

The Original Ferris Wheel of 1893/Midway Plaisance Skating Rink

1130 Midway Plaisance, Chicago, IL 60637

Short Intro:

The Original Ferris Wheel was created by an engineer, George Washington Gale Ferris Junior, for the 1893 World's Fair in Chicago on Midway. The Original Ferris Wheel was a behemoth of a project, with 36 cars that could carry more than 2,000 riders. While extremely expensive to build, the Wheel was immensely popular with fair-goers. After the Fair, it was moved from Chicago to Louisiana for the 1904 Louisiana Exposition and ultimately blown up with dynamite to destroy.

Local History/Background for Teachers' Prep:

The 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago had no shortage of innovations and wonders, yet one loomed larger than all others: the giant Ferris wheel on Midway. Created to rival the Eiffel Tower that Paris created for their own World Fair in 1889, Ferris had the idea of creating something just as large but also movable. Legend has it that he had the idea in mind for months after watching a water wheel, and pitched it for this Fair. Others were recommending towers similar to the Eiffel Tower, but those ideas were not chosen. And for good reason—the Ferris Wheel was one of the most popular attractions at the Fair. It stood the tallest in the city of Chicago, was built in just six months, and could carry more than 2,000 people on it. One ticket was 50 cents, allowing riders to experience two revolutions. It is estimated that approximately 1.5 million people rode the Ferris Wheel. At a time when airplanes did not exist, this type of ride was what allowed people to leave the ground and see the view from above [see images below].

After the fair, it was assumed that the Ferris Wheel would stay in place, but that did not happen. In 1904, Louisiana reassembled The Ferris Wheel for their Exposition. In 1906, the Ferris Wheel was scrapped. The creator of this behemoth, George Washington Gale Ferris Junior, faced a tragic end too. He died in 1896 of typhoid after going bankrupt.

The remains of the Original Ferris Wheel of the World's Columbian Exposition of 1893 lay in the Midway Plaisance Park, under the ice rink, which now connects the University of Chicago campus. The Ferris Wheel no longer exists at this location and neither do the fabulous structures created for the Exposition, but its legacy lives to this day.

Videos (Pre Field-Trip Prep):

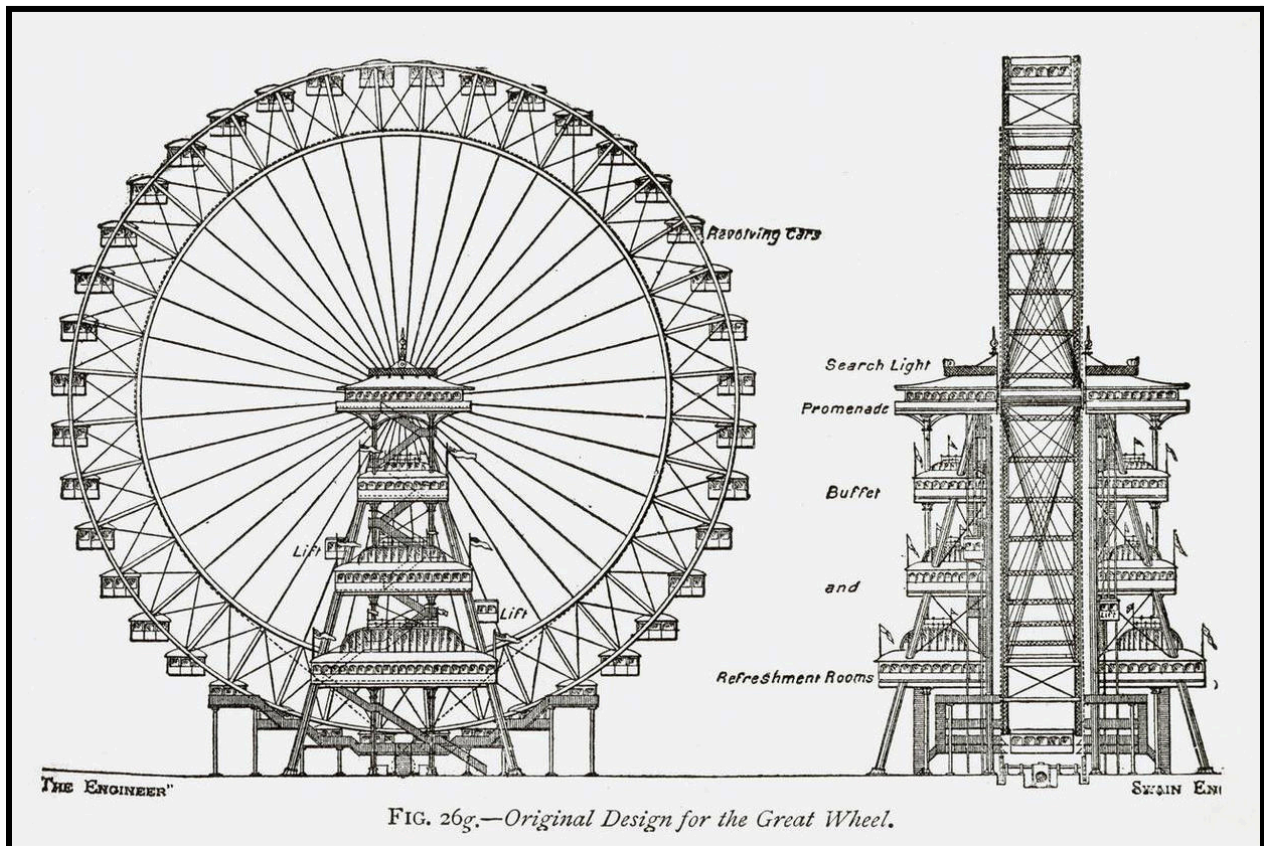
Very first Ferris Wheel, Chicago, 1890s - Film 1011101

