



*Bird's eye view of the Columbian Exposition, 1893. (Rand, McNally & Co., 1898). The Ferris Wheel may be seen in the background, on the Midway. The very large building in the foreground is the Manufactures and Liberal Arts Building. An elevated railway circled the grounds and there was a moving sidewalk on the pier jutting into the lake (left foreground). Of all the hundreds of structures and attractions, little remains today. The Fine Arts Building (far right) became the Field Columbian Museum and is today the Museum of Science and Industry. The lagoon and wooded island and a gilded replica of the Statue of The Republic remain in Jackson Park.*

# Chicago Comes of Age

## The World's Columbian Exposition and The Birth of Field Museum

By Donald Collier

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zens were beginning to look beyond the prairies to the wider world. This turning outward and the desire to bring the wonders of the world to Chicago were stimulated by the Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia in 1876, the International Exposition in Paris in 1878, and by the ambitious plans for the Universal Exposition to be held in Paris the following year.

On July 22, 1889, Chicago's Mayor DeWitt C. Cregier appointed a committee to organize and promote the Exposition. A company, "The World's Columbian Exposition of 1892," was formed and chartered by the State of Illinois. Within two months \$5,000,000 was pledged on stock issued by the company.<sup>1</sup> By this time, New York, Washington, and St. Louis were also competing to hold the Fair, and the

four cities laid their claims before Congress. After three months of debate in committees and on the floors of the House and the Senate, Chicago won out. On April 25, 1890, the Congress passed "An Act to provide for celebrating the 400th anniversary of the discovery of America by Christopher Columbus, by holding an International Exposition of Arts, Industries and Manufactures, and products of the soil, mine and sea, in the City of Chicago." The act set May 1, 1893, as the opening date, although providing for dedication of the Exposition in October, 1892, and authorized \$1,500,000 for the United States exhibit.

The first public appeal for extensive anthropological exhibits at the Exposition, which would serve as the nucleus

<sup>1</sup> By April, 1890, the subscriptions exceeded \$10,000,000.

for a permanent museum, was made by Frederick W. Putnam in a communication to a Chicago newspaper on May 31, 1890. Putnam was Curator of the Peabody Museum and Professor of Anthropology at Harvard University. He believed that the Fair offered a great opportunity to secure and display "a perfect ethnographical exhibition of the past and present peoples of America and thus make an important contribution to science, which at the time will be appropriate, as it will be the first bringing together on a grand scale of representatives of the peoples who were living on the continent when it was discovered by Columbus . . ."

Professor Putnam's proposals for the Fair, although favorably received by the Fair Directors, did not rouse universal enthusiasm. A leading Chicago newspaper vigorously attacked the plan on September 16.

If such an exhibition as this is needed it can be amply provided for from the collection of the Smithsonian Institution. If the archaeological enthusiasts think that the public has a wild, yearning desire to see skeletons from the glacial gravels or detritus from cave floors and shell heaps, let them spend their own money. The directors have no money to waste on the man of the ice sheet or stone monstrosities from serpent mounds—Prof. Putnam, like all these dried-up prehistoric specialists, mistakes the purpose of the Fair. The directors could easily waste five times the amount of money they have if they were to listen to the specialists.

In spite of the opposition of several Chicago newspapers, Putnam successfully campaigned for his ideas in speeches and press interviews. On February 5, 1891, he was appointed Chief of the Department of Ethnology (Department M). He made Franz Boas, then professor at Clark University, his chief assistant and head of the Section on Physical Anthropology, and George A. Dorsey, one of his students at Harvard, head of the Section on Archaeology. He then plunged into the organizing of the most extensive anthropology exhibit of its kind ever assembled. He was also responsible for securing most of the natural history exhibits at the Fair, including the great exhibition of Ward's Natural Science Establishment.

During the ensuing two years, Putnam, Boas and their assistants carried out an unprecedented program of excavation, collecting, and research that extended from Alaska and Greenland to Tierra del Fuego. Altogether, about a hundred persons were engaged in these activities. They included nearly all the anthropology students at Clark and Harvard, established ethnologists and archaeologists, government officials, missionaries, and army and navy officers. Boas organized a program of physical anthropology that collected skeletal material from both hemispheres and gathered anthropometric data from various Indian tribes, as well as measurements of children of various races from the United States, Canada, Hawaii, and Japan. These data were organized in diagrams and charts for display in the physical anthropology laboratory at the Exposition.

