

Millbrook Park

Levi York, a founder of the steel mill and the New Boston town developer, launched a new project in 1899 that he called, "Millbrook Park". Mr. York leased the park to the Portsmouth Street Railway and Electric Light Company to oversee the construction and operation of the park. The acreage when it was completed was 85.4 acres. Although the park was operational in 1902, it was not fully completed until 1910.

Millbrook Park was one of the top three parks in Ohio. The other two were Coney Island in Cincinnati and the Olentangia in Columbus. Millbrook was most popular from 1902 to 1913.

Millbrook Park was a showcase of the natural beauty of the area. Over a thousand trees were planted and several types of grass and flowers covered the many acres. The main natural attraction was the lake, which was created by a dam at Munn's Run. To see the beauty of the park, a person could row a boat, rent a motor launch or take a gondola ride. With the lake and many lagoons, there were bridges everywhere to allow numerous walkways within the park.

A "streetcar party" ride to Millbrook for a picnic was quite fashionable. The 4 original streetcars had a seating capacity of 24 each.

The pavilion was built in 1902 from the lumber of the demolished city jail at Front and Washington Streets. The 2-story structure was built by Captain James Smith at the cost of \$15,708. The building housed bowling alleys, a rifle range, a soda parlor with pool tables and other games on the first floor.

On the second floor was a full-sized skating rink with a dance floor in the center. The famous River City band played music for

the dancers and skaters. In 1903, the new pavilion added a restaurant.

The merry-go-round was purchased in 1905 at the cost of \$3,900. The ride consisted of beautiful painted animals along with seats for those not wanting a pony ride. The ride operated Saturday and Sunday from 12 noon until 10 p.m. The popular tune that played was "Goodbye My Blue Bell".

In 1905, a large beautiful theatre was built and named the "Casino". The two-story frame was built at the cost of \$21,500 and had a seating capacity of 500. The Casino was located just inside the park gate (where Cornett Building Supply now is located). The Casino was the area's social place from 1905 to 1924. The River City Band would perform on Sunday evenings from Memorial Day until Labor Day. Each season there would be plays, concerts, films and even off-Broadway productions.

The ballpark was built in 1906. In 1908, the field was redesigned and a grandstand was built that seated 1,000 people. The cost to update the field to a professional standard was \$6,650. New Boston and Portsmouth High schools used ballpark. It was also a location for training and professional games. In 1925, the Cincinnati Reds played an exhibition game at the park.

In 1908, 4 tennis and 2 volleyball courts were constructed on the right side of the ball field.

Also in 1908, a bathing beach was added. The bathhouse contained 50 lockers. The lake edge was made to resemble a seashore. In 1909, a fishing club was formed and leased the lake for activities. A clubhouse for its members was built.

In 1910, the Street Railway and Light Company bought a roller coaster from the Foy Amusement Company of Cincinnati. The cost was \$15,000 for the ride and installation. With more than a

half mile of tracks, the coaster was located just west of the ballpark. The coaster lasted on until March of 1913. The structure was weakened by the 1913 flood and thus declared unsafe.

In 1914, a motordrome was erected in the park. This attraction was to allow patrons the excitement of daredevil motorcycle riding. The race park was located on the south- eastern side of East Millbrook Lake.

There is little, if anything written about the trotting park in Millbrook. The Portsmouth Driving Association is listed in the city directories from 1901-1909.

The big flood of 1913 began the fall of Millbrook Park.

In the late 1920s, the steel mill began to expand and thus filled in several lagoons and canals.

The ballpark grandstand was torn down in 1926. Most of the games had moved to the new stadium.

By 1935, the park was almost completely dismantled.