

Chicago Rises from the Ashes: The Columbian Exposition Gives Perspective to the Family Historian

Prepared and Presented by

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DISCUSSED IN THIS PROGRAM

- Before the Fair was created
- Process of approval of the Fair
- The Fair's relevance to other things in the world
- The fairgrounds – before the Fair
- The buildings and different cultures that contributed
- The inventions revealed
- Health and crowd control issues
- Tear-down and post-Fair elements

Originally compiled as an article in 1958 by Virginia Johnson Wilcox, Columbian Exposition expert, its over 6,000 word content was more than magazines would even consider. The original manuscript was never published during the author's lifetime but was compiled, edited, and updated by her daughter, Jean Wilcox Hibben, and has been published in *Crossroads*, the Utah Genealogical Association's publication, in Winter 2016. All 6,000+ words of it.

As with any such project, numerous articles, interviews, and websites were consulted and the presentation details much more than can be outlined in a basic syllabus. For that reason, here is presented the most recent websites researched (accessed during the summer of 2018) and the final section of the original article (provided immediately below), with minor editing changes to bring it into the 21st Century.

After the Exposition closed, October 31, 1893, the Palace of Fine Arts was taken over as the Columbian Museum. Into it were placed all the relics (except those on loan) from La Rabida and many other displays from the Fair. Colleges and universities that had asked for certain Exposition exhibits withdrew their requests when they learned of the formation of the museum. In 1894 the name was changed to the Field Columbian Museum, honoring its principal benefactor, Marshall Field. In 1905 the name was again changed, to the Field Museum of Natural History, as the directors chose to specialize in that area of interest. Transportation exhibits were returned to their donors, while many of the Columbus relics that had been in La Rabida were given to the Chicago Historical Museum in Lincoln Park.¹ Although the Arts building had been of more permanent character than others of the Columbian Exposition, it had not been designed to withstand many winters. Heating it was very difficult, the stucco exterior began to fall off, the skylights leaked, and maintenance costs became unreasonably high. Feeling, also, that a location closer to the center of the city was more advantageous, Stanley Field, nephew of Marshall (then deceased) and president of the museum, directed the erection of a new building in Grant Park in 1915. After this new structure was completed in 1920, the exhibits from the old Arts Palace were moved to the new location that, in 1943, became known as the Chicago Natural History Museum. But the old Arts Palace remained standing, empty and crumbling, until Julius Rosenwald, inspired by industrial museums in Germany, took over the building in 1929 and rebuilt it exactly along its original lines, but of sturdy materials, completing the project in 1931. In 1933 it was opened to the public as the Museum of Science and Industry.²

Until 1952 there was moored in the lagoon of Jackson Park, just below La Rabida, an old battered hull of a ship that, fifty-nine years before, had proudly ridden the waves of the Atlantic, following the course Columbus had taken, until it came to rest in Chicago. Its history was a glorious one, for this was the replica of Columbus's flag-ship, the *Santa Maria*. A representative of the Fair had traveled to Barcelona,

Spain, searching for a ship builder who could reproduce the three famous caravels, the *Nina*, the *Pinta*, and the *Santa Maria*. The Spanish government was enthusiastic about the plan for building the ships, but, in financial straits, could pay for only the flag-ship. So the US Government picked up the tab on the *Nina* and the *Pinta*, and, after first being displayed at two Spanish celebrations – in Huelva and Cádiz – commemorating Columbus's departure, they were towed by two US warships along Columbus's route to Havana. Arriving there March 21, they were transferred to Spanish crews and taken to Hampton Roads, Virginia, and thence to New York City where they formed part of the great naval celebration of April 26 to 28. They were then towed through the St. Lawrence River, the Welland Canal, and the Great Lakes, arriving in Chicago July 7 – 147 days out of Cádiz – where, amid high-pitched enthusiasm, they were dedicated two days later. Crowds poured onto them, inspecting the limited space and primitive equipment with which the daring and courageous explorer and his crew sailed on into the setting sun to find a new world. Turned over by the Federal Government, at the close of the Fair, to the Field Columbian Museum, these ships finally became the property of the Chicago Park District and spent most of their remaining days in the spot of their Exposition glory. Attempts to display them elsewhere had proved too much for the crafts, and in the fall of 1918 the *Pinta's* seams parted and she sank. The following February the *Nina* burned to the water's edge. Only the *Santa Maria* stayed afloat, and was rebuilt in 1920 at the cost of \$90,000. Water and the elements took their toll, though, and when she again needed rebuilding twenty-eight years later, the cost was so great that no one could be found to undertake the task. So – a mastless, barren, rotting hulk – she continued to float, in her customary spot, until 1952 when she was quietly disposed of.