Warren K. Moorehead excavated in 1891-92 the Hopewell site situated on the Hopewell Farm in Grant County,

Ohio. This is the type site for the Hopewell culture. Material from this excavation forms an important display in the Field Museum today. George Dorsey spent most of 1891 and 1892 in South America excavating and collecting archaeological and ethnographic material in Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia, and Chile. Lt. George Welles, Jr., was dispatched up the Orinoco River and was the first North American to ascend to near its headwaters. He brought back an ethnographic collection from the tribes encountered along the river. Lt. Robert E. Peary was commissioned to make an ethnographic collection among the Eskimos of North Greenland. More than \$100,000 was spent on this program of excavation and field collecting of specimens and data.



*Frederick W. Putnam, Curator of the Peabody Museum and Professor of Anthropology, Harvard University, was a prime mover in the development of anthropological exhibits at the Exposition.*



*Edward E. Ayer (1841-1927), a founder and the first president of Field Museum. A prominent and dedicated citizen, Ayer was perhaps the most important civic and intellectual force behind the founding of the Museum.*

Emissaries were sent to various countries of the New and Old World to borrow museum and private collections and to encourage the foreign governments represented at the Fair to include anthropological materials in their exhibits. Arrangements were made to bring to Chicago a group of Eskimos and delegations from several Indian tribes to occupy typical villages that were being constructed at the Fair.

On November 28, 1891, in an address before the Commercial Club of Chicago, Putnam again urged the people of Chicago to take advantage of the opportunity afforded by the Exposition to found a great natural history museum. He outlined in detail the administrative organization of the proposed museum, the organization and activities of its scientific departments (Anthropology, Botany, Geology, and Zoology), and the nature of its exhibits. These proposals formed the blueprint of the future museum.

A brief description of the Exposition will give the setting in which Professor Putnam's exhibits were displayed and the atmosphere from which sprang the Field Museum. The Fair grounds covered the whole of Jackson Park on the lake front from 56th Street to 67th Street (553 acres). The Midway from Stony Island Avenue to Cottage Grove (80 acres) was occupied by the Fair concessions, including the "Streets of Cairo" and the 270-foot-high Ferris Wheel, which was opposite the present Social Science building at the University of Chicago. The 20 official Fair buildings were mainly in Neo-Classical or Renaissance style,<sup>2</sup> and reflected not at all the Chicago school of architecture nor the new skyscrapers with steel skeletons that were then being built in the Chicago business district. These buildings, excluding



*The Manufactures and Liberal Arts Building, at the time the largest building in the world. The central hall could seat 75,000 people. The central corridor was called "Columbia Avenue" and was lined on both sides with handsome lamp-posts. The building was designed by George M. Post of New York, and was the kind of triumph that led Chicago architect Louis Sullivan to remark that the Exposition set American architecture back 50 years.*

the numerous foreign, state and territorial structures, had a total floor area of 6,320,000 square feet (155 acres). The greatest building, Manufactures and Liberal Arts, was the largest structure in the world at the time. It was 1,687 feet long and 787 feet wide, covered 30.47 acres and had 44 acres of floor space. The great central hall, 380 by 1,280 feet, covered 11 acres without a supporting pillar. The domed glass roof 237 feet from the floor was supported by steel-trussed arches spanning 360 feet.

The two-story building of the Department of Ethnology, which was called the Anthropological Building, with the subtitle "Man and His Works," was a modest 255 by 415 feet with 161,000 square feet of exhibit space. Beside it were the native villages and a full-scale model of a prehistoric cliff dwelling in Colorado.

<sup>2</sup>The principal architects are listed in the appendix.

The total cost of the Exposition for landscaping, buildings, and exhibits was close to \$34,000,000, the equivalent of about \$200,000,000 in 1969 currency. The sources of these funds were the City of Chicago and Exposition Stockholders, 15,500,000; States and Territories, 6,000,000; United States government, 5,371,000; and Foreign governments, 7,000,000.

In spite of the serious financial panic during the summer of 1893, the total attendance at the Exposition from May 1 to October 30 was 20,263,280. The admission fee was 50c. The highest daily attendance was on Chicago Day, October 9, the anniversary of the Chicago Fire, when there were 716,880 paid admissions.