https://youtu.be/H4k9X4yFTgQ?si=fRzB1xe_3HO2eAMY

The incredible story of the first Ferris wheel's life at two World's Fairs

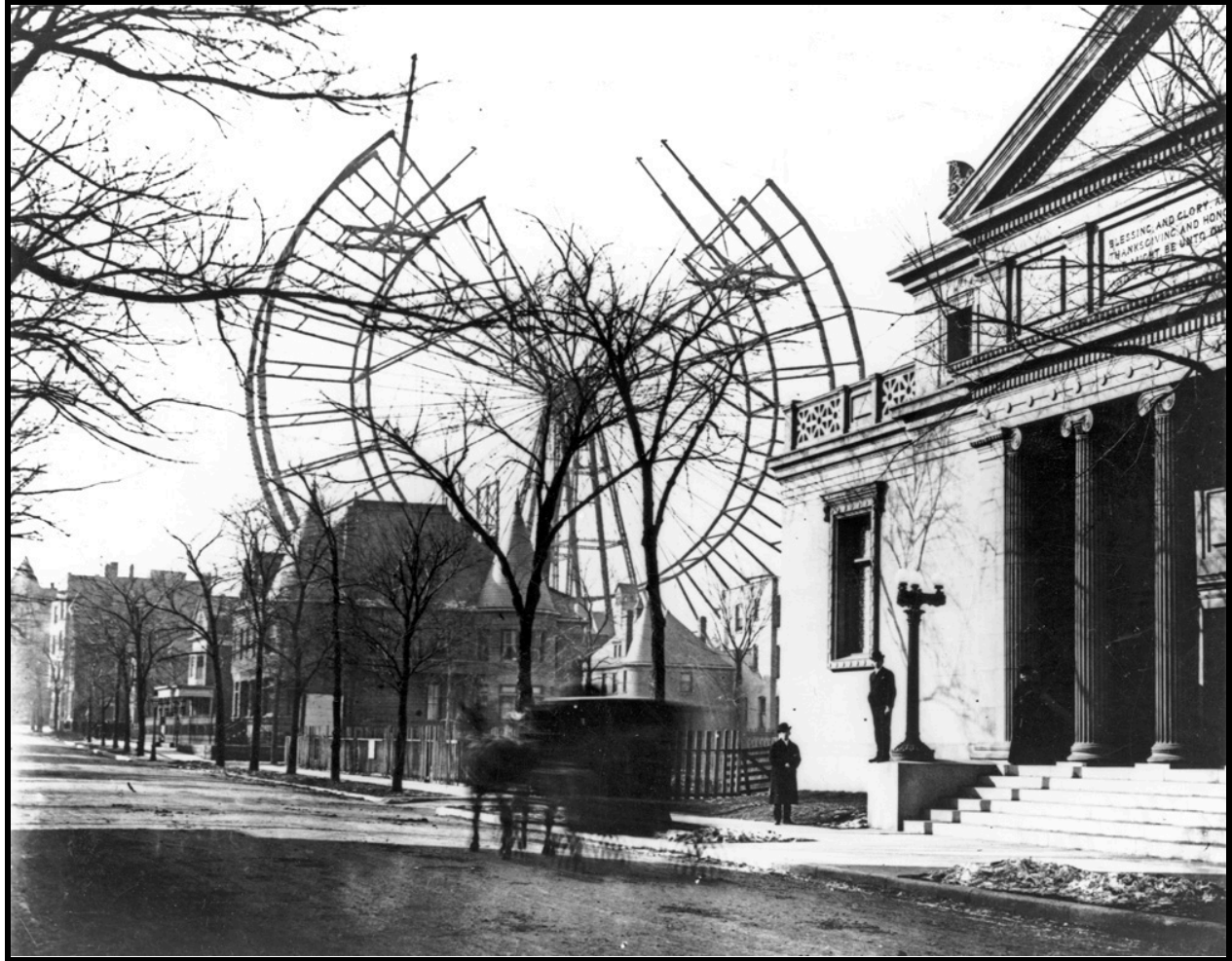
<https://youtu.be/Hu8tN1gyYF4?si=OI1Am8Jyzgzcp-7v>

