

# The Tennessee Centennial Exposition of 1897

Teacher's Packet  
The Parthenon  
Nashville, Tennessee



# *Creating a Centennial Celebration*

*Most big projects and events undergo a debate process, with citizens lining up for or against the idea. Usually, the debate centers on money - how to fund the project and whether or not to use public funds (tax dollars). For large projects the city must often seek approval from voters or the state legislature before proceeding. Throughout history, building projects and major events required funding and stirred controversy. Let's look at two examples:*

***The Parthenon in Athens, Greece:*** In ancient Greece, public buildings such as temples were constructed by the city-state or individuals (such as politicians seeking the support of grateful citizens) without tapping into public funds. However, when building began on the Parthenon, the project stirred controversy throughout Greece by using money from the Delian League – the war chest (or fund) for the protection of *all* Greeks. Opposition was so strong among some people that they ridiculed the building as a “deceitful woman” –large and “painted up” in contrast to the quiet dignity of other temples on the Acropolis. However, the construction of the temple continued and the result was an architectural masterpiece and a world treasure.

***The 1897 Tennessee Centennial Exposition in Nashville, Tennessee:*** You may wonder why the correct date for the Tennessee Centennial was 1896 but the Tennessee Centennial Exposition was delayed until 1897. Again, controversy surrounded the project. First proposed in 1892 in a letter to the editor of the *Chattanooga Times* by Nashville attorney, Douglas Anderson, the initial steps toward an exposition were taken in 1893. Despite a statewide economic panic that produced a general gloom among the population, as exposition committee was formed, by-laws established, and meetings set. The people of the state began raising money for the exposition through subscription, and petitioned the Davidson County Court and the Tennessee State Legislature for help. However, as time for the event drew near, the campaign had acquired only \$62,635 in public support, and funding from the legislature stalled. A mass meeting was set for Monday, July 8, 1895, to determine the fate of the exposition. Headlines read *Centennial or Not? Subscribers must decide this question Monday night*. Following a passionate speech by the chairman of the Chamber of Commerce, members of the Nashville City Council announced a decision to let the people vote for or against the proposition to use \$100,000 for the exposition. Voters approved the measure, but with much work still left to be done, the exposition was postponed one year and opened May 1, 1897.

**YES**

**NO**



## *Tennessee Time Line*

- 1779** James Robertson and John Donelson establish a settlement on the bluffs of the Cumberland River.
- 1796** Tennessee admitted to the union as the sixteenth state.
- 1806** Nashville incorporated into a town.
- 1812** War of 1812 begins  
First legislature meets in Nashville.
- 1828** Tennessean Andrew Jackson elected President of the United States (served 1829-1837).
- 1838** Cherokees pass through Tennessee on the Trail of Tears.
- 1844** Tennessean James K. Polk elected President of the United States (served 1845-1849).
- 1859** Tennessee State Capitol (designed by William Strickland) completed.
- 1861** Civil War begins.  
Tennessee is the last southern state to secede from the Union.
- 1862** Federal troops occupy Nashville.  
African American troops build Ft. Negley.
- 1864** Union troops win the Battle of Nashville.
- 1865** Civil War ends.  
Tennessean Andrew Johnson becomes the 17<sup>th</sup> President of the United States following the assassination of Abraham Lincoln. Johnson served 1865-1869.  
The Thirteenth Amendment (Emancipation) was ratified by Congress.
- 1880** Centennial of the founding of the city of Nashville.
- 1896** Centennial of Tennessee statehood; Centennial Exposition delayed one year due to financial difficulties.
- 1897** Tennessee Centennial Exposition  
May 1, Opening Ceremonies  
May 9, Formal Opening of the Parthenon  
June 11, President William McKinley visits the exposition.  
October 30, Closing Day Celebration.
- 1902** Centennial grounds acquired by the city of Nashville.  
Establishment of the Nashville Public Park System with the Centennial grounds as the city's first public park.
- 1917-1918** World War I.

- 1920** Tennessee establishes its unique place in the history of Women's Suffrage as the 36<sup>th</sup> state to ratify the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, giving women the right to vote.
- 1920-1931** Reconstruction of the Nashville Parthenon
- 1925** The Grand Ole Opry begins.
- 1927-1931** Cowan Collection arrives in Nashville and is assembled at Peabody College and the Centennial Club until completion of the Parthenon.
- 1929** The Great Depression begins.
- 1930** Opening of the Parthenon; Cowan Collection transferred to the Parthenon.
- 1941** Attack on Pearl Harbor; United States enters World War II.
- 1943** The Grand Ole Opry moves to the Ryman Auditorium.
- 1945** End of World War II.
- 1950** Capital Records is the first major record company to relocate its Director of Country Music in Nashville, Tennessee.
- 1954** Brown vs. Board of Education declares segregation as unconstitutional.
- 1962** Metropolitan form of government approved by Nashville voters.
- 1964** Congress passes Civil Rights Act.
- 1986** Two-year Parthenon restoration begins.
- 1988** The Parthenon reopens.
- 1990** The Athena statue by Alan LeQuire is unveiled at the Parthenon.
- 1996** Tennessee Bicentennial Celebration  
Parthenon exterior restoration underway.
- 2001** Exterior restoration of the Parthenon completed.
- 2002** Athena statue gilding completed.

