

FP-061

THE ESPLANADE - EAST END

This end of the reflecting basin is the Esplanade's most ceremonial spot, in part because it is immediately next to the Court of Honor, the thoroughfare immediately behind you. Over time, many official plaques, seals and presentations have received attention at this location. Before you is a towering structure called The Great Pylon. The original pylon was installed for the Texas Centennial Exposition of 1936, but workers then removed it around 1939. The base of this pylon and the accompanying plaque survive from the original. But the pylon itself is a reconstructed replica, installed in 2009.

In 1996, Fair Park was a central location for the festivities associated with Texas's Sesquicentennial. A large seal commemorating that event is at this end of the Esplanade as well.

The most prominent occupants of this end of the basin, however, are certainly the unclothed statues that jut out over the basin's eastern edge, as if preparing for a long swim. In 1936, renowned artist Lawrence Tenney Stevens sculpted the original versions, called Tenor (on the north side) and Contralto (on the south side). The images symbolized sound traveling through air, and appropriately were flanked by short pylons containing a state-of-the-art speaker system. You see replicas of those pylons here as well.

Somehow, over time, the original aluminum sculptures got misplaced; some speculate they were melted down during World War Two to help with war efforts. These are reconstructions of those dynamic images, crafted in 2009 by Dallas artist David Newton.

The 700-foot-long reflecting basin in front of you, also built for the 1936 Texas Centennial Exposition, provided a graceful, architectural structure to an area that before had been open and somewhat chaotic. The three fountains within it provided exciting entertainment, especially at night when they were lit.

For many years, the basin's fountains went silent due to cost concerns. The reflecting basin came to life only sporadically. For example, during the 1996 State Fair of Texas, it hosted a Tiger Island exhibit that was enormously popular with fair visitors. Seven real tigers roamed a makeshift island reserve erected in the center of the reflecting basin. Three years later, the basin hosted an Energy Extravaganza, featuring strobe lights and fireworks.

Then in the 2000s, a fund-raising campaign brought the fountains back to life. Now, during the State Fair of Texas and some other special events, 272 jets spray water up to 100 feet into the air to music that ranges from classical to country western to songs reflecting different holidays.

Another tour stop at the opposite end of the reflecting basin will provide additional information about that end of the esplanade.

###