

Essential History of the Lincoln Park Conservatory

Chicago History

- Chicago was incorporated as a town in 1833 and as a city in 1837.
- The name Chicago comes from a Miami Indian word for the wild leeks (sometimes called wild onions) that grew on the bank of the short Chicago River. Over the centuries the Miami, Sauk, Fox, and Potawatomi tribes all lived in the area.
- Key points in Chicago's History are memorialized by the city's flag:
 - The three white bars represent the three sections: North, West, and South.
 - The two blue bars are the major water features: Lake Michigan and the River.
 - The four stars represent four major historical events:
 - Fort Dearborn built in 1795 (Michigan Avenue and Wacker Drive) is sometimes credited as the founding of the city. Jean Baptiste Point DuSable (the first permanent non-Indigenous settler) lived permanently in the area by the 1780s and is recognized as the "Founder of Chicago".
 - The Great Fire of 1871 destroyed one-third of Chicago and left more than 100,000 homeless.
 - The World's Columbian Exposition of 1893 celebrated the 400th anniversary of Christopher Columbus's arrival in the New World and drew over 20 million visitors to the "White City."
 - The Century of Progress Exposition in 1933 celebrated Chicago's 100th anniversary.

Lincoln Park

The 1,208-acre park now includes dozens of gardens, natural areas, lagoons, and bathing beaches. As natural-looking as the park is today, its entire landscape has been designed, engineered, constructed, and planted.

- Lincoln Park began as a public cemetery on the northernmost boundary of Chicago for Confederate prisoners and the victims of cholera and smallpox, among other diseases.
- In the 1850's, Dr. John Rauch (1828–1894), a Chicago physician and health advocate, warned that bacteria and viruses from corpses of those who had died of cholera, smallpox, and other infectious diseases could leach into the lake and contaminate Chicago's drinking water supply. Even with Rauch and other prominent citizens advocating to move the cemetery, it would take decades before bodies would be disinterred and moved.
- In 1860 city officials agreed to use the unused northern 60-acre part of City Cemetery "for park purposes," and the new park first became known as Cemetery Park and then as Lake Park.
- In 1865 the Common Council renamed the park in honor of President Abraham Lincoln only a few months after his death. With the new name came \$10,000 for improvements.
- Landscape gardener Swain Nelson, with help from his cousin Olof Benson, submitted a whimsical plan for Lincoln Park that addressed the property's challenging conditions: sandy ridges unfriendly to plants, and low swales and pools of stagnant water caused by the ineffective Ten-Mile Ditch diagonally slicing through the park. Nelson's design

Essential History of the Lincoln Park Conservatory

features a serpentine artificial lake composed of three interconnecting waterways meant to be crossed by rustic bridges (today, the north end of South Pond and Lincoln Park Zoo's Waterfowl Pond remain of the original three ponds). He surrounded the water features with lawns and scattered trees and an intricate system of winding drives and paths. Nelson's design featured rolling topography to be formed from the excavated soil, including a dramatic 35-foot-tall hill dubbed "Lookout Mountain."

- The 1869 Lincoln Park Act established a special taxing jurisdiction and expanded the park north to Diversey Avenue (later Diversey Parkway) and south to North Avenue.
- The Lincoln Park Board planned several ambitious projects, including construction of Lake Shore Drive (now Cannon Drive) along the park's eastern edge, creation of a zoo (the Lincoln Park Zoo), and a long promenade south of the South Pond lined with elm trees and rustic baskets of flowers, known as the Mall.
- In October 1871, fire consumed Chicago. In the Park, the exhuming and removal of bodies from the cemetery was in progress, and people hid from the fire in open graves.
- By the mid-1870s, under the direction of the Lincoln Park Commission, bodies still in the cemetery were exhumed and relocated. While most remains were moved, many additional skeletons and fragments were left behind. Of the more than 35,000 bodies buried in City Cemetery and nearby graveyards, only about 22,500 bodies were exhumed—meaning that skeletal remains of more than 10,000 people may still lie in unmarked graves beneath the southernmost end of Lincoln Park. Discoveries of human remains have occurred as construction projects disturbed the older areas of the park.
 - Today, the 1858 Couch Tomb provides an important aboveground link to Lincoln Park's earlier history.
- Lincoln Park developed into a showplace of gardens during the late 19th century, and the Commissioners planted gardens and established a greenhouse in the park in 1877.
- The Lincoln Park Commissioners began improving the area between Fullerton and Diversey Avenues in the early 1880s. Nelson & Benson excavated the North Pond and used the fill material to create a large hill known as Mount Prospect on its northeast side. On the west side, a flowing artesian well embellished with a rocky grotto supplied fresh water to park visitors near the rustic shelter.
 - In 1899 the Lincoln Park Commissioners purchased rabbits, gophers, and squirrels to populate the park. Only a few of the 144 squirrels were seen again. Audubon Society members noted that "boys with slingshots" regularly killed the squirrels and that birds had disappeared in a similar manner.
- The building of parkland along the Chicago lakeshore in the late 1800s and early 1900s involved innovations in geological engineering. As Lincoln Park expanded during the early 20th Century, new park land was largely created through landfill additions.
- Ossian Cole Simonds, the park's landscape gardener in the early 20th Century, vastly increased the number of species and varieties of plants in the park, including native flowers and shrubs to create natural-looking scenery, and screen views of streets and buildings. This produced "the quite sylvan conditions so needed by city dwellers."
- By the middle of the 20th Century, the park reached its northern boundary at Hollywood beach.