*Mark Your Calendars!!!  
For an exciting new production*

**2008** *The 1897 Tennessee Centennial Exposition is the setting for a brand new production of Tchaikovsky's holiday classic, **The Nutcracker** performed by the Nashville Ballet.*

*Performances at TPAC:*

*Friday: December 13<sup>th</sup> at 8:00 pm*

*Friday: December 19<sup>th</sup> at 2:00 pm and 7:00 pm*

*Saturdays: December 14<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> at 2:00 pm  
and 7:00 pm*

*Sundays: December 15<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> at 2:00 pm  
and 7:00 pm*

*Music by **Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky***

*Choreography by **Paul Vasterling***

## *COMMEMORATION*

Commemoration is defined by *The American Heritage Dictionary* as the act of honoring the memory of a person, place, or event with a ceremony. Commemoration can be expressed in a variety of ways:

- Preservation or restoration of a significant structure, such as the Hermitage.
- Reconstruction of a vanished site, such as Fort Nashboro.
- Erection of a monument to a person, place, or event, such as the Vietnam Memorial.
- Preservation of a significant site, such as Stones River Battlefield.
- Celebration of significant people, such as Dr. Martin Luther King Day.
- Celebration of significant events, such as the 1897 Tennessee Centennial.

Commemoration is linked to *memory* and *identity* for both the individual and the group. Throughout history, commemoration efforts pointed backward to reinforce cultural values and forward to encourage purposeful progress. In America, the pioneers (ordinary people embracing both traditional values and courageous expectation for the future) emerged as a powerful historical symbol and a central figure in national commemoration efforts. Moving into unknown territory, the pioneers struggled constantly to overcome hardship, to improve their circumstances, and to build a brighter future. The characteristics embodied by the pioneer and the “self-made man” have been embraced by generations of American politicians, entrepreneurs, and others.

Commemorative efforts in America struggled for public acceptance until the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Even historic buildings such as George Washington’s Presidential Mansion in Philadelphia or Thomas Jefferson’s home, Monticello, were torn down or allowed to decay for decades before any attempt was made to save them. Throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century, national leaders complained that the country’s sacred days such as July 4<sup>th</sup> had been allowed to decline into boisterous holidays for workers with little attention to the day’s “true meaning.”

One Civil War historian noted that the Civil War changed America’s concept of commemoration by drawing “thousands of ordinary people into dramatic episodes of tragedy and sacrifice.” In the decades following the war grieving Americans sought public acknowledgement of soldier’s sacrifices through the establishment of monuments and the setting aside of national battlefields such as Shiloh, Chickamauga, Gettysburg, and Vicksburg.

Increased commemoration efforts were not limited to this nation or to dramatic events such as war. Cities and nations around the world also used commemorative dates to celebrate their own history and to acknowledge their progress. By the 1870s, cities around the world vied for the most spectacular of commemorative events – a world’s fair. Vienna, Paris, and London hosted international expositions which promoted host cities and celebrated society’s technological advances. In the United States, Philadelphia set off a new round of exposition frenzy by hosting America’s Centennial Exposition of 1876. Among the American cities to follow Philadelphia’s lead in hosting expositions were Atlanta (1883, 1887, and 1895), Louisville (1883), New Orleans (1884), Chicago (1893), Nashville (1897), Buffalo (1901), and St. Louis (1904).

Historians cite a number of reasons for the appeal of hosting giant expositions during this period. Historian John Bodnar advances the notion that during the years following the Civil War, these fairs “speeded the process of reunification while preserving something of regional pride.” In addition, expositions promoted local economies and the special features and level of progress of the host city. Third, expositions were used by community leaders to encourage progressive notions for improving society through education, improved hygiene, planning, and institutional reform. Finally, the expositions celebrated technological advancement of society from the savagery of the nation’s past to the embracing of “modern civilization.”

