

An Exposition to Transform the Arts of a Nation

A small open space in a crowded downtown city with trains, cars, boats, and even a rollercoaster drowning out the sense of calm usually found outside. But within this small open space, there is a circle of 12 large stones hosting ceremonies for the arts and initiating a new tradition to the Western Hemisphere.

The 1913 Pittsburgh International Eisteddfod was held between July 2nd and July 5th at Exposition Hall near Pittsburgh's point. The festival and competition spread throughout the Exposition buildings and outside to the Gorsedd Stone Circle held near the Fort Pitt Blockhouse. The 1913 Eisteddfod stands out among the Eisteddfodau of history as the establishment of the American Order of the Bards and the first American Bardic Circle.

The Eisteddfod is a traditional Welsh celebration and the first official National Eisteddfod was held in 1176. Following the first Eisteddfod in 1176, many eisteddfodau were held throughout Wales, under the patronage of Welsh gentry and noblemen. The Eisteddfod eventually developed into a folk festival on a grand scale. After declining in popularity in the 18th century, it was revived in the early years of the 19th. In 1880, the National Eisteddfod Association was formed and since then an Eisteddfod has been held every year, except for 1914 and 1940. The Pittsburgh International Eisteddfod was held in Pittsburgh due to Mrs. David Davis and her son James J. Davis. Mrs. Davis attended Eisteddfodau when she was young in Wales and explained her sentimental thoughts on the Eisteddfodau prompting her son, James J Davis, to propose hosting an International Eisteddfod in Pittsburgh.

The Gorsedd Stone Circle is made of twelve stones evenly placed in a circle around the center stone. The size of the stones has varied from pebbles symbolically placed around in a circle to towering standing stones. The remains of the stone circles scatter the cities throughout Wales as a reminder of past Eisteddfods. The tradition of the Gorsedd Stone Circle was first formally created for a festival in 1792 when Iolo Morganwg, a Welsh academic and scholar, wanted to display the Welsh ancestral connections to the Celts and their traditions. This first Gorsedd Circle actually took place outside of Wales on Primrose Hill in London. Towards the end of the 19th century, the Herald Bard, Arlunydd Pen-y-garn, made a detailed plan of the Gorsedd Circle. According to this plan the stone to the east, the Maen Cyfamod, and the two Portal stones formed the shape of the mystic mark. The stones were often dressed with oak and mistletoe leaves at the turn of the century although this trend has largely dissipated over time. In 2004, the new stone circles each year were replaced with a set of man-made stones that are moved annually for the next Eisteddfod.

The 1913 International Eisteddfod held in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania hosted their Gorsedd Stone Circle outside Exposition Hall near Pittsburgh's point. The opening ceremony was held on July 2nd and the closing on July 5th. The ceremony was lead by Dryfed, Archdruid of the Order

of the Bard, establishing the American Order of the Bard. Members were inducted into the organization throughout the various ceremonies that took place over the course of the Eisteddfod. The goals of the organization are to amuse, instruct, and elevate. The Gorsedd embodies not just music but literature, poetry, oratory, painting, sculpture, and other art forms.

Although the Pittsburgh Eisteddfod was hosted over a hundred years ago, its influence on the Welsh community in America has remained. The Order of the Bard, Ovate, and Druids still hosts American members within its coveted ranks. And Pittsburgh, among many other cities across the nation, has people invested in connecting with longstanding traditions of their ancestors.