

INDIANAPOLIS AMUSEMENT PARKS, 1903-1911:

LANDSCAPES ON THE EDGE

Connie J. Zeigler

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Annie Gilbert Coleman, Ph.D., Chair

Robert G. Barrows, Ph.D.

Master's Thesis
Committee

Owen J. Dwyer III, Ph.D.

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Planting the Seed

In May 1906, Wonderland Amusement Park opened its gates on East Washington Street in Indianapolis to reveal its 125-foot tall “Electric Tower,” a tree-top “Scenic Railway,” and dozens of other thrilling and fantastical attractions. Indianapolis now had a Coney Island of its own. Even more amazing, by the end of the month, two more Coney-Island-style amusement parks had opened in the city. This thesis examines three Indianapolis parks: Wonderland Amusement Park, White City Amusement Park and Riverside Amusement Park and their impacts on the city of Indianapolis in the first years of the twentieth century.

Turn-of-the-century amusement parks celebrated the industrial achievements of mechanization and electricity. Yet they were located at the undeveloped green edges of cities. They were plaster and concrete, steel and electric examples of the American exaltation of industry and its simultaneous, and seemingly antithetical, longing for green tranquility. In his classic book, *The Machine in the Garden*, Leo Marx first proposed the theory that Americans desired spaces of verdant peace, but, at the same time worshipped the machinery of industrialization that blighted that pined-for tranquility.¹ In the green spaces at the end of streetcar lines, often along unspoiled waterways, amusement parks provided much-needed relief from the smoke and noise of urban industrial life. At the same time, they paid homage to the machinery of industry with their racket-making rides, dependent on electricity and the newly electrified streetcars for their very existence. Within their peacefully green perimeters the ratcheting, clanking, smoke-belching machines of entertainment clamored.

¹ Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America* (London, Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1964).

These parks were much more than the sum of their mechanical attractions, however. The tensions and internal conflicts that attached to every aspect of amusement parks made them landscapes that pushed the edges in pre-WWI American culture. The first turn-of-the-century rollicking amusement parks were on New York's Coney Island. Coney Island became a model for the hundreds of amusement parks, including the three in Indianapolis, that geared up around the U.S. in the first decade of the twentieth century. Historians have shown that the Coney Island parks helped usher a new modern, mass culture into the world outside the parks and across the nation. At a time when the American economy had reached a level of abundance, industrial workers sought new leisure pursuits outside of their unfulfilling work. Coney Island park owners were quick to welcome the working class and the middle class. Large audiences meant greater profits. This "mass consumption" of leisure offered not only pleasure, but also some equalization of social station.² Behind the park gates, immigrants frolicked beside native sons, working women next to middle-class mothers, men with women. At the same time park owners typically excluded African Americans from the parks, clearly eliminating the possibility of true cultural exchange even in these edge-pushing landscapes. Because Indianapolis amusement parks followed the cultural racism of the day, African Americans are, unfortunately, not a significant part of this discussion. Amusement parks were landscapes where urban residents pushed the edges of acceptable behavior, but some residents, notably African Americans, were not part of these landscapes.

² Lisabeth Cohen, *A Consumers' Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York: Vintage Books of Random House, 2003), 10.

“If a man suffered in a trolley car what ten thousand New Yorkers pay ten cents to have done to them at Coney Island, he would go to a hospital for a month, call himself a nervous wreck for the rest of his days and sue the trolley company for \$20,000 damages,” according to a writer in the *Atlantic Monthly* in 1907.³ Coney Island-style parks exaggerated the everyday aspects of life in urban areas with a myriad of mechanized rides, including clanking “rolly coasters”—bumpity imitations of the streetcars that brought the customers to these parks. Historian Kathy Peiss found that the “free and easy culture of working-class streets, clubs, taverns and public halls was expressed at Coney Island.”⁴ And members of the middle class were as attracted as the working class to this uninhibited culture. Amusement parks encouraged a free and easy play time. In the process, they created opportunities for interactions that did not often occur outside the park between members of different social classes and different sexes. Amusement parks became landscapes that pushed the edges of interaction. In their spectacular landscapes that blended nature and the industrialized city, they brought together disparate groups of people in new, compelling ways.

By 1907, a hundred million dollars had been invested in amusement parks across the United States.⁵ There were parks in Ohio, Illinois, Pennsylvania, California and elsewhere sprouting at about the same time as in Indianapolis. The rides and attractions, spectacles and amusements were very similar, in many cases duplicates, of those at Coney Island, but few historians have examined parks in other cities to see if

³ Rollin Lynde Hartt, “The Amusement Park,” *Atlantic Monthly* (May 1907): 674.

⁴ Kathy Peiss, *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the-Century New York* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986), 124.

⁵ Michael Immerso, *Coney Island: The People’s Playground* (New Brunswick, N.J. and London: Rutgers University Press, 2002), 79.

the experience for visitors was the same and if the parks in these other places created the same changes in local culture as did Coney Island.

Amusement parks became a new feature on the landscape starting in the 1890s. They did not erupt spontaneously, however. While Bessamer and Edison created the processes that made the steel and electricity for the mechanized attractions at these parks, urban and national parks, world's fairs and traveling circuses forged the cultural path that made amusement parks possible in twentieth-century America. With a genesis springing from Central Park, national parks, the World's Columbian Exposition, and the traveling attractions world's fairs spawned, amusement parks were an important step in the cultural evolution of the United States in the years prior to World War I. The history of Coney Island amusement parks, and their copycat parks in Indianapolis and across the nation, began with and evolved from events in nineteenth-century American culture.

The first of these precipitating events was the planning and construction of a new type of leisure location, Central Park, in New York City in the 1850s. In 1851, the legislature of the State of New York passed an act setting aside land to be developed as a public park. The hallmark of this legislation was that the land would belong to the people. Not only did they have access to public park land (a rarity at the time); in essence, they owned it.⁶ When the City of New York chose Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux's plan for the park in 1857, it set in motion a new way of thinking about the importance of green spaces to improve the lives of urban dwellers.

⁶ Norman T. Newton, *Design on the Land* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1971) 267.

Central Park was a carefully planned, yet natural-appearing landscape designed to allow visitors to forget for a time that they were in a huge industrial city.⁷ The park exemplified what Leo Marx called “the contradiction between the rural myth and the technological fact.”⁸ But beauty and escape were not all that the city fathers and park planners hoped to impart through Central Park. Central Park provided New York’s elite with a public space to display their wealth. Elegant New Yorkers rode carriages in the park, showing off their stylish clothes and conveyances. But ordinary citizens also visited the park. New York was socially and culturally segregated, and although distance and expense limited access to the park for the working class at first, by the late nineteenth century, this public space became a leisure space for all citizens, including the city’s working class and even its immigrants.

Central Park gathered citizens from divergent backgrounds and classes, but the middle class set the park’s rules of behavior and controlled its list of acceptable activities. The middle class monitors encouraged sedate and circumspect activities, such as walking, horse-riding and contemplating nature, but forbade more active pastimes, such as ball games.⁹ Through these controls, the middle class made Central Park what one historian has called a “gentle but effective school for citizenship.”¹⁰ Central Park was imbued with the middle-class value that even leisure activity should be constructive. The middle-class park guardians made the working class a better citizenry by offering them relief, in a placid green environment, from the drudgery of industrial

⁷ John F. Kasson, *Amusing the Million: Coney Island at the Turn of the Century* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1978), 19.

⁸ Marx, *Machine in the Garden*, 354.

⁹ Roy Rosenzweig and Elizabeth Blackmar, *The Park and the People: A History of Central Park* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University, 1992), 1, 6, 233.

¹⁰ Kasson, *Amusing the Million*, 15.

work. At Central Park the middle-class put into practice their beliefs that nature healed the societal ills caused by urban industrial life.

The park's planners, Olmsted and Vaux, extended the notion of healing green space to residential living when, a decade after planning Central Park, they laid out a park-like neighborhood for middle-class New Yorkers. The two men planned Prospect Park in Brooklyn between 1866 and 1867. Olmsted wrote that the design of urban park space required reconciling incompatible qualities: "scenery offering the most agreeable contrast to that of the rest of the town; and opportunity for people to come together for the single purpose of enjoyment, unembarrassed by the limitation with which they are surrounded at home, or in the pursuit of their daily avocations . . ." ¹¹ Through landscape, Olmsted and Vaux upheld the middle-class belief that leisure should improve and expand the lives of citizens. ¹² In the public bucolic scenes of Central Park, healing uplift was offered to all citizens; in the private neighborhood of Prospect Park, green space would rejuvenate the middle class, who also needed relief from the "pursuit" of their work. And though Olmsted wrote that the parks were for the "single purpose of enjoyment," he also expressed the middle-class belief that leisure should be spent constructively in a healthful natural environment. Central Park laid the foundation for public green spaces of leisure and amusement in America. It formed a cultural footprint for amusement parks.

Building on the importance of set-aside green spaces in order to make life better in industrial America, a movement for national parks came into being in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. In 1872, the United States government expressed an interest

¹¹ Quoted in Richard Grusin, *Culture, Technology, and the Creation of America's National Parks* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 44.

¹² Kasson, *Amusing the Million*, 4.

in preserving wild spaces for its people by setting apart “a great national park or pleasure-ground for the benefit and enjoyment of the people,” a tract of land 55-miles wide and 65-miles long. On March 1, 1872, President Ulysses S. Grant signed a bill into law creating Yellowstone, the first national park.¹³ Before long, thunderous, coal-guzzling railroads would make Yellowstone and the set-aside national parks that followed it accessible to visitors from across the nation. These “machines in the garden” were expressions of the American desire for industrial benefits and the American veneration of nature.¹⁴ These special, natural places on the edges of civilization provided a framework for amusement parks placed at the green, natural places along cities’ edges. As railroad barons had capitalized on the construction of rail lines to the distant locations of national parks, so too did streetcar owners eventually increase their capital by building amusement parks at the ends of streetcar lines, gathering not only pennies for patrons’ rides to the park, but also nickels and dimes for customers’ who rode the mechanical rides at the parks.

The idea that set-aside park land helped city dwellers escape the brutish influences of their industrial world and, hence, made them better citizens, spread across the nation. It reached Indianapolis the same year that the Federal government created Yellowstone and resulted in the city’s purchase of its first public park land, Southern Park (now Garfield Park), in 1873.¹⁵ In these early years of the 1870s, John S. Spann led the movement to beautify University Park with walkways, fountains and benches,

¹³ Elizabeth U. Mangan, “Yellowstone the first National Park,” <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/gmdhtml/yehtml/yeabout.html> (accessed December 1, 2005).

¹⁴ See Marx, *Machine in the Garden*.

¹⁵ Connie J. Zeigler, “Landscape Design,” in David J. Bodenhamer and Robert G. Barrows eds., *Encyclopedia of Indianapolis* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994), 894-895.

and George Merritt took on the same role at Military Park.¹⁶ Following the Olmsted and Vaux example set at Prospect Park, a few Indianapolis businessmen developed the town of Irvington on 300 acres of farmland east of Indianapolis in 1873. Platting the town with park-like areas, curving streets and irregularly sized lots, they broke with the grid that had helped America's Early Republic leaders organize and control nature, and sought, instead, to create a curvilinear community of "refinement and culture," bringing parks into the city and into the neighborhoods.¹⁷

Twenty years after Irvington's developers expressed concepts of refinement and culture in the way they laid out residential spaces, and almost half a century after Olmsted and Vaux created Central Park, the Chicago World's Columbian Exposition opened in 1893. The exposition's designers included Central Park's Frederick Law Olmsted, who had somewhat revised his vision of landscape's role in an ideal urban life in the United States. Unlike Central Park, Prospect Park (and even Irvington's garden suburb), all of which intended, as much as possible, to give residents escape from the city's negative influence, the landscape and architecture of the White City at the Columbian Exposition was designed to reveal the "refining aspects of city design" rather than offer a retreat from urban, industrial life.¹⁸ The White City provided a model for order and uplift in urban, industrial society. It was a model of monumental architecture and designed urban green spaces that spread across the land—it was the City Beautiful. Perhaps more than any other contributing factor, world's fairs were a progenitor of amusement parks.

¹⁶ Zeigler, "Landscape Design," 895.

¹⁷ Sheryl D. Vanderstel, "Irvington," Bodenhamer and Barrows, *Encyclopedia of Indianapolis*, 832.

¹⁸ Kasson, *Amusing the Million*, 19.

At the Columbian Exposition, Olmsted hoped to “manifest the taste of gentlemen” in his landscape designs.¹⁹ Daniel Burnham, the fair’s chief architect, created monumental, classical architecture that harkened back to America’s democratic roots in ancient Greece. His aim was to instruct fairgoers in their history with the hope of enlightening their future. Like Olmsted’s attractive landscapes, Burnham’s Beaux Arts architecture would show Americans that aesthetically appealing structures also edified. Monumental in size and classical in design, the fair’s architecture expressed a lofty idealized vision for the future of U.S. cities that recalled America’s republican predecessor. The City Beautiful vision manifested itself across the nation in Beaux Arts public buildings and carefully landscaped public grounds. The highly successful Chicago fair also served as a blueprint for the reforming qualities of good taste throughout America. Indianapolis’s city fathers were slow to become part of the City Beautiful Movement, but in 1896, the newly appointed Board of Park Commissioners hired John C. Olmsted (Frederick Law Olmsted’s stepson) to create a City Beautiful-inspired plan for additional city parks.²⁰ In 1898, Mayor Thomas Taggart purchased several hundred acres along White River on the city’s westside that would become Riverside Park.²¹ The official report of the purchase echoed Frederick Law Olmsted’s writings about his designs for Central Park,

...it is not for the special benefit of the rich that large parks are built, as some who oppose parks would have us believe, but observation will show that their quietness is more often sought by the workmen and their families, to whom a day in the park means more than it is possible to estimate.²²

¹⁹ Erik Larson, *The Devil in the White City: Murder, Magic and Madness at the Fair that Changed America* (New York: Vintage Books, 2003), 196.

²⁰ Zeigler, “Landscape Design,” 895.

²¹ *Indianapolis City Reports* (Indianapolis: City of Indianapolis, 1899), 184.

²² *Indianapolis City Reports*, 137.

Olmsted had written about his design for the Chicago Exposition, “let us be thought over-much plain and simple, even bare, rather than gaudy, flashy, cheap and meretricious.”²³ The threads of Olmsted’s ideals helped to weave the fabric of Riverside’s design, where, according to the park report, the “objects to be obtained” were “beauty of lines, form, color and association” and those to avoided were “all kinds of eccentricities and shams.”²⁴ Ironically, eccentricities and shams would be the main components in the amusement park soon to rise beside Riverside City Park.

Visually, the World’s Columbian Exposition served its purpose to manifest the taste of gentlemen. The exposition was also, however, a breeding ground for new forms of entertainment and new social and cultural ideas. Official exhibits disseminated some of these ideas; the carnivalesque midway passed on others. Beginning with the Columbian Exposition, world’s fairs had two, in some ways opposing, cultural messages. The government- and business-sponsored scientific and technological exhibits displayed in the official park buildings “educated” Americans on how far they had come and how much more advanced they were than other countries, particularly countries with dark-skinned inhabitants. The midway entertained and titillated with its permanent carnival of fantastic rides and crass sideshow entertainments. This combination of high-brow educational exhibits and low-brow midway attractions would be incorporated into amusement park offerings, with heavy emphasis on the latter.²⁵

²³ Frederick Law Olmsted, quoted in Larson, *Devil in the White City*, 196.

²⁴ *Indianapolis City Reports*, 137.

²⁵ Lawrence Levine argues in *Highbrow Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (Cambridge, Mass., London: Harvard University Press, 1988) that this mixture of high culture and low-brow entertainment was common in early nineteenth century America but had become uncommon by the later years of the nineteenth century. If so, the world’s fairs and the amusement parks of the early twentieth century went a long way toward reviving it.

World's fairs displayed new machines, technologies and sciences that gave Americans new ways of viewing their world. The official exhibits of telephones, electric sewing machines, incandescent lights, moving picture machines and baby incubators awed visitors.²⁶ The new sciences, such as anthropology and ethnology, educated them. The Columbian Exposition and the world's fairs following it in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries purveyed what one historian has termed "scientific racism."²⁷ Otis T. Mason, curator of the Smithsonian Bureau of American Ethnology and designer of the ethnology exhibit at the fair, called the Chicago Exposition "one vast anthropological revelation."²⁸

While the White City, which housed the official exhibits at the Chicago Exposition, revealed the promoters' ideas that social evolution culminated in whiteness, the Midway attractions and sideshows supported this idea in a more raucous fashion. On the midway, in addition to dozens of "automatic amusement machines" and sideshows, fairgoers also saw "authentic" Native American villages. They visited the exotic Streets of Cairo with its Algerian, Syrian, Egyptian and Sudanese dancers whose "danse du ventre" caused a great scandal. They ogled pygmies from Africa and Igorrotes from the Philippines.²⁹ They also rode the Ferris Wheel and other mechanized rides and attractions. The official exhibits at the fairs awed and educated, midway attractions excited and titillated. The differences between the lofty impression of the White City and the clattering and far more popular midway represented the cultural chasm between

²⁶ Immerso, *Coney Island*, 6.

²⁷ Robert W. Rydell, *All the World's a Fair* (Chicago, London: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 5.

²⁸ Quoted in Rydell, *All the World's a Fair*, 55.

²⁹ Immerso, *Coney Island*, 51; David Nasaw, *Going Out: The Rise and Fall of Public Amusement* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999), 68.

Chicago's genteel fair organizers and the fair's massive audience. At all subsequent world's fairs, the midways were the most popular attractions.

The World's Columbian Exposition counted 27,529,400 attendees by the time its gates closed on October 30, 1893.³⁰ Its popularity gave birth to a budding exposition market in the United States. In 1898, the Trans-Mississippi and International Exposition was held in Omaha; in 1901, the Pan Am Exposition in Buffalo; the St. Louis Exposition in 1904. Following the St. Louis Exposition in 1904, the International Anthropological Exhibit Company formed to sell "exhibits" of Philippine Iggorotes (the most popular attraction at the exposition) around the country.

Soon, the native Iggorotes found themselves at Luna Park on Coney Island.³¹ (In a few more years, they would also become an attraction at amusement parks in Indianapolis.) The expositions' midways also gave rise to a new industry of traveling carnival shows and resort attractions that carried the less-genteel rides and attractions of the midways to those who could not come to the fairs. According to one historian, traveling carnivals became a "new model of democratic, urban recreation."³²

Urban and national parks inspired the landscapes of expositions, world's fairs showed the popularity of the clanking machines and thrilling attractions within those landscapes and traveling carnivals showed that Americans wanted these amusements in their own backyards. Entrepreneurs soon would weld together these disparate elements to create amusement parks. Men who later became amusement park owners at Coney Island also had ties to world's fairs at the turn of the century. Paul Boyton, for instance, who opened Sea Lion Park on Coney Island in 1895, had produced attractions for two

³⁰ Rydell, *All the World's a Fair*, 40.

³¹ Rydell, *All the World's a Fair*, 194.

³² Kasson, *Amusing the Million*, 26.

European world's fairs. In 1892, he ran an aquatic circus at the exhibition held in London. Two years later, at the Antwerp World's Exposition, he introduced the first large-scale water ride, the Shoot the Chutes. In 1895, Boyton brought both the aquatic circus and the Shoot the Chutes to Coney Island where he opened the world's first permanent, mechanized amusement park at this location that had previously been home of working-class male amusements such as taverns and vaudeville shows.³³

Boyton enclosed and gated his park to clearly mark what was outside and what was inside the world of mechanized amusement. By so doing he created a place of recreation, set apart from the rest of the world. Within the walls of the park, groups that did not normally mingle encountered special forms of amusement and behaved in special ways that would not have been appropriate outside the park's gates. The entrance gates were concrete and symbolic lines of separation between the real world and the fantastic. Once inside the gates, fantasy, imagination and play began, and relaxed behavioral standards were the norm. Within the park was the "technology of the fantastic"; there "imagination [was] in practice."³⁴ Boyton's success allowed him to market his imaginative Shoot the Chutes and Old Mill rides to amusement parks across the nation, including to the soon-to-be amusement parks in Indianapolis. His technology of the fantastic, the rickety machinery of fun, the oddities for gawking, the green landscape of an urban park setting, eventually made its way to the heartland.

Other Coney Island amusement park entrepreneurs also got their starts at world's fairs. Frederic Thompson introduced a cyclorama, "Darkness and Dawn," at the Omaha Trans-Mississippi Exposition. One of Thompson's fellow concessionaires at the

³³ Immerso, *Coney Island*, 55.

³⁴ Alexander Styre and Tobias Engberg, "Spaces of Consumption: from Margin to Centre," *Ephemera* 3 No. 2 (2003): 118, 120.

Omaha fair, Elmer “Skip” Dundy, became his business partner. In 1901, the two men controlled many of the concessions at the Buffalo Pan-American Exposition. There they sponsored a cyclorama, and an Aerial Cycle, as well as the ride, “A Trip to the Moon.” After the fair, they sold these last two rides to George Tilyou, by then, owner of Steeplechase Park, a permanent amusement park at Coney Island.³⁵

Tilyou opened Steeplechase Park in 1897. Steeplechase covered fifteen acres and Tilyou charged a single admission which purchased access to all the amusements within.³⁶ They were varied and fantastic: the Aerial Slide, the Eccentric Fountain, the Electric Seat, the Razzle Dazzle. The gated park was encircled by a gravity-powered Steeplechase horse race ride. According to Tilyou’s promotions, a ride on the Steeplechase provided a “healthful, stimulant that stirs the heart and clears the brain. It straightens out wrinkles and irons out puckers...it’s cheap fun, real fun, lively fun.”³⁷ Tilyou’s park and others like it manufactured fun within their green landscapes. Sitting on the edges of the cities to which they were attached, like an electric cord, by streetcar lines, amusement parks also became a place for behaviors and entertainments that pushed at the limits of acceptance.

Visitors experienced the lively fun of Steeplechase both as participant and as onlooker. A large portion of Steeplechase’s attraction was its spectator participation.³⁸ Onlookers in the Laughing Gallery watched and tittered as compressed jets of air in the Blowhole Theater blew off hats and up skirts. Then, the visitors who had just been laughed at became the audience for the next unsuspecting group. Other entertainments,

³⁵ Immerso, *Coney Island*, 60.

³⁶ Immerso, *Coney Island*, 57.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Kasson, *Amusing the Million*, 61.

such as the Human Whirlpool, a spinning bowl-shaped ride that demonstrated the power of centripetal force, knocked customers down and into each other, much to the amusement of those watching from the railing above.³⁹ Steeplechase moved its visitors both directly and vicariously. Using titillation and unavoidable physical contact between the sexes, on rides like the Human Whirlpool, Steeplechase offered customers the “unexpected in a sexual context.”⁴⁰ On some rides, such as the Tunnel of Love, the context was unabashedly sexual.

At the turn of the century, middle-class and, to only a slightly lesser degree, working-class etiquette demanded chaperones and highly circumscribed behavior between the sexes. For unmarried couples, “privacy could be had only in public.”⁴¹ Is it any wonder then that amusement parks, where behavioral standards encouraged the public expression of sexuality, became immensely popular among single men and women of both social classes? At Coney Island behavior was freer, but sexuality was structured and safe, because, in the words of historian Kathy Peiss, it was “treated as theater.” Laughter defused the ambiguous morality of sexual encounters at amusement parks.⁴² The parks allowed the expression of a clearly delimited and therefore non-threatening sexuality. Steeplechase Park turned tension and conflict—between ride and rider, onlooker and participant, men and women—into dollars for Tilyou. The park attracted over a million visitors in 1899.⁴³

To make amusement parks successful, Tilyou and other park owners especially sought women as customers. Both working- and middle-class women were icons of

³⁹ Kasson, *Amusing the Million*, 93.

⁴⁰ Peiss, *Cheap Amusements*, 134.

⁴¹ Quoted in Kasson, *Amusing the Million*, 42.

⁴² Peiss, *Cheap Amusements*, 136.

⁴³ Immerso, *Coney Island*, 57.

decency in the early years of the twentieth century, just as they had been in the nineteenth century.⁴⁴ Women represented respectability. Though the reasoning was circular, it was obvious to park owners that they needed women customers to lend legitimacy and wholesomeness to their establishments so that they could attract women customers. Women were subject and object at these parks. They were part of the crowd and they were part of the attraction, both for other women and for men. Steeplechase and other parks provided a wholesome atmosphere for women at the same time that they offered a public place where they encouraged easing of inhibitions and intimacy, which was, for participants on the rides and in the attractions, sometime hard to avoid.⁴⁵ This was a popular combination that translated into money in the park coffers.

Following Steeplechase's successful opening, in 1903 Thompson and Dundy opened Luna Park on the property of Paul Boyton's now-defunct Sea Lion Park.⁴⁶ Before becoming an amusement concessionaire Frederic Thompson had been an architectural draftsman. Luna Park was an incandescent jewel in the crown that merged his two careers. On opening night, Luna Park played host to 60,000 customers. They must have been as awed as a local news reporter who wrote that "The brilliance and beauty and weirdness of it all beggars description."⁴⁷ The other Coney Island parks, up to this time, had been merely conglomerates of sideshows and rides placed with no particular design or aesthetic appeal. Luna Park's beautiful architecture was itself an attraction.