Organizers of Nashville’s 1897 exposition envisioned the event as a way to lift the city and state out of the economic doldrums that remained from the 1893 depression. In addition, the event promoted the city’s potential as a leader for an educational and commercial revival in the New South, while paying homage to the memory of the Old South. The exposition buildings, monuments, sham battles, parades, and special days blended old and new to promote the city and state’s noble past and promising future.

**Sources:**

1. *The Official History of the Tennessee Centennial Exposition, Nashville 1897*, Herman Justi, editor (Nashville, TN: Centennial Committee on Publications, 1898).
2. John Bodnar, *Remaking America: Public Memory, Commemoration, and Patriotism in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992): 27-33.
3. Don Doyle, *Nashville In the New South, 1880-1930* (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1985): 3, 143-149.
4. Michael Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993).



## *Overview of the 1897 Tennessee Centennial Exposition*

Today, the Parthenon (rebuilt in 1931 as a permanent structure) and Lake Watauga are the only remaining evidence of the Tennessee Centennial Exposition of 1897. Over 100 years ago, visitors strolling the grounds of today's Centennial Park marveled at grand structures, played in Vanity Fair, stood awe-struck by the sight of the Parthenon, and gasped in amazement at the nightly display of gleaming white buildings outlined against the sky by thousands of electric lights.

Trains and trolleys brought visitors to the park and deposited riders at terminals on the north and southeast entrances. Visitors entering the main gates on the south (near the present-day entrance to the park) passed Lake Katherine. Three additional lakes dotted the landscape: Lake Watauga offered gondola rides and could be crossed by an copy of the exotic Rialto Bridge; Lily Lake (now the site of the park's sunken flower garden northwest of the Parthenon); and Lake Sevier (to the east, behind the present-day Centennial Sportsplex). In addition, shade arbors, statues (including a large statue of Athena outside the east entrance of the Parthenon), and fountains graced the park grounds.

More than a dozen major exhibit buildings comprised the core of what was nicknamed the "White City" (recollecting the famous White City of the Chicago World's Fair a few years previous). The buildings located in the center of the park were devoted to civic pride. These buildings included the U.S. Government Building, the History Building, the Auditorium, and the two most impressive structures: the Nashville Parthenon which served as the Art Pavilion and the Shelby County Pyramid.

Buildings located along the eastern flank of the central grounds included Minerals and Forestry, the Negro Building, and the Machinery Building. The large Agriculture Building fronted by cotton and tobacco fields marked the northern boundary of the central park area. Continuing south along the western flank of the central grounds, visitors saw buildings devoted to Transportation, Education and Hygiene, and to Commerce, as well as the Children's Building, the Woman's Building and a club house for gentlemen.

Exhibition buildings were also provided by states (including New York, Texas, and Alabama), cities, such as Knoxville, and fraternal organizations such as Woodsmen of the World, Knights of Pythias, and the Red Men (housed in an elaborate wigwam). A number of popular restaurants also dotted the grounds. The tents of military personnel

and fields for athletic events and battle reenactments lined the eastern edge of the park, at the site of today's Centennial Sportsplex.

A section of the park called *Vanity Fair* (west of Lily Lake) was the most popular area for children. Loaded with attractions and rides, this part of the exposition grounds included the mysteries of the Moorish Palace, a Cuban Village, and the Streets of Cairo. Visitors could view silent motion pictures at the Edison Mirage, visit a gold mine, see an animal show, or relive the Civil War at the Cyclorama of the Battle of Gettysburg. Children of all ages enjoyed the carousel and other rides – from the camels in Cairo to water rides, and a giant see-saw that lifted riders high above the Exposition grounds.

Imagine the excitement of visitors – most from rural areas – who experienced for the first time the thrill of electric lights, the novelty of foreign lands, and the pride of state and national accomplishments.

*OPENING DAY:  
TENNESSEE CENTENNIAL*

**May 1, 1897**

Nashvillians and visitors to the city awoke to gray, overcast skies on the long-awaited opening day of the Tennessee Centennial Exposition on May 1, 1897. However, by 9 am when introductory speeches began, the clouds parted, revealing a brilliant sun. Excited crowds filled the park anticipating the moment when President William McKinley opened the exposition from far-away Washington, D.C. It was 1897 high-technology.

At noon (1 pm Washington time) a group of Tennesseans crowded into McKinley's White House office and watched as the President pressed a button sending an instant telegraph signal at Nashville. On the Centennial grounds a cannon fired and the exposition crowd erupted in a giant cheer. Nashville telegraphed a return signal to the President: ***“People wild. The gun went off all right. Bands playing and whistles going. Everybody shaking hands.”***

In an effort to keep the ceremonies simple, exposition organizers avoided a large parade, but allowed a small procession by one of the fraternal organizations, the Knights of the Ancient Essenic Order. Throughout the remainder of the day crowds roamed the park grounds and visited the exhibits and the dedications of buildings including the Knoxville Building and the Children's Building (erected with contributions from Tennessee school children). Although all major buildings opened that day, the formal opening of several, including the Women's Building (May 3) the Parthenon (May 9), and the Government Building (May 17) occurred over the following weeks.

