

TROLLEY

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entertainment included free outdoor movies, hot air balloons and trapeze artists. People walked to the park or rode streetcars. Excursion boats from Gallipolis and Point Pleasant sometimes stopped at the park to let off passengers.

On May 5, 1923, a fire started by welders working on a new swimming pool destroyed most of the park. Although Luna's owners announced that they would rebuild, the park never reopened. Eventually single-family houses were constructed on the site.

In 2012, the National Park Service designated 40 acres of Charleston's West Side, including the area once occupied by Luna Park, as the Luna Park Historic District.

Terrapin Park

In 1898, Charles H. Shattuck, president of the Parkersburg Electric Power and Street Railway, built a trolley park at the intersection of Dudley Avenue and 25th Street. He named it Terrapin Park because of a small, humped-up knoll on the property. The following year he built the Terrapin Park Casino — not a gambling casino as we use the term today, but a multi-purpose building that included a 2,000-seat auditorium.

In 1913, Henry L. Brenig expanded Terrapin Park by adding a roller coaster, carousel, dance hall and skating rink and other items. In 1916, Paul and Jack Crane took over the park and had two good seasons, but when the park closed for the season after Labor Day in 1918, a fire



WV ENCYCLOPEDIA | Courtesy photo

In this undated file photo, crowds take part in the festivities at Luna Park on Charleston's West Side.



Courtesy photo

A postcard showing the entrance to Luna Park, a trolley park served by the Charleston Interurban Railway Company. The park was built in 1912 on the north bank of the Kanawha River.

broke out that all but leveled it. The owners had no insurance and the park was not rebuilt.

Paden Park

In 1904, the Ohio Valley and Duquesne Glass Companies

partnered to build Paden Park on land in south Paden City, installing a baseball field, open-air dance floor, confectionary and carousel. The park proved popular but didn't come into full flower until 1909 when the Union Traction Company, which operated the Sistersville-New Martinsville trolley line, built the two-story Paden Park Pavilion.

The pavilion's first floor had a large ballroom that replaced the open-air dance floor on the park grounds. The second floor featured a big skating rink. Although the last trolley in Tyler County ceased operation in 1930, Paden Park lived on until 1943.

Oak Park

Located about one mile west of Masontown, in Preston County,

Oak Park was built in 1909 by the Morgantown & Kingwood Railroad. The park was an easy train ride from Morgantown.

On weekends and holidays, it attracted thousands of fun seekers, not just from West Virginia, but also from neighboring Pennsylvania and Maryland. On August 25, 1909, 14 trains brought more than 4,000 people to the park.

Oak Park's attractions included a 65-foot wooden slide, two roller coasters, walking paths, picnic areas, a carousel, a Ferris wheel, a swimming hole, paddle boats and carnival-style game stands. One of the main attractions was the baseball games played at the park between teams formed in surrounding towns and by mine companies.

The park closed in 1930, a victim of the Great Depression.

CAMDEN

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dealer John P. Boylin Sr., then purchased the park.

When Boylin bought it, the park had nine rides and a number of buildings still damaged by the 1937 flood. He undertook a substantial expansion of the park, adding rides and other attractions over the next few years.

In 1980, the Boylin family sold the park to out-of-town owners, a move that would prove disastrous. The new owners neglected essential maintenance. When they found themselves drowning in debt, they even sold off the hand-carved wooden horses that once graced the vintage carousel, replacing them with metal replicas. By 1994, the park owners owed \$2 million to their creditors, including the Boylins.

In 1995, the Boylins, who still owned the land where Camden Park stands, stepped in and took the park back. It was at this point that Jack Boylin got involved in the park.

"As a kid, I enjoyed coming to the park and riding the rides," he said. "It never registered with me that my family owned the place. In 1995, when we bought back the park, I had just graduated from college and so the timing was right for me to get involved. My father (J.P. Boylin Jr.) couldn't run the place by himself, so I was happy to help. I've been here ever since."

Today, he and his mother, Helen Bolin, own and operate the park. "She likes working here," said Jack. "She says doing so keeps her young."

Jack's son, Dev, a student at the University of South Carolina, now works summers at the park. He's the fourth generation of Boylins at the park. "This year, he's helping out in maintenance," his father said.

On their return to the park, the Boylin family got off to a rocky start with a \$1 million fire that in 1996 destroyed the park's office, Skee-ball area and popular Roller Rink. In addition to dealing with the fire damage, the Boylins faced a long list of maintenance projects.

"It was as if nothing had been painted or landscaped for 15 years," said Jack Boylin. Leaky roofs and cracked pavement demanded repair.

Then came new attractions. Swan Lake, a lake filled with pedal boats, was added in 2002. Other additions included an 18-hole miniature golf course and the Camden Princess, a towboat-like ride that rocks back and forth.



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It's hard to miss the jumbo happy clown sign that towers over the entrance to Camden Park.

Fans of the park's Ferris Wheel were saddened when it was dismantled, a victim of old age. Its site is now used for two new rides. First came the Rattler, which suspends its riders from an overhead axis and puts them through dual swinging and spinning motions. The park's newest ride, the Slingshot, came next. It's a figure-eight roller coaster with spinning cars.

Big Dipper a coaster landmark

Surely, Camden Park's best-known ride is the Big Dipper roller coaster.

Camden's antique carousel is its oldest ride. About 1912, the park's first roller coaster was added. Known as the "New Sensation," it featured a tall hill, a spiraling section of track and several dips of varying lengths.

In 1957, Camden Park owner John P. Boylin Sr. decided that the park's aging roller coaster needed to be replaced. He subsequently hired Aurel Vassin with the National Amusement Device (NAD) of Dayton, Ohio, to build a new wooden roller coaster for

the park.