⁴⁴ Nasaw, *Going Out*, 25.

⁴⁵ Kasson, *Amusing the Million*, 42.

⁴⁶ Immerso, *Coney Island*, 61-62.

⁴⁷ Immerso, *Coney Island*, 60.

Splayed out over 22 acres across a vast boardwalk, Luna Park's 250,000 electric lights were a celebration of the electricity that made the park possible. The park's architecture was a phantasmagoric combination of exotic Arabian and Italian influence and Herculean proportions.⁴⁸ Echoing the Neoclassical theme of the Chicago Exposition, Luna Park featured five Roman chariots guarding the entrance gate, which was a giant arch half-a-city-block wide. Trumpeting America's power, the Great Naval Spectatorium, a building shaped like a giant ship, held a huge pool where attacks on New York harbor by the European powers were enacted daily.⁴⁹ The ballroom at the park was decorated with 200,000 live plants and 700,000 artificial leaves on its trellis ceiling.⁵⁰

At the center of Luna Park a lagoon was flanked by Boyton's Shoot the Chutes ride and the park's signature piece, a 200-foot tall Tower. Lit by 80,000 incandescent bulbs, the tower changed color every second. From this tower, visitors could watch aerialist Cameroni the Great descend on a 2,000 foot cable, hanging from a leather strap held in his teeth, hands tied behind his back.⁵¹ At Luna Park, one could journey to the moon or 20,000 leagues beneath the sea, watch Hassan Ben Ali's Troupe of Hindoos or the native Iggorotes, ride an elephant or bump into a girl on the Helter-Skelter slide.⁵²

Luna and other parks at Coney Island (and later, the Indianapolis parks) also offered glimpses into new sciences and technology, playing on the interests that had been piqued by the world's fairs. In addition to exhibits that could loosely be called "anthropological," such as the native villages, these parks often incorporated

⁴⁸ Immerso, *Coney Island*, 62.

⁴⁹ Immerso, 62-63.

⁵⁰ "Prepare Luna Park," *Indianapolis Star*, 5 May 1907.

⁵¹ Immerso, *Coney Island*, 64-65.

⁵² Immerso, *Coney Island*, 66-67, 72.

technological breakthroughs introduced at the fairs. At Luna, scientific technology became spectacle. One of the park's most popular attractions was the baby incubator exhibit. First introduced at the Trans-Mississippi Exposition in 1898 and displayed again at the Buffalo Pan-American Exposition in 1901, the incubators found a home at the new Luna Park in 1903 (and at Indianapolis's White City Park in 1906).⁵³ The incubators exhibit at Luna Park was housed in its own white building and became the longest running attraction at Luna Park. Visitors grew attached to the tiny, premature babies who were lucky to be part of these experimental exhibits. The incubators turned out to be effective at keeping premature babies alive and successful at bringing visitors to the park. Patrons returned time after time to keep track of the progress of their favorite babies.⁵⁴

Inside the gates of Luna Park was a different world—an “other” world, where architecture, entertainment, people and behavior were all different. From the moment Thompson and Dundy opened the gates of Luna Park in 1903, audiences were enraptured. By 1907, the park employed 2,000 workers and had an annual budget of more than four million dollars. Advertisements for the park offered “Amusement for the masses,” and the masses came.⁵⁵ Luna Park, just one of the Coney Island parks, was attracting more than five million visitors each season.⁵⁶

By 1904, another park had emerged on the scene at Coney Island. Dreamland opened on 15 acres of prime real estate that extended from Surf Avenue to the Atlantic

⁵³ Hannah Lieberman, “Incubator Baby Shows: A Medical and Social Frontier,” *The History Teacher*, 35 No 1 (November 2001): 2; “White City Growing,” *Indianapolis Star*, 27 May 1906.

⁵⁴ Lieberman, “Incubator Baby Shows”, 2. Lieberman’s interesting article notes that the Brooklyn Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children protested the incubators at Luna Park. The society said it was immoral to display babies to make money.

⁵⁵ Immerso, *Coney Island*, 81.

⁵⁶ “Prepare Luna Park,” *Indianapolis Star*, 5 May 1907.

Ocean. Former U. S. Senator William H. Reynolds convinced a number of his political cronies to invest in the park, which cost \$3.5 million to construct. At the center of Dreamland (laid out much like Luna Park) was a lagoon, a 370-foot Beacon Tower and a sunken garden. Dreamland's owners sought in every way to surpass Luna Park in majesty, size and opulence. Luna Park's tower had 80,000 light bulbs; Dreamland's had 100,000. When lit, its reflection in the lagoon produced an "ocean of fire."⁵⁷

Many of Dreamland's attractions were simply larger versions of those at Luna Park. It was more of everything. Dreamland's Shoot the Chutes ride was double-tracked and the steel pier which held it extended 300 feet into the Atlantic Ocean. Reportedly, 7,000 passengers an hour took the plunge. Luna Park took visitors "20,000 Leagues under the Sea"; Dreamland carried them "Under and Over the Ocean."⁵⁸

Surpassing the other Coney Island parks in size and spectacle, Dreamland also had an attraction of Lilliputian dimension that dwarfed the "otherness" of the native villages at Luna and Steeplechase. Its most unusual presentation was its smallest: a Midget City.⁵⁹ In a re-creation of fifteenth-century Nuremburg (at half-scale) three hundred little people lived, worked and frolicked. Each hour the midget fire department's steam fire engine, drawn by two fat ponies, responded to a false alarm in the miniature town square.⁶⁰

Outside the midget city, Dreamland's architecture was a fantastical Beaux Arts homage to the White City of the Chicago World's Fair. The buildings were white with fanciful touches of color. Everything blazed with electric light bulbs. According to an

⁵⁷ Immerso, *Coney Island*, 68.

⁵⁸ Immerso, *Coney Island*, 68.

⁵⁹ Perhaps the idea of the Midget Village arose from interest in Frank Baum's *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* and its Munchkins. That book was published in 1900, four years before Dreamland opened.

⁶⁰ Immerso, *Coney Island*, 69.

article in the *Brooklyn Eagle* newspaper the day after the park opened, “The tower that rose by day, a white shaft to a glorious conquest of Good Taste, by night became a beacon against the blackness of the heavens.”⁶¹ This image of white light conquering darkness was a metaphor for the racist message of American world’s fairs—the triumph of white culture over dark (skinned) peoples.

Like the other Coney Island parks (and world’s fairs before them), many of Dreamland’s attractions perpetuated racial stereotyping. “The Orient” featured a number of exotic attractions, including Herod’s Temple, Salome’s Dance of the Seven Veils and La Belle Sultana’s Dance of the Wicked. At the Midget City, there was a tiny Chinese laundryman.⁶² The parks reinforced stereotypes, raising the specter of the seductive dusky-skinned beauties as well as that of the subservient and sly Asian.

Unlike the other Coney Island Parks, Dreamland emphasized sideshows and attractions that were “morally instructive,” using dramatic effects to enliven shows on biblical topics. “Creation” depicted the six days of Creation from the book of Genesis. The arched entrance was supported by outspread angel’s wings.⁶³ Despite, or perhaps because of, this higher moral tone, Dreamland was never as popular as its rival, Luna Park. Both were temples to spectacle and industry, but Luna Park’s message was both less morally toned and more broadly attractive.

For these parks, wide appeal meant more dollars. Amusement parks were expensive ventures. Owners needed to attract the widest possible audience in order to be successful. These massive spaces needed mass audiences. Park owners welcomed and sought middle class and working class, women and men, native sons and immigrants. In

⁶¹ Quoted in Immerso, *Coney Island*, 71.

⁶² Nasaw, *Going Out*, 93; Immerso, *Coney Island*, 69-74.

⁶³ Immerso, *Coney Island*, 73.

Youngstown, Ohio, Idora Park held “Nationality Days,” to attract an immigrant audience. And the immigrants came, in great numbers.⁶⁴ Drawn by midget Chinamen and Philippine Iggorrotos, the mixes of nationalities at these parks helped “to knit a heterogeneous audience into a cohesive whole.”⁶⁵ Parks across the nation followed this example, attracting hundreds of thousands of customers who created a massive audience of diverse groups sharing the same experiences at the same time in the same location and in the same ways as their counterparts at parks in other cities. In 1903, Willow Grove Amusement Park in Philadelphia had 3,000,000 visitors and the same year Olentangy Park in Columbus, Ohio, had more than 600,000 visitors.⁶⁶

This convergence of massive numbers of people of different classes, sexes and ages in one place of entertainment was new at the turn of the century. Just as the new assembly lines at Henry Ford’s Model-T plant in Detroit fit together the pieces of automobiles that put most Americans behind the wheel in the coming years, amusement park owners whirled, levered and ratcheted the separate parts of early twentieth century America into a massive audience, and in turn, helped create a modern and mass culture.

One segment of American society was typically denied entry to the “new cultural order” that was rising in these parks, however.⁶⁷ Most amusement parks across the nation excluded African Americans, or limited their attendance to special “colored days.”⁶⁸ Amusement parks were both explicitly and implicitly reflective of the period’s racial prejudice. Only a few years earlier in 1896 the Supreme Court decision in *Plessy*

⁶⁴ Donna DeBlasio, “The Immigrant and the Trolley Park in Youngstown, Ohio, 1899-1945,” *Rethinking History* 5:1 (2001): 75.

⁶⁵ Kasson, *Amusing the Million*, 4.

⁶⁶ Nasaw, *Going Out*, 95.

⁶⁷ Kasson, *Amusing the Million*, 4.

⁶⁸ Nasaw, *Going Out*, 91.

v. Ferguson, had institutionalized racial prejudice with a “separate but equal” ruling in a case of a man of seven-eighths African ancestry who was arrested for attempting to sit in the white section of a railway coach in New Orleans.⁶⁹ Although parks offered a place for patrons to dance along the edges of “appropriate” behavior, they stayed within the cultural framework that was comfortable for most middle- and working-class Americans with respect to racial segregation. In general, park owners prohibited access by African Americans, except for those blacks who were performers in stereotypical attractions.⁷⁰ Lowering racial barriers might have threatened collapse of the framework that kept the middle and working classes coming back to the parks. Following the examples of U.S. world’s fairs in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, park owners heralded white American superiority by installing Iggorotte villages, funny Japanese villages and sinister Chinese opium dens.⁷¹ Reflecting the day’s popular notions about race and civilization, and a resulting lack of sensitivity to all races, park owners, however, barred only blacks from regular access to the parks. Amusement parks allowed exploitive exhibits of the “Old Plantation,” but prevented the mixing of blacks with whites among the audience. In so doing, they acknowledged the prevailing white cultural sentiment toward African Americans.

While contemporary reformers may have condemned this racial injustice, those condemnations do not appear in histories of amusement parks. Some of the national

⁶⁹ *Plessy v. Ferguson*, FindLaw, <http://caselaw.lp.findlaw.com/scripts/getcase.pl?court=US&vol=163&invol=537> (accessed December 29, 2006).

⁷⁰ In her article on baby incubators, Lieberman notes that the incubator exhibits at these parks accepted African American babies. “Babies born in every station in life, high or low, rich or poor, black or white,” were kept in the incubators at amusement parks, though one wonders if the parents of African American children were allowed to visit them in the segregated parks. Lieberman, “Incubators,” 4.

⁷¹ “White City is Razed by Fire,” *Indianapolis Star*, 27 June 1908. According to this article the fire that destroyed the Indianapolis park started in the imitation opium den, a feature of the Mystic Cave.

leaders of Progressive Era movements, who were bastions of middle-class values, inveighed against the parks, but not because of their segregation practices. Jane Addams, founder of Hull House in Chicago, warned, “Looping the loop amid shrieks of stimulated [*sic*] terror or dancing in disorderly saloon halls, are perhaps the natural reactions to a day spent in noisy factories and in trolley cars whirling through the distracting streets, but the city which permits them to be the acme of pleasure and recreation to its young people, commits a grievous mistake.”⁷² Proponents of the Social Gospel movement in the 1910s, those who believed in social evolution through economic and political progress, also condemned amusement parks.⁷³ These reform-minded citizens saw amusement parks as corrupters. Hoping social reforms would elevate the working class and the poor, they saw instead parks where thousands gathered to take part in activities and behaviors that did not meet the reformers’ middle-class standards of deportment. Walter Rauschenbusch, a liberal cleric and reformer, observed that “an exhausted body craves rest, change, and stimulus, but it responds only to strong and coarse stimulation.”⁷⁴ Unfortunately for reformers of the era, this “coarse stimulation” attracted a massive audience of working-class and middle-class citizens, who rejected their refining influences.

By the turn of the century, commercial entertainment had emerged from working class origins and was “sweeping the urban middle class.”⁷⁵ The societal shifts brought about by and represented in these entertainments would help create a new cultural order. Coney Island brought together activities and people of the working and

⁷² Kasson, *Amusing the Million*, 100.

⁷³ Henry F. May, *The End of American Innocence: A Study of the First Years of Our Own Time* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1959), 12.

⁷⁴ Kasson, *Amusing the Million*, 100.

⁷⁵ Kasson, *Amusing the Million*, 36.

middle classes, while relaxing gender relations and showing Americans new ways to act in a play world. The cultural shift that would grow from the Petri dish of Coney Island amusement parks would be pervaded with working-class activities and behaviors. It was accepted with enthusiasm by the mass culture of early twentieth-century America.⁷⁶

Amusement parks lightened burdens and stirred Americans to partake in new activities and new behaviors with new groups. Evolving at the turn of the century, their predecessors were Central Park, national parks, World's Fairs and the City Beautiful Movement. World's Fairs had drawn huge crowds and introduced mechanized rides and exhibits of other cultures to the primarily wealthy and middle class. Amusement parks introduced mass entertainment to all who could afford a streetcar ride, bringing these attractions to cumulatively larger and more diverse crowds. Life in an urban, industrial society made these parks attractive retreats, and yet, they were a tension-filled celebration of industrialization within their garden landscapes. The technology that made electricity available created their possibility and that technology became, itself, an attraction. At these parks, the masses gathered. Men and women, workers and middle class, native-born and immigrant came together. All could gape at the "other"—the Iggorotes who occupied their native villages, the Chinaman in his midget town, and the African Americans at the Old Plantation, who were included as attractions, but excluded as patrons. Interestingly, some of the gapers at amusement parks, immigrants, were themselves treated as other in the culture outside the parks.

Amusement park entrepreneurs took elements of Central Park's urban green space, of national parks established on the margins of civilizations and reached by train,

⁷⁶For further discussion of the way Americans embraced new activities and modes of behavior at the turn of the century, see Henry F. May, *End of American Innocence*.

of world's fairs scientific and midway attractions, and of traveling carnivals and their democratic audiences, and built their machines of amusement inside garden landscapes. In the first years of the twentieth century, amusement parks were under construction across the United States. By 1906, they were cranking up to produce new landscapes along the edges of Indianapolis. Within the gates of these set-aside places of amusement, men and women, working class and middle class interacted in ways that did not previously happen outside the parks' walls.

Machines and Gardens

In 1906, Indianapolis's entertainment lexicon expanded to include new terms. Now there were "Shoot-the-Chutes," "loop-the-loops," "flying jinnies," and "rolly coasters." Across the city, this vocabulary emerged to describe what had not existed here before—Coney Island-style amusement parks. "Technology of the fantastic" had arrived in the heartland.⁷⁷ And Indianapolis residents could apply the terminology that accompanied these new entertainments not just to one amusement park in the city, but to three.

The concept of Indianapolis' parks came directly from the amusement parks of New York's Coney Island, which were descendants of earlier social and cultural movements. With few exceptions, the impetus, the money, and the ingenuity that brought these parks to Indianapolis also came from other places, from men who reasoned that reproducing the success of Coney Island would be as simple as duplicating electric towers, roly coasters and "Johnstown Floods." Indianapolis and other cities followed the trends that arose on the East Coast. Men from Chicago and Pennsylvania and New York invested money. The inventors from Coney Island sold ideas and machinery. A few Indianapolis men (and one woman), risked their own savings on the plans, and all hoped their investments would produce profit. Investment met invention and infrastructure on the green edges of Indianapolis—at the ends of the streetcar lines. The parks exploded from the city's ball fields and river banks. In Indianapolis, entrepreneurs transferred Coney Island onto the midwestern landscape.

Just as amusement parks had social and cultural antecedents, they also built upon technological and scientific advancements. All amusement parks were born out of

⁷⁷ Styre and Engbert, "Spaces of Consumption," 118.

new technology as well as having evolved from new forms of leisure. Steel and the new, relatively cheap availability of electricity made them possible. Electrified streetcars and entrepreneurial spirit made them reality. Those threads were being spun into amusement parks all across the United States just after the turn of the century. By 1907, a hundred million dollars had been invested in constructing amusement parks in this country.⁷⁸ The glue of all these parks, however, was Americans' desire for public spaces in which to spend their increasing leisure time.

As late as the 1890s, Indianapolis provided few municipal recreation spots. A small number of city parks existed, but they were, for the most part, undeveloped and unattractive until the twentieth century.⁷⁹ Private interests from Chicago were the first to answer the call for designated green expanses crafted for leisure. By so doing, they created a money-making enterprise for their business while benefiting city dwellers. During the ensuing fifteen years, electric streetcars would move citizens around Indianapolis, outside entrepreneurs, and a few local ones, would build leisure spaces at the end of those car lines and fill those green spaces with amusement machinery to create a new world of entertainment for Indianapolis.

In August 1889, the board of directors and owners of the Citizens Street Railway purchased the Adam Scott farm north of Indianapolis as part of the company's plan for development and expansion of the streetcar system.

Impetus for the creation of a park on this land came from the new president of the street railway company, John C. Shaffer (at that time publisher of the *Chicago Post*

⁷⁸ Immerso, *Coney Island*, 79.

⁷⁹ Michelle Hale, "Parks," *Encyclopedia of Indianapolis*, 1076-1077.

and, later, publisher and editor of the *Indianapolis Star* newspaper).⁸⁰ Shaffer and his family had stayed at the downtown Denison Hotel when they visited Indianapolis from Chicago. Because his young children had no park in which to play, he realized the need and the money-making possibilities of recreational space.⁸¹ Shaffer's partner in the Indianapolis Citizen's Street Railway Company was Samuel W. Allerton, organizer of the Union Stock Yards in Chicago and director of the Chicago City Railways Company.⁸² These entrepreneurs turned the Scott Farm's 246 acres into a suburban park at the terminus of one of their streetcar lines. The new owners named their park Fairview, for that is just what it had.⁸³

Trolley car parks were popular all across the country. Created by street railway companies to provide attractive leisure spots, they also encouraged streetcar use, doubly profiting the companies' owners. Fairview Park opened on the day that Indianapolis's streetcar system converted to electricity. The streetcar line to Fairview was the first in Indianapolis to be electrified. Fanfare and hoopla accompanied the application of electric current to the railway. On June 18, 1890, following numerous breakdowns along the route and the electrocution of at least one dog on the rail line, the city's first electric street car arrived for opening day at Fairview Park. The streetcar took more than an hour to travel 12 miles from the corner of Illinois and Washington streets to the park entrance (on the current-day Butler University campus) on that first day. But once the

⁸⁰ "Trolley Riding to Fairview Thrilling Event in the 90s," in "Indianapolis Parks—1949" clipping file Indiana State Library, Indianapolis; Charles Johnson Taggart, "Streetcars," *Encyclopedia of Indianapolis*, 1305.

⁸¹ "How Mr. Shaffer came to buy Fairview—New Street Car Ordinance," *Indianapolis News*, 25 July 1890.

⁸² *Ibid.*; Louise Carroll Wade, *Chicago's Pride: The Stockyards, Packingtown and Environ in the Nineteenth Century* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 35, 48.

⁸³ "Indianapolis Parks" clipping files, Indianapolis/Marion County Public Library, Indianapolis.

railway company corrected the glitches, the ride to Fairview became an entertainment in itself.⁸⁴

Electric streetcar lines were essential to the development of amusement parks. They provided quick and inexpensive transportation to the parks that were usually located at the outskirts of cities, and into the hinterlands they brought electricity that the parks could tap. Although Fairview was not a mechanized amusement park—it was primarily a gardenlike retreat—it did contain a few of the ingredients of these parks.

In 1899, the streetcar company hired a new president, Missourian Hugh McGowan, whose consolidation of the street railway company and the interurban lines proved highly successful.⁸⁵ McGowan’s innovations were not limited to the traction lines, however. He was also interested in increasing customers at Fairview Park. In 1902, McGowan added a new attraction that became popular: King and Queen “the diving horses.” King and Queen performed daily leaps from a forty-five foot platform into a tank of water at the park.⁸⁶ By May 1904, the fame of King and Queen was so widespread that Prince Pu Lun, the son of the Chinese Emperor, took time out of his tour of the United States to visit Fairview and watch the horses dive from their tower. The prince proved to be an attraction himself that day; over 10,000 visited the park to watch the Prince watching the horses.⁸⁷

Making double use of the electricity they generated to bring streetcar patrons to the park, Fairview’s owners decided to add electrically powered attractions to their offerings there. In July 1903, newspapers reported a merry-go-round, an electric

⁸⁴ “First ‘Electrocution,’” *Indianapolis News*, 18 June 1890; John O. Kain, “History of the Indianapolis Street Railway Company” (Indianapolis: Unpublished manuscript, 1922), 24.

⁸⁵ Jacob Piatt Dunn, *Greater Indianapolis*, (Chicago: Lewis Publishing Company, 1910), 1191.

⁸⁶ “Diving Horses Again,” *Indianapolis News*, 31 May 1902.

⁸⁷ “Ten Thousand See Prince at Fairview Park,” *Indianapolis Star*, 23 May 1904.

fountain, moving pictures and a miniature railway at Fairview. The management also added a “switchback” roller coaster ride powered by gravity.⁸⁸ These gravity-powered roller coasters had debuted at Coney Island before the turn of the century.⁸⁹ Thrill-seekers at Fairview entered the cars at the top of a manmade hill, rolled down one slope and up another. Then two “husky employees” pushed the car to the end of the track, the patrons turned around in their seats and rode down the hill in a reversed process. One rider later claimed he had “never in [his] life heard so much shrieking and squealing from the girls.”⁹⁰

Other girls were shrieking and squealing elsewhere in the city by 1903. The thrills provided by Fairview’s gravity-powered roller coaster would prove no match for the electrically powered, industrial-inspired excitement on the west side of town. Along White River, next to the city’s new Riverside City Park (opened in 1899), Riverside Amusement Park had opened the gates to mechanized amusement in Indianapolis along the city’s western limits.

Riverside Amusement Company filed Articles of Incorporation in January 1903. Company directors were William W. Jineson of Charlevois, Pennsylvania, Elmore E. Gregg and Frederick Ingersoll, both of Pittsburgh, and J. Clyde Power and Albert Lieber of Indianapolis.⁹¹ At least one of these men, Frederick Ingersoll, was an amusement park entrepreneur elsewhere. He had built a figure-eight roller coaster at Kennywood Park outside Pittsburgh in 1902.⁹² A few years later, in 1905, he opened

⁸⁸ “Pictures at Fairview,” *Indianapolis Star*, 13, July 1903; “All Aboard!—Fairview,” *Indianapolis News*, 18 July 1903.

⁸⁹ Immerso, *Coney Island*, 39.

⁹⁰ “Indianapolis Parks,” clipping file, Indianapolis/Marion County Public Library.

⁹¹ “Riverside Amusement Company,” Articles of Incorporation, filed January 6, 1903, Indiana State Archives (Commission on Public Records), Indianapolis.

⁹² “Kennywood,” <http://home.nyc.rr.com/johnmiller/kenny.html> (accessed March 12, 2003).

“Luna Park” in Pittsburgh, applying experience gained at Riverside Amusement Park to his home city.⁹³

According to the incorporation papers, the Riverside Amusement Company’s mission was to purchase and develop a “pleasure resort” adjacent to the city’s Riverside City Park, on 30th Street between White River and the Central Canal. The owners planned to “erect, construct, and operate thereon toboggan slides, buildings containing so-called ‘laughing galleries’ and other appliances, instruments, articles and things adapted or intended for the pleasure or amusement of the public . . .” They also planned to erect pavilions and other buildings, possibly even “hotels, club, boating and bathing houses and gymnasium” in connection with the park. They issued capital stock of \$35,000 in 350 equal shares. The officers owned all the stock. The officers signed the incorporation papers on Christmas Eve, 1902.⁹⁴

One of Riverside Amusement Park’s co-owners, J. Clyde Power, happened to also be the engineer and superintendent of Indianapolis’s relatively new parks’ department, who compiled the city report on Riverside City Park in 1904.⁹⁵ His experience and knowledge probably made him the city’s expert on amusing the masses with outdoor recreation. His influence resulted in the construction of City Beautiful-inspired stone and stone-faced concrete bridges in Indianapolis; he was especially concerned that the bridges near the city parks would be attractive stone spans. One of the new bridges the city constructed to Power’s exacting standards was the Emrichsville Bridge, the most elaborate and beautiful in Indianapolis in 1905. Not coincidentally and

⁹³ “Frederick Ingersoll,” <http://nyc.rr.com/johnmiller/inger.html> (accessed March 13, 2006).