One of the highlights of the opening day festivities was the evening illumination of buildings throughout the park. As in the Chicago World's Fair, electric lights outlined all major structures. At 7:00 a signal was given and an arc of lights illuminated the Centennial Exposition to the ooohs and aaahs of the happy crowds unaccustomed to large displays of electric lights. As the band played, the evening was topped by a fireworks display.

## CENTENNIAL CALENDAR OF EVENTS

*The celebration honoring Tennessee's Centennial took place one hundred years ago, in 1896. However, the Tennessee Centennial Exhibition, delayed one year (see handout entitled "Creating a Centennial Celebration") ran from May 1 to October 31, 1897. The exposition included a full calendar of events with certain days set aside for building dedication ceremonies or to honor specific events or groups. Below are some of the most important Centennial calendar events.*

May 1<sup>st</sup> (Saturday) - **Opening Day Ceremonies**  
May 3<sup>rd</sup> Formal opening of the Women's Building  
May 4<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> Hermitage Convocation  
May 5<sup>th</sup> First Children's Day  
May 6<sup>th</sup> First flight of Barnard's Airship  
May 7<sup>th</sup> U.S. Art Day  
May 9<sup>th</sup> **Formal opening of the Parthenon**  
Mother's Convocation  
May 12<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> Equal Suffrage Convocation  
May 15<sup>th</sup> Children's Day  
May 17<sup>th</sup> Formal opening of Government Building  
May 17<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> Women's Musical Congress  
May 21<sup>st</sup> Opening of Blue Grotto  
May 24<sup>th</sup> Kentucky Day  
Victoria Day Convocation  
June 1<sup>st</sup> **Tennessee Day**  
**Governor's Day**  
June 11<sup>th</sup> **President McKinley Day**  
June 14<sup>th</sup> Fisk University Day  
June 17<sup>th</sup> Knoxville Day  
June 22<sup>nd</sup>-24<sup>th</sup> United Confederate Veterans Days  
June 24<sup>th</sup> Confederate Day  
July 1<sup>st</sup> Pan American Congress  
July 10<sup>th</sup> Children's Carnival  
July 23<sup>rd</sup>-24<sup>th</sup> Cowboy's League Days  
August 9<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> Military Week  
August 12<sup>th</sup> Custer Massacre Reenactment  
August 19<sup>th</sup> Texas Negro's Day  
September 6<sup>th</sup> Labor Day  
September 11<sup>th</sup> Nashville Day  
September 14<sup>th</sup> Memphis Day  
September 30<sup>th</sup> Kate Kirkman Day  
October 11<sup>th</sup> Vanderbilt Day  
October 21<sup>st</sup> Director General's (E.C. Lewis) Day  
October 22<sup>nd</sup> Farmer's Day  
October 28<sup>th</sup> John W. Thomas Day  
October 30<sup>th</sup> Official Closing Celebration





## *Who's Who In the Tennessee Centennial Exposition*

### **Arion- Centennial High Wire Performer**

Arion amazed Centennial visitors each night as he walked, without a net, across a live electric wire while sparks shot from his shoes and clothing. As an encore, Arion rode a bicycle forward and backward long the live wire high above the crowd. On the second night of his performance, the daredevil fell and suffered severe burns. Despite this setback, and in true “the show must go on” tradition, Arion continued to perform throughout the six months of the Exposition. Later, Arion died while performing similar feats at another fair.

### **Theodore Cooley – Chief of the Department of Fine Arts**

Cooley appointed subcommittees of the Art Department, secured works of art from around the world for inclusion in the Parthenon galleries, and prepared an art catalog for the 1897 Exposition. His artistic expertise and skills as an administrator are evident in the size of the Parthenon’s artistic collection for the Exposition – almost 1,200 works of art.

### **Sara Ward Conley – Architect of the Women’s Building**

A Nashville artist trained in Europe, Conley was selected as architect for the Women’s Building for the Tennessee Centennial Exposition. The design of this popular building included a grand stairway, parlor, library, model kitchen, and individual rooms furnished by women from various cities and organizations. This was Conley’s last major project. In late 1897 she was stricken with Typhoid and confined to a wheelchair for the

remainder of her life. However, as a teacher she continued to be a force in Nashville for almost fifty years.

