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THE HISTORY OF FOREST PARK AMUSEMENT PARK

Desplaines Avenue & West Harrison Street, Forest Park, Ill.
(1908-1922)



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THE HISTORY OF FOREST PARK AMUSEMENT PARK

Desplaines Avenue & West Harrison Street, Forest Park, Ill.
(1908-1922)

1905, A YEAR OF PLANNING

The planning for the Forest Park amusement park began in 1905. Financier Oliver L. Brown had formed the Beach Amusement Company with the intent of building a magnificent resort on the lake front; however, "the clamors of the people on the West Side for a summer resort of their own" convinced him to select a second site far from the lake: the corner of Desplaines Avenue and West Harrison Street in what was then the suburb of Harlem. Brown was reported to have hired Franc R.E. Woodward, "the man who made White City famous", to direct publicity, and H.E. Rice, owner of the Globe Theater in St. Louis, to oversee construction; the New York firm of Kirby, Pettit & Green, Coney Island architects, would build the park in a combination of Moorish, Arabian, and renaissance styles at cost of \$1,300,000 The opening was set for May of 1906.

With all this activity sparked by White City, "Chicago," wrote Billboard, "might well be named 'The Park City'." And indeed, as Chicago parks expanded, so did Billboard's coverage of them. By 1906, Chicago's parks were receiving as much ink in the magazine as Coney Island's, a sign of their importance to the industry as a whole. Concessionaires and ride manufacturers flocked to the city, making a center for the booming American amusement business. As Billboard concluded, "The year 1906 holds great promise..."

The New Year, however, got off to a rocky start for the area's newest proposed park. The site chosen by the Beach Amusement Company at Desplaines and Harrison in the western suburb of Harlem was dedicated in November, then surrounded by a high board fence in December. However, on January 3, 1906, the Evangelical Lutheran ministers' conference of Chicago met to oppose plans to build the new park next to the Concordia and Waldheim Cemeteries. They drafted resolutions of opposition to be read from the pulpits of fifty Churches in Chicago the following Sunday. They enlisted



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Alderman Albert W. Belifuss of the 15th Ward to take the matter before the Harlem village board. In the face of such opposition, plans for the new park stalled.

1907, FOREST PARK IS NEARLY READY TO OPEN

A new Forest Park Fair Grounds Amusement Company had been organized by area politicians and liquor interests. President James J. Gray was a former assessor and circuit court clerk; Vice-president Henry Maiwurm was head of the State Liquor Dealers Protective Association. Treasurer A.E. Winterroth was a Forest Park florist and local agent for the McAvoy Brewing Company; secretary and general manager Joseph Grein was a former state representative and Chicago city sealer. What these men didn't know about running a park would be provided by Forest Park's amusement director, Thomas W. Prior, fresh from Riverview last season and White City the year before.



The new company leased the old Beach Amusement site, 22 acres with an option for 14 more, at Desplaines Avenue and Harrison Street, adjacent to the terminals of the Metropolitan (West Side) "L" and the Aurora & Elgin Railroad. The village of Forest Park granted a franchise to operate for ten years. The park was to be constructed by May 30, 1908, at a cost of \$1 million. \$300,000 coming from the Forest Park Fair Grounds Amusement Company and \$700,000 coming from concessionaires.



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Once again, the Chicago Lutheran Synod protested the building of a park next to the Waldheim, Concordia and Forest Home Cemeteries as a "mercenary scheme showing no respect for the dead". On Sunday, February 23rd, all forty German Lutheran churches in Chicago adopted the resolution of protest. At the same time, however, Forest Park women were going door-to-door in the suburb, getting signatures on a petition in favor of the proposed park and condemning the cemeteries and churches as non-taxpaying "meddlers". This time, the Synod failed, and park construction went ahead as planned.

Formal dedication of the park was held March 22nd. Interest ran so high that special trains were added on the Metropolitan and Lake Street "L"s, the A&E, and west side surface lines. Between 5000 and 10,000 attended. In April, a local option referendum threatened to turn the new park dry. Anti-saloon (and pro-cemetery) forces in the neighboring dry village of River Forest saw the vote as a way of stopping the "doubtless... demoralizing influence" of the not-yet-open amusement park. Despite a concerted effort, the dry forces were defeated; one reason may have been a new paper, the Forest Park Weekly News, edited by "F. R. E. Woodward of the park's publicity department", as an "organ of Chicago brewers and the local saloon interests".

Though construction was rushed to meet the May 30th date, the park's troubles were not over yet. On the night of May 28th, less than 48 hours from opening, a freak storm hit the park, flooding the grounds in moments. With the main braces of the park's Giant Safety Coaster not yet in place, furious winds blew down the coaster structure, crushing the loading station of the Pneumatic Tube ride and a half-dozen smaller buildings.

Opening day was postponed a week to June 6th. Several thousand people showed up, although the weather was still unfavorable and much in the park was not yet ready. Among the dignitaries on hand was Robert R. McCormick, then president of the Sanitary District of Chicago, and soon to be publisher of the Chicago Tribune.

The park had arranged to get its electricity from the Sanitary District instead of a commercial power company, and local electric interests had tried hard to prevent this. At 11:15 o'clock pm opening night, there was a sudden flash and the crowded park went dark. Lanterns were used to help everyone exit the park safely. McCormick suspected



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sabotage due to the "many threats and obstacles put in the way of the district bringing power to the park."

By the end of June, however, everything was running smoothly, and patrons from all over Chicago's West Side flocked to the new Forest Park. Its main buildings were designed in Art Nouveau style, by E.E. Roberts, a popular Oak Park architect of Frank Lloyd Wright's Prairie School, and thus its architecture was the most distinctive of any parks since White City. Particularly impressive was the, park's entrance, between two towers each over four stories tall.



