

lower court project

Intro panel:

Rising from the ashes of the Great Chicago Fire of 1871, a group of innovators laid the groundwork for one of the most influential celebrations of all time.

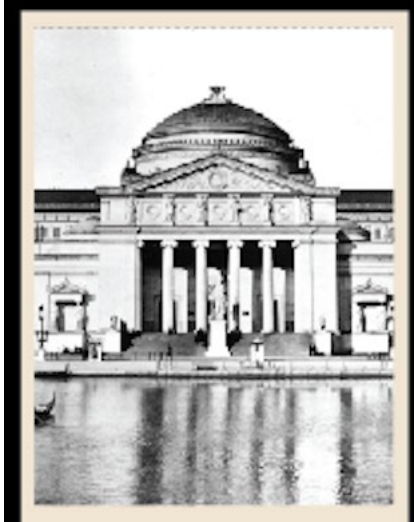
The World's Columbian Exposition of 1893 was set to celebrate the 400th anniversary of Christopher Columbus's arrival to the Americas, and U.S. Congress was tasked with selecting the host city. Narrowly beating out New York City, Washington, D.C., and St. Louis, the fair was officially awarded to the city of Chicago in December of 1890. Rejoicing from the honor of its selection, Chicago quickly got to work on what would become the one most famous World's Fair hosted in America.

As the director of works, well-known Chicago architect Daniel Burnham oversaw the design of the fair's nearly 200 buildings, which famously featured Beaux-Arts and Neoclassical architectural styles. World-renowned landscape architect, Frederick Law Olmsted, designed the exposition's 600 acres of parks, canals, lagoons and gardens. The hub of the excitement would be centrally located on the fairgrounds in the Court of Honor which featured glimmering, all-white buildings, earning the nickname the White City.

With little time and as a cost-cutting measure, the facades of these White City structures did not feature stone, but of a mixture of plaster, cement, and jute fiber called staff. The buildings were painted a sparkling white, which was amplified at night when the fair was lit by electricity.

Dedication ceremonies for the fair were held on October 21, 1892, but the exposition did not open to the public until May 1, 1893. By the time the fair ended on October 30, 1893, over 27 million people had attended.

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Palace of Fine Arts

This is the main entrance to the Palace of Fine Arts at the World's Columbian Exposition. This building was designed by architect Charles B. Atwood, who worked closely with Daniel Burnham on many of the buildings at the exposition. Unlike the other structures at the fair that were designed to be temporary, this building was constructed with bricks and permanent materials as it was intended to house priceless works of art from around the world. Many fair-goers arrived at this building by gondola and entered through the South Portico, which was adorned by a pair of bronze lion statues that now sit at the entrance of the Art Institute of Chicago. As for the Palace of Fine Arts? You're standing inside of it—it has been the Museum's home since 1933.

Find out where this photo was taken from



Great Manufactures and Liberal Arts Building

This image shows the massive steel frame from the Great Manufactures and Liberal Arts Building at the World's Columbian Exposition. Stretching over a third of a mile long, these steel trusses spanned the entire width of the building and soared overhead at 210 feet high. As the main exhibit space for the fair, this was the largest building ever constructed at the time and the most visited site at the exposition. Featuring 44 acres of exhibits, guests enjoyed literature, science, art and music from around the world on display in the Manufactures Building.

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"The Columbian Exposition: The Art Of The World," Volumes 4, 5, and 6, published by D. Appleton and Company, 1895.



Columbian Fountain

In 1891, American sculptor Frederick William MacMonnies was commissioned to create one of the more dramatic statues for the fair. MacMonnies designed this large-scale fountain depicting Columbia's arriving upon her elaborate ship, which was drawn by seahorses of "Commerce" and oared by "Arts and Industries." Placed in the center of the Court of Honor, this is the rear-view of the Columbian Fountain at the World's Columbian Exposition.

This image is a part of the W H Jackson photo set from "The White City (As It Was)" published by The White City Art Company, 1894.



