

THINK BIG!

Gateway Arch St. Louis, Missouri

BY MELISSA BRANDZEL

What do you get when you combine a dedicated civic leader, a prestigious design contest, a mathematical equation, and 43,226 tons of steel and concrete?

You get America's tallest monument.

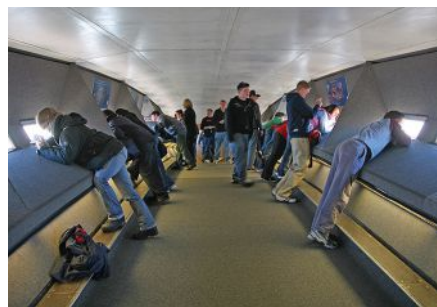
As part of our tribute to the one-hundredth anniversary of the National Park Service this year, we salute the Gateway Arch of St. Louis, Missouri, the soaring highlight of the Jefferson National Expansion Memorial—a roughly ninety-one-acre national park that holds not only the famous Arch and grounds, but also the Old Courthouse and Luther Ely Smith Square. Nestled into the west bank of the Mississippi River, the Arch and its surrounding landscape comprise a National Historic Landmark.

The iconic "Gateway of the West" had a slow rise to fame. In 1933, as the Great Depression ravaged the nation, St. Louis attorney and civic leader Luther Ely Smith aspired to rebuild the city's run-down riverfront area into something special. He envisioned a tribute to Thomas Jefferson, the Louisiana Purchase, and America's westward expansion of the 1800s—and to the St. Louis area itself, from which Lewis and Clark made their expedition, commissioned by Jefferson. Smith convinced the mayor, Bernard Dickmann, of the idea, and they formed the Jefferson National Expansion Memorial Association (JNEMA) in 1934. But JNEMA struggled to gain local and congressional sup-

port. The matter wound up in court, and finally President Franklin D. Roosevelt gave the green light via executive order in 1935. One dollar of city money would be provided for each \$3 in federal money.

The city spent years clearing the riverfront site. Progress was halted by World War II, after which Smith renewed his lofty ambition. He wanted an impressive monument on the grounds that would draw visitors, so, in 1947, JNEMA launched a national design competition. A plucky young architect, Eero Saarinen, rose above the pack with his arch design, beating nearly 175 rivals, including his own architect father, Eliel, and legendary designers Charles and Ray Eames. Executing Saarinen's inverted catenary curve required a mathematical equation, engineering studies—and a mountain of patience. Getting the Arch to completion proved to be a tall order.

In 1950, President Truman dedicated the site; President Eisenhower authorized its construction four years later. Groundbreaking began in 1959. However, the Arch, a stressed skin of stainless steel, was no easy thing to build—in scope, structure, or materials—resulting in delays along the way. Although the exterior shell was finished in 1965, it wasn't formally dedicated until 1968. Standing at 630 feet (sixty-three stories) high—and stretching 630 feet wide at ground level between the outer sides of the legs—the Arch became not only the tallest man-made monument in America,



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but also in the Western Hemisphere, and the tallest arch in the world.

Today, the Arch and grounds offer plenty to see. There's an underground visitor center, which houses the Museum of Westward Expansion. For a fee, visitors can take a tram to the observation platform at the top of the Arch for an expansive view. The Old Courthouse, where the Dred Scott case was tried, features ranger-led talks, exhibits, and more. The park grounds and seasonal riverboat cruises give visitors a scenic respite. Saarinen remarked that he wished to "create a monument which would have lasting significance and would be a landmark of our time." The overarching conclusion? He did indeed. ♥

MELISSA BRANDZEL is a writer and the Copy Editor for AMERICAN ROAD. Modern photos by David Schwen. Historic construction photo courtesy Library of Congress.