Statuary from the Exposition may still be seen in many places throughout the city. One statue of Columbus, fifteen feet high on a twenty-foot pedestal, is near the Chicago Museum of Natural History, at the junction of Columbus Drive and Roosevelt Road. In front of Engine Company 51 at 6345 South Wentworth stands another statue of Columbus – twelve feet high, of hollow copper. Many years ago it was atop the six-story Cold Storage Building, where the roof held the ice skating rink. On July 10, as the Exposition was well underway, this building caught fire and seventeen [exact number continues to be in question] firemen lost their lives as the roof collapsed, depositing them in the midst of the holocaust. In memory of the victims of the only serious conflagration during the Fair's operation, the Directors gave this statue to the Chicago Fire Department. When it eventually needed repairs, at the suggestion of Fire Commissioner Anthony J. Mullaney, the firemen undertook the task of mending and repainting it. Although in its customary spot again [as of 1958], the statue will be moved to a place of honor at the new Fire Department Training School after it is built at 558 DeKoven Street, the site of the [alleged] origin of the Great Chicago Fire of 1871.³ The Statue of the *Republic* (sometimes called "Big Mary") was destroyed. A replica, smaller in size than the original, stands at the Jackson Park public golf course.⁴

Just off US Highways 18 and 151, twenty-five miles from Madison, Wisconsin, is a quaint bit of Scandinavia called "Little Norway." Largest and most imposing of the buildings there is a replica of an ancient Norse church which, though Christian, yet bears on its many gables, carved dragon heads, similar to those appearing on Viking ships to frighten evil spirits. Originally built in Norway, this structure was taken down in sections and transported to Chicago where it was put together again to serve as the Norwegian Building at the World's Columbian Exposition. It was disassembled and moved several times before coming to its present resting place.⁵

Similarly, the Swedish Building and the Ceylon Pavilion were first constructed in their respective countries, taken apart, and shipped in sections to be reassembled at the Fair of '93 – a mute mockery to our twentieth [and twenty-first] Century boast of modern speed of erection by prefabrication. The latter of these two structures, a replica of pre-Christian Buddhist temples found in ruins throughout the island of Ceylon, was moved to the shores of Lake Geneva, Wisconsin where, with an interior abounding in elaborate hand carving, it served as a summer home for several families as its ownership changed throughout the years.

There are undoubtedly many more reminders of the Fair throughout the city; throughout the nation.⁶ But while there is civilization, while there is culture, the World's Columbian Exposition continues to live.⁷

¹ Now called the Chicago History Museum.

² Continuing to operate as such today (2018).

³ Such was the plan in the late 1950s, but the statue is now located at the Chicago Fire Museum, inside and protected from the elements, at 517 Senon Dr., Lemont, Illinois. Whether or not it spent any time at the, now named, Quinn Fire Academy on DeKoven is not known. View it here: <http://www.chicagonow.com/chicago-strange-haunted-history/2012/05/the-columbus-statue-and-the-cold-storage-building-fire-july-10-1893-article-1-in-a-series/> .

