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The Great Central Fair of 1864.



HISTORY

The Great Central Fair took place from June 7 until June 28 of 1864^[1] in the [Logan Circle](#) park in Philadelphia.^[2] It was inspired by past [sanitary fairs](#) that happened throughout the United States to raise funds for the [United States Sanitary Commission](#).^[3] It was a fundraiser for the [United States Sanitary Commission](#).

The main exhibit building was 200,000 square feet in size. It was designed by [Samuel Honeyman Kneass](#) and [William Stickland](#).^[3] There was also Union Street, which was 540 feet long and ran in the middle of the fair.^[1] Union Street was compared to a [cathedral](#) by Charles J. Stille. Inside the main building were "departments" with different themes. Themes included the neighboring states of [New Jersey](#) and [Delaware](#), themes about [corn](#) and [sewing](#), a restaurant and [parlor](#), as well as weaponry, fine art, [curiosities](#), transportation and children's subjects.^[3]

On June 16, [Abraham Lincoln](#) and his family visited the fair. He donated 48 copies of the [Emancipation Proclamation](#) at \$10 a book. They were all autographed by Lincoln. The festival raised over \$1 million.^[1]

The United States Sanitary Commission (USSC) was a private relief agency created by federal legislation on June 18, 1861, to support sick and wounded soldiers of the United States Army (Federal / Northern / Union Army) during the American Civil War.[a] It operated across the North, raised an estimated \$25 million in Civil War era revenue (assuming 1865 dollars, \$417.55 million in 2020) and in-kind contributions[1] to support the cause, and enlisted thousands of volunteers. The president was Henry Whitney Bellows, and Frederick Law Olmsted acted as executive secretary.

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