Peristyle, Water Gate and the Quadriga

The Peristyle and the Water Gate was located at the eastern end of the Court of Honor, near Lake Michigan. Designed by Charles B. Atwood, this classically-styled structure featured 48 columns that symbolized the country's states and territories. Perched atop the Water Gate, you can see a statue depicting Christopher Columbus at the helm a "quadriga," which is a chariot drawn by four horses. This statue was created by American artist, Daniel Chester French, and measured 14 feet.

This image is a part of the W H Jackson photo set from "The White City (As It Was)" published by The White City Art Company, 1894.

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Balcony of the Manufacturers and Liberal Arts Building

Fair-goers look out over the Court of Honor with views of the White City's grounds from the roof of the Great Manufactures and Liberal Arts Building. The Machinery Hall and Columbian Fountain can be seen from this photo, with the Administration Building just out of frame.

C. D. Arnold. "Chicago Day, Grand Plaza in front of Administration Building from Official views of the World's Columbian Exposition." 1893.



Ferris Wheel

The World's Columbian Exposition was comprised of two distinct areas: the White City that featured grand exhibition halls, and the Midway Plaisance which was the entertainment and amusement park section located just outside the gates to the fair. The centerpiece of the Midway was the world's first Ferris wheel. Designed and constructed by American bridge-builder, George Washington Gale Ferris Jr., this Ferris wheel featured 36 suspended passenger cars that could accommodate up to 60 people. To get a birds-eye view of the exposition, fair-goers would pay 50 cents to ride around the 264-foot wheel, twice.

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Statue of The Republic

Prominently located at the eastern end of the Court of Honor facing the Administration Building, the Statue of the Republic was one of the most iconic statues of the fair. Designed by American artist, Daniel Chester French, this impressive sculpture towered over the fair at 65-feet tall. Constructed of plaster and covered in gold leaf, this statue unfortunately was destroyed in a fire after the fair in 1896. To commemorate the 25th anniversary of the Exposition in 1918, French was commissioned to construct a bronze, 24-foot reproduction of The Republic. This statue still proudly stands as a golden icon in Jackson Park, south of the lagoon.

This image was published in "The Dream City-World's Fair Art Series 1" by N. D. Thompson Publishing Company, 1893.



Palace of Fine Arts Exhibit

Charles B. Atwood designed the Palace of Fine Arts purposely without windows. The only source of natural light came from the roof, which was almost entirely comprised of skylights. This was a careful design decision so that fair-goers may view the various works of art on display without of shadows or reflection.

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Palace of Fine Arts Exhibit

The Palace of Fine Arts was the only building in the White City with brick walls and concrete foundations, fireproofed to protect the many priceless artworks on display inside. The building showcased over 10,000 artworks from around the world, including works from Monet, Pissarro, Whistler, Homer, Saint-Gaudens and Cassatt.

Find out where this photo was taken from



Administration Building

The Administration Building, as viewed looking southeast across the Court of Honor at the World's Columbian Exposition. American architect Richard M. Hunt designed this building to be the focal point of the fair, even though it was only used for administration purposes. The beautiful classical detailing and large-scale nature of this building complemented the White City perfectly. Fair-goers travelling by train would arrive at the station behind the Administration Building and then walk through the rotunda to proceed to the Court of Honor. To this day it remains one of the most recognizable landmarks associated with the exposition.

This image is a part of the W H Jackson photo set from "The White City (As It Was)" published by The White City Art Company, 1894.

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South Portico of the Palace of Fine Arts

A view of the Northern Lagoon, with a gondola in the foreground. Guests to the exposition could take a gondola ride across the many waterways designed by Frederick Law Olmsted as a fun way to cover the massive fairgrounds while giving their feet a rest. The buildings lining the lagoon in the background are some of the 37 State Buildings from the fair, which were used to showcase the major resources of each state/territory. Today, this photo can be reimagined if you were to look north upon the South Portico of the Museum, across the Jackson Park Lagoon.

This image is a part of the W H Jackson photo set from "The White City (As It Was)" published by The White City Art Company, 1894.