### **James M. Cowan – Art Collector**

Born in Mississippi and raised in Tennessee, Cowan became a successful businessman and gained a reputation as a collector of American art. In 1897 Cowan, director of the Armor Drill Corps of Chicago, was invited to bring these one hundred young girls to perform at the Tennessee Centennial Exposition. Impressed by the warm welcome extended by Nashvillians and by the high caliber of art housed in the Parthenon during the Exposition, Cowan later donated sixty-three paintings from his vast collection to Nashville during the rebuilding of the Parthenon in the 1920s. Today, the James M. Cowan Gallery houses the Parthenon's permanent art collection.

### **Richard Hill – Chief of the Negro Department**

In his capacity as Chief of the Negro Department, Hill had the responsibility of overseeing development of the Negro Building and the largest-ever display of African-American life and achievement. As educator and the son of one of Nashville's most famous fiddlers, Hill demonstrated wisdom, creativity, and skill in developing one of the Exposition's most popular exhibit areas.

### **Kate Kirkman – President of the Women's Board**

Mrs. Van Leer (Kate) Kirkman was the third president of the Women's Board for the Centennial Exposition. Taking the reigns of the troubled board, Kirkman skillfully guided the committees and programs, creating one of the Exposition's most successful and admired exhibits. She was honored by the Exposition on September 30, 1897 with "Kate Kirkman Day," which featured an elaborate flower parade.

### **Major E.C. Lewis – Director General, Tennessee Centennial Exposition**

Appointed by Major John Thomas to fill this crucial role, Major Lewis, despite poor health, was credited with the successful creation of what was labeled "a magnificent White City" on the Exposition grounds.

### **William McKinley – President of the United States (1897-1901)**

President McKinley opened the Tennessee Centennial Exposition from his White House office in Washington, D.C. by flipping the electric switch that signaled Nashville to set off the canon announcing the official

start of the six-month fair. McKinley later attended the Exposition when he was honored with William McKinley Day (June 11<sup>th</sup>). While attending a similar event at the Pan American Exposition in Buffalo, New York on September 6, 1901, McKinley was shot by Leon Czolgosz. McKinley's death a week later propelled Theodore Roosevelt into the presidency.

**Major John W. Thomas – President, Tennessee Centennial Exposition**

The unanimous choice of the Board of Directors, Major Thomas displayed leadership and skill in his management of Exposition finances and in setting high standards for all aspects of the six-month festival.

**Booker T. Washington – African-American Leader of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century**

President of Tuskegee Normal College in Alabama, and noted author and public speaker, Washington addressed Exposition crowds on September 22, 1897 – a day set aside to celebrate Emancipation. In his speech, Washington encouraged unity and reminded both races of their common destiny.

# *Vanity Fair*

## *Tennessee Centennial Exposition*

The most popular area of the Tennessee Centennial Exposition was called *Vanity Fair*. Located in the northwest corner of the exposition grounds (site of today's HCA Data Processing building), this area included rides, shows, and many of the exposition's unique attractions. Touted in the *Official Guide to the Tennessee Centennial* as a "place replete with strange people, strange sights, and strange noises," Vanity Fair introduced visitors to a wide range of new experiences.

The Edison Mirage at the entrance to Vanity Fair offered photographs of the fair and gave visitors a glimpse of the latest inventions in photography as well as a chance to view any of seven silent films which were shown simultaneously throughout the Edison exhibit space.

After viewing the Edison Mirage, a sharp turn to the right led visitors past exhibits featuring the log cabins of Abraham Lincoln and Jefferson Davis to the gates "Streets of Cairo." This replica of a Cairo bazaar featured picturesque buildings and shops packed with trinkets, jewelry, and Egyptian textiles and clothing. Visitors could take a camel ride or see a wide range of unusual sights including "coochee coochee girls" and a mosque from which a Muezzin chanted daily prayers at noon and sunset.

After leaving the Streets of Cairo, guests entered the gates of the Cuban Village. This quaint area featured lively Cuban music, adobe houses and small shops. Escalating problems in their homeland and problems stemming from a theft by the director of the Cuban Village, forced most Cuban participants to leave midway through the summer to return to Cuba.

Vanity Fair's central thoroughfare, called Broadway, featured Gorman and Boone's Wild animal Arena and an ostrich farm. Guests could also visit a southern plantation, pan for gold in the "Colorado Rockies," tour a Chinese village, wander through a maze of mirrors, or relive the Battle of Gettysburg in the enormous Cyclorama.

