

## *Fun in Indiana Through the Years*

At the end of the nineteenth century, Hoosier found themselves with more leisure time than ever before. Technological advances in industry allowed increased efficiency in manufacturing and farming while transportation innovations connected farmers and city-dwellers, easing travel between work, home, and play.

### *Parks*

The Progressive Era's focus on health, hygiene, and all-around better living generated interest in outdoor recreation and physical activity, giving Americans reasons to get outside their homes and incorporate nature into their cities and lifestyles. The American Playground Movement, building off Progressive principles, started in Chicago at the end of the nineteenth century. It touted the importance of children spending time in the fresh air at play to improve their mental, moral, and physical well-being, increasing the call for safe public spaces dedicated to play and leisure. Adults were also looking for places to relax and leave the stresses of working life, making a strong case for the creation of local parks by city initiatives or generous donations from wealthy benefactors.

Indianapolis (Marion County) undertook an extensive campaign of urban beautification through a park and boulevard system started in 1907 by landscape architect George Kessler. The plan wove recreational corridors throughout the city, allowing natural elements to guide Indianapolis's growth. Kessler's work can still be seen today in bridges and detailed landscaping throughout the city. Terre Haute (Vigo County), dedicated Collet Park the city's first public park, in 1891, which attracted residents with its hand-wrought iron sign, concerts performed in the bandstand, stocked fish pond, and well-manicured flower garden. A departure from Terre Haute's bustling downtown, the park quickly became an integral part of everyday life, acting as the site of countless picnics, horse-and-buggy rides, and municipal band concerts, as well as a local precinct's electoral polling place. It also influenced the cityscape, attracting Terre Haute's most prominent citizens to build exquisite homes along the park's periphery.

Michigan City (LaPorte County), situated on Lake Michigan's southern shore capitalized on its proximity to Chicago when planning a recreational area. Washington Park, located along the lake at the former site of fishermen shanties, was designated in 1891 and earned a reputation as the premiere spot for Chicago office picnics and boating excursions. Other Washington Park attractions included Hoosier Slide, a 200-foot sand dune, a bandstand which could accommodate over 40 band members during performances, and, starting in 1913, amusement rides. A dance



This postcard, postmarked 1926, shows Indianapolis's Senate Avenue Bridge, part of Kessler's innovative park system.

floor, skating rink, bath house, narrow-gauge steam train, and additional boat pier only added to the festive atmosphere and site's appeal. The dance floor and thrill rides have long gone from Washington Park, but Michigan City still acts as a lakeshore retreat for busy Chicago urbanites and Hoosiers alike with its swimming beaches and dunes.

Cities and towns weren't the only ones interested in offering up natural escapes for frazzled industrialists and workers. In 1916, the federal government created the National Park Service to help conserve resources, while also providing public access to the country's natural



wonders. Indiana followed suit, creating a state park system the same year to celebrate the state's centennial. Piloted by Indianapolis businessman Colonel Richard Lieber's efforts, Indiana's park system quickly gained a reputation for high quality parks even though it contained a relatively small number of sites. Guests from across the state paid a nominal fee, used to maintain park amenities, to hike, swim, or marvel at Indiana's natural beauty at Big Clifty Falls in Clifty Falls State Park (Jefferson

County), Sugar Creek within Turkey Run State Park (Parke County), and caves at McCormick's Creek State Park (Owen County) throughout the 1920s. With the Great Depression, manpower

Civilian Conservation Corp. workers were responsible for much of Indiana State Parks' cabin, shelters, and landscape architecture. The two men photographed here were with the CCC group based at Pokagon State Park.

and federal funds associated with the Works Progress Act (WPA) and Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) transformed park landscapes by constructing shelters, elaborate entrances, bridges, footpaths, trails, and roads across the state out of local, found materials. Many parks, including Pokagon State Park (Steuben County) and Brown County State Park, still boast the 1930s architecture that showcases the rustic style associated with WPA and CCC efforts.

### *Country Club/Golf Resorts*

With the growth of suburbanization during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, wealthy and up-and-coming individuals moved out of dense, compacted cities towards accessible but still separate suburbs on the outskirts of town. Trading in the close-knit communities found within the heart of downtown areas for individually-owned houses, new suburbanites longed for associations where they could connect with others who shared their economic and educational background as well as their social standing. Country clubs filled this niche, offering voluntary organizations that allowed suburbanites to create social groups outside their limited geographic neighborhoods. The Country Club Movement embraced the Anglo-centric desires of the upper and upper-middle class, giving the elite and would-be elite a place to mingle, network, and share their increased leisure time indulging in the increasingly-popular British-influenced recreational activities of golf, tennis, and swimming. Most early clubs emphasized outdoor activities and socializing, appealing to families and young professionals, as well as singles who wanted to firmly assert their social standings.