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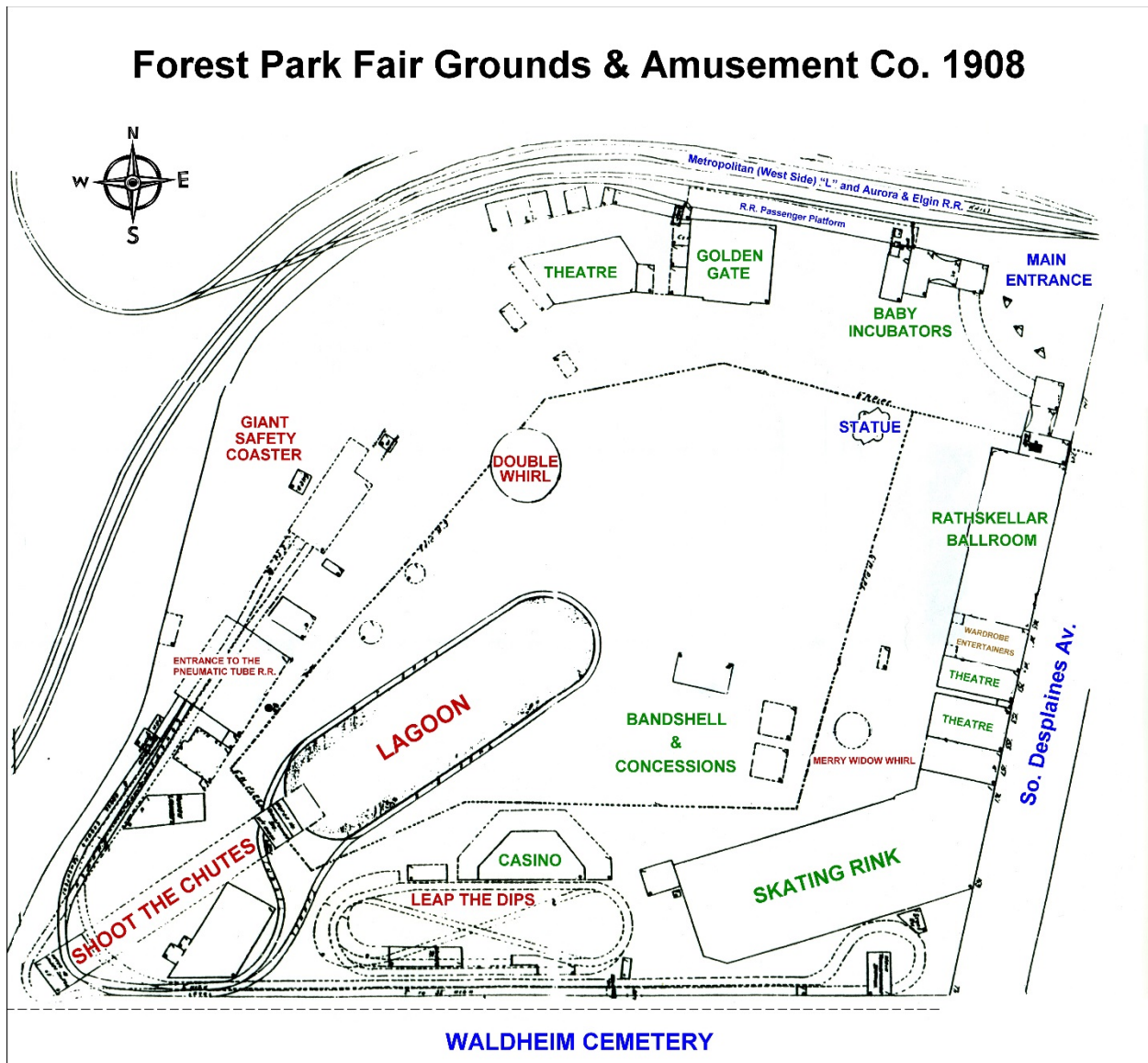
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1908, MAIN ATTRACTIONS & PARK MAP



Folly, the Queen of the Carnival -- Artist William Schmingen's statue of a female figure in full Mardi Gras costume, "with cap and bells and stick and bladder", stood just inside the entrance, welcoming visitors to Forest Park. The Grand Fountain originally stood in what was later converted to a flower bed.



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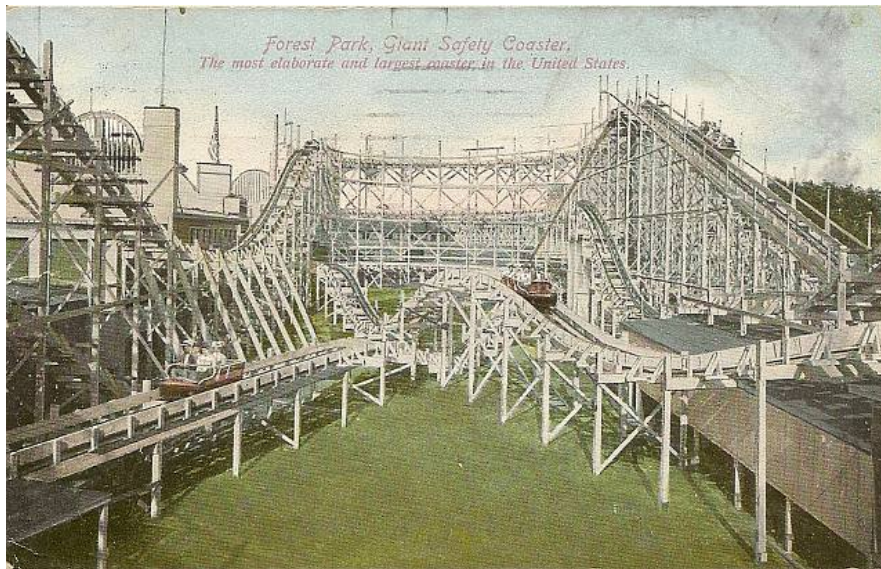
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Giant Safety Coaster -- Forest Park's greatest ride, also called the Chase Through the Clouds, was said to be the longest, highest and steepest coaster in the United States at the time. It was also billed as the safest, though there are unconfirmed reports that "passengers flew out of it more than once."



Designed by the Ingersoll Engineering & Constructing Company and built by Paul Howse's Coaster Construction Company, it justified the Lutheran Synod's fears about Forest Park -- outlined in electric lights at night, the coaster ran right alongside the fence of Waldheim Cemetery; its screaming passengers could be heard from blocks away.





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The Pneumatic Tube -- A unique ride invented by one Joseph J. Stoetzel: air was pumped out of a long, underground tunnel, creating a vacuum; the vacuum then pulled cars full of passengers through the tunnel at breakneck speeds. Seventy-five years later, passenger Edna Blank recalled:

"It was thrilling and scary. You got into your car in the above-ground station. You were all caged in and in nearly total darkness as you were blown or sucked through the tube by terrific blasts of air ... You'd be going so fast ... just when it looked like you were going to crash there was a spooky green light in front of you. Then the doors would suddenly burst open. Your ride was safely over."

Among the crew that built the Pneumatic Tube ride was a young construction man from Kewanee, IL, named Harry C. Baker. From this start in the amusement field at Forest Park, Baker would go on to become one of America's top ride and park builders; a partner of legendary coaster designer, John A. Miller, builder of Coney Island's fabled Cyclone (1927).

Leap the Dips -- Forest Park's second coaster, a figure "8", also designed by the Ingersoll Company ran along the Waldheim Cemetery's fence.





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The Rathskellar, Ballroom, Theaters, penny arcade --These buildings lining Desplaines Avenue showed off E.E. Roberts' distinctive architecture for the park. Forest Park's Ballroom, like White City's, stayed open year-round.



The Golden Gate -- A large building whose facade was a massive painting of San Francisco ablaze; inside was a circular panorama of the 1906 earthquake which patrons rode past on a slowly revolving floor.