⁹⁴ “Riverside Amusement Company,” Articles of Incorporation.

⁹⁵ J. Clyde Powers, *Indianapolis Reports: Tenth Annual Report of the Board of Park Commissioners* (Indianapolis: Department of Public Works), 1904.

perhaps connoting a conflict of interest, this beautiful new bridge spanned White River on the 16th Street approach to Riverside Park. The bridge over White River on 30th Street's approach to Riverside City Park and Riverside Amusement Park was also planned during Power's tenure; it opened the year he retired from the parks department (but not from his position as co-owner of Riverside Amusement Park) in 1908.⁹⁶ (The 30th Street bridge is still extant in 2007).

In May 1903, when Riverside Amusement Park opened, the local newspapers did not mention Power's involvement in the enterprise. Riverside Amusement Park's manager, Frank P. Thomas, Sr., was trumpeting the big "double-eight toboggan railway at 5 [cents] a shot" and the looking-glass maze at the "new place" of Riverside Amusement Company.⁹⁷ The amusement park was located near the entrance to the city's Riverside Park. On July 15, 1903, about the same time that Fairview was introducing its gravity-powered roller coaster, the officers of Riverside Amusement Company held a special meeting to increase their capital stock to \$50,000.⁹⁸ They used this extra money to install "a form of amusement never seen in this city before." That amusement was an "Old Mill" ride. New to Indianapolis, it was first introduced by Captain Paul Boyton at his Sea Lion Park on Coney Island in 1895.⁹⁹ Passengers (over the age of twelve), rode boats into the darkened tunnel of the replica of a working flour mill. Once inside the vaulted chambers, riders were delighted by a variety of miniature painted scenes illuminated by electric lights.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁶ James L. Cooper, *Artistry and Ingenuity in Artificial Stone: Indiana's Concrete Bridges, 1900-1942* (self published, 1997), 6, 235.

⁹⁷ "What Parks will offer Visitors this Summer," *Indianapolis News*, 2 May 1903.

⁹⁸ "Minutes of Special Meeting" held July 15, 1903, Indiana State Archives, Indianapolis.

⁹⁹ Boyton's park featured a number of water rides, including an Old Mill and a Shoot-the-Chutes.

¹⁰⁰ "Invention - 16.5 Million," *Indianapolis Star Magazine*, 30 November 1969.

Counting the Old Mill, the double-eight and the looking glass maze, Riverside Amusement Park now had a handful of electrically powered mechanical rides that competed favorably with Fairview's less-thrilling amusements. For two years, Riverside Amusement Park entertained visitors with this small assortment. But tales of the success of the huge mechanized amusement parks on Coney Island soon reached Indianapolis. And tales of additional competition were also swirling around the city by 1906. Riverside Amusement Park's owners began to dream the dream of a Steeplechase or a Luna Park of their own. They hired a new manager, J. S. Sandy, who in turn hired a crew of 120 men to build a newer, bigger, more thrilling park.¹⁰¹ A new age of amusement was rising in Indianapolis. Riverside Amusement Park's owners had begun to build the city's first full-fledged mechanized amusement park. Before long, this park would be in competition for the nickels and dimes of amusement seekers.

By May 6, 1906, Sandy was boasting that a crowd of 30,000 had visited Riverside Amusement Park on opening day. Exaggeration was commonplace in the tales amusement park managers told. But if Sandy's count was correct, then the crowd at Riverside Amusement Park on that one day represented between 13 and 17 percent of the entire Indianapolis population at that time.¹⁰² Impressive numbers, indeed, especially considering the park had not yet completed all of its amusement attractions by opening day.

Riverside's attractions at the beginning of summer in 1906 clearly resonated with the public and it is easy to see why. Several new rides were ready for opening day.

¹⁰¹ "Many Improvements at Riverside Park," *Indianapolis Star*, 6 May 1906.

¹⁰² In a non-census year, it is difficult to know the actual population count, but the population of Indianapolis was 169,164 in 1900 and 233,650 in 1910. 30,000 is 17 percent of the former and 13 percent of the latter. Population figures from David J. Bodenhamer and Robert G. Barrows, eds., *Encyclopedia of Indianapolis*, 1505.

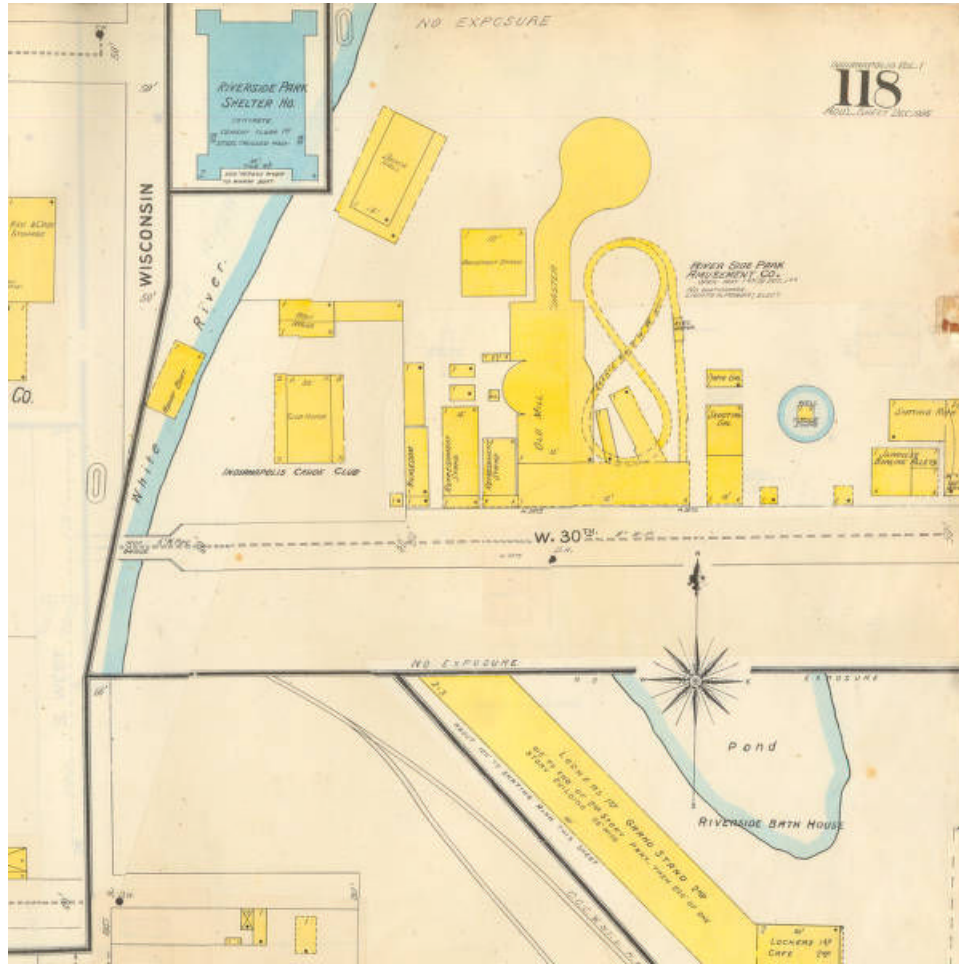
The “Gee Whiz” was in action. Sandy claimed to have one of the few Gee Whizzes in the country and described the ride cryptically as a “cross between a monster ‘teeter-totter’ and a ‘flying jinny.’”¹⁰³ The old double-eight roller coaster had received a face lift; its cars were remodeled and named for Sunday comic strip characters. Safety “contrivances” had been installed at every curve of its track. The “Aerial Swing” (a ride first introduced at Coney Island) “bedecked with lights,” defied gravity, rotating its swinging cab cars almost horizontal to the ground. The refurbished Old Mill now had newly painted scenery and was redubbed the “Scenic River.” Other new additions were an electric carousel, a miniature railway and a Japanese bowling alley, as well as a number of lesser games and stands that were already in “full blast.”¹⁰⁴

Some rides were still under construction, including a “Shoot-the-Chutes” water flume ride, which, like the Old Mill, was first introduced at Paul Boyton’s Sea Lion Park on Coney Island.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰³ “Many Improvements at Riverside,” *Indianapolis Star*, 6 May 1906.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*; Immerso, *Coney Island*, 77.



Sanborn Map of Riverside Amusement Park, circa 1905

Once Riverside Amusement Park's "chutes" was completed, riders would board the chute cars from a starting platform 35 feet off the ground. The cars would climb the tall incline and shoot down the 350-foot slide skimming over an artificial lake, "which will be clear as crystal with its white concrete bottom."¹⁰⁶ All the rides and attractions were decorated with electric lights safely installed with underground wire connections.¹⁰⁷

Adding value to the thrilling rides was the possibility of a romantic adventure. For the price of canoe or boat rental, patrons of Riverside Amusement Park could take to the "ripples in the water where it is not so light, where the moon alone casts its friendly glow" on the "tiny white hands of the fair creatures in the end of the boat."¹⁰⁸ This silky promise of romance, easy access to an adjacent, beautiful city park, and free admission to a park full of mechanized thrills made Riverside Amusement Park an attractive destination.

Although admission to the park was free, patrons who wanted to ride the rides or play the games had to count out their dimes and nickels. All the amusement rides and many of the other attractions in the park required paid admissions.¹⁰⁹ Several of the park's attractions and rides were installed and owned by individual entrepreneurs. Hoping to cash in on the profit of this new enterprise, they probably leased their spot on the grounds and paid the park company a portion of their admissions. Sandy had persuaded the street railway company to put additional streetcars on the Riverside line to carry amusement seekers. By the end of summer 1906, these cars were arriving at

¹⁰⁶ *Indianapolis Star*, 6 May 1906.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ "Riverside is Ready," *Indianapolis Star*, 27 May 1906.

Riverside Amusement Park every three minutes.¹¹⁰ A three-cent streetcar fare gave the public access to an urban destination of industrialized fantasy and natural beauty.

Riverside Amusement Park and the adjacent Riverside City Park offered an undeniably attractive combination.

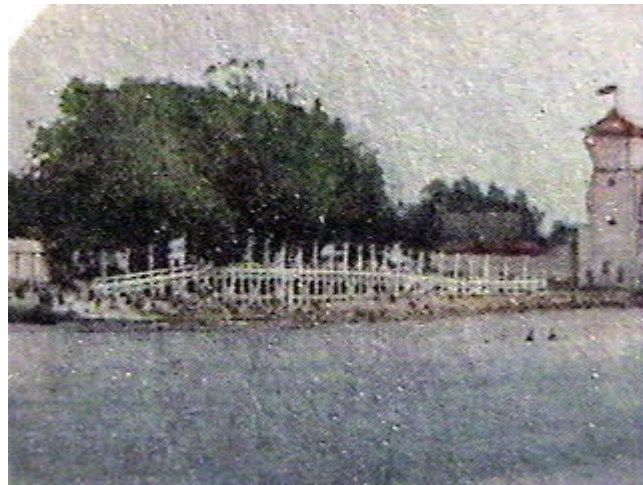
The profit potential of a Coney Island of their own had convinced Riverside Amusement Park's investors to expand. Their desire to increase amusements at Riverside was probably also fueled by the competition expected from two new, mechanized amusement parks rising on the flat lands of Indianapolis in 1906. The owners of these two brand new amusement parks in Indianapolis were betting their investment that they could find a market for their mechanized amusements, as well. Their parks' names evoked magic: Wonderland . . . White City. They would have to work magic to compete with Riverside and with each other in the coming years.

It could not have been a good sign to J. S. Sandy that Riverside Amusement Park's crowd was smaller on Wonderland's first Sunday in business, May 20, 1906. He had bragged about a crowd of 30,000 on May 1; on Sunday, May 20, he estimated it to be 28,000.¹¹¹ Though Sandy did not acknowledge the other parks as the cause for the smaller crowd, the competition was on. It would burn hot for the next few years.

Wonderland's history began many months before its opening night. Richard Kann of Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and Edward H. Rentsch and Minnie E. Wilson, both of Indianapolis, had filed articles of association in November 1905 for the Wonderland Construction Company.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Ibid.



Two postcard views of Riverside Amusement Park (author's collection)

Their mission was to “organize, promote and carry on pleasure resorts.” The \$200,000 in capital stock issued would purchase property and erect and maintain “buildings, structures, appliances, machinery, and lawful devices adapted thereto, and to carry on and furnish lawful amusement at such resorts.”¹¹²

Construction began in the spring of 1906. By early May, activity was reaching a crescendo at the corner of Gray and Washington streets, where Wonderland was rising on the two city blocks that had formerly been a baseball field.¹¹³ Though the park was gated and walled, Wonderland’s marvels reached heights that were visible to passersby, even before the management formally threw open the gates. The city officially ended just a few blocks east of Wonderland, but the area around the park was sparsely populated and still mostly undeveloped.¹¹⁴ Gawkers rode the Irvington streetcar (the recently annexed Irvington was several blocks east of Wonderland) or drove out in buggies, perhaps even automobiles, to watch workers assemble the buildings and rides.¹¹⁵

By May 13, the skeleton of the “Scenic Railroad” had risen above the gates. That day, an article in the *Indianapolis Star* described the “immense” railway, which was 575 feet long with four interweaving tracks to take passengers on a ride of over one-half mile. The tandem train cars held ten riders each and would be controlled by “an able-bodied brakeman.” This scenic railway used the same signal system as a

¹¹² “Wonderland Construction Company,” Articles of Association, Indiana State Archives.

¹¹³ “Building Scenic Railroad at Wonderland,” *Indianapolis Star*, 13 May 1906.

¹¹⁴ *Indianapolis* (Chicago: Sanborn Map Company, 1898, page updated 1907), The Digital Collections of IUPUI University Library, http://indiamond6.ulib.iupui.edu/cdm4/item_viewer.php?CISOROOT=/SanbornJP2&CISOPTR=694&REC=1 (accessed November 29, 2006).

¹¹⁵ “Work at Wonderland,” *Indianapolis Star*, 13 May 1906.

standard steam railroad. It ran on a fifty horsepower motor and had so many safety devices the park management promised “an absolute assurance against accident.”¹¹⁶

The L. A. Thompson Scenic Railway Company of New York had drawn the plans for Wonderland’s Scenic Railway. By 1906, Thompson’s company already had six scenic railway coasters at Coney Island. As evidenced by the one at Wonderland, the company had also begun to sell their designs across the nation.¹¹⁷ Thompson’s design combined the ups and downs of a roller coaster with painted scenery and an element of sightseeing as riders toured above the park’s landscape by rail.¹¹⁸ Construction costs for the Scenic Railway at Wonderland, which was just one of many attractions at the park, amounted to \$18,000; nearly \$10,000 of that the owners invested in lumber alone. Almost 5,000 electric lights decorated the structure.¹¹⁹

Wonderland’s cool opening night, Saturday, May 19, 1906, was cause for celebration for the 8,000 people who formed the “constant stream of pleasure seekers” entering the park’s gates. Though falling far short of the 30,000 that J. S. Sandy claimed had attended Riverside Amusement Park’s opening, 8,000 paying customers on an inclement May day must have been satisfying to the officers of Wonderland Amusement Company. It took nearly two hours merely to admit the sizable crowd.¹²⁰

Hyperbole barely sufficed for local newspapers attempting to describe Wonderland Park. As many as 50,000 electric light bulbs illuminated the wonders within the gated walls. Imitating Coney Island’s Luna Park, Wonderland had its own

¹¹⁶ “Building Scenic Railroad at Wonderland Park,” *Indianapolis Star*, 13 May 1906.

¹¹⁷ Immerso, *Coney Island*, 97-98.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ “Building Scenic Railroad at Wonderland Park.”

¹²⁰ “Wonderland Opening Drew a Great Crowd,” *Indianapolis News*, 21 May 1906.

Electric Tower. It was 125 feet tall (a shorter cousin to Luna Park's 200-foot tower), and decorated with enough incandescent light bulbs "to illuminate a city of 10,000."¹²¹

Throughout the park there were enough electric lights for a city of 35,000. Not only were the buildings and rides illuminated, there were also 25 arc lights and a 10,000 candlepower searchlight, "such as is used on United States battleships."¹²² Although Riverside Amusement Park was free, admission to Wonderland cost ten cents for adults and five cents for children. The admission must have seemed well worth it on Wonderland's opening night.¹²³

In addition to riding the scenic railway and climbing the Electric Tower, patrons could watch a realistic depiction of a natural spectacle, the Johnstown flood, in an attraction of that name. The strikingly authentic reproduction of the tragic flood in Johnstown, Pennsylvania in 1889 enthralled audiences. The hushed crowd listened and watched as a narrator described the events leading to the destruction of the town. Painted scenes, illuminated with lighting effects, made the flood seem remarkably real.¹²⁴ The "Johnstown Flood," an attraction that first gained popularity at Coney Island, quickly became one of Wonderland's most popular spectacles. The Coney Island parks featured an array of disaster reenactments such as this one, and the Indianapolis parks followed their lead with good results.

Although the Johnstown Flood spectacle was one of the most popular attractions, Wonderland's patrons had much to choose from. There were "mysteries

¹²¹ Immerso, *Coney Island*, 64-65; "Work at Wonderland: Plans for Opening Pushed," *Indianapolis Star*, 13 May 1906.

¹²² "Work at Wonderland," *Indianapolis Star*, May 13, 1906.

¹²³ "Wonderland Opening Drew a Great Crowd," *Indianapolis News*, 21 May 1906.

¹²⁴ "Indianapolis Parks and Playgrounds" clipping file, Indianapolis/Marion County Public Library, Indianapolis.

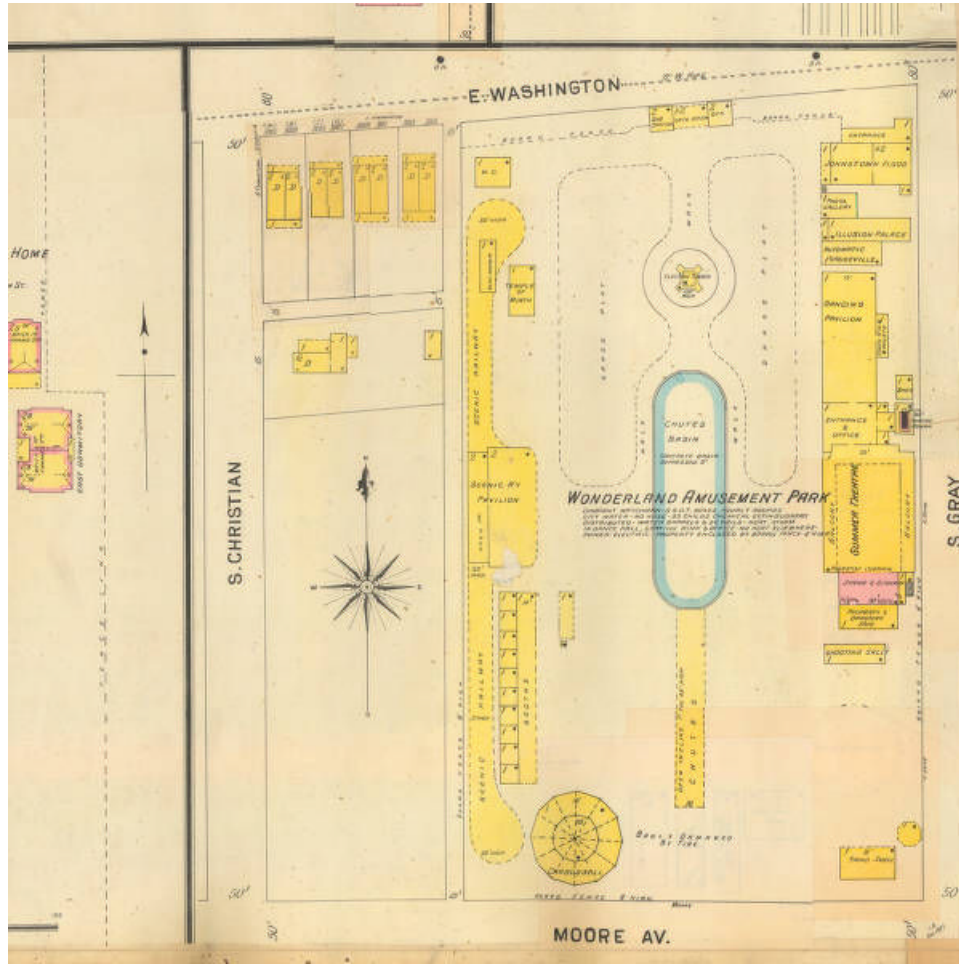
galore” at the “Third Degree,” the park’s “Shoot-the-Chutes” was completed, as was “Hale’s Tour of the World,” the fun factory, the circle swing and the “Mystic Maze.” Adults and children could slide down the “Bump-the-Bumps” a bumpity, adult-sized slide that provided entertainment for on-lookers as well as those on the ride. Onlookers could also watch Dare Devil Dash perform thrilling motorcycle tricks.¹²⁵

There was so much to ogle at Wonderland. Copying Coney Island’s Luna Park and the St. Louis Exposition before it, Wonderland had an imported tribe of Igorrotes from the Philippines, the cause of much gawking by the park’s customers.¹²⁶

This was a raucous, industrialized environment, full of banging, clanging, ratcheting and drumming. And yet, Wonderland’s management understood what Leo Marx would later put into words in *The Machine in the Garden*: Americans best appreciated their machinery in juxtaposition with their beautiful, green spaces. Located on a former baseball field at the edge of the growing city, Wonderland attempted to recreate pastoral green landscape with brimming pots of flowers, newly planted trees, and green lawn in the spaces between the amusement machines. These parks created a topsy-turvy world predicated on dissonance and tension. Wonderland’s “natural” beauty was just as crafted as its mechanized rides, its spectacles of natural disasters were amusements, its machinery of industry had become thrilling rides.

¹²⁵ “Work at Wonderland,” *Indianapolis Star*, 13 May 1906.

¹²⁶ Rydell, *All the World’s a Fair*, 194; “Work at Wonderland,” *Indianapolis Star*, 13 May 1906.



Sanborn Map of Wonderland Amusement Park, circa 1907

Imagine the excitement in Indianapolis over these new recreation options. First there were Riverside Amusement Park's attractions and now this entirely new Wonderland. Already, they had changed the landscape and the vocabulary of leisure time in this midwestern city. Still, there was yet another park rising on the banks of White River, in a northern suburb of Indianapolis. That park's name harkened back to the famous Chicago Exposition of 1893, which had set the amusement park trend in motion. Soon Indianapolis would have its own "White City."

White City Amusement Park in Broad Ripple, a few miles north of the Indianapolis city limits, was the final amusement park to open in May 1906. On May 28, "after an expenditure of hundreds of thousands of dollars and the efforts of hundreds of workmen," the six iron gates finally parted to admit the public to the park, located on a former local picnic grounds.¹²⁷

The White City of Indianapolis incorporated on October 4, 1905. Principals in the corporation were Raymond P. Van Camp, Dr. Robert C. Light, Milton S. Huey and John W. Bowles, all of Indianapolis, and Leon O. Bailey of New York.¹²⁸ Light was the president of the Broad Ripple Rapid Transit Company, a street railway. Like Fairview's John Shaffer and other street railway entrepreneurs, Light understood that placing an amusement park at the end of his streetcar line nearly guaranteed a profit for the railway company.¹²⁹ Once White City opened, and after some tricky negotiations with the Indianapolis street railways about transfers between the two railway lines, White City's management could state that the trip to White City from Indianapolis took only 5

¹²⁷ "White City Aglow for its Opening," *Indianapolis Star*, 6 May 1906.

¹²⁸ "Articles of Association for White City Amusement Company."

¹²⁹ For elaboration on the Broad Ripple Rapid Transit Company history, see Esther Dawson, "Broad Ripple: A History of the Northern Indianapolis Community Built Around the Construction of the Central Canal" (circa 1960), http://www.broadripplehistory.com/br_esther.htm (August 2, 2006).

minutes (though they must have been optimistically timing the ride from the northern edge of the city rather than the center of Indianapolis, which was about eight miles south of the park).¹³⁰

For several weeks, the Indianapolis newspapers kept citizens intrigued about the ongoing construction at the park. Even before the park opened, an article in the *Indianapolis Star* described its many attractions. White City took its name from the famous Chicago Exposition of 1893.¹³¹ At Coney Island, sand beaches created the need for a boardwalk. Though lacking the sand, and therefore the need, White City had a Coney Island-style boardwalk nonetheless. The park manager, W. C. Tabb, constructed the boardwalk around its sea of tall trees.¹³² Patrons navigated through natural beauty to mechanized attractions. White City's scenic railway delighted the *Star* reporter with its "thrilling ups and downs through the tops of forest trees and along the painted scenery." The Buster Brown was a "tricky niche for novelty." "Vesuvius," was a spectacle that reenacted the disastrous volcano eruption at Pompeii. The "Shoot-the-Chutes" emptied into an artificial lake. "The Hereafter" was probably fashioned after Coney Island attractions that took patrons on a ride through scenery depicting heaven and hell.¹³³

¹³⁰ Various advertisements, *Indianapolis Star*, 1906.

¹³¹ Note: There is no Sanborn Map of White City during its years of operation.

¹³² "White City Aglow for its Opening."

¹³³ Ibid.