Of the less serious exhibits, one of the most popular was the Streets of Cairo on the Midway where Little Egypt and her sisters demonstrated the *Danse du ventre* (belly dance) to amazed and admiring audiences. There was considerable public criticism of the propriety of these performances. Professor Putnam defended the dance as being ethnographically authentic and commented with the classical relativity of the anthropologist: "What wonderful muscular movements did these dancers make, and how strange did this dance seem to us: but is it not probable that the waltz would seem equally strange to these dusky women of Egypt."

Throughout the summer of 1893 there was agitation for and newspaper promotion of the proposal to found a natural history museum which would incorporate the collections assembled at the Exposition. No concrete action was taken until August 11, when the Board of Directors of the World's Columbian Exposition appointed Harlow N. Higinbotham, President of the Exposition, George R. Davis, Director-General of the World's Columbian Commission, and J. W. Scott, a member of the Board of Directors, to begin organizing the museum. They called a public meeting on August 17, which chose a citizen's committee of nine, including Edward E. Ayer, to work on incorporating the museum. The larger committee chose the name Columbian Museum of Chicago, and selected 65 Incorporators and 15 Trustees. On August 23 the organizing committee made a public announcement of plans and appealed to the exhibitors to postpone plans to disperse their collections until the claims of the Museum could be laid before them.

The Incorporators applied for a state charter on September 16. Only six weeks of the Fair remained. The raising of money to purchase collections and to start the Museum was stalled and the prospects of success were poor. Marshall Field had been asked to give a million dollars to start the fund drive. He had replied, "I don't know anything about a museum and I don't care to know anything about a museum. I'm not going to give you a million dollars."

Edward Ayer, who was chairman of the temporary finance committee, was asked to make one more try with Marshall Field. His effort is best told in Ayer's own words<sup>3</sup>:

The next morning I was in Mr. Field's office when

<sup>3</sup>From Frank E. Lockwood, *The Life of Edward E. Ayer*, pp. 189-190.

he arrived at about half past nine. I said:

"Marshall Field, I want to see you tonight after dinner."

"You can't do it," he replied, "I have a dinner party and shall be late."

"Well, the next night."

"No, I have another engagement then."

"Well, I have to see you right away; it is important."

"You want to talk to me about that darned museum," was his reply to this.

"Yes," I admitted.

"How much time do you want?"

I replied, "If I can't talk you out of a million dollars in fifteen minutes, I'm no good, nor you either."

"He got up, closed the door, came back, and said, 'Fire ahead.'"

I commenced in this way, "Marshall Field, how many men or women twenty-five years of age or younger know that A. T. Stewart ever lived?"

Not one," he replied.

I continued, "Marshall Field, he was a greater merchant than you, or Claflin, or Wanamaker, because he originated and worked out the scheme that made you all rich; *and he is forgotten in twenty-five years*. Now, Marshall Field, you can sell dry goods until Hell freezes over; you can sell it on the ice until that melts; and in twenty-five years you will be just the figure A. T. Stewart is—absolutely forgotten. You have an opportunity here that has been vouchsafed to very few people on earth. From the point of view of natural history you have the privilege of being the educational host to the untold millions of people who will follow us in the Mississippi Valley. There is practically no museum of any kind within five hundred miles; and these children who are growing up in this region by hundreds of thousands haven't the remotest opportunity of learning about the ordinary things they see and talk about and hear about every day of their lives, and it does seem a crime not to provide them with the information they need."

I talked fast and steady. Finally, he took out his watch and said, "You have been here forty-five minutes—you get out of here."

I replied, "Marshall Field, you have been better to me than you ever have been before; you have always said No, and you haven't this time—yet. Now I want you to do me a personal favor: I want you to go through this World's Fair with me and let me show you the amount of material that is there—I mean exactly what there is that can be used in a natural history museum; for the collections can be gotten very cheap, much of the material for nothing. I want you to go through the World's Fair with me before you say No."

"Well, Ed," he replied, "I should like to go through with you. George Pullman told me you had shown him through and that he had been astounded at the quantity of material that was there. My brother Joe

is here and I should like to have you go with us. We will do it tomorrow morning at ten o'clock."

We went through the whole exhibition. When we came out a little before one o'clock, I said, "Can Norman Ream and I come to your office tomorrow morning at half-past nine and see you about this matter?"

"Yes," he answered.

We were there promptly, and he gave the million dollars with which to start the Museum.

Within a few days there followed gifts of \$100,000 each from George M. Pullman and Harlow Higinbotham, and \$50,000 from Mrs. George Sturges. The following month Ayer gave his large collection of ethnographic and archaeological material from North America, which had been exhibited at the Fair and was valued at \$100,000. The immediate financial problems of the Museum were solved.