The first Indianapolis county club was established northeast of the city in 1891, but within the first few decades of the twentieth century other clubs sprung up around town giving Indianapolis residents options when considering club membership. They could join the Country Club of Indianapolis (the city's first club), the Highland Golf and Country Club opened in 1908, the Woodstock Club occupying CCI's original site after the older club moved to a larger property in 1914, Meridian Hills Country Club, established in 1923 and appealing to Meridian Hills's residents, and Avalon Country Club, which offered a distinctly rural setting starting in 1924. These clubs constructed large clubhouses, some including dining rooms and dance pavilions where the wealthy could go to see their peers and be sure they would be seen by other members. Clubs hosted social and athletic events, bringing together members to create strong social bond and start traditions that are still active today. Many clubs still exist, counting three or four generations of local families as members.

Jewish social clubs also formed in Indianapolis as the city's Jewish population reached a steady 1% during the late nineteenth century and self-selection kept most Jews out of already established clubs and organizations. Patterned after the social clubs of the 1860s and 1870s, the Americus Club, opened in 1892, offered a place where Jewish men could comfortably socialize in a setting based off the Protestant elite's increasingly-popular country club model. The Indianapolis Club, located in a mansion at 23<sup>rd</sup> and Meridian Street on Indianapolis's northside, was started by Standard Paper's Albert Rosenthal in 1908. Later, in 1925, the club was relocated to Kessler Boulevard and renamed the Broadmoor Country Club. (Although the clubs catered to specifically Jewish populations, care was taken by founders to avoid any Jewish identification within the club names.)

African-American Hoosiers enjoyed the same leisure activities embraced by their white counterparts, but were systematically denied access to many of the venues associated with recreation. The Great Migration of African Americans from the south in the 1920s and 1930s increased Indiana's Black presence from only 2% of the state's population in 1900 to over 3.5% by the beginning of the 1930s, raising concerns over segregation and access to recreational facilities. This unfortunate segregation led to blacks creating their own organizations, businesses, and communities where they could fully participate in popular past-times. Although the County Club of Indianapolis, opened in 1891, and following country clubs and golf courses were segregated, the Douglass Golf Course allowed Indianapolis Blacks to use the course since its 1922 opening.

Golf, introduced to America in the 1700s, experienced a popularity boom in the first quarter of the twentieth century and became a ubiquitous part of the country club lifestyle. The sport attracted thousands through its connection to England's upper classes and its combination of outdoor physical activity and opportunity to socialize. Golf quickly grew from a simple recreational pursuit to a central part of business life as businessmen used the game as an extension of the office, forming lucrative professional partnerships and sealing deals on the greens. In 1916, 743 golf courses were open in the United States; by 1930, over 5,800 dotted the countryside. First plotted on farmland bordering the city park, Kokomo's first golf course, aptly named Kokomo Country Club Golf Course (Howard County), opened in 1904. The nine-hole course doubled in size during the 1920s, expanding to the now-standard 18-hole course and counting over 200 members. Community industrial leaders would often take to the course when finalizing business deals or when courting new clients. Bedford's Town and County Golf Course (Lawrence County), boasting a pool along with its nine-hole course, opened in 1914, and quickly attracted players from surrounding communities looking for a relaxing recreational activity. With

the increase in interest and almost 200 members, the group founded the Bedford Country Club and Golf Course, completed in 1923 on the former site of a dairy farm. When the club went bankrupt in 1934, the city of Bedford purchased the facility, transforming it with the help of WPA workers into the city's largest park, complete with a baseball field, concessions, picnic shelters, and playground. Some private country clubs folded during the Depression and World Wars, but many of golf courses associated with the organizations were made public and survived, much like Bedford's course. Although many of Indiana's earliest golf courses have undergone extensive redesigns to expand from the three or nine holes courses typical of the early twentieth century to today's accepted eighteen, most of them remain open, showcasing golf's continued popularity.

### Resorts

After the Civil War, wealthy citizens within urban areas longed to get away from the increasing filth and noise associated with cities. Railroads, expanded during the war, offered a practical and easy way to commute from the hustle of the cities to the relaxation associated with pastoral areas and lake shores.

Farm land originally bordered Lake Maxintuckee near Culver (Marshall Co.), but by the 1860s sports fishermen started visiting the area for short weekend getaways. These visitors began bringing their families to the lake during the 1870s and 1880s, the same time farmers sold land to individuals interested in turning the area into a resort. "Clubhouses," private hotels sponsored by groups of prominent businessmen coming from the same community, sprouted up, with a group from Plymouth, IN building the first in 1873 and continued to be popular until the early 1900s. At that time private cottages replaced communal institutions and numerous prominent Indianapolis



This vintage postcard, dated 1908, shows the Depot Pier on the shore of Lake Maxintuckee near Culver.

