Large Print Parthenon Brochure

The Parthenon:

The city of Nashville first undertook the construction of a full-scale replica of the Parthenon for the 1897 Tennessee Centennial and International Exposition. Many cities and states, major industries, and other interest groups also built pavilions for the celebration. Nashville's pavilion was constructed of

brick, wood lathe and plaster and represented the city's reputation as the "Athens of the South." The Parthenon housed the art exhibition consisting of 1,172 pieces from all over the world. The building was so popular that the city left the temporary structure standing after the Exposition. By 1921, faced with crumbling pediments and decaying plaster, the city authorized the reconstruction

of the landmark with permanent materials.

Rather than rebuilding the structure exactly as it appeared at the Exposition, the city decided to create a complete replica of the original Greek temple, both inside and out. What had been the basement of the 1897 Parthenon became gallery space in order to continue the Nashville

Parthenon's history of exhibiting fine art.

On May 21, 1931, the Parthenon reopened to the public, attracting over 10,000 visitors from 46 states and 12 foreign countries during its first month. The Parthenon remained virtually unchanged until 1987, when a radical 20month renovation began, completely updating the galleries and offices, and adding the ground-level

entrance to the east end as well as a gift shop and visitor facilities.

The Galleries

The art galleries of the Parthenon are located on the lower level, and consist of the Gallery Lobby, the East Gallery, the Cowan Gallery, and the West Gallery.

This area was first converted to an informal gallery during the reconstruction completed in 1931. Renovations completed in 1988 brought them into compliance with current museum standards.

Exhibits in the East and West Galleries are changed approximately every three months. The large column in the East Gallery contains the infrastructure supporting the Athena statue above.

The Cowan Collection of American Art

James Cowan was a businessman and art collector living outside Chicago at the end of the nineteenth century. Originally from the South, he considered Tennessee his true family home. He was a guest at the 1897 Exposition and never forgot the hospitality shown to him. Cowan anonymously donated 63 pieces from his collection to

the city of Nashville between 1927 and 1929. His identity as a donor was revealed after his death in 1930. The collection includes such notable American artists as William Merritt Chase, Frederic Church, and Winslow Homer.

The Naos

The Naos is the larger of the two halls on the upper level of the Parthenon. It is located

at the east end of the building and is the room one enters when coming up from the gallery level.

The original Naos was specifically designed to house Phidias' 42-foot (13m) statue of the goddess Athena. Nashville's Naos recreates the original's size, scale, and color, including the two registers of 23 Doric columns.

In the ancient building there would have been no lighting from the coffered ceiling. Recent evidence indicates these windows were located in the east wall, level with the top of the doors, and allowed light along the side aisles, further enhancing the statue.

Athena Parthenos

According to Greek mythology, Athena was born from the head of Zeus, chief

of the Olympian gods. She was known as the goddess of wisdom, prudent warfare and the useful arts such as weaving and pottery.

The sculptor Phidias created the original Athena Parthenos in the 5th century BCE. It was formed of ivory and plates of gold affixed to a wooden frame. Phidias' original is now lost, and knowledge about it comes from written descriptions and small Roman copies.

Beginning in 1982, Nashville sculptor Alan LeQuire and a handful of assistants worked to recreate Phidias' masterpiece in Nashville. LeQuire completed the sculpture in 1990 and the gilding and painting took place under his supervision during the summer of 2002.

Athena stands almost 42 feet (13m) tall, making her the largest indoor sculpture in the Western world. Nike, the winged goddess of victory, stands 6 feet, 4 inches (2m) tall in Athena's outstretched right palm; her left hand and arm support a 17 ft (5m) shield and a 36 ft (11m) spear.

The five ft high marble pedestal on which Athena stands is decorated with bas-

relief panels depicting the goddesses and gods present at Pandora's birth.

Scholars also now believe there was a shallow pool of water extending from immediately in front of the statue to the fourth column. The water would have functioned like a mirror to bounce light onto the statue and may also have increased the room's humidity, thus

preventing the ivory from becoming brittle.

The Treasury

The Treasury is located at the west end of the building, adjacent to the Naos. In ancient Greece, it housed all the treasures brought as offerings to Athena. The four columns found here, unlike the Doric columns outside the building and in the Naos, are Ionic.