Merry Widow Whirl -- Essentially two, side-by-side Ferris wheels. Each of the two wheels had 8 enclosed cars; each car accommodated 4 adults. A metal tower between the two wheels supported the common axle.



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Shoot-The-Chutes -- The concrete rim of Forest Park's massive Chutes lagoon had a series of windows in it. The rim was actually the skylight of the Pneumatic Tube tunnel which circled the Chutes lagoon.



Roller Rink -- Forest Park, caught the roller skating craze. There was a palm garden cafe and soda fountain in the middle of the rink which was an oval, 1/8 mile long oval with a 25 foot wide skating surface.

The ride took its name from Franz Lehar's *The Merry Widow*, the outstanding theatrical event of the previous year. Hundreds of items were named after the operetta and its wildly popular "Merry Widow Waltz"; Merry Widow cocktails, corsets, dinner plates, hats, etc. This ride's motion may have reminded its maker of the 'whirling' of the waltz.

This was probably the first installation of this ride, which may have been manufactured locally. By 1909, when a second Whirl had been installed at Riverview, a souvenir postcard was issued. On the back was a poem:



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Say! Have you heard of the Merry Widow and Whirl?

The latest invention to please your girl.

You'll find it at Riverview and Forest Park,

You surely must ride on it if you're out for a lark.

So when you go to those parks with your girl,

Don't fail to ride on the Merry Widow Whirl.

On the front of the card is a photo of the ride, probably taken at Forest Park; a ticket booth in Forest Park's Art Nouveau style can be seen in the photo.



Bandshell -- "The Merry Widow Waltz" was probably played more than a few times here. Kryl's, Patsy Conway's, Fraser's Highlanders and Thaviu's were among the bands featured the first season.

Other attractions included Baby Incubators, a Double Whirl, a burro ride and a Casino with a restaurant.



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1909 – 1914, THE FAST TIMES



In 1909, Paul Howse left White City to replace Thomas W. Prior as manager of Forest Park.

The fact that Thomas Prior left Forest Park after just one season was not that surprising. He had a history of short runs at Ferris Wheel Park, White City and Riverview. But Paul Howse leaving White City, a spectacularly successful park, the one he had founded only four years earlier. This marked a significant change in Chicago amusements parks.

Though White City had been his idea, Howse had always been low man on its ownership totem pole, below Joseph Beifeld and Aaron Jones. And so, in the last two



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years, Howse had increasingly devoted his energies to his own Coaster Construction Company, building and operating rides in various parks around the country.

Times were changing. People, especially the young, were throwing off the restraints of the old Victorian Age, becoming faster and wilder. Like the automobile and the airplane, thrill rides were part of this change. Howse saw the change coming as early as 1906, telling Billboard: *"The country over, inventors and managers are seeking new devices to amuse the fickle public, which is constantly crying for something new. Riding devices stand the wear and tear of years, but shows do not. In ten years the former have grown steadily in popularity, but shows 'play out' in one or two seasons. My guess is that in five years from today the summer park will have 80 per cent sensational riding devices and 20 per cent shows, whereas today they have 75 per cent shows and 25 per cent riding devices."*





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Howse's statement was amazingly prophetic for 1906. Over the next few years, watching the rise of Riverview, he also began to see problems inherent at White City. Interviewed around the time he jumped to Forest Park, Howse said:

"A number of parks have been designed and built by architects who have had no knowledge of the (amusement) park business and the demands of park patrons. These parks have been overloaded with buildings where rides should have been built. Not over two or three show buildings can bring any return to a park owner. His money should be invested in rides. All spaces should not be filled in merely to form a solid wall of one attraction after another. When a new feature comes out, the park should have a space for it without destroying previous investments."

Though Forest Park had been designed by architect E.E. Roberts, its buildings had been kept to a minimum, leaving lots of room for Howse's firm to build the huge Giant Safety Coaster in 1908. Now, as manager of Forest Park for the 1909 season, Howse did what there was no room to do at White City, he built two big new rides.

One was a Steeplechase ride, a kind of coaster with wooden horses straddling the rails instead of cars to sit in. Patrons rode the horses the way they would on a carousel. The horses were chain-lifted up an incline, then released to glide over an undulating, curving course like a roller coaster would. With six parallel tracks, the gravity-powered ride was a fair imitation of a horse race; the steed with the most weight would move fastest and be the winner. This, of course, was inducement for couples, even threesomes, to ride a single horse, pressed daringly close together which, naturally, increased the ride's popularity.



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The signature ride of George Tilyou's Steeplechase Park at Coney Island since 1897, Forest Park's Steeplechase was the only one ever built at a Chicago park. A half-mile long, it was built between the Chutes lagoon and the Giant Safety Coaster by the Steeplechase Construction Company, a new firm founded by Paul Howse.

The second big ride built by Howse's new company was the Grand Canyon roller coaster, at first called the Rocky Mountain Ride. Part scenic and part thrill coaster, a la Riverview's Royal Gorge, the Grand Canyon was unique in that it was the only three rail coaster ever built at a Chicago amusement park.

Using the same principle as the city's "L" trains, the Grand Canyon drew electric power from a third rail the entire length of its track. Like the "L", a motorman in the front seat controlled the coaster's speed. He could make it slow down or go deadly fast taking a back curve at full speed. For this reason, third railers were among the most frightening roller coasters ever built, with the worst safety record of any ride in history.



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Sometimes, though, the experience was more farcical than fearful. Not dependent on gravity like other coasters, the Grand Canyon's last hills were as high as the first. On inclement days, when rainfall cut down traction, the Grand Canyon's cars "couldn't make the later hills on the first try. Then the motorman had to back up and take a full power run at the rise-- perhaps several times before it could be topped. That way the customers got more mileage and more thrills without additional cost."

The Grand Canyon was credited to Howse and Charles J. Scheel, the former manager of White City's Scenic Railway, who had co-designed Howse's Figure-8 at Chicago's Luna Park. The Figure-8's other designer, White City's chief mechanical engineer Arthur Jarvis, may have also had a hand in Howse's new rides at Forest Park. Jarvis left White City at the same time as Howse to build rides for other parks, and went on to build several at Coney Island, and in England at the 1925 British Empire Exhibition. In 1923,



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Jarvis became general manager of Coney's Luna Park, and built its famous Mile Sky Chaser coaster in 1925.

Howse and Scheel were also said to have 'built' Forest Park's new Carousel, however, as with White City's carousel the year before, it seems they bought a machine made by the Dentzel company and merely built the pavilion to house it. Further drawing on his White City experience, Howse also added the Reign of Fire to the park. Complete with the usual street cars, fire engines and daring rescues of young women from burning buildings, Reign was described as a "Red-Hot Fire Show".