Map of Indianapolis Amusement Parks' Approximate Locations



Postcards of Wonderland and White City, circa 1906 (author's collection)

“Hale’s Tour of the World,” a “rolly coaster,” merry-go-round, “loop-the-loop,” “bump-the-bumps,” and a “razzle dazzle” were part of the mix. A roller skating rink built inside an old, renovated theater building, a new dancing pavilion, a soda fountain and a restaurant added to the array of White City.¹³⁴ “Fighting the Flames,” a fire spectacle, copied an attraction at Dreamland Park on Coney Island.¹³⁵ An amusement arcade, a shooting gallery and a baseball diamond were included. There were beautiful “forest trees” in the park. And there was also the White River. Like Riverside, White City bordered the river and offered opportunities for swimming, boating and canoeing.¹³⁶

White City’s management copied the attractions of Coney Island and hoped to copy its success. The *Indianapolis Star* stated the park’s connection to its progenitors explicitly, calling White City, “a form of amusement which has already made such a hit in other cities.”¹³⁷ The owners’ hopes that the park would be a “hit” seemed justified. By Friday, May 25, White City had not yet opened, but “thousands” had already been to the park to watch the construction. “Various buildings containing the shows and other amusements . . .” were “bright with paint and ready for the doors to be thrown open” according to the *Indianapolis Star*.¹³⁸ The opening day crowd must have been sizable. The park management helped ensure high attendance over the next week by dropping \$50 in money orders, redeemable at the *Indianapolis Star* office, from Horace Wild’s airship, the *White Eagle*, as it circled “thousands of feet above the park.”¹³⁹

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Immerso, *Coney Island*, 73.

¹³⁶ “White City Aglow for its Opening.”

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ “White City Lagoon – Looking Down the Chutes,” *Indianapolis Star*, 25 May 1906.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

One of the most intriguing attractions at White City carried the machine-and-nature essence of amusement parks to a new degree. Under headlines announcing “Baby Incubators Arrive: Tiny Creatures being nurtured by Science,” an article described this latest attraction. “Several of the tiny creatures who are to be brought to strength, with dimples in their cheeks and laughter still many days distant, are already being cared for at the baby incubator display[,] which is in a specially prepared building near the north end of the amusement park . . .”¹⁴⁰ The management of White City copied the Baby Incubators exhibit from one at Luna Park, which, in turn, had borrowed it from the 1901 Pan American Exposition in Buffalo.¹⁴¹ In a time before preemies received special treatment in hospitals, amusement parks were the only real hope for these infants and their families, and the baby incubator exhibits were highly successful in saving premature infants who might otherwise have died.¹⁴² A burgeoning American interest in science and industrial technology and the human drama of saving premature babies brought large crowds to the baby incubators. Just as amusement parks improved their “natural” beauty with boardwalks and flower pots framing their machines of amusement, these baby incubators improved on nature by keeping these tiny humans in scientifically regulated environments for all to see.

By the end of May 1906, three amusement parks were open on the north, east, and west sides of Indianapolis. A slightly off-kilter but almost equilateral triangle could be drawn on the map by connecting the points of White City, to Wonderland, to Riverside Amusement Park and back again to White City. There were, indeed,

¹⁴⁰ “White City Growing: Baby Incubators Arrive,” *Indianapolis Star*, 10 June 1906.

¹⁴¹ Immerso, *Coney Island*, 64.

¹⁴² See Lieberman, “Incubator Baby Shows,” for discussion of the efficacy of baby incubator exhibits.

machines in these garden spots of the city, all of which were still surrounded, in 1906, mostly by undeveloped land. The “natural” gardens of these parks were a draw.

Already imitating Coney Island’s attractions and rides, two of the new Indianapolis parks also attempted to imitate the architectural aesthetic of Luna Park and Dreamland. Riverside, whose construction began earlier and took place in a piecemeal fashion, was the only one of the three Indianapolis parks that made no concerted attempt to create a unified architectural look. The park had grown in spurts over a three-year period, with attractions and structures on both sides of 30th Street creating an obstacle to architectural continuity.¹⁴³ The few images of Riverside’s architecture in this era show a collection of wooden structures placed somewhat randomly on the landscape, and painted in a variety of colors.¹⁴⁴ By 1910, a large white gateway to the park was topped by flags and visible from White River.

In contrast, both Wonderland and White City featured fantastical and monumental architecture reminiscent of the White City of the 1893 Exposition and of the Coney Island parks. Magnificent gateways gave entry to the worlds of fantasy inside these parks’ walls. Wonderland’s buildings were City Beautiful-inspired Beaux Arts confections. At Wonderland, this style made popular by the 1893 Exposition in Chicago revealed itself in symmetrical structures with garland friezes, arched entries and deep eaves. It was a spectacular interpretation of the popular architectural form of the era. The park’s gateway, almost identical to the one at Luna Park, was a two-story building with a central, gated arch flanked by two sets of windows. On each side of the arch

¹⁴³ *Sanborn Map of Indianapolis*, (1914-1915), Indiana University Geography Library, Bloomington, Indiana.

¹⁴⁴ Images in author’s collection; “Riverside Park” postcards in the “Jay Small Postcard Collection,” Indiana Historical Society, Indianapolis; Immerso, *Coney Island*, unnumbered page before 57.

were the park offices. The name “Wonderland” was emblazoned above the arch. The gateway building rose to a parapet; the roof was decorated with huge bollards topped by large spheres spiked with light bulbs (a design element also taken from Luna Park).¹⁴⁵

Patrons entered the park through this arched gateway on Washington Street. This symbol of separation from the city gave access to a topsy-turvy fantasy world of both natural and mechanical amusement. A long esplanade stretched out behind it. Immediately, visitors noticed all the white buildings trimmed in yellow.¹⁴⁶ The park buildings’ diagonal, vertical and horizontal lines carried the eye every which way. The white electric tower with its vertical colored accent lines stood at the center of the esplanade. The four-sided square tower stretched upward for more than ten stories to an observation deck near the top.¹⁴⁷ South of the tower was the “Shoot the Chutes” lagoon. The park’s elephant bathed here, to the delight of onlookers, each day. The lagoon was unfenced but surrounded by the same sort of light-bulb spiked, sphere-topped bollards as those on the entrance arch; these, taller than a man. The tall chutes ride was at the south end of the lagoon. Two tracks wide and topped with a cupola sporting a tall flag, the chutes slide was lined on both sides with the lighted bollards.¹⁴⁸

Buildings spread out from both sides of the chutes. By 1910, the building east of it housed “Brewster’s Millions.” This small, one-story building had an arched entry and tall columns on each corner. Further east was the “Flat Iron” building attraction; ironically in a rectangular building, two-stories high, with an arched entrance. The

¹⁴⁵ ““Indianapolis Parks—1949” clipping file Indiana State Library, Indianapolis.

¹⁴⁶ Postcards in author’s collection. The yellow trim is shown on some colorized postcards. These tinted postcards are admittedly not always an accurate source, but more than one card shows this color combination, and even black and white photos show that buildings were trimmed in a color different from the body, so, for the sake of argument, the colors shown on the postcards are described here.

¹⁴⁷ “Wonderland Park Tower,” photograph in Bass Photo collection, Indiana Historical Society, Indianapolis.

¹⁴⁸ “South End of ‘Wonderland, Indianapolis, Ind.,” Postcard in author’s collection.

parapet along the roof was topped with flags. A painted scrim over the entry depicted people fleeing a fire in the famous Flatiron building in New York.¹⁴⁹

West of the chutes was the “Third Degree,” in a rectangular, two-story building that had an embossed swag decoration across its second story façade. Its parapet roof was topped with the familiar light-bulb spiked balls and flags.¹⁵⁰ A 1906 postcard image shows men and women dashing down the stairs of the Third Degree building, the women attempting to hold down their skirts as they blew wildly around their ankles. Like the Blowhole Theater at Steeplechase, part of the fun of the Third Degree must have been unexpected gusts of air that blew women’s skirts up and men’s hats off.¹⁵¹

The remainder of the park landscape was lined with rides and buildings, including a wide, three-story building next to the Third Degree, which was the scenic railway pavilion. Among the remaining structures and attractions was a “Tish-i-Mingo” cigar “smokehouse.” The dancing pavilion was on the park’s east side, between the Automatic Vaudeville building and the Shooting Gallery; at the southern edge of the property stood a large carousel and the band shell.¹⁵² Colorful flags rose above the rooftops, and everywhere, on every surface imaginable, there were incandescent lights.¹⁵³ Wonderland’s management billed it as the “Park Beautiful”; both architecture and landscape helped it live up to that moniker.

¹⁴⁹ “8 New Attractions please at Wonderland,” *Indianapolis Star*, 24 May 1907.

¹⁵⁰ ““Indianapolis Parks—1949” clipping file Indiana State Library, Indianapolis.

¹⁵¹ “Wonderland” brief history and photocopies of postcards; ““Indianapolis Parks—1949” clipping file Indiana State Library.

¹⁵² *Ibid*; *Indianapolis* (Chicago: Sanborn Map Company, 1898, page updated 1907), The Digital Collections of IUPUI University Library, http://indiamond6.ulib.iupui.edu/cdm4/item_viewer.php?CISOROOT=/SanbornJP2&CISOPTR=694&REC=1 (accessed November 29, 2006).

¹⁵³ Postcards in author’s collection; photocopies of Wonderland postcards in ““Indianapolis Parks—1949” clipping file Indiana State Library, Indianapolis.

True to its City Beautiful inspiration, Wonderland's environment was carefully landscaped. Its gardens enveloped the machinery and buildings of amusement with bountiful blooms and green borders. Incandescent iron "streetlights," placed upon paths and near the buildings of the park, cast a yellowish glow at night. The park had pleasing curved pathways, wide enough to accommodate large crowds without forcing them to "rub elbows." Iron fences lined the paths and shrubbery and potted flowers decorated the park, whose grounds were also adorned with small, freshly planted trees.¹⁵⁴ A few park benches dotted the pathways, but taking a lesson in amusement park design from Luna Park's owners, who said benches removed the sitters from the action of the parks, Wonderland's management kept them to a minimum.¹⁵⁵

Both Wonderland and White City created special environments with architecture and landscape. Wonderland's architecture was Beaux Arts inspired; White City's might be called "fantasy Neo-Classical." Harkening back to the classical architectural roots that inspired the Beaux Arts architecture of the White City at the Chicago Exposition, Indianapolis's White City used simple lines, two-story columns and magnificent towers to create a fantasy ambience. White City's layout was similar to Wonderland's. Patrons entered the park through six iron gates, beneath an arch with two park office buildings on either side.¹⁵⁶ Visitors stepped into the park onto the boardwalk. Directly in front of them was an attractive bandstand filled with a variety of musicians playing lively tunes.¹⁵⁷ The park's buildings were frame constructions, as were those at Riverside and Wonderland. Like the buildings at Wonderland, White City's appear to have been

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ Kasson, *Amusing the Million*, 82.

¹⁵⁶ "Entrance to White City," photograph, *Indianapolis Star*, 27 May 1906.

¹⁵⁷ Postcards, author's collection.

covered in the Plaster of Paris and jute “staff” coating that was used at the Chicago Exposition and at amusement parks on Coney Island.¹⁵⁸

A wide concrete walkway over the top of the “Shoot-the-Chutes” slide was the park’s most significant design feature. Similar to a Dreamland Park (Coney Island) design, it became White City’s signature. Postcards and photographs of White City typically looked downward from the top of the chutes toward the lagoon, showing the wide walkway that bridged the lagoon.¹⁵⁹ Customers standing on the walkway could watch the chute riders descend into the water.

Next to the chutes was the “Hereafter” building, next to it, the “Fun Factory.” Along the western edge of the park, White City’s scenic railway had a view of White River on the west and, at the top of the incline, of the town of Broad Ripple to the south. On the north side of the park were the roller skating rink, a restaurant and the dancing pavilion on a hill.¹⁶⁰ The twenty-cent adult admission, plus a five-cent streetcar ride, bought entry to the exciting attractions of White City. True to its advertisements, for a while at least, it was the “amusement park that satisfie[d].”¹⁶¹

As they copied attractions and inventiveness from Coney Island, so, too, did Indianapolis amusement parks copy the monumental, fantasy architecture. Although Riverside Amusement Park’s architecture was far more plebian in appearance than Wonderland’s or White City’s, all these parks created special environments of fantasy

¹⁵⁸ “Interactive Guide to the World’s Columbian Exposition,”

<http://users.vnet.net/schulman/Columbian/columbian.html#CONST> (accessed November 29, 2006).

¹⁵⁹ “White City Park, Indianapolis, Ind.,” postcard, author’s collection; “White City Lagoon—Looking Down the Chutes,” *Indianapolis Star*, 26 May 1906.

¹⁶⁰ “White City Aglow for its Opening,” *Indianapolis Star*, 6 May 1906.

¹⁶¹ Advertisement, *Indianapolis Star*, 10 June 1906.

inside gated, set-aside locations. Both the fantastical architecture and the landscapes that held their machines of amusement were inviting and special.

Throughout the summer of 1906, the Indianapolis amusement parks made news on a weekly basis. The coverage of these parks was so thorough and regular it seems likely the newspapers were trading “news” coverage for advertising revenues. If so, this pattern, too, copied the Coney Island parks and their relationship with the New York newspapers.¹⁶² In Indianapolis, each Sunday of 1906, the *Indianapolis Star* ran a photograph from at least one, often all three, of the parks. The paper also typically ran articles about the parks. In one or two paragraphs, these articles talked about continuing construction, new attractions and high attendance. All three parks purchased large advertisements in the *Star*, which probably earned them the articles as *quid pro quo*. The *Indianapolis News* also seemed to participate in equal and regular coverage of each park, and the parks also advertised in the *News*, suggesting a similar advertising-for-coverage arrangement.

In this first year of the parks’ competition, newspapers gave them relatively equal treatment. In the ensuing years, Riverside no longer advertised in the *Indianapolis Star*, and news coverage of this amusement park in the *Star* diminished to almost nothing. This also seemed to be true in the *Indianapolis News*, although more advertisements and articles about Riverside Amusement Park appeared in the *News* after 1907 than in the *Star*. Wonderland and White City continued to advertise in the

¹⁶² Immerso, *Coney Island*, 62.

Star on a weekly basis and the *Star* continued to print weekly articles about the two parks until their demise.¹⁶³

Throughout the summer of 1906, coverage was still divided equally and apportioned to all the amusement parks in the newspapers. In May, articles included more about construction and the parks' openings. In June, they revealed that Riverside added more new attractions and that the management was contemplating yet more. White City was growing and its "loop-the-loop" was the "most exciting and best patronized" of all its amusements. Wonderland boasted "many startling free exhibitions in addition to the usual attractions."¹⁶⁴ The article's use of the phrase, "usual attractions" about a park that had been open less than a month, seems odd. In a city that suddenly had three amusement parks, "the usual attractions" could be found at any of them; owners soon learned they had to promote their constantly changing, improving and better attractions.

None of these parks could afford to seem static, not even for a week. The week of June 10, Wonderland featured daredevil Castelaine, completing the "double gap of death" and Madame La Blanche, once again performing the daring "slide for life," after having fully recovered from her injuries of the previous week. The major draw that week, however, was the free exhibition of the Kann War Airship (presumably named for one of the park's owners, Richard Kann).

¹⁶³ The author attempted to review most of the Sunday *Indianapolis Star* newspapers from 1906 to 1909 and sporadically sampled after 1909 to 1911. The *Star* ran a weekly item on each park. The *Indianapolis News* was more difficult to sample because it did not publish on Sundays and sprinkled the park "news" throughout the week. Nevertheless, the author sampled the *News* at random and found a great number of articles and advertisements.

¹⁶⁴ Various articles, *Indianapolis Star*, 10 June 1906.

Although airships had flown over the amusement parks on Coney Island (and the Louisiana Purchase Exposition in St. Louis), the Kann War Airship actually had Indianapolis connections.¹⁶⁵ Carl Fisher, soon to be the developer of the Indianapolis Motor Speedway, built the airship's engine, which was "powerful enough to drive an automobile carrying five persons." The dirigible, the size of two streetcars, was built by Leo Stevens, who had "the only air-ship factory in the world." A local inventor, Ansel Moffatt, made the hydrogen gas for the airship using eighteen tons of material, including 4,500 pounds of sulphuric acid and 2,000 pounds of nails. Wonderland visitors could see the airship for free in its own aerodrome at the park. Once a day and once each night, it lifted above the building tops, above the Scenic Railway, and sailed over the chutes in its flight over Wonderland.¹⁶⁶

The parks were still new in 1906, and their spectacles and thrills excited the masses. Their novelty in Indianapolis, albeit a novelty stolen from Coney Island, sustained them for the first season. There were so many choices and each week brought something new and different, adding more words to Indianapolis's new amusement vocabulary. But these new amusement parks were businesses. They were expensive to build and expensive to maintain. The crowds that fed them had to remain large. The question in the owners' minds at the end of the 1906 season was how to maintain and increase their crowds and their profits. They had come to this midwestern city and they had built the machinery of amusement that first arose on Coney Island, using the infrastructure of electrified streetcars and the electricity that ran them. They placed their mechanized amusement parks on green lawns shaded by forest trees (or they planted

¹⁶⁵ Rydell, *All the World's a Fair*, 155; "Something about Wonderland's War Air-Ship," *Indianapolis News*, 2 June 1906.

¹⁶⁶ "Something About Wonderland's War Air-Ship."

new trees), along the edges of Indianapolis. By 1906, these fantasy worlds were complete. With machinery clanking away in these carefully manipulated gardens, their spectacles were belching forth flood and flame. How long each park could sustain its balance of nature and machine with funds for new attractions and the crowds willing to pay for them was a question that could not yet be answered.

Surplus

Mechanical amusement parks were premised on the fantastical, the spectacular, “the other.” They were “the other.” They were worlds of machinery and fun set apart from the workaday world, but at the same time they were very much a part of urban life. They drew huge crowds to their locations on the city margins. In New York, Coney Island was an actual island of fantasy, holding several amusement parks in one special unique place of mechanized amusement. By 1906, Indianapolis also had three of these make-believe worlds of recreation—three set-aside places of the fantastical. But each stood alone on the undeveloped edges of the city.

Riverside Amusement Park, Wonderland, and White City, the three new amusement parks in Indianapolis, had successful kick-off seasons in 1906. They attracted large crowds with their thrilling attractions. The three parks in Indianapolis were forced to compete against each other for an audience significantly smaller than the three parks at Coney Island could attract. In Indianapolis, three parks competing drove each to constantly push the edge, acquiring bigger, more fantastic attractions. Each park offered a compelling blend of machine and garden but it was difficult to sustain a balance between the tensions that these parks depended on for survival, among them, the need to constantly renew and build ever-bigger, ever-better in order to draw the number of patrons needed to stay in business and pay for the improvements. In the end only one park managed to survive this tension. Ultimately, real-life spectacles brought ends to the other two.

In their second season, Indianapolis amusement parks opened sequentially, starting the first week of May with White City. On opening day, the “amusement park

that satisfies” featured Wheelock’s Famous Indian Band and Howard and Germaine, “famous aerialists.” In addition, there were “nearly two score of popular attractions.” Along with “miles and miles of roller skating,” new amusements included “Paris by Night,” a “mysterious flying lady,” “Kemp’s model city,” and a billiard hall. According to the park’s advertisement in the *Indianapolis Star*, for its twenty cent admission price, White City was “the greatest bargain in amusements ever offered in Indiana.”¹⁶⁷

For the first week in May, White City was the only amusement park open; it had the crowd to itself, for once. But, lacking other local parks to report on, the *Indianapolis Star* provided implied competition for White City with a long article about Coney Island’s Luna Park. Running the length of the page on May 5, 1907, the article described Luna Park’s multitude of attractions, including many that had been copied at the Indianapolis parks, such as the scenic railway, the “chutes,” and the “Red Mill.” Indianapolis residents could only imagine others, such as the “Trip to the Moon,” the “Mountain Torrent,” the “Dragon’s Gorge,” and the “Kansas Cyclone.”¹⁶⁸

Luna Park’s owners, Thompson and Dundy, had invested \$4 million in their 38-acre park. How could Indianapolis parks compare? Even though Wonderland owned the bragging rights locally for its 10,000 incandescent lights, the number seemed paltry when compared to Luna Park’s 900,000 electric light bulbs. So did the Indianapolis’s parks’ attendance figures. Luna Park claimed an average season’s attendance of more than 5 million.¹⁶⁹ Even the probably inflated counts of Riverside’s J. S. Sandy paled in comparison. Indianapolis’s amusement parks could not rise to the heights of Luna Park; but they had to compete only with each other.

¹⁶⁷ White City advertisement, *Indianapolis Star*, 5 May 1907.

¹⁶⁸ “Prepare Luna Park,” *Indianapolis Star*, 5 May 1907.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

That competition heated up in 1907. Beneath a White City advertisement that proclaimed “all roads lead to White City,” Wonderland’s advertisement on May 11, 1907 trumpeted its opening day acts. Miss Allie Jackson was introducing her equestrienne act on a \$10,000 Arabian Charger named Prince. And the European equilibrists, Lydia and Albino (yes, he was one), shared headline space with King Bill, “the greatest trained bull in the world.”¹⁷⁰

The following day’s *Indianapolis Star* headline indicated that King Bill may not have been quite as well-trained as advertised. “Bull Routs Crowd, Women and Children Run,” it proclaimed. Apparently, Bill had behaved with the best bovine manners, until the first toot of a horn in the band set him jumping off the six-foot tall stage straight into the crowd. “Pipe de bull skidoo,” the newspaper quoted one “dirty faced urchin” shouting as he leaped over the picket fence to safety by the Aerial Swing. Bill’s owner eventually corralled him and went on with the performance, blaming “that bloomin’ music” for Bill’s misbehavior. The bull performed nicely for the rest of his act, climbing a stairway and even firing a gun, “all to the great delight of his audience.”¹⁷¹

Given King Bill’s misbehavior, it may have been lucky that Wonderland’s opening day attendance was lower than expected. The crowd was small “owing to the cool weather,” according to the *Star*, but the skating rink was well patronized and a throng of children “took care” of the “Bumps.” According to new manager, F. M. Wicks, the park owners had invested \$25,000 on improvements in the off-season. Management had used the money to spruce up buildings, construct a new band shell, add a new attraction called “the Creation or the Mysterious Black Art,” and to build a

¹⁷⁰ White City and Wonderland advertisements, *Indianapolis News*, 11 May 1907.

¹⁷¹ “Bull Routs Crowd,” *Indianapolis Star*, 12 May 1907.

monkey house for 48 new monkey residents at the park.¹⁷² Like White City, Wonderland was improved and ready to please its patrons at the beginning of the second season.

By May 19, 1907, Riverside Amusement Park was also pleasing patrons. The “family playground” had been open for the season long enough for the *Indianapolis Star* to write that “good crowds are patronizing the pleasing resort.” Like both Wonderland and White City, Riverside promised many new attractions for its second season, although the May 19 article did not mention any of these, merely stating that the Old Mill ride had been repainted.¹⁷³

Riverside Amusement Park’s advertisement, and the article about it that appeared the same day, both celebrated the arrival of “Buckskin Ben’s Wild West Show and Famous Cowboy Band” at the park. This “wonderful portrayal of the real western life” featured cowboys, bucking broncos and bronco busters, lassoing and knife throwing and “a remarkable performance of educated trick ponies, dogs, and monkeys.” Though the article in the *Star* did not explain why monkeys were part of a show on “real western life,” monkeys had obviously become popular at Indianapolis amusement parks in 1907. Riverside was the second amusement park in town, following Wonderland, to add them to its list of attractions. Riverside Amusement Park’s manager Sandy said he’d do “anything to amuse the children and entertain the ‘grownups.’”¹⁷⁴

In the second season, the parks continued to update and create new attractions, pushing each other to compete. The competition was fierce and at times the parks risked their crowds’ safety in an effort at one-upmanship. Both White City and Riverside

¹⁷² Ibid.

¹⁷³ Riverside Amusement Park advertisement, “Wild West at Riverside,” *Indianapolis Star*, 19 May 1907.

¹⁷⁴ “Wild West at Riverside,” *Indianapolis Star*, 19 May 1907.

opened their seasons with traveling western-themed attractions. Wild West shows had been popular at amusement parks since the Buffalo Bill Wild West Show first came to Coney Island in 1883.¹⁷⁵ A decade later, Frederick Jackson Turner’s “frontier thesis,” presented at the Chicago Exposition of 1893, made these acts even more popular. In his famous thesis, Turner claimed that Americans were formed by their push westward into the frontier and that the frontier had now been civilized, changing America’s direction and Americans’ views of themselves. With the settlement of the frontier, the first period of American history, its defining period, had ended.¹⁷⁶ Wild West shows conjured the earlier, adventurous years of America. They gave city dwellers a peek into the lives of their intrepid wilderness-civilizing ancestors, however sanitized and clichéd that peek was. As they had been and continued to be at Coney Island, western shows, cowboys and Indian bands were staples at Indianapolis amusement parks.