⁴ Chris McNamara, Special to the Tribune, "Remnants of the White City," *Chicago Tribune* online, July 2, 2004.

⁵ Little Norway is no longer open to the public. The building has been relocated to Orkdal, Norway; see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Little_Norway,_Wisconsin for more details.

⁶ See examples at <http://www.choosechicago.mobi/content.cfm?page=the-white-city-chicago-1893&menuid=4397&pageid=2110>

⁷ See examples at <http://www.atlasobscura.com/articles/relics-of-the-world-s-fair-chicago>

OTHER RESOURCES, NOT LISTED ABOVE (websites not verified)

Related Local and World History

- *Art Institute of Chicago*, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Art_Institute_of_Chicago
- *Art Institute of Chicago Building*, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Art_Institute_of_Chicago_Building
- *Beaux-Arts Architecture*, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Beaux-Arts_architecture
- *Great Chicago Fire*, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Great_Chicago_Fire
- *Illinois Central Railroad*, <http://www.encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org/pages/627.html>
- *Industrial Age*, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Industrial_Age

General information about the Columbian Exposition

- *The 1893 World Columbian Exposition in Chicago*, <https://www.loc.gov/item/ihas.200198127/>
- *1893 World's Columbian Exposition*, <http://www.nypap.org/preservation-history/1893-worlds-columbian-exposition/>
- *1893 World's Fair*, <https://chicagology.com/columbiaexpo/> (numerous pages at this website)
- *The Dark Side of the Fair*, <https://worldscolumbianexposition.weebly.com/the-dark-side-of-the-fair.html>
- *Fun Facts about the World's Columbian Exposition*, <https://www.fieldmuseum.org/fun-facts-about-worlds-columbian-exposition>
- *A History of the Fair*, <http://xroads.virginia.edu/~ma96/wce/history.html>
- *The Legacy of the Fair*, <http://xroads.virginia.edu/~ma96/wce/legacy.html>
- *Men Who Will Guard the Fair: Col. Edmund Rice and his Columbian Guard*, <https://worldsfairchicago1893.com/2018/07/20/edmund-rice/>
- *Reading: The Clean and Colorless City*, <https://www.chicagoreader.com/chicago/reading-the-clean-and-colorless-city/Content?oid=879315>
- *Water, Typhoid Rates, and the Columbian Exposition in Chicago*, <https://www.publichealth.northwestern.edu/nphr/2015-v2i2/3-rae.html>
- *World's Columbian Exposition*, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World%27s_Columbian_Exposition
- *World's Columbian Exposition*, <http://www.encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org/pages/1386.html>
- *The World's Columbian Exposition at the "White City,"* <http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/nationworld/politics/chi-chicagodays-columbianexposition-story-story.html>
- *World's Columbian Exposition, Chicago, Illinois, USA, May 1, 1893-October 30, 1893*, http://livinghistoryofillinois.com/1893_worlds_columbian_exposition_chicago_illinois.html
- *World's Columbian Exposition of 1893*, <http://columbus.iit.edu>
- *The World's Columbian Exposition's Lasting Effect on Chicago*, <http://www.eiu.edu/historia/2010Wolski.pdf>

Fair Firsts

- *10 Everyday Items Brought to us by the 1893 Chicago World's Fair*, <https://www.toptenz.net/10-everyday-items-brought-us-1893-chicago-worlds-fair.php>
- *1893 Worlds Columbian Exposition*, <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/museums-static/objectretrieval/node/225>
- *Cream of Wheat*, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cream_of_Wheat

- *Electricity at the World's Fair*, https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Popular_Science_Monthly/Volume_44/November_1893/Electricity_at_the_World%27s_Fair_II
- *Fair Firsts*, <https://chicagology.com/columbiaexpo/fairfirsts/>
- *Saying Goodbye to the Navy Pier Ferris Wheel? Here's the History Behind it*, <https://www.dnainfo.com/chicago/20150925/downtown/saying-goodbye-navy-pier-ferris-wheel-heres-history-behind-it/>
- *Small Talk: A Fair to Remember*, <http://www.toyandminiaturemuseum.org/toys/fair-to-remember/>
- *Where the Future Came From*, <https://paleofuture.gizmodo.com/where-the-future-came-from-a-trip-through-the-1893-chi-743942247>