"Red-Hot" as well this season was the Human Roulette Wheel, a spinning device invented by Coney Island's George Tilyou that allowed men and women to get tangled together in a mix of laughter and sexual contact. Every Chicago Park installed one in



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1909, including Forest Park. Like the Steeplechase; "popular because it defied conventions" with its chance for close, physical contact and the foolhardy thrills of the Grand Canyon third railer, the craze for the Human Roulette Wheel signified a new and reckless abandon in the air in 1909. A sign that the Victorian Age was dying and that much 'faster' times lay ahead.

1910 AT FOREST PARK

Forest Park's slogan this year was "Go Where The Gos Go": ads and billboards showed the Gos, an imaginary family, enjoying the park; employees portraying the Gos were on hand at the park and made promotional appearances around the city as well.

For all this publicity, there were only a few new attractions to promote this year. Borrowing from Riverview, a new "mammoth" swimming pool was opened. Borrowing from White City, its star attractions were Margaret and Elsie, "Queens of the Deep Blue Sea". Bullfights were presented by toreadors brought up from Mexico. Happily, the bull was roped and thrown, cowboy style and were not killed. Broncho buster 'Texas Hills' and his Wild West troupe demonstrated the 'hanging' of a horse thief. The William Morris agency was put in charge of booking the park's vaudeville theater.





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All these new attractions were shows, which seems strange, given manager Paul Howse's belief that parks should concentrate on rides instead. Perhaps it wasn't so strange after all. At the end of this season, Howse quit Forest Park.

Forest Park featured Link's Posing Beauties, Mlle Mercino Del Pino, the 'sensational Spanish snake dancer', and the Mystery Dance of Serina the barefoot Greek.

1911 AT FOREST PARK

Replacing Paul Howse as manager this year was former assistant manager, M.A. Bredel. Replacing the Go family as the costumed characters from last season, the park introduced Mutt and Jeff, the popular comic strip creations of cartoonist Bud Fisher. The characters met the public in 'receptions' twice daily, in the afternoon for children, and in the evening for adults.

New at Forest Park this year was the Mouse Trap which was renamed in later years to the Iron Maze. In October, it was used for scientific research by Fleming Perrin, professor of psychology at the University of Pittsburgh. College students tried to make their way through the maze in "Experiment II" in a study of the human learning process which begun in 1909 at the University of Chicago's psychology lab. Results of the Forest Park experiment were published by Princeton University in 1914.





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Replacing the Infant Incubators and the Reign of Fire show from last year, was a tan bark arena seating 1000 and featuring such acts as the A.K. Ranch and Real Wild West. Another new attraction was Alligator Joe and his 3000 live alligators and crocodiles which range in size from three inches to 30 feet long.

Billboard noted that the Chase Through the Clouds giant coaster was "doing the largest business in its career", now that it had been "thoroughly overhauled", and "made as safe as money and engineering ability will permit". Reports of people flying out of the cars may have been true after all.

The magazine also reported that the miniature railway along with Forest Park's bowling alleys, billiard tables, race track game and candy wheel-- were owned by a Sylvester Ferretti, co-owner of the wrestling concession at Riverview this same year.

There had been raids on gambling dens in the suburb of Forest Park that spring on July 15th. The Oak Leaves newspaper reported that gambling was "Wide Open" at the amusement park. Claiming that pickpockets were roaming the park, as well, the paper alleged that police and village officials were in cahoots with the thieves.

1912 AT FOREST PARK

A large amount of money was spent on reconstruction, remodeling, painting and decorating at Forest Park this year. Last year's manager M.A. Bredel became secretary of the park company; former secretary Joseph Grein, after an unsuccessful run for bailiff of the Municipal Court, became the park's new business manager.

The attractions owned by Paul Howse's old Steeplechase Construction Company were taken over by Forest Park's management this year. These included the Steeplechase ride, Grand Canyon third rail coaster, Merry-Go-Round, Mouse Trap, Fun Factory funhouse and the vaudeville theater.

Forest Park presented no major new attractions for 1912. Instead, Alligator Joe returned with his 3000 reptiles, including Jumbo Joe, "largest of the gators", claimed to be 1,946 years old. Anna Harris, a local swimmer who had taken third place in 1910's Chicago River Marathon, was the featured star at the park's swimming pool.



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The Diana game proved to be popular. It is a version of the African Dip, but the Diana game uses white women instead of Negro men. The object, of course, was that once the young women were dunked, their wet clothes plastered tightly to their bodies, becoming slightly 'see-through', as well. A great money maker.

1913 AT FOREST PARK

Hard-pressed as well to compete with Riverview and White City, there were major changes at Forest Park for the 1913 season. The Steeplechase ride, the only one in the Midwest, was razed and several thousand feet of the ride reported for sale on April 5, 1913. The miniature railroad was also for sale, along with other concessions owned by Sylvester Ferretti.

These old standbys were replaced by some "20 New Attractions", including a Trip Thru Hell and a Trip to Chinatown, an Eden Musee wax museum and Chamber of Horrors, and, as at both Riverview and White City this year, a model of the Panama Canal.

Following Riverview's success with Dante's Inferno, the open-air arena that had replaced Forest Park's fire show in 1911 became a "Movie Airdrome" for 1913, featuring the latest Italian film spectacular, Quo Vadis. With all these changes, the suburban fun-spot billed itself as "The New Forest Park".

The Forest Park Ballroom advertised itself as "Chicago's smoothest dancing palace", and devoted Tuesday and Friday evenings to the latest dance craze, the Tango. The Ballroom stayed open during the winter months, with another new fad, cabaret acts, in the grill room each evening.

Still, not all Forest Park's entertainment was this sophisticated. On Sunday, August 31, "six known experts from the Stockyards" slaughtered live steers in a "Prize Beef Killing Contest". All the meat was served up the next day at the park's "Free Labor Day Barbecue."



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1914 AT FOREST PARK

After last years "20 New Attractions", there were only a few new additions to Forest Park this year. Pasha Allah's Wonderland, an undescribed attraction which may have been a funhouse; the only Wild West troupe headed by a woman, Lucille Mulhall, a champion roper and rider; and a "Whale" or "Giant Fish", 78 feet long and 16 feet high. (It was a big year for giant fish. Riverview had one, too, but it was only 45 feet long, a guppy.)

Forest Park's biggest hit of the year, however, was the new Tango Wheel, a revolving dance floor installed in the Casino. Couples crowded onto it throughout the season to do the tango and the hesitation, despite the fact these dances had been banned by the General Federation of Women's Clubs, in convention in Chicago that June. The only Tango Wheel in the U.S., it was a novelty brought from Europe by Paul Heinze, chief electrician and park superintendent. On the strength of its success, Heinze would find himself promoted to park manager the following year.