Braver souls could venture into "Night & Morning Café" where they were greeted by waiters and waitresses dressed in mourning clothing and ushered into a room in which meals were served on coffins and the surrounding walls featured terrifying scenes from *Dante's Inferno*. Meanwhile, visitors to the Moorish Palace could pay an extra 10¢ to enter a Chamber of Horrors.

Rides included a carousel, a Phantom Swing, and The Chutes water ride. Another popular ride was the Giant See-Saw which lifted guests to a height of over 200 feet. When the see-saw broke down one evening, stranded guests were forced to spend the night suspended in the air.

Vanity Fair offered visitors almost 30 exciting rides and attractions and easily lived up to its reputation for adventure, thrills, and unique experiences.

## *The Parthenon*



Today's magnificent Parthenon is actually Nashville's second full-scale replica of the Athenian temple. The first Nashville Parthenon was constructed in 1897 for the Centennial Exposition and was constructed from wood, brick and plaster as a temporary building. Designed to house an international art exhibition, the building also provided a visual reinforcement of Nashville's reputation as the *Athens of the South* (so-called because of the city's many colleges). The building's exterior replicated the ancient temple while the interior was divided into three great halls displaying 1,175 works of art from around the world. Outside the Parthenon a 42' (including base) statue of Pallas Athena stood before the eastern entrance to the temple.

The Parthenon remained standing after the other exposition buildings were removed at the conclusion of the fair. By 1921, the city's Parks Board, faces with the increasing decay of the landmark, authorized replacement of the building. In the new design special attention was given to recreating the interior as well as the exterior of the original temple in Athens.

On May 31, 1931, the Parthenon reopened to the public attracting 10,000 guests from forty-six states and twelve foreign countries during its first month. A major renovation of the building occurred in 1987 with the addition of the basement entrance, museum gift store and visitor facilities, and the expansion of basement galleries and offices. In 1990, the massive 42' statue of Athena by sculptor Alan LeQuire was unveiled. A massive restoration of the building's exterior occurred from the mid '90s to 2001, and in 2005 gilding was completed on the Athena statue.



## *and the Pyramid*

Beside the Parthenon (on the site of today's circular parking lot for Parthenon museum guests) a colorful Pyramid of Cheops represented the city of Memphis during the exposition. Like the adjacent Athenian temple, the Memphis pyramid identified the sponsoring city with an ancient heritage. Measuring one-sixth the size of the original in Egypt, the imposing structure displayed objects relating to the city of Memphis and Shelby County as well as the art and architecture of ancient Egypt.

## *The Woman's Building 1897 Tennessee Centennial Exposition*

Propelled by the efforts of the Ladies Hermitage Association and enthusiastically supported by women across the state and around the nation, the Woman's Building became a major attraction at the 1897 Tennessee Centennial Exposition.

In an era of few female architects, a local artist, Sara Ward Conley, designed the Woman's Building. The structure's exterior was a modified version of Andrew Jackson's home, The Hermitage. Inside, the building abandoned the typical exposition layout of a main hall and mezzanine dotted with exhibit booths, in favor of a series of distinct rooms decorated by various women's organizations as well as Tennessee towns and counties and other cities and states. The exhibit rooms showcased domestic decoration and modern appliances, and the presence of a crude log cabin behind the Woman's Building reinforced the progress of women since the pioneer days.

The first floor included an entrance hall and rotunda with a grand stairway to the second floor individual exhibit rooms, a library, a model kitchen, a Patent Room demonstrating women's ingenuity, an Assembly Hall, and a Decorative Arts Room. The Colonial Sitting Room (sponsored by Maury County) was a reproduction of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's home which had served as headquarters for General George Washington. Following the Exposition, the furnishings from this room moved to Mount Vernon. The Ladies Hermitage Association honored Tennessee presidents with "The Three Presidents Room." Other second floor rooms included Sumner County's Sycamore Room, the New York Room, the Georgia Art Studio, the Hermitage Room, the Chicago Room, and rooms decorated by the women of Chattanooga, Marion County, and Murfreesboro. Outside the Woman's Building, a magnificent sculptured fountain entitled "The Genius of Electricity" by Moretti, amazed visitors with a unique combination of water and electric torches.

The Woman's Building also hosted feminist events such as an Equal Suffrage Convocation (May 12-14). Jane Addams, founder of Chicago's Hull House, addressed the Social Science Convocation (October 8-9), while a meeting of the National Council of Women (October 25-27) features speakers such as Susan B. Anthony.

Such "radical" events contrasted starkly with the presentation of "traditional" feminine roles epitomized by the "Mother's Convocation" (May 11) and "Kate Kirkman Day" (September 30), honoring the president of the Woman's Board. In typical Victorian language *The Official History of the Tennessee Centennial* touts this event, featuring a baby show, a flower parade, and a ball as exemplary of "the three great missions in a woman's life – (as) the mother, the artist...and the belle."

