

## GLENWOOD AND THE CHAUTAUQUA

*A camp meeting, a revival, a picnic, a circus, a vacation, an educational program – roll them all into one and you have the old-time Chautauqua, an institution which flourished every summer in towns all over the United States in the early years of this century. New Albany had its Chautauqua, too, every summer at Glenwood Park. The Chautauqua and Glenwood Park are the subjects of today's Historical Series.*

It was in 1903 that the new traction line between New Albany and Jeffersonville brought a new era in transportation to the two cities – and the traction line brought a new institution that is still fondly remembered by many New Albany residents . . . Glenwood Park.

Traction companies frequently built amusement parks and picnic grounds along their lines on the theory that park patrons would ride the cars and increase the passenger business. The Louisville & Southern Indiana Traction, whose tracks crossed Silver Creek where Spring Street crosses today, picked that spot as the site for their park – the area north of Spring Street that is today one of New Albany's finest residential areas.

First called Silver Creek Park, it was opened July 1, 1903, with Indiana Gov. Winthrop Durbin as guest of honor, and was an immediate success. The interurban cars running past the park operated from New Albany through Jeffersonville and to Louisville. Residents of all three cities soon discovered the delights of Silver Creek, the flower garden, the band concerts, picnics, the ferris wheel, the pavilion, the auditorium, the baseball diamond and the tennis courts.

The miniature railway with its tiny steam locomotive was the special love of the youngsters.

The next year the name was changed to Glenwood Park at the suggestion of George P. Dorn, superintendent of the traction line and the man who picked the site. That year, too, a concrete dam was built in Silver Creek to provide for boating and fishing. The dam is still there and the spot is still a favorite with fishermen.

But something more important happened in 1904 – that was the year of the first Chautauqua. It was organized by New Albany and Jeffersonville businessmen and was patterned after the annual events which had originated at Chautauqua Lake, New York. Dr. J. H. Baldwin of Jeffersonville was president and New Albany was represented by School Superintendent Charles Prosser, photographer Alex Heimberger, attorney John Weathers and by T. E. Crawford.

Designed to provide education, inspiration and relaxation, the Chautauqua acquired its first big-name speaker on opening day – August 5, 1904 – when William Jennings Bryan mounted the platform and held the huge crowd spellbound. Held every summer for two weeks at Glenwood Park, the Chautauqua brought to New Albany an amazing variety of lecturers, entertainers and new ideas.

Some of New Albany's first movies were shown at the Chautauqua and many a local youngster discovered his first ice cream cone there. The lecturers through the years included such names as "Billy" Sunday, James Whitcomb Riley, "Champ" Clark of Missouri, Robert LaFollette of Wisconsin, Eugene V. Debs of Terre Haute, perennial candidate for president of the United States on the Socialist ticket; Leonardo Taft, the famous sculptor, and Maude Bullington Booth, daughter of General Booth, founder of the Salvation Army.

Entertainment in a lighter vein included Sousa's Band, a product of Longfellow's "Hiawatha" by a troupe of full-blooded Indians, and illustrated travel lectures. Many families rented tents at the park during Chautauqua and lived on the grounds for the full two weeks.

Most Chautauqua events were held in a huge tent which seated 4,000 and one of the most exciting events occurred in 1911 when a high wind toppled the tent over on a full house of startled patrons, but fortunately none was injured seriously.

Current topics of the day were a favorite subject of debate from the Chautauqua platform and during the time Prohibition was being proposed, "Champ" Clark debated the issue with Charles Landis, a leading "dry". Before the debate was over, tempers grew quite hot and many listeners were expecting a platform brawl between Clark and Landis, but Chautauqua officials managed to calm down the two debaters.

Glenwood Park also was the scene of other important events. Pageants written and directed by Charles B. McLinn were held at Glenwood Park at the time Indiana celebrated its 100<sup>th</sup> birthday in 1916. Attendance at these pageants numbered in the thousands and one estimate of the 1916 pageant placed the number of spectators at 30,000. During the World War I a number of patriotic pageants were presented at Glenwood, but with the end of the war the park started to decline.

Chautauqua ceased in 1916, although an unsuccessful attempt was made in 1922 to revive them, but William Jennings Bryan didn't attract the crowds any more. Now and again special events were held at the park. As late as 1927 a Water Carnival was held as part of a fundraising drive for Silvercrest Sanitorium, but Glenwood Park seemed to have no place in an age of radio, movies and automobiles. It continued with decreasing patronage until about

1935, then stood empty and desolate until finally within the past few years it became a residential area with only the street name of Glenwood to give any indication of what once had been.

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