

St. Louis History



Gateway Arch Construction

St. Louis' signature attraction, the Gateway Arch, opened in 1965 as a monument to honor President Thomas Jefferson and his vision of a continental United States. The soaring Arch, the Museum of Westward Expansion and the historic Old Courthouse make up the Jefferson National Expansion Memorial, a National Park Service site along the banks of the Mississippi River. The engineering marvel doubles as a giant sculpture and a monument to the historic opening of the American West.

St. Louis has a decidedly colorful history, including ownership by both France and Spain. But before European explorers traveled here, this rich land was home to the Mississippians, an Indian civilization of mound builders where more than 20,000 people lived in the fertile river valley. When that culture disappeared during Europe's Middle Ages, only their huge, mysterious earthen structures were left, earning St. Louis one of its earliest nicknames, "Mound City."

In 1764, French-born fur traders Pierre Laclede and his stepson Auguste Chouteau journeyed upriver from New Orleans and founded the city, naming it for Louis IX, the Crusader King of France. St. Louis was built in Spanish territory on a high bluff just 18 miles south of the confluence of the Mississippi and Missouri rivers, a perfect site from which to trade with Native Americans in the fur-rich lands to the west. France regained rights to St. Louis and points west in 1800, but Napoleon sold the Louisiana Territory to President Thomas Jefferson in 1803 without ever taking possession. Overnight the size of the United States had doubled.

When Jefferson sent explorers Lewis & Clark from St. Louis to chart the new Louisiana Territory in 1804, more than 1,000 French, Spanish, Indian and free and slave blacks lived in the city, which already was the center of the fur trade in America. Two years later, after the triumphant explorers returned from the Pacific with their Corps of Discovery, St. Louis became the last stop for mountain men and trappers heading to the newly opened frontier. St. Louis' booming



Museum of Westward Expansion



Lewis and Clark Portraits



Saint Louis Statue



Steamboats on the Mississippi River circa 1904



White Haven, the Ulysses S. Grant National Historic Site circa 1920



Eads Bridge

fur trade lasted until 1840, but the westward movement of Americans through St. Louis – “the gateway to the west” – was to last for many more years. For decades, entrepreneurs would make fortunes in St. Louis by selling goods to pioneers and adventurers who gathered their supplies and headed west for land, gold and glory.

The first steamboat arrived in St. Louis in 1817, heralding a new era of commerce and travel along the Mississippi River. Soon it was common to see more than 100 steamboats lining the cobblestone levee during the day. This was the Mississippi River Mark Twain came to know as a riverboat pilot and later as an author. In 1849, a deadly fire destroyed one-third of the city when the steamboat “White Cloud” exploded on the riverfront. Only two historic structures – the Old Courthouse and Old Cathedral – were saved by a quick-thinking fireman who lost his life setting an explosion that kept the flames away from both buildings. Both structures remain and are open to the public.

The Civil War divided St. Louis just as it divided the nation. Missouri stayed in the Union and abolitionists shared the streets of the booming city with slaveholders. The result of the Dred Scott trials, which began at the Old Courthouse downtown, is considered the flashpoint that led the nation into the Civil War. In 1857, the United States Supreme Court denied slaves Dred and Harriet Scott their freedom, and the 10 year legal battle finally ended. St. Louis’ Civil War connections can be explored in depth at attractions such as White Haven, the Ulysses S. Grant National Historic Site, and at the Jefferson Barracks Historic Park. Grant served at the Barracks prior to the war along with other well-known soldiers, including Robert E. Lee.

In 1874, the completion of the Eads Bridge across the Mississippi heralded a new day for the railroad, also known as the “Iron Horse.” St. Louis became a major industrial center with dozens of breweries operating in the city, including Anheuser-Busch. The company offers free tours of its historic complex daily. Brewing history is also explored at tours of the Schlafly Bottleworks, a local microbrewery that has gained popularity during the past two decades.

Clothing and shoe manufacturers thrived in St. Louis, and the former warehouses that populated downtown's garment district have been reborn as new lofts, restaurants, retail, nightclubs and office space. This is the St. Louis the world called, "first in shoes, first in booze, and last in the American League," a reference to the St. Louis Browns baseball club.

