



THE VOLTAIC EXHIBITION OF 1899

You can find this point of interest in Como 6 – Stage 1.

INFORMATION

Location: the Voltaic Exhibition of 1899 was organized in the area currently occupied by the Municipal Gardens near the lake.

DESCRIPTION

(by Silvia Fasana)

In 1899 the city of Como commemorated the physicist Alessandro Volta on the centenary of the invention of the voltaic battery with a great Exhibition, able to rival the Universal Expositions held in large European and American cities. The Como engineer Eugenio Linati designed a vast exhibition area in the area currently occupied by the Municipal Gardens near the lake, covering an exhibition area of about 15,000 square meters. The main idea of his project was to create a single pavilion that would allow a continuous visit, always indoors, of the objects on display: from Volta's memorabilia to new technical discoveries, to the most refined products of the silk industry for which Como was famous. The main façade of the central pavilion, facing the city, was built in Empire style, with reference to the time of Alessandro Volta. At the ends of the loggia rose two tall towers in the form of an electric battery; in one of the two there was a very modern elevator, reaching a belvedere from which you could enjoy an unprecedented view of the city. Separated from the rest of the exhibition was the art pavilion, where numerous examples of historical artistic styles, chosen from the masterpieces scattered throughout the territory, were presented together with contemporary artists.

The Voltaic Exhibition, the first in unified Italy, was a great success; it was visited by the main political authorities of the time, including King Umberto I, accompanied by his wife Margherita and the heir to the throne Vittorio Emanuele, Prince of Naples, with his spouse, Elena from Montenegro. The pavilions were flanked by a series of promotional initiatives: specially designed posters, countless celebratory postcards, rallies (such as the International Congress of Telegraphists, the National Congress of Electricians, the General Assemblies of the Italian Electrotechnical Association and the Italian Physical Society) and social outings. Particular attention was paid to music: Giacomo Puccini, one of the greatest musicians of the time, composed a march significantly entitled *Electric Shock*, while Lorenzo Perosi granted the world premiere of his oratorio *Il Natale del Redentore* to the city of Como.

On July 8, 1899, however, a furious fire, provoked by a cigarette butt, completely destroyed, in less than an hour, the pavilions of the exhibition including the shed that housed the first examples registered in the Como tramway network, with the exception of the artistic pavilion, due to its isolated location. However, many relics were recovered. A subscription was immediately opened for the reconstruction of the exhibition in which King Umberto I also participated. Based on a project by the architect Linati, the reconstruction was completed in a month and was reopened on 20 August 1899.

With the great Voltaic Exhibition of 1899, the history of electric lighting began in Como. In that

year the Baragiola brothers, owners of the Grand Hotel Plinius, were the first to equip the hotel and their homes with electric lighting systems. In the following year the Comense Electric Company "A. Volta" was established, in which the main entrepreneurs of the area participated.