1915 AT FOREST PARK

Paul Heinze, Forest Park's new manager this year, was a local success story. Having moved to the town of Forest Park in 1904 with his wife and one year old daughter Marga, Heinze was hired as chief electrician when the Forest Park Amusement Park opened in 1908. His fortunes rose. By 1912, he had become park superintendent, and bought a better house in the suburb, one he called "the House of the Golden Heart". Now as manager, Heinze moved his family again, to new quarters in one of the park's front gate towers. Here, three more daughters-- Clara, Edna, and Pauline were born, a happiness tempered by a fourth birth, that of a son who survived only one hour.

As park manager, Heinze became one of the suburb's leading businessmen; Treasurer of the Forest Park Commercial Association; President of the Associated Charities of Forest Park, member of the school board, and charter member of the PTA. When America entered World War I, Heinze would also take leading roles in the local Loyal Citizens group and the Patriotic Community League.



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His first order of business as new manager was to increase attendance. Despite its proximity to the new Harlem Speedway, one of Chicago's first venues for auto racing (Desplaines Avenue and Roosevelt Road), Forest Park drew more "neighborhood devotees" than "wandering pilgrims".

Heinze added a major new attraction, the Hiawatha Indian Village, a troupe of nearly 100 Iroquois who camp in the park and acted out a version of Longfellow's poem. In June, a group of cowboys joined the Indians for an "old-fashioned Wild West wedding", complete with a supposed traditional Western "chase for the bride".

Forest Park had a roller rink when it first opened in 1908, but the concession had been removed soon after due to poor management. With roller skating a revived fad, Heinze installed a new Roller Rink adjacent to the park swimming pool.

Other new attractions included a Motordrome, a free circus in the open-air Hippodrome, a miniature city, a giant turtle, a 'Funnyland' show, a mysterious palace, a trip to Pike's Peak, pony and goat tracks, the Bioplasticon (an early form of sound movies) presenting "grand opera", and a "Cooch" show, reported to be "doing well" in early August.

"Tango Teas" and a complete chicken dinner for 85 cents were features of the new Full Measure restaurant and cabaret, run by politician and former park manager Joe Grein.

To attract more women & children, Heinze offered them free admission (except Sundays and holidays) and installed the "latest equipment" in the park's free playground.

On July 25, the park hosted a rally of the United Societies for Local Self-Government, a coalition of ethnic groups opposed to the growing prohibition movement, put together by an up and coming young politician named Anton Cermak. Featured speaker was noted defense attorney Clarence Darrow.

With both Riverview and White City now running successful annual Mardi Gras, Heinze decided to give it a shot this year, too. Forest Park's Mid-Season Mardi Gras, held for 9 days, starting August 21, featured nightly parades with 6 bands, 100 clowns,



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"serpentine battles", and 20 free acts, including the Fearless Greggs, "leaping the gap" and turning triple somersaults with speeding automobiles.

Special events were scheduled each night in the Ballroom (dance contests, masquerades), Grill room (amateur nights), skating rink (races) and Grein's Full Measure restaurant.

The Forest Park Fair Grounds & Amusement Company files bankruptcy in 1915. A new Forest Park Amusement Company was organized for the 1916 season. The new incorporators were Heinze, A.E. Winterroth of Forest Park, and Thomas F. Graham of Chicago. New directors included John Broderick, a state senator, as the President; William B. Malcolm, Vice-president / treasurer; and August Bunge, Jr., as Secretary.

1916 AT FOREST PARK

Manager Paul Heinze was busy this year, as the new Forest Park Amusement Company announced \$75,000 in improvements to the old park for 1916. A garage for several hundred autos was to be constructed opposite the main entrance. The north end of the park was completely remodeled, the children's playground enlarged, and the space north of the Chutes lagoon used for a goat track & burro trail. A new picnic grove with a dance platform was laid out on the former site of the Fire Show. The grandstand, Motordrome and one half of the "Funny Land" building were removed to make room for new attractions.

New shows included an Alligator Fight for Life and Museum, the Crown of Thorns, a Funny Arcade, a Jonah and the Whale diving show, and a Crazy House.

A new Sea Swing ride, a kind of Circle Swing that dipped passengers into the water of a lagoon or pool, was installed on the "bathing beach" (probably the park's big swimming pool). It was mentioned that the Grand Canyon was to be converted into a racing coaster, but it is uncertain if this was ever done.

Keeping up with the war in Europe, the old Fun Factory was renamed to: A Trip to the Kaiser's Lantern. The meaning of this name seems lost in the passage of time.



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Creatore, Ballman, the Banda Roma and Johnny Hand Band were among the bands booked by the park this year. Special "Sweetheart Nights" were held each Friday to attract young people, with prizes given away in both the Ballroom and the Grill room.

1917 AT FOREST PARK

While Riverview and White City were reported busily renovating their parks early in 1917, Forest Park held off until after the April 2 Primary, when the question of liquor prohibition in Proviso Township was once again put to a vote. According to Billboard, the fact that Forest Park was a "wet" suburb, with open Sunday laws, had much to do with the park's success the previous year, when Chicago's bars, including those at Riverview and White City, were ordered closed on the Sabbath.

When the wet vote again carried Proviso in the primary, the park began ordering new rides in a flurry of activity. Former manager Tom Prior was reported negotiating to install one of his and Fred Church's new Great American Racing Derby rides; this would have been the first one of these rides outside of California. Similarly, Forest Park contracted for a Spiral Wheel while the first of these rides was being built at Coney's Luna Park. An Aero Joy Plane ride was also reported being installed.

Though construction of the Spiral Wheel was said to be underway that April, neither it, nor the Prior and Church Racing Derby ride, or the Joy Plane ride were ever installed. There may have been problems with the Spiral Wheel. Riverview didn't get its model until August. As for the other rides, perhaps the orders were placed too late; negotiations fell through; the steel shortage continued to be a problem. At any rate, Forest Park never obtained any of the above-mentioned rides. Instead, the park finally got the Whip it had ordered the previous season, and additionally, remodeled two old attractions, the Grand Canyon coaster and remodeled two old attractions, the Grand Canyon coaster and the Hilarity Hall funhouse.

Even so, by June 16, manager Paul Heinze was expecting a record-breaking season. Martin Ballmann's band, playing his new war song, "Our Blue Jackets", performed twice a day in the concert grove. A vaudeville and musical comedy revue was staged nightly in the Grill room, which was heavily booked for dinner parties of 12 to 100 people. The



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Park Theater mixed movies with live musical comedy featuring an "all-negro cast and chorus".

Dance contests were held in the ballroom, diving contests in the big swimming pool. By August, the hundreds of windows in the ballroom were "flung wide to welcome every breeze", and the pool was crowded from 10 o'clock in the morning until 10 o'clock at night. For "those who live in the western suburbs and the western part of the city itself," Forest Park's pool eliminated the discomfort of the long, hot drive to the lakefront and back.

Promotions this year included Dan O'Leary, "Chicago's veteran pedestrian", celebrating his 75th birthday on July 8 by walking 100 miles in 24 hours. The champion walker accomplished this by ambling 300 times around the park's 1/3 mile promenade.