## *The Negro Building 1897 Tennessee Centennial Exposition*

Exposition organizers were especially proud of the Negro Building honoring the New South's goals for fostering racial harmony and self-help through industrial education. The building's popular exhibits offered visitors an opportunity to witness the contributions of Blacks throughout history and the level of progress of Blacks since the end of the Civil War and slavery. In language that today's audience would find offensive, *The Official History of the Centennial Exposition* boasted the Negro Building was "the most complete display of this character ever made."

Richard Hill, a respected Nashville educator and son of a slave, was named as Chief of the Negro Department. African-Americans from throughout the state and around the nation combined hard work and ingenuity to create one of the Exposition's featured attractions. In a move toward greater racial harmony, progressive Southern whites donated \$12,000 toward completion of the Negro Building, while railroads offered free transportation and "equal" railway accommodations for African-American exhibitors.

Prominently located across Lake Watauga from the Parthenon, the enormous (250 ft. in frontage) Negro Building was designed in the Spanish Renaissance style. Inside, a main floor and a mezzanine contained 300 exhibits and a restaurant providing African-Americans with "separate but equal" dining facilities whose popularity also attracted whites as the only integrated restaurant on the Exposition grounds.

Exhibits included prominent displays by the American Missionary Association, the Perry Savings Bank, Chattanooga Public Schools, Fisk University, Meharry University, Tuskegee Institute, and a collection of African-American art from Topeka, Kansas. The Negro Building captured 58 Exposition awards including 3 gold medals, 5 silver medals, 19 bronze medals, and 31 certificates of achievement. During the six-month Exposition, organizers set aside eight "special days" to honor African-Americans, including Fisk University Day (June 14), Texas Negro's Day (August 19), National Race Council Day (Sept. 1 & 2), and Meharry Alumni Day (Oct. 16). Prominent speakers at these events included Booker T. Washington, and W.E.B. DuBois. The exhibits, speakers, and special days contributed to a new awareness of Black achievement and potential in Tennessee and throughout the nation.

*"Negro, Black or African-American?"*

*The 21<sup>st</sup> century student may find it awkward to use the term "Negro" in relation to the African-American building and exhibits for the Centennial Exposition. Keep in mind that many words evolve over time. In the 1890s and into the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Negro was the proper term, replaced during the Civil Rights era with the term, Blacks. By the late 20<sup>th</sup> century most Americans had settled on the term African-American.*

# *THE CHILDREN'S BUILDING*

## *1897 TENNESSEE CENTENNIAL EXPOSITION*

As plans for the Tennessee Centennial Exposition progressed, school children from throughout the state contributed their pennies and nickels and worked vigorously to collect money for construction of a Children's Building and bell tower on the Exposition grounds.

The building featured displays of children's art and handiwork demonstrating the potential of a "well trained child." Another popular feature was the model kindergarten highlighting a growing trend in American education toward early childhood training. The working kindergarten (an idea that originated in Germany) was attended by area children, allowing Exposition guests to observe a functioning classroom and consider the potential value of establishing kindergartens in their own communities. Such advances in education were reinforced by a popular lecture series focusing on progressive notions for educational reform, child labor reform, and ways for combating the problem of growing juvenile delinquency.

### **Follow-up Activities:**

- 1) The Children's Building placed a great deal of focus on educational reform and ways to improve education. Ask your students to create posters that could improve your school by encouraging greater tolerance, better study habits, school safety and cleanliness, improved reading skills, encouraging parental involvement, or developing life skills such as teamwork.
- 2) News Teams: Divide students into three interview teams exploring progressive educational efforts implemented by Metro Schools. Each team will report on one of the following educational initiatives after researching the program and interviewing at least one administrator for the program and one principal or teacher from a school that implemented the program:

#### **The Big Picture School**

#### **9<sup>th</sup> Grade Academies**

#### **Alignment Nashville**

A good place to start your research is with the MNPS website.

Your questions can follow the "who, what, when, where, how formula.

Some examples of questions include

Who originated the program?

What schools are involved in the program?

Was additional teacher training required to implement the program?

What role do teachers, parents and students play in the program's success?

Had this program been tried in other school systems?

How does the program work?

What evidence (improved grades, lower drop-out rates, higher over-all

School performance, improved discipline) indicates success?

## *Let There Be Lights!!!!!!!*

### *Fireworks:*

The A.L. Due Fireworks Company of Cincinnati, Ohio was responsible for Centennial Exposition fireworks displays presented every Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday evenings, as well as for special events such as the visit by President and Mrs. McKinley. Festivities began with a “bomb signal” as the lights on the east side of Lake Watauga were turned off. The final step was the lighting of the great wheel of fire which set off bursts of white rockets that illuminated the night skies to the cheers of the crowds.

