

Electric Park and the “Glorious Past”

When we think of recreational activities in the Albany Area today, we think of the Museum, of Saratoga Performing Arts, of Lake George - but, one hundred years ago, a major attraction was “Electric Park” on Kinderhook Lake. The Park was one of the first areas in the nation to be electrified with electric lights and amusement rides.

In 1901, the Albany and Hudson Railway, which owned and operated a third-rail electric trolley line that ran along the east shore of the lake, opened a Park to attract riders to their trolley. Admission was free for those who had a 40-cent round-trip ticket on the trolley. The Park was lined with colored lights with a steam-powered ferris wheel at the entrance and an electric-powered wheel inside. A roller coaster was built over the water of a lagoon near the entrance with a carousel on a small island in the center of the lagoon. Revelers would ride floating carts down a wooden “Chute to Chute” into the water in the summer and toboggans onto the ice in the winter. Of course, there were refreshments - ice cream, Cracker Jacks, popcorn, soda and peanuts.

The Park was built on the Chatham Township side of the lake, which was dry, so those who wished to imbibe rented boats and paddled to Hawley Point or “rest areas” on two islands in the lake on the Kinderhook Township side. To provide easier access, a wooden bridge was built from the east shore to Hawley Point in 2006. Holes were chopped through the ice and wooden poles were driven into the muddy bottom to hold the bridge. It was not very sturdy and young men would make it sway in the middle to frighten young ladies. A dance Hall, restaurant, bowling alley, shooting gallery and “Rustic Theater” were built on the Point - it was a favorite place for hundreds to spend a Saturday or Sunday. There were two performances each day at the Theater for plays, vaudeville shows and, later, motion pictures. Of course, there was not much foresight in the construction of the bridge and expansion of the ice in 1907 tore it down but the amusements on Hawley Point continued to be a major attraction.

World War I and the development of the automobile spelled the end to the Park as a unique attraction. It closed in 1915 and attempts were made to reopen in 1917 but they failed and it closed for good in 1921. Some of the buildings of the Park have been converted into residences but the Theater burned and much of the wood in the Park was used to construct new homes. Hawley Point became a Boy Scout Camp where some of the “boys” who are still around remember the enjoyable times they spent there. A few of the poles that held the roller coaster can still be seen in the lagoon and a Community Hall stands at the location of Trolley Station, but it is difficult to imagine what it must have been like a century ago.

However, the Lake is still a major amusement attraction in the area. The Corporation sells a book, “Kinderhook Lake and its Glorious Past” and North Chatham Library and the Kinderhook Historical Society have large collections of pictures and post cards. Of course, a few are still around who remember those “Glorious Days.” Here is a more detailed article by Mindy Potts, a Corporation member who writes articles for local papers - <http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.com/~clifflamere/History/Col/ElectricParkColCo.htm>