At the Park Theater, a picture of "Mr. Raffles" was shown during each movie performance. Outside, Mr. Raffles wandered the park, carrying a bag of \$100 in gold coins for the person who recognized him. (A similar "Raffles" promotion was held at Chutes Park back in 1905.)

An increased effort to attract picnics this year resulted in bookings from many organizations, including a "Monster" Labor Day picnic held by Chicago's labor unions for September 3rd.

1918 AT FOREST PARK

In March, 1918, the company owning Forest Park was reorganized, for the second time in as many years. Officers of the new Amusement Exhibition Company were park manager Paul Heinze, president; Thomas Graham, manager of the Giant Safety Coaster, as secretary; and H.J. McGurran, superintendent of the Compensation Bureau, Chicago, as treasurer.

The new company put another \$30,000 worth of improvements into Forest Park for 1918. With movie houses springing up everywhere, the old theater on the north side of the park could no longer compete. It was torn out this year for a major new attraction, the Gumps' Mad House.



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This was a \$17,000 funhouse based on the popular Tribune comic strip Andy Gump, where the strip's characters Andy and his wife, Min, were supposed to "hold forth". The attraction was personally designed by Gump creator Sidney Smith. Additionally, Smith drew posters for the park's opening, and was said to be on the park's advertising staff for the season.

A female reporter for the local Forest Park Review toured the Gumps' Mad House and left an account of the 24 "goat getters" this funhouse offered for a 15 cent ticket. Chaperoned by "Woody", the manager, (Milton Woodward, Sr., formerly manager of the park's Steeplechase ride), the reporter passed thru the "ringers", climbed "sliding" stairs, then got a "hot foot" (an electric shock to the soles of her shoes). She encountered an undulating balcony, an alternating balcony, a crashing bumper, and rocking stairs. Gusts of air shot at her at regular intervals. Next came a falling stool, an electrified checker board, a "bull moose glide" and a "turkey trot"; a rocking floor, a revolving stool, a musical bench, a lung tester; a bumper seat, a "wobble wobble", and a falling floor. There were two slides to choose from, the "Lover's Delight" or the "easy glide", concave and convex mirrors, and last, but not least, a "joy wheel". Before leaving the Mad House, the reporter climbed a ladder to visit Roy Bloomfield, the man at the electric switchboard "responsible for the proper thing at the proper moment".

On the east side of the grounds, the old penny arcade was replaced by a new, all metal, war-themed attraction called the Terror of the Seas. Here, patrons watched in horror as a German submarine treacherously sank an unarmed hospital ship, then cheered as a U.S. warship ran the sub down to avenge the cold-blooded act. This marine melodrama was enacted, of course, by mechanical models in a water tank.

Forest Park's opening, May 22, was its most prosperous since its first season. Martin Ballmann's ballet review, "A World of Pleasure", featuring "20 or more young ladies", was performed free twice daily in the concert grove, moving to the Grill room in case of bad weather. The park employed 200 people, and paid \$2000 for its bar permit and amusement license.

Just inside the entrance, there was a permanent U.S. Recruiting Bureau attended by uniformed marines, who also drove through the park on a mounted cannon, giving talks



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and seeking recruits. Porter's Freak Animal Show was in its second season at the park. Max Goldstein, former White City concessionaire, had a Kewpie (doll) wheel and five other games of chance. William M. Green of the H.C. Evans vending company had the season's hot new game, Kill the Kaiser. Patrons could knock the heads off life-size figures of "America's enemies", not all war-related: along with the Kaiser, von Hindenburg, and the Sultan of Turkey, there was also a figure of black boxer Jack Johnson.

By July 20, the park seemed to be enjoying the same kind of record season as Riverview and White City. Billboard reported " 'BUSINESS FINE', Say the Boys at Forest Park"; the Ballroom, Grill, and Gump House were getting the most play. Manager Paul Heinze reported most concessionaires already assuring him they would book with the park again for the following year. Just five days later, a fire destroyed 1/5 of the park.

The blaze broke out at 3:30 in the morning, Thursday, July 25, in the boiler room of the park's heated swimming pool, and rapidly spread to adjoining structures on the south side of the park. It was discovered by a park policeman who hurried to the home of Paul Heinze in the front gate towers. As the alarm was sounded, Heinze's eldest daughter, 16 year old Marga, hurried to the burning stable on the south part of the grounds, and led out her pet Shetland pony, Daisy, at risk to her own life.

At first it was feared the entire park would go up in flames, as the fire, starting at the covered swimming pool had cut off the park's water supply. With the Sanitary District's power house and lighting station also among the first structures burned, the combined lack of power and water hampered firemen for nearly two hours. The fire departments of Oak Park, Austin, and other suburbs were summoned to help, and a crowd of residents hurried to the scene to assist, but with no water, they could only confine the fire, not fight it. Valves were finally reached and opened, and more water pumped in from neighboring Oak Park; an "especially heroic effort" saved the Ballroom, first thought doomed.

But the south end of the park was not so lucky. The fire completely destroyed the park's rink (with 5000 skates and a large orchestration), swimming pool (with 8000 bathing suits), the Sanitary District substation, a big new freak show scheduled to open that afternoon, a skeeball alley, 400-1000' of the Giant Safety Coaster, the Terror of the



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Seas, and the entire Leap the Dips coaster. A Japanese tea room, a bowling alley, a chop suey restaurant, and two ice cream parlors were damaged by water and smoke. Almost unbelievably, it was reported that the fire was still raging at 7 am while Paul Heinze announced that Forest Park would open as usual at 1 o'clock in the afternoon --- AND IT DID! Visitors took great interest in the newest attraction, the huge area of charred remains, while the rest of the park operated as if nothing had happened. Incredibly, Heinze promised that all ruined attractions would be replaced or repaired by Monday, July 29th which was just five days later.

Though it's not known whether Heinze was able to fulfill this promise, Forest Park stayed open until the end of the season. Rumors flew that the fire had been German sabotage or, even more mysteriously, a revenge plot. On Friday night, August 23rd, 22 year old John Sheppard, of Elgin, spying the Kill the Kaiser game, shouted "Over the Top!", jumped the counter and proceeded to smash the dummies of the Kaiser and Crown Prince of Germany. Some things were back to 'normal' once again.

1919 AT FOREST PARK

To bring back the crowds after last year's disastrous fire, manager Paul Heinze operated Forest Park this year with a free gate; no admission was charged except on Saturday nights, Sundays and holidays.

The season started May 21, to the usual chilly "park opening" weather. With most of The Boys returned from camps and overseas, rain and cold weather failed to keep the crowds away on opening night. They found the park painted throughout, the Giant Safety Coaster and the Leap the Dips rebuilt, and such old standbys as the Pneumatic Tube, the Grand Canyon, and the Whip operating as usual.

