

This Day in History... April 6, 1968

HemisFair '68

On April 6, 1968, HemisFair '68 opened in San Antonio, Texas. It was the first official international exposition held in the Southwestern US. The fair honored the 250th anniversary of the founding of San Antonio.

The fair was awarded to San Antonio on November 17, 1965. The fair's planners estimated the cost to build up the site to be \$156 million, which was paid for by both public and private funds. The fair was constructed on a 96.2 acre area in southeastern downtown San Antonio. Many existing structures were torn down, though 24 were left standing. The city also extended its River Walk into the site.

The fair opened on April 6, 1968. It was just two days after the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. Featured speaker Lady Bird Johnson was one of many VIPs who had received death threats from segregationists leading up to the fair. However, she opted to attend the fair anyway, with increased security.



Texas-native First Lady Lady Bird Johnson was the featured speaker at the opening ceremony.

In her opening remarks, she said, "Let us not set the fires of hatred but quench them... What we have become, we owe to dozens of different peoples... In these troubled, tragic hours, we need to remember that we are moving forward."

With an overall theme of "Confluence of Civilization in the Americas," San Antonio's mixed cultural heritage was celebrated. It also highlighted San Antonio's potential as a center for international commerce and cultural exchange between the US and Latin America. Several permanent structures were built for the fair, including the theme structure, a 622-foot-tall Tower of the Americas.

More than 30 nations participated, many with special exhibit pavilions. Several companies also had corporate pavilions, including Eastman Kodak, Ford Motor Company, General Electric, Electric Motors, IBM, RCS, Frito Lay, Pepsi, Coca-Cola, American Express, Chrysler, and 3M. There were also church pavilions, as well as women and youth pavilions. The fair included a monorail that traveled between the pavilions.

Some of the special exhibits at the fair included *Confluence/Cosmos* – a presentation on space exploration, and *El Encanto de un Pueblo* – a display of 5,000 toys and miniatures depicting life in a Latin-American village. There was also a production of Giuseppe Verdi's *Don Carlo*, artwork from the Prado Museum in Madrid, plus stage shows, ballets, and more. Among the fair's most notable visitors were Grace Kelly and her husband, Prince Rainier of Monaco.



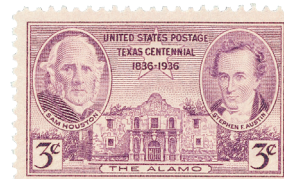
Grace Kelly and her husband were among the high-profile visitors to the fair.

The fair also had its own mascot, a dragon named Luther. Created by Sid and Marty Krofft, Luther had his own show at the fair's Coca-Cola pavilion. After the fair ended, the dragon was renamed and featured on the Krofft's children's television show, *H.R. Pufnstuf*.

After hosting more than 6.3 million visitors, HemisFair closed on October 6, 1968. Several of the buildings are still standing today. To celebrate the 20th anniversary of the fair in 1988, about 15 acres of the former fair grounds were transformed with waterfalls, fountains, and playgrounds. The work was centered around the Tower of the America's and the area was dedicated HemisFair Park in April 1988. Today the tower remains San Antonio's tallest building. It includes a revolving restaurant, lounge, and observation deck.



This stamp was issued in 1968 a week before the fair opened.



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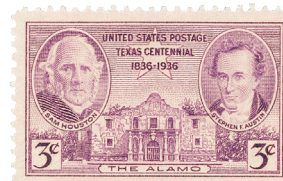


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