Images:

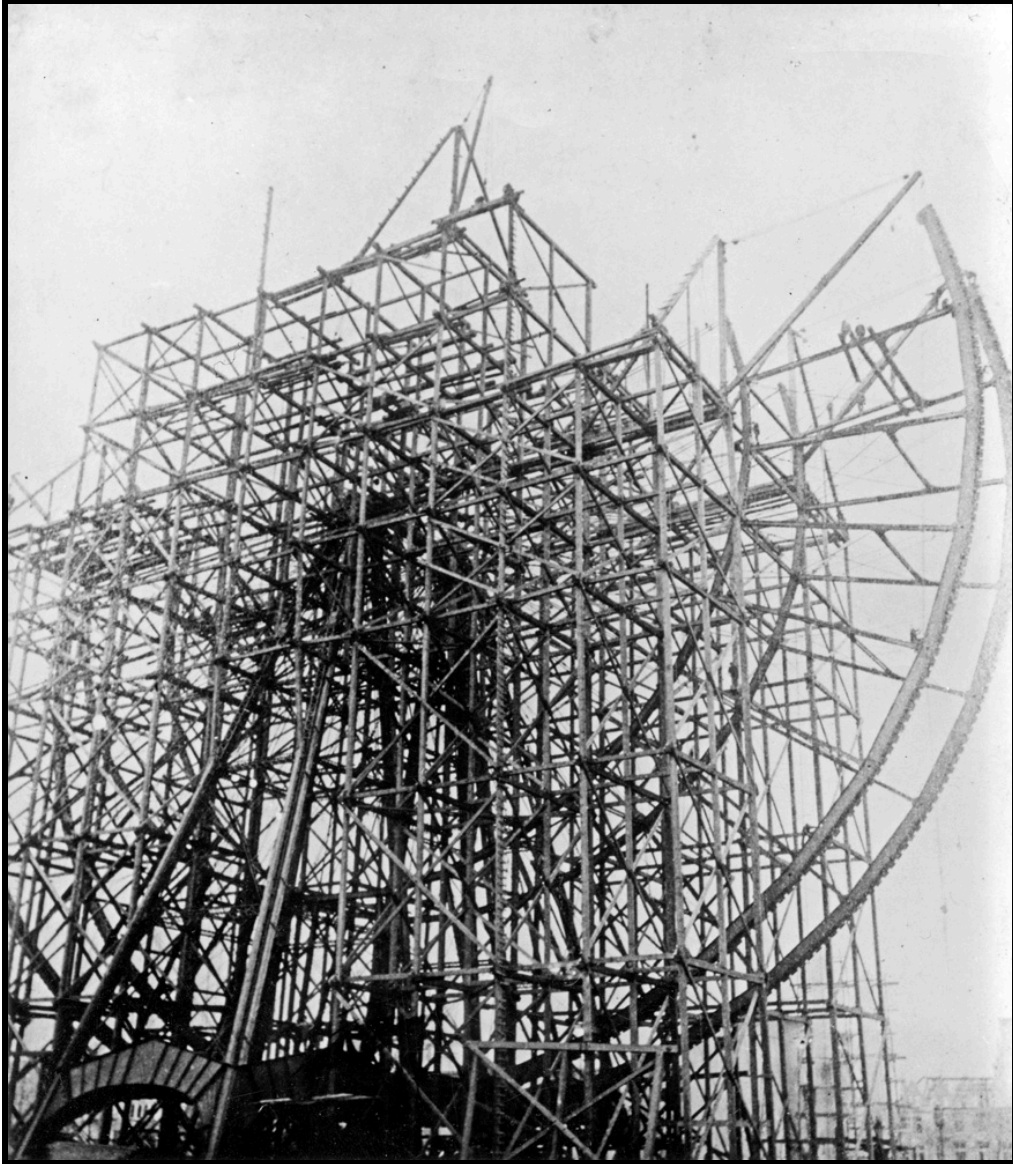


“Diagram of the original design for the Great Wheel of the Columbian Exposition of 1893, designed and built by George Washington Gale Ferris Jr.”