There were some new devices in the Gumps' Mad House, and a 20 in 1 Platform (Freak) Show. A new Open Air Revue, in an enlarged band shell in the center of the old oak grove, featured a chorus line of "Broadway Beauties".

The "Ballroom De Lux" was filled to overflowing each night with returned soldiers and sailors and their girls. Operated this year by "Professor" Ralph J. O'Hara of Chicago's



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Madison Square Ballroom, there was no admission charged to dance to "O'Hara's Famous Orchestra".

Starting June 20, Tuesdays and Fridays were again "Children's Days", with souvenirs and complimentary rides given to every child.

In July, however, the City Council heard a disturbing report from the suburb's building commissioner, that the village architect had found the rebuilt Leap the Dips to be "unsafe"; the ride's manager protested, and action on the matter was deferred. The problem was evidentially corrected, as the coaster was running again the following year.

In September, two fires of suspicious origin were discovered at the park. In the first, a packing box had been set ablaze and placed directly under one of the coaster structures; the second was a fire started in between the walls of the poolroom. Fortunately, both were extinguished before damage could be done. The park was reported keeping a sharp eye out for "firebugs".

Despite such problems, the season of 1919 was very good for Forest Park. Prominent in the village's Independence Day parade that year was a Victory Float designed by Paul Heinze and Gump House manager Milton Woodward. The float featured Victory angels in papier-mâché and "living angels" from the park's revue, wearing "petty skirts" of red, white and blue, as well as several doughboys, a huge Victory eagle and a battleship. The park also contributed a funny "water wagon", a Prohibition joke. The popular Heinze, his wife and daughters rode in the parade in their private automobile.

In many ways, the war showed the village of Forest Park to be a small town at heart, and the amusement park to be a kind of community resource. In October, a Welcome Home picnic and football game had been scheduled for servicemen in the neighboring town of Maywood, but cold weather cancelled the planned "supper under the trees". Paul Heinze was asked as late as the morning of the celebration for use of the park's Grill room; light, water, and gas, shut off for the season, had to be turned on. Despite the short notice, 550 veterans from Proviso and River Forest townships were fed at the park by volunteer girls from the Patriotic Service League, followed by a dance, attracting crowds of several thousand more. Leftover food was donated to local poor families by Heinze, president of Forest Park's charities. It was announced that Welcome Home



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Celebrations would continue monthly until every Forest Park boy was home from the war.

On November 11, the first anniversary of Armistice Day, the Patriotic Community League hosted a Victory Dance at the park. Heinze was chairman of the Entertainment Committee; concessionaire Max Goldstein and wife were on the Amusement Committee; Milton Woodward chaired, and A.E. Winterroth served on the Refreshment Committee. The dance attracted the biggest crowd ever in the history of the park's Ballroom and Grill room.

1920 AT FOREST PARK

The same could not be said for Forest Park. It suffered two crushing blows at the very start of this decade.

The first blow was the passage of Prohibition. From the very beginning, the amusement park had been connected to beer and liquor interests; A.E. Winterroth, official of the park since 1908, was the local agent for the McAvoy Brewing Co. and that firm had long sponsored the park's Rathskellar, Grill Room, and Casino restaurants. The village of Forest Park had a large German population that enjoyed their local biergartens; both village and amusement park had reputations as "wet" oases amidst neighboring "dry" suburbs. Those suburbs had tried to vote the township dry in 1908, and again in 1917; both times it was assumed that the park would shut down if local Prohibition had passed. Now Prohibition was national law. Though the park stayed open, a great loss of patronage resulted. Customers who had come to sip beer under the trees now headed for backroom speakeasies instead.

Then, in March, 1920, Paul Heinze, long-time manager of Forest Park, announced that he was resigning, to take a new position as manager of Belle Isle Amusement Park in Detroit, MI. Already wounded from Prohibition (perhaps one reason why Heinze chose to leave) this was another crushing blow to Forest Park. The Board of Directors quickly offered to increase Heinze's salary. In the end, though, the Belle Isle offer proved more attractive, and Heinze and his family left for Detroit that spring.



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Forest Park's Board put on a brave face, naming a new manager, Herbert W. Wright, but the season of 1920 seemed anti-climactic after Heinze's departure. Despite the addition of a new Over the Alps ride, concessionaire Bill Lewis' Venetian Swings (made by the H.C. Evans Co.), and new devices in the Gumps' Mad House as well as Slater Brockman's Garden Follies of 1920 with a chorus line dubbed the "Chic Chic Revu". There were few ads for the park in the Chicago papers and virtually no news in the local amusement columns or in Billboard. This did not bode well for the park's future. It closed the season of 1920 with a Mardi Gras from August 15th to September 6th, featuring Brockman's Revue and Ballroom director Ralph O'Hara's Clown Band.

1921 AT FOREST PARK

After years of leasing the 12 acres on which the park was located, the Forest Park Amusement Company finally purchased the land at the end of 1920. In hindsight, the timing seems strange since the passage of Prohibition and former manager Paul Heinze's departure causing Forest Park to decline.

On Friday evening, March 18th, a fire broke out in the park's North Gate Tower. It was shortly after 6 pm, just when the Metro L was "very busy disgorging a great portion of (the village of) Forest Park's male population. Everybody came to watch the blaze. Confined to the upper portion of the Tower, the blaze was put out in about an hour. It was said to be caused by crossed wires. The fire's damage was estimated at only \$500-600. The Heinzes' old Tower living quarters, now occupied by Ralph O'Hara, Ballroom manager and new park custodian, and his wife, were evidently spared.

But the fire was just the start of a problem-plagued season. In May, village Mayor Henry Kaul announced he would not grant an operating license "if the park is going to be run like it was last year." Illegal gambling was the allegation, with an "ex-park official" quoted as claiming \$4300 in graft had been paid by the park in previous years. Though the police chief stated "he didn't see or hear anything" in the park last year, the City Council denied the park's permit to operate. At first it looked like the park would not be able to open Wednesday, May 18th, however, that very day, the Superior Court granted an injunction, allowing the park to open that night. Attendance and weather were both reported to be good.



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Park attorney Charles Soelke, appearing before the next meeting of the City Council, swore that the park would never tolerate any gambling. Mayor Kaul then switched tactics, complaining that the park's shows let girls "appear sans skirts if they desire". Soelke argued that short skirts were the current fashion, and the girls in the park's revue should be allowed to wear skirts as short as those worn by 'flappers' on Michigan Avenue downtown. (Bear in mind, the skirts in question were just below the knee!) Soelke finally prevailed, and the Council granted the park's license.

But the gambling issue was raised again the following month when sheriff's deputies raided the park on a Saturday night. Wheel of Fortune games were ordered stopped, though the wheels were not confiscated. Soon after, the local "Citizen's Protective League" demanded the village take action. This time, however, the mayor and council backed off. The Forest Park Review hinted the reason was graft, describing the officials' attitude as "We have taken (the park's) money now and we do not want to be unreasonable."