Daytime crowds, especially children, also enjoyed daytime fireworks. The sound of explosions overhead sent children scurrying into open fields to capture inflated balloon-like animals that descended slowly to the ground.



### *Electric lights:*

During the 1890s only the wealthy could afford the luxury of electric lights. Imagine what a thrill it was for visitors to the Exposition to witness the nightly illumination of the Centennial grounds. Over ten thousand small lights outlined the Exposition buildings surrounding Lake Watauga were simultaneously turned on each evening at dusk. The novelty of electric lights and the beauty of classical architecture reflected in the shimmering waters of the lake creating never-to-be-forgotten scenes for fairgoers.

*The Tennessee Centennial Exposition*  
*May 1-October 30, 1897      Nashville, Tennessee*

## **Fun Facts**

- The celebration which honored Tennessee's 100<sup>th</sup> birthday created a "city within a city" with the erection of the fairgrounds for the Tennessee Centennial. The Centennial had its own police and fire departments and other services separate from greater Nashville. A Centennial city ordinance also allowed the selling of beer on the grounds during the fair.
- Admission to the Centennial grounds was 50¢ for adults during the day and 25¢ at night. Children's admission was 25¢. Individuals could also purchase season tickets allowing multiple visits to the fair.
- Prior to transformation into the Centennial Exposition grounds, the site had been known as West Side Park and included a horse race track where the present-day Lake Watauga is located.
- On display was one of the oldest trees in the world, estimated to be 600 years old – a mere sapling when Christopher Columbus landed in the New World. The tree measured 10 feet across at the base and was removed from the Exposition grounds when the Centennial closed on October 30, 1897.
- One popular ride, called The Chutes, remained for several years on the grounds after the closing of the Centennial. People boarded a boat at the top of the ride and slid down a steep incline to the water below. It was described by visitors as a "dizzy whirl through space" and everyone talked of shooting the chutes!
- There were 13 public water faucets scattered throughout the grounds. Ice was packed around the water pipes to keep the water cool. In those pre-air-conditioning days, guests could also cool themselves by strolling or sitting beneath two centrally located arbors or by relaxing on the wide porches of several exhibition halls.
- The danger of some Exposition attractions was impressed upon fairgoers when the airship, flying at an altitude of 2,000 ft. exploded on June 9<sup>th</sup>.
- Most attractions and rides in Vanity Fair charged admission, with prices ranging from 10¢ for the Chamber of Horrors to 50¢ for the Cyclorama. If a visitor had entered all of the attractions offered in Vanity Fair, the total cost would be \$5.90.
- Total attendance for the six months of the Exposition was 1,786,714 visitors. The high attendance day was John Thomas Day on Oct. 28<sup>th</sup> (63,055 visitors).

## *Suggestions for follow-up activities:*

1. Write a diary entry describing an imaginary visit to the 1897 Tennessee Centennial Exposition.
2. Draw a picture or design a class mural of the 1897 Centennial Exposition.
3. Write a short (five minute) speech which you would have given for the opening ceremonies at one of the following Centennial events:
  - a. The opening ceremony for the Centennial
  - b. The opening of the Women's Building.
  - c. The opening of the Children's Building.
  - d. The opening of the Negro Building.
  - e. An introduction of President McKinley.
4. After reading about the 1897 Tennessee Centennial Exposition as presented in this material, what values and image of the state do you believe Tennesseans tried to project? How do their selection of exhibits, events, buildings, and programs reflect these values and images? Do you think the organizers of the Centennial Exposition met their goals?
5. Plan a photographic display of five different commemorative efforts in your area. These may include historic homes, monuments, buildings, street or park names, etc. For each commemorative effort, answer the following questions:
  - What is being commemorated? (person or event)
  - When was this commemoration established?
  - Was the main commemorative event a one-time ceremony or is it an annual event?
  - Whose efforts led to the commemorative event? Did a group, individual, organization, or government initiate the original commemorative effort?
  - What was the *larger* goal of the commemorative effort? (Patriotism, pride, unity, progress, social control, etc.).
  - How has the event changed over time?
6. Commemorative efforts are often controversial. Explore the controversies surrounding the design and construction of two familiar monuments: the Washington Monument and the Vietnam Memorial in Washington, D.C. What were the controversies surrounding each? Who opposed the commemorative effort or design and why? Were there design changes? What was the initial public reaction to the completed monument? Has the passage of time changed negative opinions about these monuments?