One feature in the planning stages at White City was unique, in Indianapolis, anyway. On May 19, 1907, the first of many articles appeared in the newspapers about a new “bathing beach” at the park. This “beach,” when completed, would have a water surface of nearly four acres. The “beach” would be, in essence, a swimming pool, with sand and a boardwalk promenade surrounding it. A construction contract had been awarded to Pease and Buzatt, who planned to begin work on May 20, 1907, with 100 men and 50 teams (the earth-moving for this type of project would have been done by mule or horse teams pulling large pans that scraped up the earth). White City’s management expected to pay \$40,000 for construction. The pool was modeled on “an amusement feature, which has proven wonderfully popular in Columbus, O. and other

¹⁷⁵ Immerso, *Coney Island*, 35.

¹⁷⁶ Rydell, *All the World’s a Fair*, 47.

inland cities...” When completed, it would allegedly be the “largest affair of the kind in the country.”¹⁷⁷

George Tilyou at Coney Island’s Steeplechase Park might have disputed White City’s claim. He claimed to have one of the “world’s largest swimming pools” at his park, which he had constructed in 1906, a year before White City’s management began planning their pool.¹⁷⁸ Other amusement park owners also made similar claims. The Long Beach “Plunge,” in Long Beach, California, opened in 1905. It, too, was allegedly “one of the largest [pools] in the world,” according to information on a postcard about the park.¹⁷⁹

Pools like the “Plunge” and the bathing beach planned for White City became commonplace across the United States in the early years of the twentieth century. They were a concrete expression of the nation’s rising interest in physical culture. This growing focus on physical fitness was manifested in the first Olympic games ever held in the western hemisphere, at the St. Louis World’s Fair in 1904.¹⁸⁰ The new physical culture resulted in the construction of facilities for sports activities across the United States. In these early years of the century, golf courses were laid out all over the nation and swimming pools, such as the one at White City, became increasingly popular and abundant on the landscape of the country.¹⁸¹ Bragging rights for the largest swimming pool in Indianapolis belonged to White City; this attraction certainly would set it apart

¹⁷⁷ “Contract is Let for Pool,” *Indianapolis Star*, 19 May 1907.

¹⁷⁸ Postcard of Steeplechase swimming pool, author’s collection.

¹⁷⁹ Postcard of the Long Beach Plunge, author’s collection. Information about the Long Beach Plunge is available at <http://www.ulwaf.com/LA-1900s/of.o7.html> (accessed August 12, 2006). It is possible to view postcards of historic pools at the web page of the Professional Pool Operators of America, http://www.ppoa.org/historical_pools_.htm (accessed April 8, 2006).

¹⁸⁰ Robert Rydell describes the intersection of the cult of physical culture and the St. Louis Exposition in *All the World’s a Fair*, 155.

¹⁸¹ Foster Rhea Dulles wrote that there were over a half-million golf courses in the United States by 1910. See his *America Learns to Play*, (New York: Appleton-Century, 1940), 357.

from the other parks. That was a good thing, for only three weeks into May of the second season, the parks' advertised acts, bizarre as they were, looked very similar to each other. On May 19, White City featured a triple horizontal bar act by Disbro and Snyder. Snyder may have been "the only albino gymnast in America," as White City's ad touted, but an albino "aerialist" had performed only the week before at Wonderland.¹⁸² One wonders if the second gymnastic albino act in the space of a week could have been much of a draw.

The parks were more successful at offering unique attractions on Decoration Day (now Memorial Day), May 30, 1907. Wonderland had a special show of Pain's Fireworks planned for the holiday.¹⁸³ Pain's Fireworks were famous at Coney Island. James Pain had begun pyrotechnic exhibitions there before 1883, long before any of the famed amusement parks made the island their home. His works eventually became a regular attraction at the Brighton Beach Park in 1907, the last mechanized amusement park (and the least renowned) built in this period on Coney Island.¹⁸⁴ Pain's Fireworks displays were not simply exploding stars and noisemakers. They were pyrotechnic spectacles. Among those set off at Wonderland on Decoration Day were portrayals of President Theodore Roosevelt and his fellow hero of the Spanish American War, General Henry Lawton.¹⁸⁵ One can almost imagine a spectacular scene of the young Teddy Roosevelt and General Lawton leading their men in a charge, depicted in sparkling, popping, fiery color.

¹⁸² *Indianapolis Star*, 19 May 1907.

¹⁸³ "Special Features Promised," *Indianapolis Star*, 26 May 1907.

¹⁸⁴ Immerse, *Coney Island*, 34, 75-76.

¹⁸⁵ Wonderland advertisement, *Indianapolis Star*, 26 May 1907.

White City had a different sort of spectacle lined up for the holiday—the “Thaw-White Tragedy,” a depiction of Harry Thaw’s shooting of famous New York architect, Stanford White, over White’s alleged seduction of Thaw’s wife, Evelyn Nesbitt. The story was made into one of the new moving pictures, in 1907. *The Unwritten Law: A Thrilling Drama Based on the Thaw-White Tragedy* starred Evelyn Nesbitt as herself.¹⁸⁶ The “Thaw-White Tragedy” advertised by White City was probably this film, but it is also possible that the park was presenting a live reenactment. Whatever form the performance took, the subject matter reveals that, even in the Midwest, Americans were fascinated by the sensational stories of the day, particularly one involving a sex scandal.

Indianapolis residents might not have been the only ones seduced to White City on Decoration Day, for the *Indianapolis Star* noted that about 10,000 “excursionists” had ridden railroads into town for a day of fun at the amusement parks and the city parks on the holiday.¹⁸⁷ The draw of these parks spread beyond the city, at least on this holiday, attracting celebrants from miles away.

As the rainy days of spring turned into the sultry days of summer in 1907, the *Indianapolis Star* continued to give weekly coverage in newsy articles and advertisements to Wonderland and White City. Riverside Amusement Park, on the other hand, dropped off the pages of the paper as the 1907 season progressed. In a sampling of the *Indianapolis Star* for the period from July 5 to September 3, 1907, only one issue, on August 11, contains an advertisement for Riverside Amusement Park. That

¹⁸⁶ A timeline of film history is available on line at <http://www.filmsite.org/milestones1900s.html> (accessed November 30, 2006).

¹⁸⁷ *Indianapolis Star* 31 May 1907.

advertisement promoted an encampment of the Uniform Ranks of the Knights of Pythias (KOP), which was being held at the park.¹⁸⁸

The Riverside advertisement made the KOP encampment sound like a spectacle that might have rivaled any in the park. Six hundred tents and three thousand “knights” were encamped there. The Pythians stayed the entire week and conducted drill practice every afternoon. On August 16, a military ball was planned for them at Riverside Amusement Park. In the meantime, they could enjoy the attractions, including the “shoot-the-chutes,” which was, according to the article, the “highest in the world,” of course.¹⁸⁹ Bringing 3,000 Pythians to the park was a coup for Riverside Amusement Park’s management. Riverside was finding some measure of success, despite a lack of newspaper advertising.

On July 4, 1907, local papers had interesting news to report from Wonderland. That day, Wonderland employee Troy Vinton Carpenter and Miss Ruby Adeline McCoy pledged their troth 125-feet in the air, at the top of Wonderland’s Electric Tower. The wedding ceremony was preceded by a triumphal march around the grounds, under the escort of the uniformed Wonderland Guards.¹⁹⁰ With the park band trumpeting their approach, the bride, in white with a long gauze veil, and her young man, “neatly attired in black,” made their way to the tower. After a fifteen-minute climb to the top, the couple emerged winded but happy. They repeated their vows in front of a pastor and two witnesses. As many as 2,000 park visitors also witnessed the ceremony from far below. At the stroke of half-past four, all the park’s rides halted briefly in

¹⁸⁸ Riverside Amusement Park advertisement, *Indianapolis Star*, 11 August 1907.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

¹⁹⁰ Many of the Coney Island parks had their own police force to keep out undesirables, according to Nasaw in *Going Out*, 88. The Wonderland Guards probably served a similar function.

honor of the occasion.¹⁹¹ Afterwards, the wedding party processed back to their waiting carriages, happily accepting the present of cash offered by Wonderland's management, and another "handsome sum" raised by the fellow employees of the groom, a popular attaché at the park.¹⁹² (Although at the time some doubted the staying power of such an unusual marriage, the still-married couple happily recalled the event in the *Indianapolis Star* sixty years later.)¹⁹³ Following the wedding, the young groom returned to his job at Wonderland.

The park returned to its normal routine of advertising the traveling specialty acts that enlivened its regular amusements. The acts that toured the amusement parks typically fell into one of three categories: animals, acrobats, or spectacles. Animals were popular. Adgie and her trained lions, Professor Wormwood and his cigarette-smoking monkeys, Ingram's ostrich farm and alligator ranch and Thompson's herd of elephants all made appearances at Wonderland that summer.¹⁹⁴ Acrobats and bicyclists were all the rage. Voldare and Varno, trick bicyclists; the Ward Trio, equilibrists; Babcock and his "death trap loop"; Bicycle Bill, who was like Buffalo Bill, but on "wheels instead of bronchos"; the Curzon Sisters, "flying aerial butterflies . . . suspended by their teeth from a wire," all played the park.¹⁹⁵ And there were spectacles. On July 8, 1907, Wonderland gave "the most pretentious exhibition of fireworks yet." Harnessing all the amazing effects that Pain's Fireworks could manage, the park

¹⁹¹ "Altar Near Clouds," *Indianapolis Star*, 5 July 1907.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*

¹⁹³ "Wed 60 Years Ago Atop Tower," *Indianapolis Star*, 2 July 1967.

¹⁹⁴ *Indianapolis Star*, 8 July 1907, 30 July 1907, 18 August 1907; *Indianapolis News* 20 July 1907.

¹⁹⁵ "He soars in Midair," *Indianapolis Star*, 14 July 1907; advertisements *Indianapolis Star*, 30 July 1907, 4 August 1907.

presented a reenactment, in the chutes lagoon, of the “Bombardment of Ft. Sumter,” complete with miniature battleships firing at the miniature fort’s tiny battlements.¹⁹⁶

While Wonderland’s management carried on the pattern of advertising it had developed in 1906, focusing on the park’s ever-changing traveling acts as well as its rides and permanent attractions, by the middle of summer 1907, White City’s owners were trying a new approach. White City’s advertisements began to refer to the park as “the coolest place, the shadiest place,” and “the best boating place.” It was, “the only amusement park with any summer resort features,” according to an advertisement at the end of July.¹⁹⁷ These features clearly differentiated White City from Wonderland. While Riverside Amusement Park could also have claimed shade and boating, Riverside was not competing with White City through advertising. White City’s management advertised their park’s resort features to attract large organizational gatherings. In July and August 1907, White City hosted the New York Store employees, the *Indianapolis News* newsboys and their families, the Old Settlers’ Meeting, and the Indiana Republican Editors, among others.¹⁹⁸ White City could offer these large groups what Wonderland could not: the river for swimming and boating, grassy swaths, large old trees and old-fashioned relay and sack races in the shade. By tipping the scales of their advertising to nature rather than machines the management hoped put a lot of customers onto White City’s boardwalk.

¹⁹⁶ Advertisement, *Indianapolis Star*, 8 July 1907.

¹⁹⁷ Advertisement, *Indianapolis Star*, 30 July 1907.

¹⁹⁸ “Eat; Run Races; Dance and have Tug of War,” *Indianapolis News*, 20 July 1907; “Newsboys and Carriers will Enjoy an Outing,” *Indianapolis News*, 24 July 1907; “Plans Old Settlers’ Meetings,” *Indianapolis Star*, 11 August 1907; “Editors Uncork Fun Barrel at Park,” *Indianapolis Star*, 31 August 1907.

White City's owners were focusing on their "gardens" rather than their machines in an attempt to point out advantages of their park over the others in town.¹⁹⁹ Riverside Amusement Park offered similar natural amenities—access to White River and adjacent park land, but Riverside was not competing with White City in terms of advertising dollars. Wonderland was. White City and Wonderland offered nearly identical mechanical amusements, similar attractions. They differed in one primary distinction, that White City also had natural park land. Bucolic beauty was White City's carrot.

White City's management chose to promote its natural features in an attempt to attract customers. Hemmed-in, landlocked Wonderland advertised its constant renewal, its ever-changing array of mechanical rides and new acts. Riverside was conserving money by not advertising. The owners of the three parks were taking very different approaches in their drives to draw the public.

Riverside Amusement Park, White City and Wonderland were ultimately in a fight for consumer dollars. In June 1907, an article in the *Indianapolis Star* made it clear there were too few entertainment dollars in the city to keep all three parks flourishing. The headline was encouraging: "City Pays Millions for Entertainment." The *Star's* "conservative estimate" was that the city's residents paid \$4 million for entertainment and recreation each year. Parsing out that total to the various entertainment options on which consumers spent money, the article revealed that \$1 million was spent on theater-going. Oddly in the category of "entertainment," another \$1.5 million allegedly went to purchase cigars and tobacco.²⁰⁰ Women and children

¹⁹⁹ See, for instance, Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden*.

²⁰⁰ "City Pays Millions for Entertainment," *Indianapolis Star*, 23 June 1907.

didn't use tobacco, according to the *Star*, but they did like ice cream and sodas and “a dozen other new-fangled drinks to be found at the soda fountains.” Apparently, they did not like them nearly as much as the men liked their tobacco, however, for customers spent only about \$300,000 on these treats each year.²⁰¹ Hunting trips and baseball consumed another \$250,000. Livery rentals, even in this age of the streetcar and the introduction of the automobile, reached \$20,000; roller skating took in \$34,000; and the five-cent theaters (nickelodeons) accumulated about \$75,000 of the public's entertainment dollars. Pool and billiards, and even chewing gum sales skimmed from the total, as well.²⁰²

By the time all these entertainment expenses were considered, only \$200,000 was left in the cache for visiting the “summer gardens,” White City, Wonderland and Riverside Amusement Park. The *Star* estimated patrons paid one million visits each summer to these parks, (by contrast, Luna Park at Coney Island boasted more than 5 million visitors each year) and “each of these means some money for the man who stands in front of his amusement place and ‘barks.’”²⁰³ The newspaper reported that 20 percent of Indianapolis “summer garden” business was “shooting-the-chutes,” an activity available at all three amusement parks in the city.²⁰⁴

If the three parks shared the audience evenly, each taking one third of the \$200,000 “summer garden” pie, then each would gross, at most, slightly under \$67,000 per season.²⁰⁵ Construction costs, only the year before, had been in the tens of thousands of dollars for each of these three parks. Building the scenic railway at

²⁰¹ Ibid.

²⁰² Ibid.

²⁰³ Ibid.; “Prepare Luna Park,” *Indianapolis Star*, 5 May 1907.

²⁰⁴ “City Pays Millions for Entertainment,” *Indianapolis Star*, 23 June 1907.

²⁰⁵ Calculations are the author's.

Wonderland had cost nearly \$28,000, and the park had paid for the construction of dozens of other rides and amusements, as well. In its second year, Wonderland's management had spent an additional \$25,000 to spruce up and to add new attractions.

The parks' initial construction costs probably had not yet been completely paid off by 1907. There were employee wages, the second season's additional construction and maintenance costs, regular advertising (except for Riverside), and what must have been spectacular electric bills. These large expenses, alone, make \$67,000 in income seem too little to generate a profit; and, as in all businesses, there would have been many small, but regular expenses that would have eaten into the profit pie, as well. With only a few months left in the 1907 season, the amusement park owners were now aware that there really were not enough entertainment dollars to split three ways. In the coming years, they would seek out bigger audiences with bigger, better attractions trying to reach success.

By 1908, Wonderland Construction Company had given way to Wonderland Amusement Company, a new corporate entity whose officers were President E. I. Fisher, also president of the Capital Paper Company in Indianapolis; Frank M. Talbott, of the Indianapolis Basket Company; A. Lehman, of the Indianapolis Paper Box Company; and Frank M. Wicks, the park's general manager. Issuing capital stock of \$300,000, these local men were determined to make Wonderland profitable.²⁰⁶

They began by adding eight new attractions in 1908. According to the *Indianapolis Star*, the most thrilling of these was the "Flatiron." It was meant to appeal to those who loved "harmless excitement with a touch of terror." Inside the Flatiron, one encountered the puzzlingly named human 'squirrel cake,' the thicket, the windy

²⁰⁶ "Articles of Association for White City Amusement Company," Indiana State Archives.

carpet, and trick floors and ceilings. The Flatiron was only one of the new “shows” at the park that year. Others included “Brewster’s Millions,” (based on a popular novel about a poor man inheriting money he must spend within a month), the “Tickler,” the “Old Swimmin’Hole,” the “Battle Royal,” and “Ray’s Manikins.”²⁰⁷ The park also now featured a restaurant with hundreds of tables where patrons could enjoy light refreshments and sodas while watching the free vaudeville shows or listening to Sleight’s Military Band.²⁰⁸ Wonderland’s management, once again, was investing more money on new amusements, hoping they had the right formula for a prosperous season.

In June, nature took precedence over machine at Wonderland. Spellman’s Bears, the park’s main attraction for the week of June 7, ushered in “Teddy Week.” Several “big bruins” and their trainer, Millie Spellman, promoted Wonderland by traveling around Indianapolis in an automobile. According to Wonderland publicity, Miss Spellman had already made a hit with her bears in New York’s Hippodrome and in vaudeville houses across the United States with her “large fellows of the cinnamon and black variet[ies].” These bears were comedians. They danced and drank “booze” on stage. Indianapolis audiences favored tiny “Midnight,” who looked just like the new, popular toy, the Teddy Bear.²⁰⁹ Like other conflicting aspects of amusement parks, this animal act was popular for its unnatural aspects. Bears do not smoke and drink in nature, but they did at Wonderland.

²⁰⁷ “Eight New Attractions Please at Wonderland,” *Indianapolis Star*, 24 May 1908. According to *Wikipedia Encyclopedia*, *Brewster’s Millions* was a novel written by George Barr McCutcheon in 1902. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brewster's_Millions (accessed October 3, 2006).

²⁰⁸ “Eight New Attractions Please at Wonderland,” *Indianapolis Star*, 24 May 1908.

²⁰⁹ “Trained Bears to visit Wonderland,” *Indianapolis Star*, 7 June 1908; “Teddy Bear Appears in Real Life,” *Indianapolis Star*, 14 June 1908.

Wonderland was not the only amusement park in the city with an animal act that pushed nature to unnatural bounds the week of June 7, 1908. In a rare article about Riverside Amusement Park, under the headline, “Big Steer at Riverside,” the *Indianapolis Star* announced that the park was hosting the “world’s largest steer.” In the hyperbolic world of amusement park advertising, phrases such as “world’s largest” were commonplace. But, at eleven feet long and almost as tall, this monster steer might have lived up to his press. Riverside Amusement Park’s list of attractions mentioned in the article was the same as the previous year: the scenic river, skating rink, aerial swing, dancing pavilion, canoes and rowboats.²¹⁰ Riverside’s management was not investing thousands in new amusements, unlike their competition.

Like Wonderland, White City had added new attractions and, also like Wonderland, was under new management in 1908. The new manager was James L. Wood. Unlike his predecessor, Wood decided not to rely on White City’s natural facilities as its primary draw. The first week of June the management touted special attractions. They included Ansel and Dorian, equilibrists, and Hardin’s Zouaves performing military drills twice a day. The Zouaves were so popular they were preparing to depart Indianapolis “for a tour of the big amusement parks of the country.”²¹¹

The newspaper listed White City’s new amusements. They included the “human roulette wheel, so popular in the East” (where George Tilyou had introduced it at Coney Island’s Steeplechase Park in 1907). Also new at the park were the London Ghost Show; new moving pictures shown twice weekly in the “electric theater,” on a screen

²¹⁰ “Big Steer at Riverside,” *Indianapolis Star*, 7 June 1908.

²¹¹ “Equilibrists This Week at White City Park,” *Indianapolis Star*, 7 June 1908.

“thought to be the largest in the city”; and Bert Swan’s alligator show, which manager Wood had “dug up in a Cincinnati vaudeville house.”²¹²

On June 21, 1908, White City announced the opening of an attraction even more exciting than Bert Swan’s alligators. The new swimming pool, begun a year earlier, was to be christened on June 27. The immense concrete pool covered nearly two acres. Accompanying bath houses had 1,000 changing rooms for men and another 500 for women. There were showers with hot and cold water and bathing suits for rent. The pool was so large that the management planned to hold boat racing events in it. There was even a grandstand for spectators.²¹³ In an attempt to lend a “true seashore feel,” the walkways around the pool were covered with sand.

White City’s management had spent an “immense amount” of money on the pool and believed they were filling “a want rarely supplied in an inland city.” The pool’s size was reflective of White City’s efforts to offer ever bigger, better attractions. The management assured the public that they had arranged a supply of guards so that “both safety and propriety will be insured both sexes.”²¹⁴ At last, one of the parks stood out from the rest. White City’s management was confident their investment would result in good returns. Constantly striving to push out the perimeters of a balance between machine and garden, amusement park owners attempted to control nature through artificial constructs, like White City’s giant bathing “beach” of concrete covered with sand. In Indianapolis, White City’s owners were the first to bear the brunt of nature’s revenge.

²¹² Immerso, *Coney Island*, 77, endnote p. 191; “Equilibrists This Week at White City Park,” *Indianapolis Star*, 7 June 1908.

²¹³ “Both Sexes will Bathe in Big White City Pool,” *Indianapolis Star*, 21 June 1908.

²¹⁴ Ibid.

On June 27, 1908, the scheduled date for the opening of White City's pool, *Indianapolis Star* front page headlines announced bad news: "White City Amusement Park is Destroyed by Fire."²¹⁵ The night before, a visitor named C. McKinney was inside the "opium den" of "Chinatown Charlie," a side attraction of the "Mystic Cave" at White City. McKinney spied a tiny flame near some smoldering incense. He at first thought it was part of the show, but decided to call it to the manager's attention. Before the attraction's manager could fill a bucket with water, the flames had engulfed the room. Everyone inside rushed out of the building. They raised the alarm, but the flames quickly spread, enveloping the Mystic Cave.²¹⁶

A brisk wind fanned the fire in both directions. It rapidly swept the quadrangle, destroying the skating rink, the scenic railway, the roller coaster, the bowling alley and the restaurant near the river. Bert Swan saw the fire approaching his alligator show. Turning on the hydrant he had used to fill his alligator tank, he intended to flood the area and douse the flames. But no water came out. With the fire bearing down on him, Swan had to save his alligators. There was no time to take the usual precaution of tying them up before moving the huge reptiles, but he muscled them into their traveling boxes by himself and then, with the help of onlookers, managed to move them to safety.

Swan's discovery that there was no water supply at his concession was repeated at faucets and hoses across the property; concessionaires and employees trying to tap into the park's water supply found them dry.²¹⁷ The Broad Ripple Fire Department encountered the same problem upon their arrival. First, they were driven back by the intense heat and then thwarted by lack of water. Although the Indianapolis Fire

²¹⁵ "White City Amusement Park is Destroyed by Fire," *Indianapolis Star*, 27 June 1908.

²¹⁶ "White City is Razed by Fire," *Indianapolis Star*, 27 June 1908.

²¹⁷ Ibid.

Department dispatched a hose wagon with its own water supply, by the time it had made the eight-mile drive to the park, there was little left to save. Swan had saved his alligators; two concessionaires managed to move their piano to safety; another saved his cash register. As the flames crept up the scenic railway and onto the shoot-the-chutes, the fire became visible miles away in Indianapolis. An immense crowd gathered at the park to watch the conflagration. The burning of White City became its final and most thrilling attraction.²¹⁸ Nature, not machine, provided White City's last spectacle.

Among all who had investments in the park, only Soko Sujiyama, the owner of the Japanese bowling alley, had insurance coverage. Sujiyama was counting the eighteen dollar premium for his \$1,000 policy a good investment the night of the fire. Despite his relative good fortune, however, the *Indianapolis Star* reported on the day after the fire that Sujiyama was making "one grand effort to swear in English" over the theft of a silk kimono he had stuffed into a suitcase during the blaze.²¹⁹

Sujiyama's loss was miniscule compared to others, however. The *Star* printed a partial list of losses beside the story of the fire. Most, but not all, of the establishment's buildings and attractions had been owned by the White City Amusement Company. Some of the company's specific losses included the arched main entrance building; the ticket office; powerhouse, engines and equipment; billiard parlors and bowling alleys; picture gallery; vaudeville show equipment and building; the baby incubator equipment and building (the babies were removed safely); the roller coaster; the chutes; and the new human roulette wheel.²²⁰

²¹⁸ "White City is Razed by Fire," *Indianapolis Star*, 27 June 1908.

²¹⁹ Ibid.

²²⁰ "Partial List of White City Losses," *Indianapolis Star*, 27 June 1908.

