

Franklin County Memorial Hall

Memorial Hall at 280 E. Broad Street in Columbus, Ohio has seen many great faces and served a variety of purposes. A parade of soldiers and sailors marching from Mound and High on January 4th, 1906, launched the dedication of the hall, built in memory of those who had served their country. The Greek-style structure, designed by local architect Frank L. Packard, was built on land formerly part of Alfred Kelley's estate.

Memorial Hall was designed as a convention center. Its auditorium featured great acoustics and seated 4,200 people; at that time the second largest seating capacity in the U.S. Enrico Caruso made an appearance during his only U.S. tour. Marion Anderson and Rachmaninoff also performed in the Hall. Besides concerts, the Hall served as a forum for many speakers; Billy Sunday, Dr. Norman Vincent Peal and William Jennings Bryan. Campaigners included Teddy Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson along with many local individuals. President Wilson returned to Memorial Hall to launch his nationwide League of Nations campaign.

The Hall was also used for local fund-raising events, OSU proms and high school graduations. The first Home and Garden Show was held there in 1928.

In 1956 the building was in dire need of refurbishing but voters defeated a bond issue to fund repairs, and the new Veteran's Memorial facility had opened across the river a year earlier. Old Memorial Hall's future was in jeopardy.

The building's only remaining inhabitants were the Senior Citizens Recreation Center and the Franklin County Historical Society. An occasional professional wrestling match drew crowds and added a different touch. A committee formed by the Franklin County Historical Society developed an idea to revive the grand old building by turning it into a science museum based on the Museum of Science and Industry located in Portland, Oregon.

COSI, Center of Science and Industry, was housed in Memorial Hall from 1964 until 1999 when it moved across the river to the old Central High School. The building was finally refurbished in 2001 and houses county agencies.

Sources:

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