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Bowling Green State University. Center for Archival Collections

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## Archival Chronicle

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August 1995: Volume 14, Number 2

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### A Good Time Was Had by All

Following the Civil War, the population began to shift from rural to urban communities. Municipal parks were developed to provide a place of quiet and recreation for city dwellers. City park commissions, boards, and departments of parks and recreation were established to care for these public facilities. Among the cities whose parks are represented in the records held at the CAC are Lima, Defiance, Toledo, Bowling Green, Perrysburg, Tiffin, Plymouth, and Adams Township of Lucas County. Soon these parks were filled with the music of municipal bands and orchestras. Later, thanks to the efforts of federal programs like the WPA, community concert halls, libraries, museums, and zoos were built, despite a crippling economic depression. Many of these facilities exist today, their work supported and enhanced by volunteer auxiliaries.



◀ Cedar Point is famous around the world for its roller coasters. This photograph, taken in the 1930s shows the view from the highest point of The Cyclone. Gift of Margy Boger Gagen.

Settlers of northwest Ohio faced a daily struggle to build and maintain their homes, raise and prepare their food, and establish the foundations of the communities we know today. Farming and manufacturing required long hours of heavy physical work. Even so, people found time to relax and enjoy life. Recreation was not simply a way to occupy idle hours, it was an important means of refreshing the spirit or celebrating personal and community milestones.

Barn-raising and quilting bees were major social occasions on the frontier. Work shared by many hands could be accomplished more quickly. Gathering the neighbors together for these purposes relieved the isolation of farm life. Schools and churches also provided focal points for community entertainment. The Center for Archival Collections holdings include many elegantly printed programs documenting such events. Women's auxiliaries used such entertaining occasions as ice cream socials and music recitals to raise funds to support their churches or volunteer fire departments and were active in promoting civic improvements to parks. Records of the ladies auxiliaries can be found with specific church records. Examples of secular organizations include the New Century Club of Perrysburg (MS 251) and the Port Clinton Literary and Social Club (MS 176). Veterans and fraternal organizations like the Grand Army of the Republic or the I.O.O.F. spread throughout the nation. They were largely social organizations, among whose greatest benefits was the opportunity for socializing with friends and families. Examples in the CAC collections include the Robbins Post #91 of Upper Sandusky (MMS 1139) or the Jehu John post #476 of Elida (MMS 335) and I.O.O.F. Lodge #530 of Haskins (MMS 249). Business, agricultural, and labor organizations also held annual picnics and holiday parties. Among the Grange records at the CAC are those for Salem Grange #2259 (MS 257) and Bowling Green's Union Grange #1475 (MS 3).



◀ Depicted in a 1912 postcard, the conservatory and fountain at Walbridge Park, Toledo, offered a soothing garden atmosphere for weary city dwellers. Gift of Beverly Miner.

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The change from a frontier to an industrial economy meant more leisure time for workers and more money to spend on recreation. Hotels and resorts, once the playground of the wealthy, now catered to middle and working class patrons. Cedar Point, founded in 1870, was among the first of the great amusement parks. Similar, smaller parks sprang up all over northwest Ohio, taking advantage of improved public rail transportation, and later the automobile. The leisure industry, thus, has a long history in northwest Ohio.

*Winners in the boys' division proudly show their catch at the Toledo Fishing Rodeo, August 28, 1954. Gift of the Commission of Publicity and Efficiency.* ▶

People have always been concerned that entertainment be "improving" or uplifting, especially where children are concerned. Local records reflect the ordinances which were written to regulate public performances, including Fulton and Putnam Counties' *Permits to Give Public Entertainments Records* and Ottawa County's *Show License Applications*. Chautauquas were extremely popular traveling lecture and concert series that drew audiences from miles around.



While Bowling Green State University held required weekly chapel sessions, articles in the *Bee Gee News* reminded students that the one-hour concerts and lectures were designed to broaden their horizons as well as to entertain them.

Today, recreation, entertainment, and tourism are an important component of our economy. Motion pictures, radio, television, and professional sports have joined traditional pastimes, and many are available even in the smallest communities. These activities, which take up so much of our time, tell a great deal about us and what is important to our culture. For further information, interested researchers should contact the CAC.

—Lee N. McLaird