Here, too, one can examine both surfaces of the massive bronze doors that stand open during museum operating hours. These doors are a matched pair, and identical to the doors found on the East end of the Naos. Each door weighs 7.5 tons and they are thought to be the largest matching set of bronze doors in existence.

In the original Parthenon, the wall between the Naos and the Treasury was solid, but during the subsequent use as a Christian church and as a mosque, alterations were made to the temple including the creation of doorways connecting the two rooms.

The Casts

Between 1801 and 1804, British diplomat Sir Thomas Bruce, 7th Earl of Elgin, removed a collection of sculptural fragments from the Acropolis to England; they included pieces from the Erectheion, the Parthenon and the Propylaia. Eventually, they became part of the British Museum's collection and are known as the Parthenon Marbles. Sculptural pieces of the ancient temple had been scattered around the Parthenon as the result of an explosion that had caused

irreparable damage in 1687 when Turkish soldiers stored gunpowder inside during a battle with the Venetians.

At the time of the Nashville Parthenon's rebuilding, the city purchased a set of Parthenon Marbles casts from the British Museum for sculptors Leopold and Belle Kinney Scholz to use as they recreated the complete pediments on the Nashville Parthenon. The casts remain,

as do the Kinney-Scholz maquettes, part of this Parthenon's permanent collection.

The Pediment Models

Sculptors Leopold and Belle Kinney Scholz made these models to aid in the creation of the pediment sculptures on the exterior of the Parthenon. Located along either side of the Treasury, each miniature

grouping depicts an important story involving Athena.

The East Pediment portrays goddesses and gods on Mt. Olympus at the moment of Athena's birth. She stands armed, facing her father Zeus, at the moment after emerging, fully-grown and armed from his head, as Nike prepares to crown her.

The West Pediment shows the contest between Athena and Poseidon for control of the land of Attica.

Centennial Park

The area that Nashvillians and visitors alike enjoy today as Centennial Park played an important role in Nashville's development.

The park was once native land. Though there were no

known permanent Native
American villages in the area,
there were probably small
Shawnee, Cherokee, and
Chickasaw settlements until
several years after the arrival
of the first European settlers
in the 1780s.

Next, the land became part of a 640-acre farm, purchased in 1783 for fifty cents an acre by pioneers John and Ann Robertson Cockrill. Then, as now, the land marked the northern terminus of the Natchez Trace.

The land was used as a staging and assembly area during the War of 1812 and the Civil War and had become a racecourse and fairgrounds before serving as the site of the 1897 Centennial Exposition celebrating Tennessee's first 100 years of statehood.

In 1902, just one year after the appointment of Nashville's first Board of Parks Commissioners, the city purchased the 130-acre Centennial Exposition site, making it the first private land in Nashville to be converted to a park.

In addition to the Parthenon, the park is home to Lake Watauga, Centennial Art Center, Centennial Performing Arts Studios, playgrounds, walking trails, and a collection of public art. It hosts numerous fairs and festivals and a variety of cultural offerings throughout the year.

Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired

In addition to meeting accessibility standards such as ramps, elevators, and a wheelchair, the Parthenon makes every effort to meet

the special needs of visitors who have visual impairment.

Braille:

The Parthenon offers on-site Braille brochures for use inside the Parthenon.

Special Tours:

The Parthenon offers a special tour for museum visitors who have visual impairment. The tours include tactile exploration of miniature Athena and

Parthenon models, columns, frieze pieces, and a full-size gryphon. In addition, guests experiment with spatial elements of the building and enter the museum office area to explore the original walls of the 1897 building.

The Galleries:

Several pieces of American art housed in the Cowan Gallery are explored through either Braille text or tactile exercises that explain specific

paintings, including artist Edwin Blashfield's painting *The New Dress*.

Scheduling a tour:

Please contact Lauren
Bufferd, Assistant Director at
tours@parthenon.org or 615862-8431. Tours must be
arranged in advance.

The Parthenon is owned and operated by the Metropolitan Board of Parks and Recreation, John Cooper,

Mayor. For information and group rates, please visit www.nashvilleparthenon.com or call 615-862-8431. For ADA information call 615-862-8400.