The list of losses also revealed that a number of attractions and rides at White City were owned by individuals and companies other than the park management. (This was probably true at all the Indianapolis parks, as it was at Coney Island.) Bert Swan had saved his alligators, but lost \$800 in equipment. Harry Gillman lost the building and equipment of the “Great London Ghost Show,” estimated at \$800. Weber & Boggs had losses that included the popcorn stand, soda fountain, and the ice cream stand. The buildings and equipment were valued at \$2,000. William Poor had a \$1,200 loss in the café building and equipment. Smith & Milburn’s ill-fated Mystic Cave was a total loss of \$2,500. They had also lost a shooting gallery, novelty stand, dart gun stand, knife rack, “Chicago Board of Trade,” Japanese fish pond, and the “Nigger Baby” rack, altogether totaling another \$1,100. Frank Keller had just completed a new skating rink and dance hall which were devoured by the fire, costing him \$6,000. And the grand Scenic Railway, owned by Jones, Lenick and Shafer, was gone. Their loss was \$21,000.²²¹

Dr. R. C. Light, vice president of the White City Amusement Company, called the park a total loss. He estimated the monetary damage at \$160,000. Soko Sujiyama’s \$1,000 policy was the only insurance coverage. Upon first light, it became clear, however, that despite the enormity of the fire, one element of the former amusement park remained—the new swimming pool. It had appeared that the fire’s embers would be blown onto the dressing rooms and the grandstand by the pool, but the wind had shifted saving the pool and its structures.²²² The pool’s opening, planned for that

²²¹ Ibid.

²²² “White City is Razed by Fire,” *Indianapolis Star*, 27 June 1908.

morning, was delayed by a few weeks. It opened on July 4, 1908, but White City was gone forever.²²³

It is doubtful that Wonderland's Frank Wicks lamented the loss of his competitor. Wonderland's crowd on the fourth of July indicated his park would benefit from the destruction of White City; the day brought record crowds. According to the next morning's *Star*, "nearly every available square foot of ground was occupied." It was the most successful day in the park's history. And not only was the crowd demonstrably large, it was also "unusually orderly," according to the newspaper report.

Wonderland's day began with a balloon menagerie and ended with a noisy thirty-minute fireworks display. In the interim, an actor playing "Mr. Brewster," the character on which one of the park's attractions was based, created quite a bang of his own with his giveaway of pennies, nickels, dimes and dollars, "all of them as bright and shiny as if they had just come out of the mint. Mr. Brewster's philanthropy was understandably exciting to the crowd, and a group of youngsters assailed him trying to reap even greater rewards.²²⁴ In an unusual sign of gratitude, they chased the actor up the chutes, onto the scenic railway and over the Tickler, before he managed to escape. Despite this lapse in decorum, "it was a 'red letter' Fourth for the children who participated in the festivities," according to the newspaper report.²²⁵ By the close of the 1908 season, Wicks had reason for optimism.

²²³ "Adam and Eve Couldn't Drink Bathing Pool Dry," *Indianapolis Star*, 5 July 1908. In 1911, the White City Amusement Company sold the park to the Union Traction Company whose principals reopened a park at the location, Broad Ripple Amusement Park. The new park centered on the pool, but also had a roller skating rink, roller coaster, carousel and dance hall, *Sanborn Map, Indianapolis 1914-1915*.

²²⁴ *Indianapolis Star*, 5 July 1908.

²²⁵ *Ibid.*

With competition diminished, Wonderland's management might have decided not to incur the expense of adding new attractions in the 1909 season. If Wonderland attracted even a portion of White City's former crowd, the park's owners could expect to increase their revenues. Apparently, even this expected increase was not enough to make the owners comfortable with their profit margin. The park management decided to push the boundaries of propriety; located not far from Temperance Avenue and even closer to the dry suburb of Irvington, Wonderland announced plans for a beer garden. By late March, this planned new attraction was the subject of newspaper articles even before the park opened for the season. Unlike the cheerful, boosting advertisements masquerading as news that the parks were used to, these articles spoke of unhappy mothers determined to stop Wonderland's plans.

"Send a Petition to Wonderland," read the headline on March 23, 1909. The article beneath it stated that "vigorous action" had been taken by a number of area mothers' groups, including those whose children attended Irvington, Emerson and Lucretia Mott public schools. The women had gathered at the neighborhood schools, speaking out and gathering signatures on a petition against plans to establish a beer garden at Wonderland.²²⁶ The women's groups, and local temperance workers, requested that Wonderland's management withdraw its application for a liquor license. They praised the park that had "been a popular place for the amusement of children, who have gone there in large numbers." The plans to add alcoholic beverages "would be particularly pernicious," the women claimed, because the "bad influences which would surround the beer garden and the people it would attract would be most undesirable to the community." The mothers were quick to point out that the "bad

²²⁶ "Send a Petition to Wonderland," *Indianapolis News*, 23 March 1909.

influences” would affect not only those who visited Wonderland but also those who would “no longer patronize the resort.” Although area mothers would no longer take their children to the park if the beer garden were added, intoxicated patrons would “crowd the streetcars” to and from the park, offending everyone who rode the East Washington Street streetcar.²²⁷

The women’s petition was printed in the *Indianapolis News*. It demanded that the park management withdraw the application for a beer license. If they refused to do so, the mothers declared their plans to “resist it to the end, in every way that may be contrived by citizens very much in earnest in this matter.”²²⁸ The next day, Wonderland’s Frank M. Wicks withdrew the request for a beer license. He said, at a meeting held that morning, “if the people do not want it, we surely do not want to force it on them.” A German Village (not a German Beer Garden) would be installed. It would have yodelers, beautiful fountains, foliage and “rustic effects.” It would not have beer.²²⁹ The mothers had won.

The park management’s quick acquiescence to the mothers’ demands was a bit disingenuous, however. The newspaper reported that “all of the Indianapolis manufacturing brewers” had refused to supply beer to the park after reading of the controversy. The brewers feared that the outspoken opposition to Wonderland’s Beer Garden would spill over onto their trade elsewhere. Their decision left Wonderland’s management without local beer suppliers, making it very difficult for the park to offer that libation. The park management presented their changed plans as though they had decided to listen to the desires of the neighborhood mothers. But without local suppliers

²²⁷ Ibid.

²²⁸ Ibid.

²²⁹ “Wonderland German Village to be Beerless,” *Indianapolis News*, 24 March 1909.

they were forced to drop plans for beer sales, anyway. They chose to make the best of the situation they could not change by at least appearing sensitive to the area's children.

Wonderland's management constructed their "dry" beer garden. But, despite their seeming submission to the desires of the neighborhood, and despite the loss of White City, attendance at Wonderland began to drop off. Beginning in 1909, business slowed so much that the park eventually discontinued its regular schedule and opened only when private groups rented the facilities.²³⁰ With attendance too low to keep the entire park open, in some years after 1909, only the dancing pavilion remained fully operational.²³¹

In the years following 1909, Wonderland's primary private customer was the International Interdenominational County Fair. The fair's proceeds benefited a local charity, the Summer Mission for Sick Children.²³² In the summer of 1911, Wonderland's management welcomed the group again. The fair committee promoted the event in local newspapers and reported that Wonderland was in "tiptop shape," with a newly renovated shoot-the-chutes and scenic railway.²³³ The fair, a fund-raising event, opened on August 12, 1911. Crowds were large. Prominent local businessmen conducted the fair and had promised patrons that they would get more than their "money's worth in good, clean, wholesome entertainment." They hoped to raise over \$4,000 for the Summer Mission.²³⁴

Events ran smoothly until the fourth day. Still trying to define its distinct landscape as a location for edge-pushing, the park once again hinted at an alcohol-

²³⁰ "Extra: Fire Sweeps Wonderland," *Indianapolis Star*, 27 August 1911.

²³¹ Ibid.

²³² "County Fair Will be Opened Tonight," *Indianapolis Star*, 12 August 1911.

²³³ *Indianapolis News*, 6 August 1911.

²³⁴ *Indianapolis News*, 6 August 1911.

related attraction. After days of teasing the public with statements about a new attraction called “the Blind Tiger,” Wonderland finally opened that attraction’s doors. The Blind Tiger’s manager, Peter B. Trone, had been “ballyhooing” to local newspapers that it would be the only “wet” place in the park. The Indianapolis police were aware that “blind tiger” was code for a place that dispensed illegal alcohol. They raided the attraction on its opening night.

Trone delayed the police as long as possible at the entrance, buying time for his bartenders to hide the booze. When the police finally gained access to the inner sanctum of the building, they found “half a dozen men” and two women “wiping their lips with their handkerchiefs,” but no alcohol. Although the officers stated their belief that the patrons were drinking something more spirited than the ginger ale the servers had given them, the police were unable to prove their accusations of illegal alcohol sales. They left the establishment threatening to return with reinforcements if the blind tiger continued to operate.²³⁵

Newspapers did not cover that threatened return, if it occurred. Nor did they report the fair committee’s response to the news of a blind tiger and a police raid at their fund-raising event for needy children. One might imagine that response was resoundingly negative. And yet, the day after the raid, Indianapolis Mayor Lew Shank visited the fair and the *Indianapolis Star* quoted him as jokingly asking for a trip to the Blind Tiger, before declaring the fair a great success.²³⁶ Shank’s reputation as a jokester may have brought needed levity to a situation that must have put the fair organizers in a

²³⁵ “Blind Tiger Raid Stirs County Fair, *Indianapolis Star*, 18 August 1911.

²³⁶ “Shank is Pleased with County Fair,” *Indianapolis Star*, 19 August 1911.

difficult position.²³⁷ The fair completed its run at Wonderland, with no further mishaps reported. Wonderland had only one event left before the close of its 1911 season.

The week after the International Interdenominational County Fair closed, the Colored Knights of Pythias rented Wonderland for their biennial encampment. Booker T. Washington came to Indianapolis as guest of honor at a reception during the week, and the park held special events each day.²³⁸ The fact that Wonderland's management would rent the park to the "Colored Pythians" is probably an indication of how few customers Wonderland could attract. Amusement parks, all across the United States, denied access to African Americans in these years.²³⁹ Indianapolis parks also apparently followed this practice of discrimination. African Americans gathered at Tomlinson Hall on Market Street, or at the State Fairgrounds, but they did not hold gatherings at the city's amusement parks. At least they had not before this time.²⁴⁰ Wonderland's hosting of this African American group reveals the fast-approaching demise of the park. It had lost the ability to draw the crowds it needed to stay in business, so the park now accepted even this marginalized group in order to keep its doors open. With the beer garden episode, Wonderland hit the hard wall of public opinion. Allowing the Blind Tiger and renting the park to the Colored Pythians were both past the limits of acceptance in 1911 Indianapolis. Wonderland was headed for disaster.

²³⁷ Shank was such a wit, he actually went on the vaudeville circuit following his first term as mayor, according to Connie J. Zeigler, "Samuel Lewis (Lew) Shank," Bodenhamer and Barrows, eds., *Encyclopedia of Indianapolis*, 1254-55.

²³⁸ "Extra: Fire Sweeps Wonderland: South End is Wiped Out," *Indianapolis Star*, 27 August 1911.

²³⁹ Nasaw, *Going Out*, 91.

²⁴⁰ The author sampled most of the weekly editions, published between 1906 and 1911, of the *Indianapolis Recorder*, an African American newspaper that is still in print in Indianapolis. No amusement parks were mentioned until the week before this encampment. Large gatherings of African Americans were advertised in the *Recorder*, but they were held either at Tomlinson Hall, at African American Masonic Halls or at the State Fairgrounds, until this one event at Wonderland, no articles mentioned the amusement parks.

The first-ever mention of Wonderland in the *Indianapolis Recorder*, the city's major African American newspaper, was on August 19, 1911. That day, an article about the Colored Pythians encampment noted that the organization had arranged with the Wonderland management to use the park exclusively for the week of August 20 through August 28, 1911.²⁴¹ The following Saturday, August 26, 1911, an advertisement for Wonderland appeared in the *Indianapolis Recorder*. This was the first and only known time the park advertised in the African American newspaper. The advertisement said that August 27 was the last day of the season and the park would be "open exclusively for colored people."²⁴² The night of August 27, 1911, after their families had visited the park, ridden the thrilling rides, and held box car races on the park's track, the Colored Pythians held a dance at Wonderland to celebrate the end of their encampment.

What happened after the last of the revelers left the park made headlines in the *Indianapolis Star* and the *Indianapolis News*, but was never mentioned in the *Indianapolis Recorder*. In the middle of the night, Wonderland erupted in flames. Wonderland's night watchman, R. C. Buchanan, raised the alarm at 1:10 a.m. on August 28. By the time the first fire truck arrived, flames had swept across the merry-go-round and onto the big shoot-the-chutes.²⁴³

The park had closed the night before sometime around 11:00 p.m., when the last of the Pythians had left the grounds. The spark that started the fire, it was assumed, was probably caused by the discarded cigarette of one of the revelers. As it had at White City, the fire raced through the park. The wooden buildings on the property burned like tinder. By 3:00 a.m., the shoot-the-chutes was enveloped in flames. The infamous

²⁴¹ "At Wonderland," *Indianapolis Recorder*, 19 August 1911.

²⁴² Wonderland advertisement, *Indianapolis Recorder*, 26 August 1911.

²⁴³ "Extra: Fire Sweeps Wonderland: South End is Wiped Out," *Indianapolis Star*, 28 August 1911.

German village was in ruins. The “electric mazes,” the “house of mirth,” and the moving picture theater were reduced to cinders.²⁴⁴ Fanned by the night’s breeze the fire swept around the property. Bright flames lit up the streets nearby, perhaps waking the neighborhood mothers who had protested Wonderland’s beer garden. Despite the early hour, a large crowd gathered.²⁴⁵

Firemen were hampered, at first, by low water pressure and heat so intense they had to work in relays. Eventually, they connected their hose trucks to the beautiful artificial lake at the base of the chutes, where the elephant had once bathed, and used the water to fight the blaze. As the flames began to go out, darkness made the final efforts more difficult, until someone entered the electric tower and turned its search light in the direction of the still smoldering buildings. After a few hours, the firemen finally extinguished the last of the flames.²⁴⁶

Spectacle fires were attractions at these parks because they were a frightening but common aspect of industrial America. Wonderland was but one of many amusement parks that became the fire spectacles they had earlier exploited. Company president E. I. Fisher estimated the damage at between \$18,000 and \$20,000. With only \$5,000 in insurance coverage and the inadequate crowds of the last few years, the owners did not consider rebuilding.²⁴⁷ Fisher spoke of selling the park to a “Milwaukee concern who [sic] would reopen it with new amusement devices,” but that sale did not happen. Ironically, Wonderland drew the largest crowd in many seasons after it burned down. The day after the huge fire, the *Indianapolis News* reported that several thousand

²⁴⁴ Ibid.

²⁴⁵ Ibid.; “Fire Causes \$20,000 Loss at Wonderland,” *Indianapolis News*, 28 August 1911.

²⁴⁶ Ibid.

²⁴⁷ Ibid.

people had come to see the remains of the park “several of them with cameras.” Their photographs were the last mementos of “Wonderland, the Park Beautiful.”²⁴⁸

Wonderland courted disaster in its waning years, pushing against the walls of public opinion in ways that were unacceptable even in its edgy landscape. As with White City, however, it was a natural spectacle that destroyed the fantastical garden of mechanized fun that had been Wonderland. By the end of August 1911, only one amusement park remained in Indianapolis.

Riverside Amusement Park, whose birth occurred three years before either of its competitors, outlived them both. While White City and Wonderland had battled for attendance with constantly changing, ever-larger attractions and with advertising dollars and newspaper attention, Riverside Amusement Park had stayed its course quietly on the banks of White River. The park had erected its own “bathing beach” by 1910. Smaller than White City’s pool, Riverside’s was next to the Central Canal on the north side of 30th Street. Its water was piped from the canal.²⁴⁹ The pool’s central feature was a tall diving tower. Six stories high and constructed of wood in a pyramidal shape, it had diving platforms at each story. Both men and women could swim at Riverside’s bathing beach, but the diving tower was a favorite spot for the sporting young men who visited the park.²⁵⁰

Although Riverside Amusement Park continued to offer mechanical rides, it was the bathing beach that became its focus in the years following its construction. As the park began to advertise again in the period after White City’s demise, it featured the

²⁴⁸ Advertisements, *Indianapolis Star*, 1907.

²⁴⁹ Wayne Guthrie, “Mayer’s Old Poolside Concert Recalled,” *Indianapolis News*, 22 March 1951, “Indianapolis Parks—Riverside” Clipping file, Indiana State Library, Indianapolis.

²⁵⁰ “Diving Tower—Riverside Bathing Beach” postcard, author’s collection. Images of the “diving tower” were popular with postcard makers; postcards of the tower are abundant.

Bathing Beach most prominently.²⁵¹ The pool was more than just a place to swim. It also became the backdrop of many park events, a place that, once again, revealed the tension of nature and machine, a place for technological spectacle. At the pool, for example, “battleships and airships” clashed in a futuristic “Battle A.D. 2000” on August 27, 1911 (the day that Wonderland caught fire).²⁵²

With its connection to Riverside City Park, with its new bathing beach and its mechanized attractions, Riverside Amusement Park achieved a balance within the tension of machine and garden and outlasted the competition. Perhaps recognizing what the other parks’ management did not, Riverside’s owners chose to minimize their investment, both in advertising and the annual additions of new mechanized attractions. Perhaps they understood that there were too many parks and too few customers to compete successfully matching its competitors dollar for dollar. But Riverside Amusement Park’s success was not just luck. By offering free admission, the management of the amusement park practically guaranteed that they would draw large numbers of those who visited the nearby city park. It may have been pure luck that prevented a disastrous fire at Riverside Amusement Park, but it was canny business sense that made this one park a long-lasting success story. Once fire destroyed White City, the combination of Riverside City Park and Riverside Amusement Park quickly outpaced Wonderland.

Riverside would not be without competition for long. By 1914, a new park with a few mechanized attractions had risen from the ashes of White City, though this new Broad Ripple Park would never match the variety and number of attractions offered by

²⁵¹ For example, advertisements in the *Indianapolis Star*, 28 May 1911 and 23 June 1911.

²⁵² “Battleships and Airships will Clash,” *Indianapolis News*, 27 August 1911.

its predecessor.²⁵³ By then, a shift had occurred. Audiences had dwindled at the mechanized amusement parks across the United States. Even at popular Coney Island, park owners could see that the halcyon days of these fantastical parks were ending. At the height of amusement park popularity, in 1907, a fire destroyed much of Steeplechase Park. Its owner, George Tilyou, reopened the park for business within a week.²⁵⁴ When Dreamland burned down in May 1911, its owners decided that rebuilding was “too much to risk.”²⁵⁵

All three of the Indianapolis amusement parks had been born of a desire to imitate the success of Coney Island. Run with electricity and constructed of flammable materials Coney Island’s history also included disastrous fires. Amusement parks copied the technology of industry, but this meant they also suffered the common misfortune of industry—fire.

The new day that dawned on August 28, 1911, freed Wonderland’s owners from the failure that the Blind Tiger and the Colored Pythians portended. White City lost its balance between machine and garden and ended in fiery spectacle. The smaller park rising on its location in Broad Ripple would never rival its predecessor. Riverside Amusement Company had shifted its primary focus from thrills and spectacles to physical culture. This new wave of recreation reflected a rising national interest in physical activity—“the gospel of muscles,” as it was called at the Louisiana Purchase Exposition in 1904. The Exposition held the first Olympic Games ever in the western hemisphere; after its construction the White City Amusement Park’s huge bathing pool

²⁵³ *Indianapolis Sanborn Fire Insurance Map*, 1914-1915.

²⁵⁴ Immerso, *Coney Island*, 77.

²⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 83.

would host Olympic trials in later decades.²⁵⁶ Although some mechanized amusement parks, like Riverside Amusement Company, would remain in business for decades, its focus for the next decade or so would be its large swimming pool, a rival to White City's. By 1911 the heyday of mechanized amusement parks was coming to an end. In many cases, including for White City and Wonderland in Indianapolis, the promise of these parks quite literally went up in smoke.

These parks were dependent on technology for their existence, since electrified streetcars brought customers and infrastructure to them. Crowds were drawn to the banging, clanging machines of industrial entertainment within the walls of the parks, and the parks continued to add newer, even more amazing attractions. Eventually crowds thinned as city dwellers began to choose the more natural (though still manmade) environment for physical activity, such as the bathing beach at Riverside. Two Indianapolis parks burned to the ground, leaving one survivor. The rides and amusements, the automatic vaudeville and scenic railways entertained for a few seasons, but then the fickle crowds became more interested in other forms of recreation, in sports and physical culture. Riverside Amusement Park survived by catering to this new interest with its huge bathing beach. White City's descendant, Broad Ripple Park, would do the same. The period of surplus and competition was over by 1911, but so was the heyday of mechanized amusement in Indianapolis.

²⁵⁶ Rydell, *All the World's a Fair*, 155.

Pushing the Edges

One man's recipe for a successful amusement park in 1907 was simply: "Cram it with heathen allurements, [and] put it where the proletariat was already wont to go a-pleasuring . . ." ²⁵⁷ Amusement parks with their "heathen" entertainments were emphatically democratic landscapes of pleasure, and some of the first locations where urban masses gathered for leisure. Immigrants and native-born, men and women, working class and middle class, all entered this special world of recreation. Within the parks' gates, at the foot of the rollicking machines of amusement, disparate groups interacted and shared experiences. This great confluence helped create a mass culture. Thousands shared the same experiences at Coney Island's parks. More importantly, entrepreneurs used those parks as a blueprint that they repeated across the nation, so that hundreds of thousands of Americans experienced the same attractions, behaviors and interactions of these special places. Within each city where an amusement park was located, these spectacular landscapes brought diverse sets of people together in new ways. Amusement parks blurred the distinctions between working class and middle class and allowed freer interactions between single men and women.

These distinctive locations relied on the tension and balance between machine and garden. They were places where human tensions between immigrant and native born, middle and working class and men and women could ease or heighten. Within their gated walls, people experimented with new ways of balancing their differentness. These special set-aside landscapes offered escape from urban life and yet remained intimately connected with it through the streetcars that formed their electrical

²⁵⁷ Hartt, "The Amusement Park," 668-669.

connection to the city. That easy connection may have aided the overflow of these new behaviors into customers' urban lives outside the parks' walls.

Historians claim amusement parks were veritable Petrie dishes of cultural change. At these fantastical locations of mechanized amusement, the coarser entertainments of the working-classes—vaudeville, movies, nickelodeons and dance halls—came to be embraced by the middle class. The interactions between people of different ethnicities and classes that accompanied these working-class entertainments filtered quickly into the broader culture in the first decade of the twentieth century, in part as a result of the middle class experiencing them at amusement parks.²⁵⁸ Also, at these parks, men and women could expand the boundaries of acceptable interactions between the sexes. Young, single men and women bumped into each other on rides; danced in the pavilions; kissed in the scenic railways. Their behavior went far beyond what would have been proper outside the parks' gates and social commentators of the day lambasted it.²⁵⁹ But historians of amusement parks suggest that at these parks this looser code of behavior was part of a play world and seemed safe and appropriate in the special context of these places on the city's margins.²⁶⁰

Both historians and contemporary observers saw the Coney Island parks as instigators of this social change. But, was this true elsewhere? Donna DeBlasio found it to be so in Youngstown, Ohio; few others have examined the impact of these ubiquitous

²⁵⁸ See Kasson, *Amusing the Million*; Peiss, *Cheap Amusements*; Rollin Lynde Hartt, "The Amusement Park," 667-677.

²⁵⁹ Notably, Hartt, in "The Amusement Park," cannily observed in 1907 many of the social changes that most historians "discovered" about the parks in their research: namely that they were attracting people of mixed nationalities and mixed socio-economic status and that they were attracting them in vast numbers and creating an opportunity for interactions between these classes of people, as well as between the genders that had not before existed, and that these behaviors might affect society outside the parks.

²⁶⁰ Peiss, *Cheap Amusements*, 136.

parks in other urban places.²⁶¹ In 1906, it remained to be seen if the people of Indianapolis would also copy the cultural shifts set in motion at Coney Island, the democratic blending of ethnicities (with the notable exception of the excluded African Americans) and classes and the freer interactions between the sexes, onto Indianapolis culture. Were these local parks places where immigrant and native-born, men and women mixed and melded into a mass culture? Did the local parks' visitors experience social interactions differently within the gated walls of these urban amusement places? In all cases, the answer is yes. While amusement parks may not have been the only factor in changes that were happening in the city's culture in this period, they were certainly one of the important places where new ways of interacting could be tested and acted out.

In this period, Indianapolis leaders considered their city a cultural oasis. Historian Henry May agreed with that assessment. Writing about the years prior to World War I, when Indianapolis was home to Booth Tarkington, James Whitcomb Riley and other well-known authors of the day, May called the city the "center of Midwest literary culture."²⁶² But Indianapolis was also a city of the "solid middle class," a moniker placed on it by an English visitor in 1912 and repeated by city promoters at the time.²⁶³ It was "a happy medium between great wealth and great

²⁶¹ Few historians have looked to any degree at parks other than those at Coney Island. Donna DeBlasio, "The Immigrant and the Trolley Park"; Wong Yunn Chii and Tan Kar Lin's "Emergence of a Cosmopolitan Space for Culture and Consumption: The New World Amusement Park—Singapore (1923-1970) in the Inter-war Years," *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies*, Vol. 5, No. 2 (August 2004): 279-304; and Hugo John Hildebrandt, "Cedar Point: A Park in Progress," *Journal of Popular Culture* XV (Summer 1981) are examinations of amusement parks in other cities.

²⁶² May, *End of American Innocence*, 96.