New immigrants changed the face of St. Louis throughout the 19th century. Joining the French, Spanish, Indians and African descendants were Germans who settled in St. Louis and along the Rhine-like Missouri River valley, Irish who escaped the famine of their homeland and Italians who worked the clay mines. St. Louis continues to welcome newcomers today, with large immigrant populations of Latinos, Bosnians and Asians settling throughout the area.

By 1890, the U.S. Census declared that the frontier had closed and America held no more unexplored and undiscovered lands. To honor St. Louis' role in the westward expansion of the United States, civic leaders planned a grand World's Fair, officially dubbed the Louisiana Purchase Exposition. The 1904 celebration, held in Forest Park, recognized the 100th anniversary of the Louisiana Purchase. The park was transformed into a glittering expanse of palaces and attractions, drawing 20 million visitors and exhibits from 43 countries over seven months. Popular new foods, including the ice cream cone and iced tea, were introduced to a wide audience at the fair, and Scott Joplin's new ragtime music enthralled visitors. The song (and later the Judy Garland movie) "Meet Me in St. Louis, Louis" summed up the most glorious time St. Louis had ever seen. The fair and the 1904 Olympic Games, which took place on the fairgrounds and at Washington University that same summer, defined St. Louis as a world-class city. Today, the legacy of the fair is explored in a permanent exhibit at the Missouri History Museum in Forest Park.

The first International Balloon Race was held in St. Louis in 1908, and less than 20 years later, aviation was still in the forefront when Charles Lindbergh captured the world's imagination by crossing the Atlantic non-stop. His 1927 solo flight from New York to Paris took place in an airplane nicknamed "Spirit of St. Louis," thanks to financial backing by local businessmen.



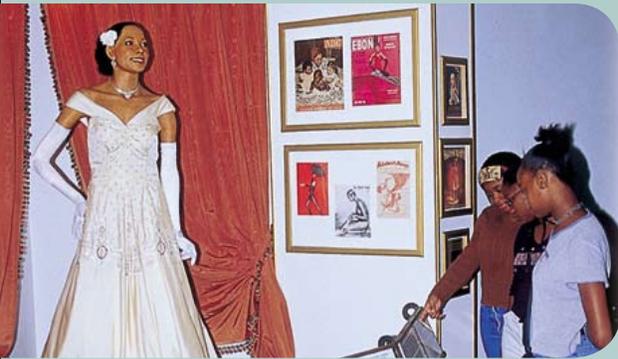
1904 Worlds Fair in Forest Park



Scott Joplin Memorabilia



Charles Lindbergh with his plane the "Spirit of St. Louis"



The Griot Museum of Black History and Culture



Campbell House Museum



Kemp Auto

When America headed into space, St. Louis provided a launching pad for the McDonnell Space Program, as Project Mercury and Gemini crafts were assembled under the tutelage of McDonnell Aircraft. Aviation continues to play a major role here today with Boeing's military manufacturing operations located in the area. Visitors can learn more about flight and space travel at Boeing's Prologue Room in the Challenger Learning Center and at the Saint Louis Science Center in Forest Park.

St. Louis' appreciation of its history is reflected in the number of historic home tours held throughout the year. For an in-depth look at St. Louis' history, visitors can explore the galleries in the Old Courthouse, the Museum of Westward Expansion at the Gateway Arch and the Missouri History Museum, where a replica of Lindbergh's Spirit of St. Louis airplane is a highlight. The Lewis & Clark expedition is chronicled and pioneer life is interpreted by National Park Service rangers at the Museum of Westward Expansion, located underground on the Gateway Arch grounds. The explorers also take center stage at the area's Lewis & Clark State Historic Site and the Lewis & Clark Boathouse.

Explore St. Louis' African American heritage at the Griot Museum of Black History and Culture. Tour historic homes such as the Campbell House Museum, an 1851 Victorian home, the Eugene Field House and St. Louis Toy Museum, or re-visit the early days of state politics at the First Missouri State Capitol State Historic Site. See St. Louis' role in worldwide events through the Holocaust Museum & Learning Center and the Soldiers Memorial Military Museum, and the city's longstanding love affair with the automobile at the Kemp Auto Museum and the Museum of Transportation.