One of the first purchases made from the Exposition exhibits was the collection of Ward's Natural Science Establishment, which was bought for \$95,000. It included a large collection of rocks and minerals, skeletons, mastodon bones and other vertebrate and invertebrate fossils, and mounted mammals and birds, including two species of birds from Australia unique in present Field Museum collections.

On November 18 the Trustees determined to assemble the accumulating collections in the Fine Arts Building, which had been built substantially with brick and steel with the idea of making it permanent (only the ornamental facade was of *staff*, a plaster reinforced with fiber). Frederick J. V. Skiff, Chief of the Department of Mines and Mining of the Exposition, was appointed acting director and was charged with organizing the incoming collections and installing them in exhibits. Skiff was vividly described these labors in his address at the dedication of the Museum.<sup>4</sup>

And now began the tremendous task of gathering the vast amount of material from every part and corner, and stretch and recess of these vast grounds; from all of the buildings, large and small; from the Midway Plaisance and from Wooded Island; from the Forestry Building to the Fisheries Building. Hundreds and hundreds of tons of exhibits, collections and objects of every describable character were transported to this building at which we are assembled. Then the selection, alteration, arrangement and rearrangement and elaboration began. Gradually hall by hall was emptied and as the objects of art left the building; a mass of material poured in, heterogenous and appalling in extent. And the beautiful products of the artist's brush and the sculptor's chisel—ours for only a summer—were supplanted by what we see in these halls today; a sequential and systematic exposition of the wonderful and instructive things of the world we live in began to grow. Through the same door streamed boxes and bales from the Transportation, Mining, Forestry, Electricity, Manufactures and Liberal Arts, and state buildings,

<sup>4</sup>An Historical and Descriptive Account of the Field Columbian Museum, pp. 13-14.

from government buildings and from the Plaisance; objects from the remotest lands and the most diversified climes!

In a reorganization of the Trustees of the Museum on January 22, 1894, Ayer was elected President, Martin A. Ryerson, Vice-President, and Skiff was appointed Director. On May 21, when the new Museum was nearly ready to be opened, the Trustees renamed it the Field Columbian Museum. On June 2 the Museum was formally opened with a reception and addresses by Director Skiff and Edward G. Mason, President of the Chicago Historical Society. Thus Field Museum was begun.

It is evident that the great exhibits of the Exposition and the ideas and support for the new Museum developed together from 1890 onwards. Putnam was the catalyst, and he focused the anthropological and natural history resources of the country in support of these objectives. The Exposition, beyond the immediate result of the founding of the Field Museum, set a precedent of large-scale, systematic anthropological field work, and crystalized a growing interest, both popular and professional, in the ethnography and antiquities of the New World. The result was that more persons were attracted to the pursuit of anthropology and a great deal of private money was made available to support anthropological and natural science research.

The World's Columbian Exposition advanced American anthropology by a generation. On the other hand, it set back American architecture by a generation and a half.



A view south and west from the top of Manufactures and Liberal Arts. The building to the right is Machinery and, left, the Agricultural Building. Early searchlights like the one shown were used for night-time illumination and display.

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#### APPENDIX

##### *Principal Architects of the World's Columbian Exposition*

The overall plan of the Fair was made by Daniel Burnham and his partner John W. Root, who died in 1891. Burnham served as Director of Works for the Exposition. Later, he made the basic design for the Field Museum building in Grant Park, although the final plans and working drawings were executed by the Chicago firm of Graham, Anderson, Probst & White, successors to D. H. Burnham & Company.

The dominant architectural influence on the Exposition came from the Beaux Arts school of New York.

The principal architects of the Fair and the buildings they designed were as follows:

- Robert M. Hunt, New York, Administration
- Jenny & Mundie, Chicago, Horticulture
- McKim, Mead & White, New York, Agricultural
- Adler & Sullivan, Chicago, Transportation
- George M. Post, New York, Manufactures and Liberal Arts
- Henry Ives Cobb, Chicago, Fisheries
- Burling & Whitehouse, Chicago, Casino (Venetian Village)
- Peabody & Stearns, Boston, Machinery
- Solon S. Beman, Chicago, Mines & Mining
- Van Brunt & Howe, Kansas City, Electricity
- Sophia G. Hayden, Boston, Woman's Building
- Charles B. Atwood, Chicago, Designer in Chief of the Exposition and designer of the Fine Arts Building



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