Harry Nudd, who was in charge of the rides at the park, then worked with NAD construction supervisor Jerome A. "Eddie" Leis to create a modest-sized wooden coaster that would be a perfect fit for the park. The old coaster was demolished and the new coaster, the Big Dipper, was put in service in 1958.

The Big Dipper features six original Century Flyer cars with working headlights, and a classic figure-eight track design. The ride's name refers to a big dip measuring almost the full 50-foot height of the roller coaster after the first turn. A second, shallower dip leads into an unlit tunnel, from which the cars emerge shortly before returning to the pavilion to let off passengers.

The ride is one of only three NAD roller coasters still in operation. One of the other two is Camden Park's Lil' Dipper, a miniature wooden roller coaster with steel supports that was built as a children's ride at the park in 1961.

In 2019, American Coaster Enthusiasts designated the Big Dipper as an "ACE

Roller Coaster Landmark" and honored the Boylin family for their continued operation of the ride.

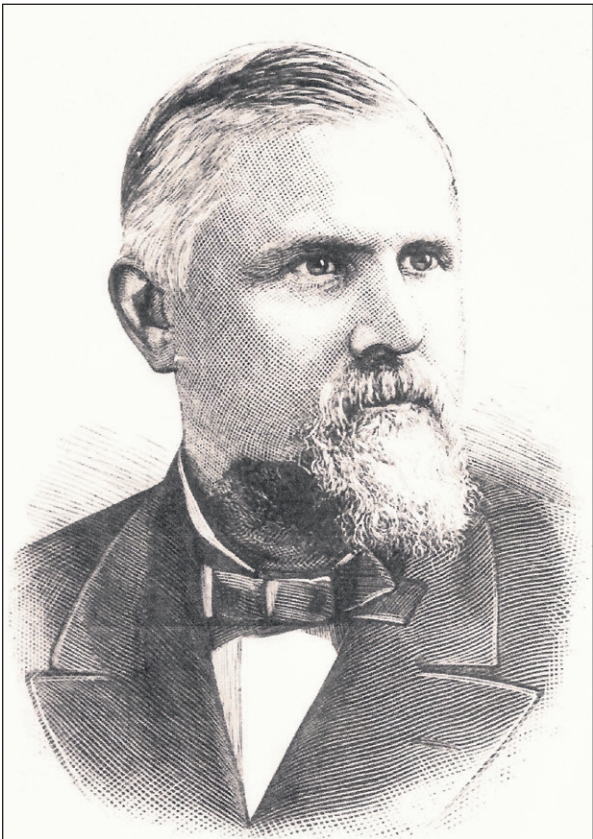
Another certifiable antique ride at the park is the Whip, built by William F. Mangels of Coney Island, New York. It's one of a handful of these classic flat-rides still in existence. The park also has a Kiddie Whip among its children's rides.

"I have no idea how old the Whip is," Boylin said. "We installed it in the 1950s and it was far from new then."

A replica steam train long has chugged its way around the park, while an aerial tram whisks overhead, providing people an airborne glimpse of what's below. On summer days, people stand in line to take a ride — and a refreshing dip — at the West Virginia Logging Company, a log flume ride.

Other popular rides at the park include the Paratrooper, which features ten cars which rise and lower as they circle the ride, and the Kite Flyer, which offers riders a sensation similar to hang-gliding.

Jack Boylin says one of



Courtesy photo

U.S. Sen. Johnson M. Camden, the principal stockholder in the local trolley line, the Camden Interstate Railway, established Camden Park in 1903.

his favorite rides is the Haunted House, which takes riders along dark, winding corridors that feature sudden and unexpected lights and noises, luminescent images and animated props. Manufactured by the Pretzel Amusement Ride Co. of Bridgeton, New Jersey, it originally was called the Laughing Lady.

Boylin believes it may have been installed as early as the 1920s and then re-themed and the name changed in the '60s. However, he doesn't know much more than that since the oldest employee at the park, which opened in 1903, only goes back to 1980. Today, it's one of only two Pretzel rides remaining in operation in the United States.

Each October, the Haunted House is the centerpiece of "Spooktacular," a park-wide Halloween celebration.

Then and now

Over the years, Camden Park has been the setting for an almost bewildering list of events and activities: marathon dances and roller derbies, baseball games and horse shows, a swimming pool and even a small zoo. (The pool and the zoo were closed years ago.)

Hungry visitors can enjoy the park's signature Pronto Pup (similar to a corn dog but with a different batter), or sit down to more substantial fare at the West Virginia Grill, which has morphed from the park's cafeteria of yesteryear.

The park's Midway is full of fun, old-timey carnival style games such as Frog

Bog, Darts, Cat Toss, Balloon Bust and Duck Pond. There's also a retro arcade full of fun and games. Located beside the arcade are the Happy Clown Toy Shop, which sells everything from stuffed animals to Lego sets, and the Candy Store.

Camden Park's rich history includes concerts by such country-music superstars as Garth Brooks, Vince Gill and Marty Stuart, who took the park's stage early in their careers. The park still offers country music concerts. Today's performers may not be well known but — who knows? — some of them may be tomorrow's stars.

At the center of the park is an Indian mound, said to be one of the largest in West Virginia. Never excavated, it was probably built by the Adena people between 1000 B.C. and A.D. 100. The top of the mound was used as a bandstand in the early part of the 20th century.

The presence of the mound has prompted rumors that the park site is haunted by Native American spirits. One witness reported seeing an apparition of one Native American chasing another with a knife. The Big Dipper has also had its share of reported apparitions, including a ghostly woman in white said to be seated in the ride's last row.

For more information on Camden Park, log on to [www.camdenpark.com](http://www.camdenpark.com).

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