the SFCI.



The impact of the fair proved very favourable to BNP, enabling it to establish itself in Canada by playing an active part in the major investments made to expand the country.

With 50 million registered visitors, the Universal Exposition of 1967 also broke the attendance record previously held by the 1900 Paris Exposition – a record which gave Montreal visibility and renown on an international social, cultural as well as political level. Even today, the event remains firmly rooted in the collective memory of contemporary Quebec.

Basically, an all-round success – or “l’affaire est ketchup” as our Quebec friends might say!

Another fascinating story from ATM Stories – Always Telling More.

We will be back again very soon with more interesting stories from the history of BNP Paribas.