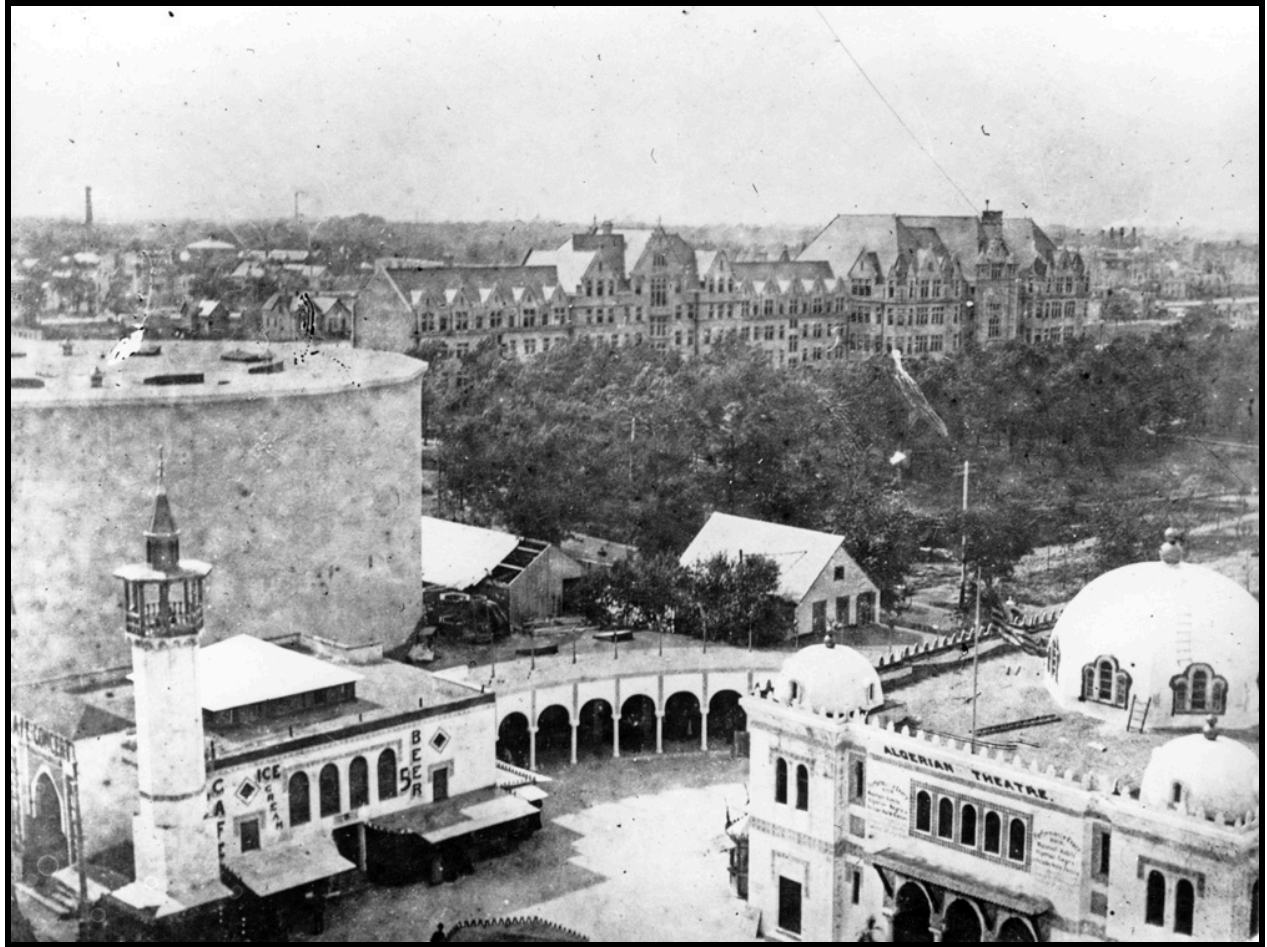
Image sourced from CBS News. <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/the-history-of-ferris-wheels/>.



