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Digital Tour of the Windy City: Chicago on the World Wide Web

By Erin Vandenberg, DePaul University

When you think of Chicago, you probably think of several things: mobsters, baseball, Chicago-style pizza, Lake Michigan, and the Magnificent Mile. Or perhaps you think of the Great Chicago Fire, the 1968 Democratic Convention, the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition, or the city's architecture. Chicago's history includes all of this and more, and information about much of the city's past can be found within many on-line archival collections. For those of you attending the 2010 annual meeting in the Windy City, the following Web sites will help you delve into Chicago's history before your trip. If you cannot attend the meeting, hopefully these Web sites will tide you over until you can visit "Chi-town" in person. Chicago truly is the "Cultural Crossroads," as you will discover as you journey through Web sites devoted to well-known and not-so-well-known historical events, people, and places.

Not only is Chicago an easy city to get to, thanks to its convenient Midwest location, it is also an easy city to navigate due to the carefully planned grid system of streets and avenues. *The Encyclopedia of Chicago*, a collaborative digital project between the Chicago History Museum, the Newberry Library, and Northwestern University, includes a special feature about Chicago's grid system, <http://www.encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org/pages/410049.html>. This resource documents the grid system with images of artifacts, maps, buildings, and aerial photographs, and an interactive copy of the 1837 Act of Incorporation for the City of Chicago. Additionally, if you're interested in learning more about city planning and Chicago, the encyclopedia also includes many other maps and a section on Daniel H. Burnham, the author of the 1909 *Plan of Chicago*, <http://www.encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org/pages/10537.html>. The Art Institute of Chicago Special Collections also has an extensive Burnham collection in its Ryerson and Burnham Digital Collections, <http://www.artic.edu/aic/libraries/research/specialcollections/digitalcollections/>, along with materials related to other architects who left their marks on the city, including Frank Lloyd Wright and Louis H. Sullivan. These on-line collections allow users to view photographs, slides, architectural drawings, papers, and oral histories documenting the history of Chicago's architecture and architects.

Other people who have shaped the history of Chicago include Jane Addams, the founder of Hull House, and George Pullman, inventor of the Pullman Sleeping Car. Photographs of Hull House and six other settlement houses have been digitized by the University of Illinois at Chicago Special Collections Department as part of an on-line exhibit titled "Changing Neighborhoods: Photographs of Social Reform from 7 Chicago Settlement Houses," <http://www.uic.edu/depts/lib/specialcoll/exhibits/7settlements/>. Around the same time that Addams established Hull House, Pullman built his eponymous planned industrial community. The Web site for the Pullman State Historic Site, <http://www.pullman-museum.org/>, includes photographs, maps, oral histories, and other images that document the town (now part of Chicago), the residents, and the Pullman Company.

While you're exploring the city, you may begin to wonder about the inhabitants of the past. The American Memory project at the Library of Congress, in conjunction with the Chicago History Museum, provides access to more than 55,000 photographs taken by *Chicago Daily News* photographers between 1902 and 1933, <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/ndlpcoop/ichihtml/>. These digitized photographs depict many aspects of Chicago life and can be searched by keyword or browsed by subject or name. The Web site also includes several on-line exhibits, developed by Chicago History Museum staff, featuring images from the collection that depict such subjects as football, Christmas, newsboys, and a variety of other topics. On its own Web site, <http://www.chicagohistory.org/history/index.html>, the Chicago History Museum features additional impressive exhibits about the Great Chicago Fire, the World's Columbian Exposition of 1893, and the Black Sox baseball scandal.

Chicago has had many newspapers come and go during its history, but the *Hyde Park Herald* has been reporting about the Hyde Park neighborhood on Chicago's South Side since 1882. Every known available issue of the paper has been digitized, <http://hpherald.com/archive/>. Access is free and open to the public, and the Web site features full text searching. Each issue is available in multiple formats,

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and users can view individual articles or full newspaper pages, browse tables of contents, or download PDFs.

Hyde Park is just one of the many neighborhoods and community areas that make up the city of Chicago. During the 1990s, Mayor Richard M. Daley officially defined many of these areas with banners, signs, and structures designating the “entrances” and boundaries, to help highlight each neighborhood’s own culture and history. According to *The Encyclopedia of Chicago*, there are 77 of these community areas, and the encyclopedia discusses the history and development of each, <http://www.encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org/pages/1760.html>. These neighborhoods are also documented in the Chicago Public Library’s (CPL) Digital Collections, <http://www.chipublic.org/images/index.php>, including images from several neighborhoods such as Lake View (home to Wrigley Field and the subarea of “Wrigleyville”) and Ravenswood (a subarea of the Lincoln Square and Lake View community areas that was designed to be one of the first of Chicago’s commuter suburbs). The CPL’s Digital Collections also include photographs depicting many well-known Chicago landmarks and people, and the site can be browsed by decade, person, and general “around the city” subjects.

In addition to the different cultures represented in the various neighborhood areas, Chicago also has a multitude of colleges and universities that bring people from all over the world to the city. The Columbia College Chicago Oral History Project documents higher education in the city, focusing on the history and contributions of the institution since 1960. Transcripts of these oral history interviews are located on-line, <http://www.lib.colum.edu/archives/oralhistory/index.php>, including one narrated by Dominic Pacyga, one of the plenary speakers for the 2010 annual meeting. The transcripts are presented in alphabetical order, and list the name, interview date, and narrator’s position at Columbia College; the interviews offer useful glimpses into the many different types of people and viewpoints that can be found in Chicago.

The various ethnic and cultural museums and archives in Chicago provide further evidence of the city’s diversity. For example, the Vivian Harsh Research Collection at the Chicago Public Library’s Woodson Regional Branch, <http://www.chipublic.org/branch/details/library/woodson-regional/p/FeatHarsh/>, is an important resource for local African American history that includes original

manuscripts, microfilm research collections, the *Heritage Press Archives*, and digitized photographs that were originally taken during the Chicago Renaissance, <http://www.chipublic.org/images/chicagorenaissance/index.php>. The DuSable Museum of African-American History’s Web site features photographs and descriptions of past and current exhibits, including an exhibit on Harold Washington, Chicago’s first black mayor, <http://www.dusablemuseum.org/exhibits/current/>. The Japanese American Service Committee Legacy Center has partnered with the Japanese American National Museum’s Discover Nikkei Project to place on the Internet historical images of Japanese American sports leagues and teams in Chicago from the 1940s through the 1980s, <http://www.discovernikkei.org/nikkeialbum/en/node/9543/>.

Finally, for those of you interested in the criminal side of Chicago history, the Chicago History Museum’s History Files include an on-line exhibit about Al Capone, complete with photographs and artifacts from the Prohibition era, <http://www.chicagohistory.org/history/capone.html>. An even darker look into the criminal element of Chicago can be found at Northwestern University School of Law’s “Homicide in Chicago 1870–1930” Web site, <http://homicide.northwestern.edu/>, which serves as an excellent example of an on-line exhibit that was created through collaboration among archives, libraries, and outside agencies. Handwritten police records from the Chicago Police Archives and the Illinois State Archives are included in this exhibit, and additional newspaper clippings, photographs, and court documents from various libraries and special collections provide a glimpse into a seedier side of the city that is rarely shared.

As you can see, these on-line collections cross many topics and formats and tell many stories about the city of Chicago. Hopefully they have whetted your appetite for everything the Cultural Crossroads has to offer. And maybe you’ll find that, to paraphrase Frank Sinatra, Chicago is your kind of town, too!

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