²⁶³ Quoted in Frederick Doyle Kershner, "A Social and Cultural History of Indianapolis, 1860-1914" (Ph.D. diss., University of Wisconsin, 1950), 192.

poverty” wrote Indianapolis booster, Max Hyman, in 1902.²⁶⁴ At the turn of the century, Indianapolis was an urban area with residents who were proud of their culture and their middle-class nature.

By 1906, Indianapolis amusement park entrepreneurs had copied Coney Island parks in Indianapolis. Amusement parks gave Americans the opportunity to ogle people of new and entirely different cultures. In *The Rise of the Modern City in 19th Century America*, Gunther Barth said that even as early as the nineteenth century the “basic form of urban leisure [was] watching others do things.”²⁶⁵ Amusement parks carried that form a step further, creating exhibits made just for watching others. World’s fairs had offered so-called anthropological exhibits at least as early as the 1893 Chicago World’s Exposition and at all the late nineteenth and early twentieth century fairs thereafter.²⁶⁶ Exhibition companies sold native “attractions” nationwide after the world’s fairs. Like Coney Island parks, amusement parks in Indianapolis offered these attractions, which purported to be peeks into other cultures, when they opened in 1906. They gave Hoosiers face-to-face encounters with the “other”; displaying Chinese, Japanese, Philippine Igorrotes and American Indians in stereotypical activities and in “native” surroundings.²⁶⁷ Amusement park crowds across the nation experienced Igorrote

²⁶⁴ Max R. Hyman, *The Journal Handbook of Indianapolis: An Outline History* (Indianapolis: Indianapolis Journal Newspaper Co., 1902), 47.

²⁶⁵ Gunther Barth, *The Rise of the Modern City in 19th Century America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 19.

²⁶⁶ See Rydell, *All the World’s a Fair*, for a thorough discussion of the explicit and implicit purposes of anthropological exhibits at United States World’s Expositions around the turn of the century; Hartt, “The Amusement Park,” 668.

²⁶⁷ Rydell, *All the World’s a Fair*, 51, 194; “Will Play at White City,” *Indianapolis Star*, 2 July 1907; for further understanding of the Anglo-American view of other races see, Sylvia Rodrigues, “Tourism, Whiteness and the Vanishing Anglo,” in *Seeing and Being Seen: Tourism in the American West*, ed. David M. Wrobel and Patrick T. Long (Boulder, Colo.: University Press of Kansas, 2001), 195-210.

villages and Chinese opium dens, practically in their own backyards, by traveling no further than the end of the streetcar line.

While these pseudo-anthropological attractions informed and, at the same time, bolstered the national pride of amusement park visitors, those visitors also experienced another, even more important, sort of encounter with other cultures at many mechanized amusement parks. Historians have noted that foreign-born immigrants made up a significant portion of the crowds at amusement parks in most cities.²⁶⁸ Stepping through the gates and entering the crowd put one immediately into contact with a cultural “other.” Living and working in separate spheres, native-born and foreign-born park visitors experienced elbow-to-elbow encounters within the park crowd, and were on relatively equal terms in this one location.

This mingling of peoples behind the gates of amusement parks added to the sense of adventure and differentness in that spot. It created interactions that did not occur outside the parks’ walls. This diversity allowed the crowd itself to become an attraction, one more offering for those who wanted to try new experiences in this special environment. Like all other aspects of the amusement park experience, these encounters pushed the customer beyond their world of normal experiences and outside their comfortable regular lives.

Historians of amusement parks in other cities have observed that these encounters with people who were different, who were “other,” was one factor in creating a mass culture out of diverse groups. These ethnically diverse groups were common in the Coney Island parks in New York, where the foreign-born population

²⁶⁸ See Peiss, *Cheap Amusements*; Immerso, *Coney Island*; Kasson, *Amusing the Million*; De Blasio, “The Immigrant and the Trolley Park.”

represented a significant proportion of the entire population. In 1900, 37 percent of New York's population was foreign-born.²⁶⁹ The lessons learned by studying Coney Island's mixing bowl of ethnicities are probably applicable to many industrial cities in the United States with large immigrant populations. In her study of Idora Park at Youngstown, Ohio, for instance, Donna DeBlasio notes that two-thirds of the population in that midwestern city were either foreign-born or the children of foreign-born parents. At Idora Park, immigrants celebrated their culture in special "nationality days" devoted to various ethnic groups. DeBlasio argues that these nationality days lowered barriers between the native-born middle class and the immigrant working class. The park also helped to Americanize immigrants by exposing them to the culture and people of their new land.²⁷⁰

Unlike Youngstown and New York, Indianapolis was not a city with a large immigrant population in these years. Indianapolis's boosters bragged about their city's homogeneity. In a promotional booklet published in the first decade of the twentieth century, the Commercial Club, the precursor organization of the Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce, noted that there was a "total absence of the foreign floating element" in Indianapolis.²⁷¹ There were foreign-born residents in the city, but as the country was experiencing what historian Robert G. Barrows termed a "massive immigration" in the decade between 1900 and 1910, Indianapolis had only a modest increase in the number

²⁶⁹ U. S. Census Bureau Webpage, "Table 19, Nativity of the Population for the 50 Largest Urban Places, 1870-1990" <http://www.census.gov/population/www/documentation/twps0029/tab19.html>. (accessed May 14, 2006).

²⁷⁰ DeBlasio, "Immigrant and the Trolley Park," 75.

²⁷¹ Commercial Club, *Indianapolis of To-Day* (Indianapolis: Commercial Club, circa 1907-1910), 1.

and an overall decrease in the percentage of the population that had been born outside the United States.²⁷²

In 1900, for instance, Indianapolis ranked twenty-first in the nation in population, but only 10.1 percent of its residents were foreign-born. Of the twenty-one largest cities that year, only Washington, D.C. had a smaller percentage of foreign-born population than Indianapolis.²⁷³ By 1910, Indianapolis's foreign-born population was an even smaller percent of the total, comprising 8.5 percent of all residents. In that decade New York City's foreign-born population had increased to become 40.8 percent of its total.²⁷⁴

If foreign-born residents visited Indianapolis's amusement parks in numbers that correlated with their percentage in the population, their presence would not have been particularly noteworthy, it would have amounted to between 680 and 800 out of 8,000 visitors to Wonderland's opening night in 1906, for instance (using the 1910 and 1900 percentage in the population, respectively).²⁷⁵ In a line of eighty people waiting to ride the aerial swings, only seven or eight would have been immigrants. At Coney Island, visiting the parks meant bumping into foreign-speaking and culturally different people on the boardwalk, sitting next to them at the restaurants, riding with them on the

²⁷² Ibid., 80, 81; Robert G. Barrows, "A Demographic Analysis of Indianapolis, 1870 to 1920" (Ph.D. diss. Indiana University, 1977), 59. There was almost a 16 percent increase in foreign-born immigration to Indianapolis between 1900 and 1910. According to James J. Divita, *Ethnic Settlement Patterns in Indianapolis* (Indianapolis: United States Department of the Interior, Marian College, 1988), 35, Indianapolis's largest foreign-born ethnic group in that year (and for decades before and after) was the Germans (there were 7,518 in 1910), who had immigrated in numbers more than twice those of the second largest group, the Irish (3,255). After these, came the Russians (1,251), Austrians (1,227) and English (1,184).

²⁷³ Washington D.C.'s foreign-born population was only 7.2 percent of its total. U. S. Census Bureau Webpage, "Table 19, Nativity of the Population for the 50 Largest Urban Places, 1870-1990," <http://www.census.gov/population/www/documentation/twps0029/tab19.html> (accessed May 14, 2006).

²⁷⁴ Ibid.

²⁷⁵ *Indianapolis News*, 21 May 1906.

rolly-coaster. It seems unlikely that Indianapolis residents had such significant encounters at their parks, however.²⁷⁶

African Americans comprised Indianapolis's fastest-growing minority group by 1910 (8.8 percent of the population), but institutional segregation in this city, and across the nation in this period, prohibited most interactions between the races.²⁷⁷ Although amusement parks in other cities may have been a nexus of change in building mass culture and in creating opportunity for interactions between some ethnic groups, most amusement parks, including those in Indianapolis, followed the cultural norm of preventing African Americans from participation.²⁷⁸ Because of segregation and the low percentage of immigrants in the Indianapolis population, Indianapolis residents missed sharing the experience of amusement parks with ethnic others.

There were still other ways in which amusement parks could have created or pushed cultural change in this city that echo those claimed for Coney Island. Historians and contemporary writers give Coney Island credit (or blame) for loosening social and cultural barriers between the working class and middle class. They argue that the middle class began to adopt working-class social behaviors through interactions at amusement parks. These parks were landscapes on the edge both literally and figuratively, located along the fringes of the city, they also allowed for some fringe behaviors.

It is apparent from contemporary newspaper articles that Indianapolis's amusement parks included attractions that previously had been, and in some cases still

²⁷⁶ DeBlasio, "Trolley Park," 81.

²⁷⁷ Bodenhamer and Barrows, *Encyclopedia of Indianapolis, 1507*; Nasaw, *Going Out*, 48, 91.

²⁷⁸ See Emma Lou Thornbrough and Lana Ruegamer, *Indiana Blacks in the Twentieth Century* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2001), 146, for a short discussion of Riverside's history of exclusion and the protests that eventually arose from it. Richard Pierce, *Polite Protest: The Political Economy of Race in Indianapolis, 1920-1970* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2005) broadens the discussion of African American protest in Indianapolis in later years.

were, working-class activities. These included vaudeville shows, nickelodeons and other movies and dance halls.

Indianapolis amusement park owners advertised their new vaudeville shows weekly. In fact, the traveling vaudeville shows were the primary focus of most amusement park advertisements, since it was the ever-changing array of vaudeville acts that represented the primary difference in the offerings of the parks on any given day. Daredevils, alligator wranglers and trick bicyclists were performers who might once have played only to audiences of working men, the primary vaudeville audience in the nineteenth century, but amusement parks helped create a new public for these traveling entertainers. In turn, these vaudeville circuit performers also helped make amusement parks part of the mass culture, by carrying urban culture “from ocean to ocean.”²⁷⁹ In the early years of the twentieth century, the vaudeville “cheap theater” began to attract an audience of working-class women and their children as the working class came to accept it more widely than before.²⁸⁰ Many members of the middle class encountered vaudeville for the first time at amusement parks where these shows were one of many attractions. This was probably true in Indianapolis, as well. Each week, Indianapolis residents had at least three different vaudeville acts to choose from at the local amusement parks.²⁸¹ On June 7, 1908, for instance, local entertainment seekers could choose between trained bears at Wonderland, equilibrists at White City, or a trained steer at Riverside Amusement Park.²⁸² These Indianapolis amusement parks, like those at Coney Island and across the nation, included the former working-man’s amusement

²⁷⁹ Barth, *Rise of the Modern City*, 20.

²⁸⁰ Nasaw, *Going Out*, 31; Peiss, *Cheap Amusements*, 125.

²⁸¹ Based on a sampling of *Indianapolis Star* Sunday newspapers from 1906 to 1909.

²⁸² *Indianapolis Star*, 7 June 1908.

of vaudeville among their regular bill of fare, constantly promoting them to draw crowds. Indianapolis amusement parks, dubbed “respectable” by local newspapers, helped transform vaudeville, formerly a working-class male amusement, into a mixed-gender and middle-class entertainment by placing it within the boundaries of their special landscapes.

Indianapolis amusement park owners also offered other formerly working-class entertainments to their crowds, including public dancing. Before the turn of the century, most public dancing took place either in family-monitored, working-class neighborhood halls or in even more private backrooms of saloons.²⁸³ In 1904, the middle-class members of the Indianapolis city council perceived public dancing in saloons as a threat to morality and made it illegal to “exhibit any concert, or dancing or theatrical performance, in any room or building wherein intoxicating liquors are sold.”²⁸⁴ In 1906, the city council began licensing and regulating entertainments involving public dancing in halls and ballrooms.²⁸⁵ Three years later, the general assembly gave local police forces the duties of observing and inspecting all places of public dancing, which presumably included amusement parks. Signaling the middle-class perception of dance halls at this time, this statute applied to “houses of ill-fame or prostitution, and houses where common prostitutes reside, all lottery or policy shops, all gambling houses, cock pits, dance houses and resorts.”²⁸⁶ Although city and state leaders were concerned obviously about carefully regulating these attractions (seemingly indicating concern about their morality), the dance halls at local amusement parks were quite popular. It

²⁸³ Peiss, *Cheap Amusements*, 89.

²⁸⁴ *The General Ordinances of the City of Indianapolis* (Indianapolis: Wm. B. Burford, 1904), 417.

²⁸⁵ Kershner, “Social and Cultural History,” 245.

²⁸⁶ *Acts of the General Assembly of the State of Indiana, so far as they control the City of Indianapolis* (Indianapolis: Sentinel Printing, 1910), 139.

would not be until the 1910s that dedicated dance halls became popular in New York City. By then commercial dance halls, perhaps hoping to copy the success of the dancing pavilions at amusement parks, had opened across the nation.²⁸⁷ These dance palaces became part of mainstream recreation appealing to both the working-class and middle-class amusement seekers, who were introduced to them at amusement parks.²⁸⁸ Prohibited by law at working-class saloons, and introduced to the working-class culture at neighborhood and family-chaperoned events, dance halls became permanent and popular attractions at each of the Indianapolis amusement parks.²⁸⁹

A completely new amusement in these years, first embraced by the working class, was the five cent movie. In 1905, nickelodeon theaters were opening around the United States. Reportedly the first movie theater in Indianapolis, the Bijou, opened in 1906. The following year, both Wonderland and White City were advertising their nickel movies.²⁹⁰ By 1907, there were an estimated 500 movie houses in New York, with a daily attendance of over two hundred thousand.²⁹¹ It did not take long for Progressive Era reformers to condemn these inexpensive entertainments. Social reformers, including those in Indianapolis, were suspicious of the working-class's attendance at nickelodeons and of the movies' effects on society.²⁹² In 1910, the Charity Organization Society and the Department of Economics and Social Science at Indiana University conducted a study of three "typical" working-class neighborhoods in Indianapolis. Following Social Gospel tenets, which held that a bad environment

²⁸⁷ Peiss, *Cheap Amusements*, 95.

²⁸⁸ Peiss, *Cheap Amusements* 95.

²⁸⁹ Hartt, "The Amusement Park," 676.

²⁹⁰ Rita W. Harlan, "Theaters," in Bodenhamer and Barrows eds., *Encyclopedia of Indianapolis*, 1333.

²⁹¹ Matthew Bernstein, *Controlling Hollywood: Censorship and Regulation in the Studio Era* (New Brunswick, NJ; Rutgers University Press, 1999), 18.

²⁹² L. M. Campbell, *An Investigation of Housing and Living Conditions in Three Districts of Indianapolis* (Bloomington: Indiana University, 1910), 117; Peiss, *Cheap Amusements*, 80.

created societal illness, the Charity Organization Society studied these neighborhoods to see what could be done for “social betterment.” They determined that five-cent movies were among the “forces of evil” in these neighborhoods.²⁹³ The Society equated the negative impact of nickelodeons with that of saloons and “houses of ill-fame.” These reformers suggested that “an educational campaign is necessary to overcome the evils resulting to working people from the . . . five-cent show habit.”²⁹⁴ Society members reported observing that a large percentage attended the Park Theater vaudeville house two to three times a week, a frequency the Society found to be “demoralizing and harmful.”²⁹⁵

Despite these reformers’ condemnations, vaudeville shows, dancing halls, and nickelodeons that Kathy Peiss called the “free and easy culture” of working-class recreation, became popular attractions at amusement parks in New York and in Indianapolis.²⁹⁶ The parks co-opted these activities from the working class streets and brought them into their gated park grounds. Introducing working-class activities to the middle class created one of the tensions that made these parks interesting to the crowd and important in pushing the edge of acceptable behavior. Indianapolis amusement park owners hoped these working-class entertainments would draw the crowds of both working- and middle-class amusement seekers that they needed to survive. But to what extent was the park crowd actually a mix of the working and middle class?

Historians and contemporary observers have claimed that amusement park crowds were comprised of members of both the working class and the middle class.

²⁹³ Campbell, *An Investigation of Housing*, 111, 123.

²⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 117.

²⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 117.

²⁹⁶ Peiss, *Cheap Amusements*, 124.

Progressive Era studies conducted in 1903 and 1909 in New York City support those claims for the Coney Island parks.²⁹⁷ They showed that working-class families paid about thirty-five cents a week for entertainment, which typically included one or two outings to Coney Island each year.²⁹⁸ Rollin Lynde Hartt, writing in 1907, complained that the people who attended the Coney Island parks were from the “mountain-ward, shore-ward and Europe-ward hegira,” in other words, they were the unrefined working classes.²⁹⁹

At Coney Island, Idora Park in Youngstown, Ohio, and at Riverside, White City and Wonderland in Indianapolis, the working class was well represented in the crowds. Their interest and participation in amusement park activities is not surprising since the parks had purposely adopted many working-class entertainments. Local amusement parks’ owners actively solicited this working-class audience. For instance, in 1906, Riverside advertised “attractions to suit the taste and purse of all pleasure seekers,” and White City’s advertisement noted it had “many big free acts,” obviously in an attempt to attract the less-affluent working class.³⁰⁰

The gambits worked. Free features and endless promotions were successful in attracting workers and their families to these parks. Both individually and in groups, newsboys and sales girls, lodge members and union laborers peopled Indianapolis amusement parks. In 1907, White City hosted a party for *Indianapolis News* newsboys, their mothers and sisters. The party allowed these working boys to be “given over to

²⁹⁷ See Peiss, *Cheap Amusements*, 80.

²⁹⁸ Ibid, 13; Kasson, *Amusing the Million*, 38.

²⁹⁹ Hartt, “The Amusement Park,” 669.

³⁰⁰ *Indianapolis Star*, 22 July 1906.

unreserved and uninterrupted pleasure, miles away from bustling, hot Indianapolis.”³⁰¹ Uninterrupted pleasures were also in store for union workers on Labor Day 1907, for the *Indianapolis Star* proclaimed that on that day, “instead of listening to speeches, the sons and daughters of labor will spend the day at Wonderland.”³⁰² And so it must have been for members of the members of the fraternal Knights of Pythias, who encamped in 600 tents at Riverside in 1907, for the “dirty-faced urchin[s]” that a newspaper reporter had noticed at Wonderland in June 1908, and for countless others.³⁰³

The parks’ popularity among the working class was in some part due to a general improvement in the lives of workers and their families in the early years of the twentieth century.³⁰⁴ Although work weeks were still long by modern standards (an average in Indiana was 54 hours), in many places Saturday was now only a half day of work and Sunday was typically a holiday.³⁰⁵ In the years before World War I, the average industrial wage in Indianapolis rose by 30.2 percent from \$472.21 in 1904 to \$614.53 in 1914.³⁰⁶ One historian wrote that the American economy advanced in these years from scarcity to abundance and that the increased abundance of workers, in particular, created for them a “realm of consumption and leisure”; income increased, especially in Indiana, where workers earned above the national average.³⁰⁷ This

³⁰¹ “Newsboys and Carriers Will Enjoy an Outing,” *Indianapolis News*, 24 July 1907.

³⁰² “Union Laborers to have Pleasure Day,” *Indianapolis Star*, 31 August 1907.

³⁰³ *Indianapolis Star*, 21 June 1908; “Bull Routs Crowd,” *Indianapolis Star*, 12 May 1907.

³⁰⁴ See Tentler, *Wage-Earning Women*; Peiss *Cheap Entertainments*; Phillips, *Indiana in Transition*.

³⁰⁵ Phillips, *Indiana in Transition*, 324; Hartt, “The Amusement Park,” 667.

³⁰⁶ Kershner, “Social and Cultural History,” 193; Phillips, in *Indiana in Transition*, p. 327, cites slightly different figures: \$501 in 1904 and \$636 in 1914. Phillips notes that Indiana’s factory workers earned “well above” the national average; Donna DeBlasio, “Immigrant and the Trolley Park,” among other authors, also took note of an increase in working-class spending money that made their attendance at amusement parks possible.

³⁰⁷ Cohen, *Consumers Republic*, 10; Tentler, *Wage Earning Women*, 53; By 1909, 7.2 percent of Indiana’s work force was working a 40-hour work week, according to Phillips, *Indiana in Transition*, 526, 327.

combination of improvements created both the funds and the time for recreation and amusement parks offered new venues for entertainments familiar to the working class.

Progressive Era studies in New York found that both working-class families and single, working women spent time and money on trips to Coney Island.³⁰⁸ Similarly, in a study of working women in Indianapolis, conducted in 1913, employers mentioned that their employees spent time at “the bathing beach” (at Riverside or White City Amusement Park).³⁰⁹ The free attractions and free entrance to amusement parks were very appealing to the working class, and inexpensive and newly electrified streetcars made travel to these parks attractive and affordable for all but the most impoverished.³¹⁰

It is not surprising that the working class would find these parks along the green edges of the city very attractive. Not only did they present popular working-class activities in dressed-up venues, amusement parks offered relief from the smell, smoke and heat of the industrial city.³¹¹ Indianapolis’s workers needed this relief as much as those in any large city of the period. By 1912, soot deposits in Indianapolis were accumulating at 58 pounds per acre each day in the southeastern section of the city near Union Station and the working-class neighborhoods and small immigrant enclaves

³⁰⁸ Kasson, *Amusing the Million*, 38; Peiss, *Cheap Amusements*, 5.

³⁰⁹ “Indiana Commission on Working Women” (1914), Indiana State Library, Indianapolis. Howard Zinn, in *A Peoples’ History of the United States* (New York: Perennial Classics, 2001), 326, says that following the social reform tenets of the Progressive movement, the formation of the Ladies Garment Workers Union, and, most directly, the Triangle Shirtwaist Company Fire in 1911, a number of commissions on working women were instituted across the United States. According to Tentler, *Wage-Earning Women*, 43, by the time Indiana’s commission began its hearings in 1913, several other states had already issued reports on the status of working women in their jurisdictions.

³¹⁰ For instance, see advertisements for Riverside and Wonderland in the *Indianapolis Star*, 22 July 1906, *Indianapolis News* 4 May 1907; DeBlasio, “Trolley Parks,” 73.

³¹¹ DeBlasio, “Trolley Parks,” 76.

surrounding it.³¹² The urban working class could temporarily escape their soot-covered lives in the garden landscapes of amusement parks only a streetcar ride away.

These neighborhoods around Union Station also happened to be in one of the districts studied by the Charity Organization Society.³¹³ The study does not specifically mention that residents escaped the dirt and smell of the city by visiting amusement parks, but it does discuss the social networks in “District 12.” The Society surveyors noted that most of the men in the district were lodge members.³¹⁴ Joining the lodge provided both a social outlet and a form of insurance for less-affluent workers.³¹⁵ It is likely some of these members joined one of the many lodge outings that took place regularly at local amusement parks. “Half a dozen or more lodge outings” were planned at Wonderland in 1908, for instance, and similar outings took place at both of the other amusement parks in the city.³¹⁶

Working women also participated in amusement park activities in groups from work. In July 1907, for instance, the New York Store employees enjoyed an outing at White City.³¹⁷ Although no records indicate if residents of the districts studied by the Charity Organization Society were employees of the New York Store, a sizeable percentage of the women in the three districts were wage earners. Most of them took in laundry or did housework away from home, but 22 percent of the women wage earners

³¹² Deborah B. Markisohn, “Smoke Abatement,” in Bodenhamer and Barrows, *Encyclopedia of Indianapolis*, 1272.

³¹³ Campbell, “Housing Conditions,” 111. According to Bradford Sample, in “A Truly Midwestern City: Indianapolis on the Eve of the Great Depression,” *Indiana Magazine of History* 97(June 2001): 147, the Charity Organization Society started as the Indianapolis Benevolent Society in 1835. By the end of the 19th century, the society had changed its name. Sample calls it a “well-organized and well-financed effort to aid the ‘deserving poor.’”

³¹⁴ Campbell, “Housing Conditions,” 116.

³¹⁵ Ibid.

³¹⁶ *Indianapolis Star*, 21 June 1908.

³¹⁷ *Indianapolis News*, 20 July 1907.

who lived in District 12, the most prosperous of the three districts studied, worked away from home.³¹⁸ In District 5 was the “foreign district” and the poorest of the three, there 28 percent of the women were wage earners. Surprisingly, at least to the Society members who surveyed the area, 60 percent of the working women in the district were “married women with husbands.” It seems likely that some of the working women of these districts were customers of the amusement parks. The Kahn Tailoring Company was located within District 5 and the manager of Kahn Tailoring, Mr. Eckhouse, testified at hearings held by Indiana’s Commission on Working Women, in 1913, that girls in his employ would often take one day a week off of work to go to the Bathing Beach swimming pools at either Riverside Amusement Park or the former White City Amusement Park.³¹⁹

Most working women throughout the United States, and probably also most working women in Indianapolis, were young and unmarried. Working women comprised 18 percent of the total workforce nationwide in 1900. In Indianapolis that year, working women were 22 percent of the state’s workforce; most were employed in personal or domestic service.³²⁰ According to Leslie Woodcock Tentler, working-class daughters were likely to be employed at some time before they married. With such a high percentage of the population comprised of employed women, local amusement park owners were smart to seek these women as customers.

