

Overview of the 1933 Century of Progress World's Fair

By Amy Walker

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The 1933 Century of Progress World's Fair was the second time that Chicago had hosted this international

event. The first, in 1893, celebrated the 400th anniversary of Columbus' landing in America and is when America's leading architects developed what has been dubbed "The White City"—a classically inspired new architectural style for the United States. By 1933, Chicago was celebrating the 100th anniversary of its incorporation by showcasing industrial, cultural, and scientific accomplishments from around the world to the over 48 million visitors to the fair. Initially the fair was only to run from May through November of 1933, but due to its popularity and the money it generated, it reopened from May through October in 1934.

The fairgrounds were located on 427 acres south of downtown on the western shore of Lake Michigan and were awash in color, thanks to the efforts of Joseph Urban, director of color for the fair—often referred to as "Rainbow City."

There were attractions for everyone. Standard buildings like the Horticultural Building, the Hall of Science, and the Court of States (where the Indiana murals were on display) were amidst the glitz and glamour of the Casino and Hollywood exhibits.

There were pavilions from around the world, including a Mayan temple and the Black Forest, Mexican, and Tunisian villages, along with buildings for many American manufacturers like Firestone, Sears-Roebuck, and Walgreens. Chrysler even had a test track next to their building.

Prohibition was repealed between the two runs of the fair, so in 1934 Miller's High Life, Hiram Walker, and Schlitz all had restaurants on the grounds.

The Midway was a popular destination with its games, rides and acts like fan-dancer Sally Rand. However, it was the Sky Ride that dominated all views of the fair. There were two 628 foot tall towers (64 stories) set 1850 feet apart. At 210 feet up (23 stories) there were steel cables connecting the towers with ten "rocket cars" suspended from the cables that would travel between the towers. Each car weighed 6200 pounds and held 36 passengers.

To see images from the Century of Progress World's Fair from the Chicago Historical Society: <http://www.chicagohs.org/history/century.html>



Figure 1: Chrysler Building
Photo from the Chicago Historical Society