Perhaps as a result of all this, the park was still seeking concessions for prime spots as late as June 25th; which is not a good sign. Though park ads were back in the Chicago papers this year, the only rides mentioned were old ones; the Giant Safety, Leap the Dips, and Grand Canyon coasters, last year's Over the Alps, and the Barrel of Fun (the Gump House new name). Billboard cites only one new feature, an airplane ride "where the old lagoon was", but this suggests that the park's old Shoot-the-Chutes had been removed. Everything points to the park in decline.

1922, THE END OF FOREST PARK AMUSEMENT PARK

Again this year, Forest Park's Mayor Kaul tried to prevent the suburb's amusement park from opening. At a City Council meeting that May, he stated he had been opposed to the park for the past 5 years. The park hadn't kept its word last year, there had been gambling there; the rides were not safe, in his opinion. Furthermore, the park should never have been granted a license, as it was too close to the cemeteries on Desplaines Avenue. Village Commissioner Fietsch commented that the people of the suburb were all for the park, judging by the way they asked for passes. The license question was voted on, the Mayor saying No, Commissioners Wendt and Fietsch voting Yes. The license was granted for another year.



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Forest Park opened for the season on Wednesday, May 11th. There were only a few new attractions; a pony bridge path for kids which was at the west end near the Pneumatic Tube ride; a new ride called The Whiz; and new stunt devices in the Barrel of Fun.

In mid-July, Ballroom manager, bandleader and park custodian Ralph O'Hara was shot in a speakeasy in the nearby suburb of Cicero. (Cicero was soon to become notorious for its speakeasies, most of them controlled by the up and coming Al Capone.) O'Hara had gone there with a party of friends, to "get some real beer", he said. A Miss Helen Gibson, with O'Hara's party, was also shot in the bizarre incident; after her wound was dressed at a nearby hospital, she hurried away.

O'Hara told the press the shooting was accidental. According to his story, he'd been carrying an automatic pistol in his hip pocket. At the speakeasy, he got into a scuffle, the pistol fell to floor, safety catch off, and fired. The bullet entered his back, passed through his left lung, and lodged in his left side. But O'Hara did not explain how Miss Gibson had been shot through her left side; according to hospital physicians, it was not probable that both were hit by the same bullet.

According to the Chicago papers, O'Hara's wife did not come to visit him in the hospital; rumors were they were not living together. The press also revealed O'Hara's ties to a local labor racketeer (an associate of Al Capone's), "Big Tim" Murphy. O'Hara had been a business agent for the Chicago Musicians Union until the previous winter, when the president of the Union had been slugged and beaten, he named O'Hara as the assailant. O'Hara resigned from the Union, only to announce a few weeks later that he was to be president of a new Chicago Musicians Club, just organized by Murphy as a rival to the Union. As for the speakeasy incident, the Cicero Police recorded it as an accidental shooting. There would be many of those in Cicero in the Capone days to come.

On Tuesday, August 5th, a Chicago streetcar strike began at 4 o'clock am with third rail trains refusing to stop at the Forest Park terminal in solidarity with the strike. The amusement park shut down until the strike was over.



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By that time, a "Great Chicago-Cook Fair" had opened at the nearby Checkerboard (Air) Field, for 9 days from August 26th to Labor Day, September 4th. The beleaguered Forest Park now had to compete with the fair's 25 big shows and rides from the H.T. Freed Exposition Co., including a Big Eli wheel, Seaplanes, a whip, a merry-go-round, etc..

Forest Park closed its gates as usual that September. Though no one knew it at the time, those gates would never open again. 1922 was Forest Park's last season.

THE AFTERMATH

On April 21, 1923, the following year, the park's Board of Directors voted not to open Forest Park that year. Prohibition was cited as the reason for shutting down. As the Forest Park Review put it, the amusement park "gave up after a two year diet of lemonade." Until passage of the 18th Amendment, the park had been a paying proposition, but business the last few years had been poor, and 1922 had been especially disastrous. Then, too, the Directors admitted considerable difficulty filling Paul Heinze's place. Rides were being sold to other parks in St. Louis, Detroit, Little Rock, Beloit WI, South Bend IN, and elsewhere. The rest of the park would be razed, with the exception of the Ballroom and other buildings fronting on Desplaines Ave, which would be left for the meantime.

The following year, 1924, "Blind Victim", a 5 reel movie by Atlas Educational Films of neighboring Oak Park, was shot in the partly dismantled park, with 300 locals as extras. That July, old Forest Park ticket booths were taken to an aviation field in nearby Elmhurst and used to sell people tickets for a "sky ride". By now, H.V. McGurran, secretary and treasurer of Forest Park, 1918-1921, had become Superintendent of Chicago's Municipal Pier.

That same year, 1924, the park grounds were purchased for \$110,000, forty thousand less than the park company had wanted. It was widely rumored that the buyer, a man named Carney, was merely a representative for the real purchaser. By 1925, that true purchaser was said to be Chicago utilities magnate Samuel Insull. The park land was to be used for terminals of the Aurora & Elgin Railroad third rail line to a new suburb, Westchester, which Insull was building southwest of Forest Park. Since 1923, the



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vacant grounds had been frequently used for picnics, and the still-standing Ballroom still used for dances, held once or twice a week in the winter months.

In October, 1926, the gate Towers and the Ballroom were finally razed. It was announced at this time that the A&ERR had no immediate plans for the land, and no depot would be built for the electric line to Westchester as originally rumored. In 1929, the stock market crash and the ruin of Insull's companies put an end to any further plans he might have had for the site, not, however, before the park's old swimming pool, still used by local kids till then, was condemned as unsafe, and destroyed.

With the demolition of the swimming pool, it was assumed that the last trace of Forest Park Amusement Park had been erased. The land sat mostly vacant for two decades, through the Depression and World War II. Then, in the 1950s, it was announced that part of Chicago's new expressway system would be built through the old park site. As workmen excavated the location, strange concrete tunnels were found beneath the ground. A half-century after they had been built, the road crew had unearthed the true last remnants of Forest Park Amusement Park; the tunnels of the old Pneumatic Tube ride.

Today, the concrete canyon of the Eisenhower Expressway cuts across the south half of the old park, many feet below where the Giant Safety Coaster, Leap the Dips, Shoot the Chutes, Pneumatic Tube, and Steeplechase rides once stood. The Forest Park terminal of the Congress-O'Hare Rapid Transit line occupies what had been the North Side, successor to the old Metropolitan (West Side) "L" that once brought Chicagoans to the park. Here, at the end of the line, the Rapid Transit still makes much the same loop the Metro "L" did. Between the expressway and Waldheim Cemetery, a Commonwealth Edison power station now stands about where the park's old main transformer station did.



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In memory of Stan Barker.