Essential History of the Lincoln Park Conservatory

Lincoln Park Conservatory

- In 1880, the Commissioners began improving the park where the Conservatory now stands. They installed the Formal (French style) Gardens with geometric beds of annuals and the Bates Fountain as the centerpiece. Within ten years, they added the Grandmother's Garden to the west that represented an English cottage garden with undulating beds of perennials. An elegant tree canal, called the "Walk of the White Birches," extended along the east. An unused ravine was transformed into a lily pond artificially heated for the growth of exotic water lilies. This was so popular that two more rocky-edged, artificially heated lily ponds were added and meandered along what is now the fence line of the Lincoln Park Zoo.
 - In 1897 the financial advisor of the Khedive of Egypt asked for seeds of the Lincoln Park Lilies, some of which had been imported from Egypt.
- In 1890, the Lincoln Park Commission hired renowned Victorian architect Joseph Lyman Silsbee and local architect Mifflin Emlen Bell to design a much more elaborate building than the simple greenhouse built in 1877. Silsbee and Bell collaborated on the design of the show houses. Bell also designed the propagating houses and horse stables.
 - Silsbee is noted as an employer and teacher of other important architects, including Frank Lloyd Wright and George W. Maher.
 - Examples of both Silsbee's and Bell's other work can still be found in the park.
- Work on the propagation houses began immediately and was completed in 1890.
- Designed with romantic associations of the exotic Near East, the new Conservatory had trusses in the shape of "OGEE arches" (two mirrored S-shaped curves) and included a fernery, palm, orchid, and show houses.
- The Lincoln Park Conservatory was built in stages between 1890 and 1895.
 - During its construction, John Pettigrew, superintendent of Lincoln Park, wrote, "These houses are probably, without exception, the finest ever designed for the purpose in this country; combining strength, lightness and beauty, with graceful lines and adaptability to the requirements of plant growth."
- The first completed sections were the Vestibule and the Palm House which were opened to the public in 1892. A "paradise under glass," the Conservatory displayed "a luxuriant tropical growth, blending the whole into a natural grouping of Nature's loveliest forms." The Palm House had a "harmonious arrangement of rocks to give character to the surface of the soil" with palms and tropical plants native to both the "Old and New Worlds."
- Between 1892 and 1895 the Conservatory's other three rooms were completed and opened to the public. These included the Tropical Room, the Fernery, and the Show House.
- The Tropical Room, sometimes known as the Stove House (now called the Orchid Room) opened in 1895 and included an assortment of tropical plants, vines, and many orchids suspended from bark covered walls.
- The last major House to open in the Lincoln Park Conservatory was the Fernery. An entrance from a small balcony provided a striking view of the lushly planted sunken

Essential History of the Lincoln Park Conservatory

room. The Fernery included stone niches with plants arranged to "produce an effect of tropical verdure" rather than botanical order.

- Goldfish in the pools were among the Conservatory's most popular features.
- In 1925 the Lincoln Park Conservatory underwent major alterations. The original terrace and the front vestibule were removed, and the entryway's original gabled roof was replaced with the bell-shaped roof that exists today.
- In 1954 the Conservatory was altered and expanded again to provide public washrooms.

WARDIAN CASE

The Wardian case was the direct forerunner of the modern terrarium.

- Invented by Dr. Nathaniel Bagshaw Ward in about 1829, it unleashed a revolution.
- The ferns in Dr. Ward's London garden died from exposure to London's air, heavily polluted by coal smoke and sulphuric acid. He observed a grass and a fern growing in a sealed glass bottle. He left the seal intact for about four years, noting that the grass actually bloomed in the bottle. When the seal rusted and broke, the plants soon died. Understanding the possibilities, Ward commissioned a closely-fitted, glazed, wooden case in which ferns thrived.
- The fern craze and the craze for growing orchids that followed, owed much of their impetus to the Wardian case. It protected foreign plants imported to Europe from overseas, the great majority of which had previously died from exposure during long sea journeys, frustrating the many scientific and amateur botanists of the time.

<https://www.chicago.gov/city/en/about/history.html>

http://library.isgs.illinois.edu/Pubs/pdfs/walkingguide/lincoln_park_booklet.pdf

<https://www.chicagoparkdistrict.com/parks-facilities/lincoln-abraham-park>

<https://www.chicagoparkdistrict.com/about-us/history-chicagos-park>

<https://www.chicagoreader.com/chicago/a-conservatory-a-zoo-and-12000-corpse/Content?oid=1109775>

<https://davesgarden.com/guides/articles/view/3607>

<http://arnoldia.arboretum.harvard.edu/pdf/articles/1973-33-1-the-history-of-ornamental-horticulture-in-america.pdf>

<https://www.chicagoparkdistrict.com/parks-facilities/conservatories-greenhouse>

<https://www.gardenandnature.com/conservatory/history>

<https://hartley-botanic.co.uk/magazine/a-history-of-the-english-glasshouse/>

<https://plantbiology.siu.edu/facilities/plant-biology-facilities/greenhouse/info/history.php>

<http://www.encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org/pages/330.html>

<http://tanglewoodconservatories.com/blog/brief-conservatory-history/>

<http://tanglewoodconservatories.com/our-firm/history/>

<https://garfieldconservatory.org/about-us/history/>