“World’s Columbian Exposition
Ferris Wheel construction on the Midway Plaisance.” (1893)
Image sourced from The University of Chicago Photographic Archive.
<https://photoarchive.lib.uchicago.edu/db.xqy?one=apf3-03155.xml>.



“World’s Columbian Exposition
Ferris Wheel construction on the Midway Plaisance.” (1893)
Image sourced from The University of Chicago Photographic Archive.
<https://photoarchive.lib.uchicago.edu/db.xqy?one=apf3-03149.xml>.



“World’s Columbian Exposition.

Midway Plaisance, View from Ferris Wheel 1” (1893)

Image sourced from The University of Chicago Photographic Archive.

<https://photoarchive.lib.uchicago.edu/db.xqy?one=apf3-03162.xml>.



Then^



Now^

“The Ferris Wheel was a central feature at the World’s Columbian Exposition of 1893. Today, the Midway Plaisance Ice Rink is located on this site. Then photo by E. R. Walker, courtesy of the Special Collections Research Center. Now photo by Robert Kozloff.”

Image sourced from the University of Chicago.

<https://125.uchicago.edu/then-and-now/midway-plaisance/>

Walking Tour Script:

- [standing by the Ice Rink]: The Original Ferris Wheel used to be here. It was created by an engineer, George Washington Gale Ferris Junior, for the 1893 World's Fair in Chicago on Midway. The Original Ferris Wheel was a behemoth of a project, with 36 cars that could carry more than 2,000 riders. While extremely expensive to build, the Wheel was immensely popular with fair-goers. After the Fair, it was moved from Chicago to Louisiana for the 1904 Louisiana Exposition and ultimately blown up with dynamite to destroy.
- The Ferris Wheel was one of the most popular attractions at the Fair. It stood the tallest in the city of Chicago, was built in just six months, and could carry more than 2,000 people on it. One ticket was 50 cents, allowing riders to experience two revolutions. It is estimated that approximately 1.5 million people rode the Ferris Wheel. At a time when airplanes did not exist, this type of ride was what allowed people to leave the ground and see the view from above [see images below].
- The Ferris Wheel was created to rival the Eiffel Tower that Paris created for their own World Fair in 1889.
- Ferris had the idea of creating something just as large but also movable. Legend has it that he had the idea in mind for months after watching a water wheel, and pitched it for this Fair.
- The remains of the Original Ferris Wheel of the World's Columbian Exposition of 1893 lay in the Midway Plaisance Park, under the ice rink, which now connects the University of Chicago campus. The Ferris Wheel no longer exists at this location and neither do the fabulous structures created for the Exposition, but its legacy lives to this day.

Questions for Discussion:

- If you were at the 1893 World's Fair, would you have attempted to ride this new and innovative ride?
- How would you describe being on a Ferris Wheel to someone who's never seen one?
- Do you think the Ferris Wheel should've been kept at its original location?

Suggested Activities:

- Coloring Sheet
<https://www.crayola.com/free-coloring-pages/print/ferris-wheel-coloring-page/>
This free printable coloring sheet can be a good way to visualize the Ferris wheel, even though it is not an accurate depiction of the Original Ferris Wheel. This

activity can be done at the field trip, allowing students to color it in and place the sheet where they think the Ferris Wheel stood.

- Ice Skating (Winter Activity)

<https://www.chicagoparkdistrict.com/parks-facilities/midway-plaisance-ice-rink>

Midway Plaisance Park now has an ice skating rink open to the public from November 24, 2023, till February 19, 2024. They offer programs suitable for children such as open skate, stick & puck and pond hockey, and drop-in skate lessons. The fee varies between \$7-10 per person, and pre-registration is required.

- Soccer Game (Summer Activity)

The Midway Plaisance Park also has a soccer field that can be used by the public. Students can play one soccer game in under 20 minutes.

Further Resources:

Chicago Historical Society: “The First Ferris Wheel Invent It!” Lesson Plan for Elementary School.

<https://www.chicagohistory.org/app/uploads/2016/10/chm-historylab-ferriswheel-01.pdf>

Hyde Park Historical Society: “Ferris Wheel”

<https://www.hydeparkhistory.org/ferris-wheel>

CBS News: “The history of Ferris wheels: What goes around comes around”

<https://www.cbsnews.com/news/the-history-of-ferris-wheels/>