At the turn of the century, women were a sought-after audience because of their status as paying customers, but also because society regarded women as “icons of

³¹⁸ Campbell, “Housing Conditions,” 115.

³¹⁹ “Commission on Working Women,” 372-373.

³²⁰ Bodenhamer and Barrows, *Encyclopedia of Indianapolis*, Figure 13, p. 1523; Phillips, *Indiana in Transition*, 329.

decency.”³²¹ They represented wholesomeness and amusement park owners used their attendance as proof of the parks’ respectability. In a circular pattern of attraction, amusement park owners promoted the parks’ wholesomeness in order to attract their hoped-for female audience and promoted the parks’ ability to attract women as proof the parks were wholesome—so they could attract more women (and not just working women).³²² In 1906, Riverside Amusement park advertised its “attractions of the highest class.”³²³ In 1907, an article about White City bemoaned the previous day’s downpour which caused the crowd to run for shelter, “particularly the White skirts.”³²⁴ In July of that year, when the *Indianapolis News* newsboys were given a special day of fun at White City, they were encouraged to “come with mothers and sisters.”³²⁵

Working women and women of the working class were clearly part of the audience these Indianapolis parks drew. As in New York, the entertainments offered at amusement parks were especially attractive to young, single working women. Whether they lived at home, as one employer testified about his female workers before the Commission on Working Women, or on their own in rented rooms, work provided these women with exposure to others who were choosing to participate in new leisure activities.³²⁶ Kathy Peiss has shown that these young women did not seek recreation in the traditional places of workingmen. These young working women took part in

³²¹ Nasaw, *Going Out*, 25.

³²² DeBlasio, “Trolley Park,” 79.

³²³ *Indianapolis News*, 2 June 1906.

³²⁴ *Indianapolis Star*, 27 May 1907.

³²⁵ *Indianapolis News* 24 July 1907.

³²⁶ Commission on Working Women, 372; Tentler, *Wage Earning Women*, 61-62.

“emergent forms” of commercialized recreations, such as dance halls and vaudeville theaters—and the one place where they could find both: amusement parks.³²⁷

Both working men and women and their families patronized all three of the amusement parks in Indianapolis, as did their counterparts at Coney Island. The owners of these local parks sought out this working class audience, advertising free features to attract the less affluent, and holding special activities for groups of working men, women and children. These parks were comfortable for the working class. They incorporated activities and attractions that had previously been familiar in the neighborhoods and local establishments of working-class neighborhoods. It is easy to see why amusement parks attracted this proletarian audience. But the working class was not the only group that park owners sought. They also hoped to bring the middle class to their parks in large numbers. To gather the massive crowds these parks needed to survive, they also had to attract middle-class customers. Historian Donna DeBlasio argued that Idora Park in Youngstown, Ohio, “transcended divisions of class.” That transcendence was also a characteristic of Indianapolis amusement parks. Both the working class and the middle class attended these parks where working-class recreation was offered to everyone.³²⁸

Historian Kathy Peiss claimed that amusement parks were a “liberating experience” for the middle class.³²⁹ Like their working-class counterparts, these “purveyors of culture” were attracted to the entertaining amusement parks.³³⁰

³²⁷ Peiss, *Cheap Amusements*, 75, 5. For an enhanced understanding of viewing women through the window of history, see Nancy F. Cott, “What’s in a Name? The Limits of ‘Social Feminism’; or, Expanding the Vocabulary of Women’s History,” *Journal of American History*, 76 (December 1989): 809-829.

³²⁸ DeBlasio, “The Trolley Park,” 75.

³²⁹ Peiss, *Cheap Amusements*, 116.

³³⁰ May, *End of American Innocence*, 96.

Indianapolis park owners, like those at Coney Island, created an edge-pushing tension within the crowd by blending familiar middle-class activities, scientific and technological advances, inspirational entertainments, and working-class activities.³³¹ On June 7, 1908, for instance, the *Indianapolis Star* carried an advertisement for Wonderland that listed the musical numbers to be performed by the Von Tilzer band. These included arias from a Verdi opera, but also a “popular medley” including the new song “Bye Bye Dearie.”³³² All three Indianapolis amusement parks advertised similar blends of classical music and the latest popular tunes.

Amusement parks also drew the middle class by offering scientific attractions that piqued their interest in science and swelled their breasts with pride in American ingenuity. Pseudo-anthropological exhibits, such as the Philippine Igorrotes village at Wonderland, satisfied the Progressive-Era, middle-class interests in other cultures that could be “uplifted” by contact with white Americans.³³³ Infant incubators exhibits showed off American technological know-how and inventiveness. According to historian Kathy Peiss, “middle-class morality suffused” some of the attractions at amusement parks. Depictions of the Creation and of Hell were popular at the Coney Island parks.³³⁴ White City’s “Hereafter” was an attraction with such a theme.³³⁵ The combination of entertainments intended to be comfortable or enlightening to members of the middle-class and those being newly introduced to middle-class sensibilities

³³¹ DeBlasio, “The Trolley Park,” 79.

³³² *Indianapolis Star*, 7 June 1908.

³³³ Rydell, *All the World’s a Fair*, 64. Albert Beveridge, Indianapolis’s native son, won national fame by promoting the notion of American Manifest Destiny to control and govern “lesser races,” such as the natives of the Philippines, according to Phillips, *Indiana in Transition*, 73.

³³⁴ Peiss, *Cheap Amusements*, 131.

³³⁵ “White City Aglow for its Opening,” *Indianapolis Star*, 1906.

created an attractive tension at amusement parks. That tension was acceptable and even palatable within these garden locations of mechanized fantasy.

When White City's owners advertised their park as "the home of clean amusement," they hoped it would help them draw a middle-class audience.³³⁶ In 1907, Indiana's Republican newspaper editors, all members of the Indiana Republican Editorial Association, were among the thousands attracted to the park. The editors brought their sweethearts, wives and children with them to White City for their annual "basket picnic."³³⁷ In addition to eating their fill of fried chicken, the editors and their families, of course, also sampled the loop-the-loop and the shoot-the-chutes, as well as the vaudeville shows. Also in attendance at the editors' picnic were many local and state political candidates, including the guests of honor, then State Republican Chairman and Mrs. James P. Goodrich (in 1916, Goodrich would become Governor of Indiana).³³⁸ The next morning's *Indianapolis Star* reported that the editors had "uncork[ed] the fun barrel."³³⁹ Republican Editors and Republican politicians, these representatives of the middle class and of the party that was not friendly to labor, had become White City's customers.

Wonderland also attracted a middle-class audience as well as a working-class one. In 1908, the *Indianapolis Star* reported a shooting contest between vaudevillians Miss Myrtle Byrne and Broncho Bill that would take place the week of June 21 at the park. Miss Byrne was making a return appearance at the park to answer the challenge of

³³⁶ *Indianapolis Star*, 25 August 1907.

³³⁷ *Indianapolis Star*, 30 August 1907.

³³⁸ "James P. Goodrich," *Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia* at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/James_P._Goodrich (accessed September 12, 2006); Paul Brockman, "Germans in Politics," Bodenhamer and Barrows, *Encyclopedia of Indianapolis*, 622.

³³⁹ *Indianapolis Star*, 31 August 1907.

Broncho Bill. Her previous week's engagement had proven so popular with local women she created a "shooting mania . . . through Wonderland's clientele of amusement seekers." In fact, Byrne had "organized a class of society women in the neighborhood of Wonderland and is giving them lessons in rifle shooting of afternoons, when their blunders can not be seen by outsiders."³⁴⁰ These middle-class women were stepping out of their usual patterns of recreation and sociability to engage in an activity drawn from an amusement park into the realm of their everyday lives.

Wonderland's neighbors probably also enjoyed various other park attractions, among them, the dancing pavilion. In 1907, writing for the *Atlantic Monthly*, Rollin Hartt condemned the public dancing he saw at Coney Island's parks. Hartt complained that the dance halls at amusement parks were places where "young folks" arrived singly and "any well-seeming youngster may invite any girl to dance."³⁴¹ This easy attitude about dancing with strangers of the opposite sex was "long since sanctioned by that maelstrom of proletarian jollity, the 'social' where tickets . . . connote partners and more partners till everybody knows everybody else."³⁴² Hardly a member of the proletariat himself, Hartt, a Congregational minister and author, condemned this laxity and further complained that proper "Introductions" between young men and women were also dispensed with at dance halls.³⁴³

Yet dance pavilions were among the greatest draws at local amusement parks. White City's big dancing pavilion "on a hill where the cool breezes blow," was one of

³⁴⁰ *Indianapolis Star*, 21 June 1908.

³⁴¹ Peiss, *Cheap Amusements*, 95.

³⁴² Hartt, "The Amusement Park," 676.

³⁴³ Hartt was also author of *The People at Play* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company: 1909), which devoted numerous pages to criticism of amusement parks; Hartt, "The Amusement Park," 676.

its most popular attractions, “especially in the evening.”³⁴⁴ The New York Store employees, who visited the park in 1907, held a dance contest there. Miss Lulu Sowders and Mr. R. S. Wilson won first prize in the waltz contest and Miss Ruby Whitman and Walter Scholler took top honors in the two-step dance.³⁴⁵ They were merely four single persons, among the thousands, who held each other close as they swirled and twirled around the dance floors of Indianapolis’s amusement parks. This dance contest reveals that at least some of these single, working women were experienced and accomplished dancers who had probably participated in dancing as a social activity before this time. It also indicates that their employer considered dancing an appropriate activity for an employee party. Dancing was popular at all the local parks. Even in Wonderland’s years of waning popularity after 1909, the one park attraction that continued to “draw a large patronage” was the dancing pavilion.³⁴⁶ Although city leaders licensed and regulated these dance halls, placing on them the same statutory controls that applied to houses of prostitution and cock fights, local newspapers promoted them as part of amusement parks’ wholesome entertainment, and no one seems to have protested against the parks’ dance halls in this city.

Rollin Hartt did not limit his concerns about the lack of “deportment” shown at amusement parks to behavior seen in the dance halls. Complaining about sexual freedoms at amusement parks, he wrote, “arms, it is true, encircle waists, and half the allurements of the Foolish House inheres in its inky, winding passages.” Hartt wondered at the owner of a Coney Island maze who “unblushingly” announced that “the men like it because it gives them a chance to hug the girls, the girls like it because it gives them a

³⁴⁴ *Indianapolis Star* 6 May and 10 June 1906.

³⁴⁵ “Eat; Run Races; Dance and Have Tug of War,” *Indianapolis New*, 20 July 1907.

³⁴⁶ *Indianapolis Star*, 27 August 1911.

chance to get hugged.”³⁴⁷ Men and women were hugging and kissing at Indianapolis amusement parks, too. The tunnels of love and the Buster Brown, with its “tricky niches for novelty,” offered ample opportunity for liberties. An artist rendering on a postcard of Riverside Park, mailed in 1907, shows a long walk bordered by benches on which young men and women sit entwined, lip to lip. Undoubtedly there were many such scenes at Indianapolis amusement parks to inspire that artist.³⁴⁸ This behavior would have been cause for scandal in the Victorian age, not many years past. Even in 1905, a young woman of the elite class would not consider such displays of affection appropriate. Edith Wharton’s heroine in the novel, *The House of Mirth*, lost marriage opportunities over a scandal that consisted of nothing more than a mere whiff of impropriety.³⁴⁹ Yet girls of the working and middle class and their male suitors, found opportunity for kissing and hugging at Indianapolis amusement parks.

Historians have claimed that the sexual interactions common at amusement parks eventually changed the way that men and women interacted even outside the parks’ walls, moving these uninhibited interactions between the sexes into the culture at large. This movement helped create a freer, modern culture. Indianapolis’s parks offered the same dance halls, lovers’ lanes and mazes made for hugging to its customers. While the youthful “gaucherie” Hartt saw at Coney Island offended his sense of decorum, similar behavior at Indianapolis amusement parks did not seem to offend the middle class of this city. Presumably, they found the parks and the parks’

³⁴⁷ Hartt, “The Amusement Park,” 676-677.

³⁴⁸ “Riverside Park” postcards, Indiana Historical Society, Indianapolis.

³⁴⁹ Edith Wharton, *The House of Mirth* (New York, Avenel: Gramercy Books, 1994, reprint of 1907 original), 61.

attractions to be respectable. But the middle-class purveyors of culture in this city were quick to speak out when their notion of propriety was violated by one of the parks.

In 1909, when Wonderland's management publicly announced that they were considering adding a beer garden to the park's attractions, many of these "society women," the mothers of students in the Irvington School and the Lucretia Mott School, rose in opposition to the idea.³⁵⁰ They asked the park to continue to offer amusements that "call for no objection on moral grounds." They expressed no reservations about allowing their children to continue to patronize the park—if they could prevent the owners from selling alcohol.³⁵¹

These women—temperance crusaders and the wives of college professors and white-collar workers—had reason to believe their voices would be heard by the city and by the Wonderland management. They were the city's solid middle class, the guardians of the moral issues of the day, and they were Wonderland's patrons. Temperance was a middle-class issue and a method of controlling behavior. Although this issue was often linked to ethnicity, even in relatively homogeneous Indianapolis, where ethnicity may not have been the primary factor in the movement, temperance still raised questions of class. These women drew the class line at that issue. Already by 1909, some of the women had incorporated the activities and interactions of the working class, introduced to them at the city's amusement parks, as acceptable behavior. The mothers' protest over the beer garden reveals what they would not accept as entertainment and behavior at amusement parks, but also that they had been accepting of other typical amusement

³⁵⁰ A further note about the middle-class nature of Irvington: In 1909, the year of the beer garden controversy, the Christian Women's Board of Missions, a national organization affiliated with the Disciples of Christ Church, opened its offices in Irvington and a missionary training school. Dunn, *Greater Indianapolis*, 436.

³⁵¹ *Ibid.*

park entertainments and behavior. They had invited one of Wonderland's vaudeville performers into their own lives and homes when they took shooting lessons from Miss Byrne. They had not risen in protest over the park's vaudeville shows or its nickelodeons (called "Automatic Vaudeville" at Wonderland).³⁵² Only the beer garden pulled the tensions with Wonderland too taut. Although they spoke out about this one issue, in general, the middle class of Indianapolis had accepted and even attended the city's amusement parks.

For the middle class and the working class, amusement parks were an exciting and respectable form of entertainment. As John Kasson has written, amusement parks "changed the prevailing notions of public conduct and social order." They also changed the concepts of acceptable, wholesome entertainment. Kasson claimed they were significant factors in the "struggle for moral, social and aesthetic authority" in the United States.³⁵³ The hegemony of the middle class resulted, in part, from the mingling of classes and cultures at urban places of mass entertainment, among them, amusement parks.³⁵⁴

One historian has called Coney Island a "harbinger of the new mass culture," a social revolt against genteel standards of taste and conduct.³⁵⁵ Indianapolis, the "city of homes," where the majority of residents owned their own property and where there was no "foreign floating element" is an unlikely place for a cultural struggle to surface.³⁵⁶ In this "happy medium" city, where there were few millionaires and the solid middle class reigned, there were few indicators of cultural conflict. The women's movement against

³⁵² Sanborn Map, Indianapolis.

³⁵³ Kasson, *Amusing the Million*, 8.

³⁵⁴ For instance, see May, *End of American Innocence*; Kasson, *Amusing the Million*; Nasaw, *Going Out*.

³⁵⁵ Kasson, *Amusing the Million*, 112.

³⁵⁶ Commercial Club, *Indianapolis of To-Day*, 1.

Wonderland's beer garden reveals its undercurrents were still moving beneath the placid surface of the city.³⁵⁷

Writing of these early years of the twentieth century, Henry May said that, in the Midwest, "morality was linked to progress."³⁵⁸ Amusement parks were electrified, mechanical incarnations of progress. Historian Frederick Doyle Kershner made special note of the fact that, in this period in Indianapolis history, middle-class "businessmen regarded the expansion and patronage of commercialized entertainment with approval."³⁵⁹ Indianapolis's middle-class businessmen, its middle-class mothers and its working-class sons and daughters largely approved, accepted, and joined in the commercialized entertainment of the masses at amusement parks.

At these parks the middle class was quickly absorbing social activities and interactions more familiar to the working class. By as early as 1910, Indianapolis historian Jacob Piatt Dunn wrote a chapter titled, "The Social Swirl" in his epic history, *Greater Indianapolis*. He noted two recent "expressions" of popular sentiment in the "Social Swirl" of the city. One was the introduction, in 1908, of dancing classes in public schools. Dunn reveals the struggle that had taken place over this issue between the former social mores of the community and the newly forming ones. The institution of dancing classes was so newly part of the social construct of Indianapolis that a committee had formed to "investigate" them. After studying the dance classes, though, the concerned committee allayed community worries (or their own, at least). In their report on dancing in the schools, they determined that the polka, waltz and other dances were being taught only as "physical training." Further, and perhaps most importantly,

³⁵⁷ Hyman, *Journal*, 47; Kershner, "Social and Cultural History," 191-192.

³⁵⁸ May, *End of American Innocence*, 92.

³⁵⁹ Kershner, "Social and Cultural History," 236.

the dance classes were sexually segregated and taught by instructors of the same sex as the class. The committee decided “that the object aimed at by the physical culture trainers . . . is the development of our boys and girls . . .” Although they cautioned the schools not to create a “desire that can find satisfaction only in the ballroom,” they allowed the dance classes to continue.³⁶⁰ By so doing, they sanctioned the inclusion of an activity, once prohibited in taverns, into the city school curriculum.

Dunn’s second “expression” of change in the city was the introduction of billiard and pool tables at the new YMCA. The Methodist ministers of the city had voiced their approval of this “healthful and sane recreation,” which had been reserved formerly for the backrooms and saloons of the working class, but, by 1906 (two years before they were added to the YMCA), already had become part of the city’s amusement parks’ offerings.³⁶¹

In Dunn’s opinion, the acceptance of dancing in schools and billiard tables in a Christian organization was noteworthy because it represented a shift in the city’s culture. The citizenry of Indianapolis was “amalgamating socially and morally.” As he saw this change, the city’s classes were “rubbing the rough corners off each other and borrowing some characteristics one of another. . .”³⁶² Dunn also chided the disingenuousness of the school committee’s claim that dancing was purely for physical development. He wrote “people do not dance or play billiards for exercise; they do not play cards or go to the theater for instruction. They do these things for recreation . . .”³⁶³

³⁶⁰ Dunn, *Greater Indianapolis*, 502.

³⁶¹ Ibid.

³⁶² Ibid., 502.

³⁶³ Ibid.

Local keepers of culture, those who formed school committees and those who wrote the city's histories, might disagree about the meaning of school dance classes: perhaps they were physical culture; perhaps they were purely recreation. But it is significant that neither group condemned dancing at amusement parks. Both Dunn and the committee members must have understood that, as they emerged into the adult world, these boys and girls would soon be dancing together. Kathy Peiss notes in *Cheap Amusements* that the passage from Victorian culture to modern culture involved redefined gender relations and a "shift from homosocial to heterosocial culture."³⁶⁴ Young men and women were dancing together at Indianapolis amusement parks. They were also into the shadows in Riverside Amusement Park's boats and swimming at Riverside's and White City's bathing beaches. Though mothers near Wonderland remonstrated against the installation of a beer garden there, they did not protest the vaudeville shows, the five-cent movies, the dancing pavilion. Their protests were reserved for just one new amusement—a beer hall.

By 1910, Jacob Piatt Dunn's conclusion that recreation was amalgamating the city's masses was reinforced in another book about the city. *Hyman's Handbook of Indianapolis* was filled with photographs and descriptions of the infrastructure, businesses and social organizations of Indianapolis, as well as local landmarks. The book was designed to promote the city's amenities. Its author, Max Hyman, was a former newspaperman who owned his own publishing firm and was an active proponent of civic improvements in Indianapolis.³⁶⁵ He said in 1910, that "for summer

³⁶⁴ Peiss, *Cheap Amusements*, 6.

³⁶⁵ According to Sheryl Vanderstel, "Max Robinson Hyman," in Bodenhamer and Barrows eds., *Encyclopedia of Indianapolis*, 724, Hyman was a charter member of the Monument Masonic Lodge and was a member of the Indianapolis Hebrew Congregation.

amusements, the principal attractions are Wonderland and White City.”³⁶⁶ In so doing, he symbolically expressed their acceptance by the middle class purveyors of culture.

Amusement parks were endlessly cranking up the tension within their disparate parts; garden and machine, man-crafted nature and baby-saving technology, audiences of working class and middle class, men and women. All these were part of the tension that these landscapes on the edge created and helped release. Man built amusement parks to celebrate nature and industry, and man destroyed them with carelessness that brought spectacular fires very much like those reenacted as park attractions. Like the parks at Coney Island, in their heyday Indianapolis’s three amusement parks provided landscapes where citizens could test different ways of interacting that might eventually become the ways they interacted even outside the park walls. It is true that Indianapolis’s parks did not provide the mixing and mingling of immigrants and native born to the same degree provided by the Coney Island parks, or even Idora Park in Youngstown, Ohio. Those groups did not exist in large numbers in this city. But Riverside Amusement Park, White City and Wonderland brought a wide range of entertainment to a crowd of different classes and mixed genders. If a large percentage of their massive crowds were working class, there also were Sunday School classes, the moral bulwarks of middle-class society, and Republican editors and their families, whose party had lost much of its working class support. These groups gathered beneath the machines of entertainment to embrace a new world, very different from the Victorian one they had left behind. And in those special places, aided by the tensions and freedoms of the amusement park surrounding them, they did indeed mix and mingle

³⁶⁶ Hyman, *Hyman’s Handbook of Indianapolis*, 143. Interestingly, White City had already burned to the ground by the time Hyman’s 1909 handbook was published. However, although most of the park was gone, the Bathing Beach continued to be a recreation venue.

and amalgamate, to test new ways of interacting. These new behaviors included unchaperoned interactions between men and women and more democratic exchanges between the working class and the middle class. In mechanized amusement parks, these uniquely urban spaces inside the walls at the end of the streetcar lines, where the city was not yet city, the masses tested freer, more democratic ways of behaving.

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Curriculum Vitae
Connie J. Zeigler

Education

Master of Arts, Indiana University, earned at Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI), 2007

Bachelor of Arts, with distinction, Indiana University, earned at IUPUI

Continuing Education

Introduction to Section 106, Historic Preservation Institute, 2004

Noise Policy Workshop, INDOT Course 2005

Cultural Landscapes, Historic Preservation Institute, 2007

Relevant Work Experience

Historian—Weintraut & Associates, Historians, 2000-current

- Resources Management—7 years experience
 - Section 106 documentation
 - National Register Nominations
 - I-69 Project Management Consultant Team
- Exhibit conceptualizing, research and writing

Business Owner—Durwyn Smedley 20th Century, 1995-2004

- Owner retail shop specializing in vintage-modern items
 - Research mid-20th century architects, designers and designs
 - Marketing, sales, purchasing, manage small staff
 - Create and update website for sales
 - Write articles for various antiques publications
- Organizer Mass Ave Merchants Association
 - Preside at meetings, create and market district events
 - Write grants, write marketing materials
 - Represent merchants association in media appearances
 - Recruit and manage volunteers
 - Serve as District Representative on Indianapolis Downtown Inc. Marketing Board

Research Associate—The POLIS Center, 1989-1994

- Research and write over 80 entries for the Encyclopedia of Indianapolis, primarily in the Built Environment section
- Team leader for year-long national study of churches

Recent Cultural Resources Management Work

- National Register Nomination, Brock Farmstead (submission April 2007)
- Indianapolis Historic Preservation Commission Historic Designation, School 97, Indianapolis [completed August 2007]
- National Register Nomination, *Kokomo Country Club*, Kokomo, Indiana [listed 2006)
- Eligibility Determination, Indiana State Prison South/Colgate-Palmolive Company (completed 2006)
- National Register Nomination, Hillcrest Country Club, Indianapolis (listed 2004)
- Hawley Heights Historic District, Huntington County, Indiana [listed 2004]
- Cultural Trail North and Northeast Segments, Indianapolis, 2007
- US 421 Lane Improvements, Zionsville, Indiana, 2007
- 45th Street Rehabilitation Project, Gary, Indiana, 2006
- Boston Street Rehabilitation, La Porte Indiana, 2006
- US 421 Realignment, Greensburg, Indiana, 2006
- IndyGo Multi-transit Center Project, Indianapolis, including coordination with city representatives and presenting at consulting party meetings, 2006
- Bruce Lake, Sewer Improvement Project
- Milltown Indiana, Bridge Replacement Project
- I-69 South, Phase 2
- I-69 South, Phase 1
- SR 62/Lloyd Expressway, Evansville, Indiana
- Pigeon Creek Greenway, Evansville, Indiana

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Co-editor.

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Author.

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Relevant Volunteer Experience

- President, North Square Fountain Square Neighborhood Association, 2007
- Founding member and President, Massachusetts Avenue Merchants Association, 1999-2002
- Committee Member, Mass Ave Development Plan Committee, 2000-2001
- Board Member, Indianapolis Downtown Marketing Inc., 2002-2004
- Committee Member, Mass Ave Marketing Committee, 2001-2004
- Committee Member, Mass Ave Cultural District Committee, 2002-2004
- Committee Member, Northeast Quadrant Planning Committee, 2000