Buildings & locations (some still in existence and, in certain cases, available for public viewing)

- *1893: Chicago and the World's Columbian Exposition*, <https://dcc.newberry.org/collections/chicago-and-the-worlds-columbian-exposition>
- *Arnold, The Court of Honor at the World's Columbian Exposition (1893)*, https://publications.newberry.org/makebigplans/plan_images/arnold-court-honor-world%E2%80%99s-columbian-exposition-1893
- *Chicago History: Children at the 1893 World's Fair*, <https://heathervoight.com/2012/04/18/chicago-history-children-at-the-1893-chicago-worlds-fair/>
- *Cold Storage Building*, <https://chicagology.com/columbiaexpo/fair058/>
- *Cold Storage Building: World's Fair at Chicago*, <http://www.terrastories.com/bearings/cold-storage-bldg>
- *Columbian Exposition – Administration Building*, <https://www.domu.com/chicago/history-map/columbian-exposition-administration-building>
- *July 10, 1893 World's Columbian Exposition Cold Storage Fire Should be the Origin of "Murphy's Law,"* <http://www.chicagonow.com/chicago-history-cop/2015/07/july-10-1893-worlds-columbian-exposition-cold-storage-fire-should-be-the-origin-of-murphys-law/>
- *Lighthouses at the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition*, <http://www.lighthouse Digest.com/Digest/StoryPage.cfm?StoryKey=2893>
- *Midway Plaisance Park*, <https://www.chicagoparkdistrict.com/parks-facilities/Midway-Plaisance-Park/>
- *On its 125th Birthday, What's Left from the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition?* <https://chicago.suntimes.com/entertainment/1893-worlds-fair-what-remains-125th-anniversary/>
- *Remnants of the White City*, <http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/ct-xpm-2004-07-02-0407020064-story.html>
- *Richard Morris Hunt: Administration Building, Chicago, 1893*, <https://digital.lib.umd.edu/worldsfairs/record?pid=umd:998>
- *Take a Virtual Trip to 1893's White City at the Museum of Science and Industry*, <https://chicago.curbed.com/2018/5/14/17351722/columbian-exposition-virtual-tour-white-city>
- *Take a Walking Tour*, <http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/history/ct-the-white-city-20170503-htmlstory.html>
- *What Remains of the 1893 Chicago World's Fair Today*, <https://allthatsinteresting.com/1893-chicago-worlds-fair>
- *World's Columbian Exposition of 1893*, <http://www.architecture.org/learn/resources/architecture-dictionary/entry/worlds-columbian-exposition-of-1893/>

Historical events, photos, and documents connected to the Columbian Exposition

- *The Official Directory of the World's Columbian Exposition*, (e-book) <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=umn.31951001264828h;view=1up;seq=124>
- *Official Guide to the World's Columbian Exposition*, <https://poklib.libguides.com/c.php?g=648949>
- *Petition Signed by Thomas A. Edison*, <https://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/edison-petition>
- *Report of the World's Columbian Commission: Message from the President of the United States*, (e-book) <https://books.google.com/books?id=9zJviDO7L74C&pg=PA163&lpg=PA163&dq=keeping+the+columbian+exposition+clean&source=bl&ots=0v41zYkCOV&sig=SqpWXiYcl86aZT7vZV9ky2DJ8yo&hl=en&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwi-17e4pafdAhVFz1QKHSPHCJAQ6AEwD3oECAEQAAQ#v=onepage&q=keeping%20the%20columbian%20exposition%20clean&f=false>