German-American families spent their summers by the lake. Maxintuckee's beauty and serenity attracted famous literary Hoosiers as well as other wealthy and powerful individuals across the state. During the 1870s, Lew Wallace wrote a few chapters of his best-seller *Ben-Hur* while enjoying the serene lakeside atmosphere offered at the Allegheny House Lodge. Fifty years later, future author Kurt Vonnegut spent his childhood summers at the lakeshore, staying in a cottage designed and built by his grandfather Bernard Vonnegut, a well-known Indianapolis architect.

The Lassen Hotel, part of the Cedar Lake resort area (Lake Co.), came from humble beginnings to become a hot-spot for the Chicago elite. Built by the Armour brother of meat-packing fame in 1890 to house workers harvesting ice from the lake in winter months, the building was sold to the Lassen brothers in the early 1900s. The building was then towed across the frozen lake the next winter, making it the 14<sup>th</sup> hotel on Cedar Lake. To attract guests and separate itself from the other lodges that crowded the shore, the Lassens organized a boat service taking guests from the train depot to the hotel's front door. Throughout the next decade, the Lassen Hotel continued to expand, boasting an on-water dancing pavilion, buffet, saloon, kitchen, and dining room. During the 1930s, when business started to dwindle, the Lassens promoted boxing and wrestling matches in the hotel's garage.

Unable to build or own houses in the popular northern Indiana resort areas such as Lake Maxintuckee and Cedar Lake, African American searched for a place to call their own away from the segregation of the cities. Taking a cue from a few resorts within Michigan catering to the growing number of middle-class Blacks, a group from Chicago attempted to buy land on Lake Sanger near Valparaiso, but ran into local opposition. After this temporary set-back, the group looked to Fox Lake outside Angola (Steuben County) and purchased land to start their own resort, the only one of its kind in Indiana. With families from Chicago, Indianapolis, Detroit, Toledo, and other industrial hubs across the Midwest building cabins, by the 1930s the small settlement became a true community, becoming much more than a simple vacation destination to be visited for one weekend. Fox Lake offered recreational opportunities not found in cities and sometimes not offered to African Americans such as swimming lessons, craft classes, dances in the lake's clubhouse, tennis courts, pick-up basketball games, horseshoe pits, saddle horses, and shooting matches. Black celebrities including jazz great Duke Ellington and boxing champ Joe Lewis visited the resort and enjoy the local restaurant alongside young black people from around the Midwest. Although Fox Lake's summer population has declined over the years and many of the cottages have been sold by their original owners, the area embraces its identity as the only African-American resorts in Indiana and some of the individuals who grew up spending summers in the clubhouse and on the lake still call the community home.



This interior shot of the West Baden Spring Hotel's dome shows the opulence associated with Orange County's mineral spring resorts.

Two of Indiana's best-known resorts, French Lick and West Baden (Orange County), formed around natural mineral spring nationally known for their supposed healing powers. As early as 1850s, advertisements touted the medicinal abilities of the springs and the benefits of visiting Orange County, Indiana. Tourists came to "take to the waters," a popular pastime across the country throughout a nationwide health movement spanning from 1870-1920. (At the time Indiana already had five mineral spring sites competing for guests'

attention and money.) With the 1887 arrival of the railroad in French Link and expansion of the French Lick Springs Hotel throughout the 1880s to include a bowling alley, croquet pitch,

ballroom, and in-room electricity, the hotel and springs became a national vacation destination. Visitors flocked to sample water from 'Pluto's Well' which was bottled and sold nationally as a laxative claiming to "do what nature can't." Although some of the springs ran dry as early as 1897, French Lick and West Baden continued to thrive into the 1920s and 1930s, attracting local and national celebrities with a mix of entertainment, relaxing leisure pursuits, and even rumors of gambling associations.

The Great Depression slowed business at Indiana resorts, with many Hoosiers no longer able to afford private cottages or weeks away from work, opting instead to plan day-trips or forgo vacations altogether. When vacations again became acceptable and affordable in the post-World War II era, far away destinations boasting better climates and larger attractions appealed to families and tempted them away from the local spots that were popular decades earlier. The natural beauty and recreational opportunities associated with Indiana's resorts experienced

renewed interest in the 1980s and 1990s, again attracting guests for day-trip and weekend stays in newly-renovated hotels, tours of restored historic properties and shopping in budding retail districts.

### *Chautauquas*

While the word “Chautauqua” (sha-tah-kwa) may be foreign to today’s Hoosier, these extensive meetings were annual social and educational highlights for those in small communities during the last quarter of the 1800s. In 1874, a Methodist minister named Dr. John Heyl Vincent organized a two-week religious education assembly at Lake Chautauqua in upstate New York. Sunday school teachers from around the state gathered together at the event, which resembled a summer camp, to cultivate religious ideas and discuss contemporary topics. Unlike religious revivals which had been popular since the 1830s, the purpose of the meeting was to educate attendants, not inspire religious fervor (although it was sometimes a welcome side-effect of scheduled events). After meeting with initial success, Vincent expanded his subsequent Chautauquas to include music, the arts, and famous lecturers covering religious, political, and philosophical topics. Thousands descended on campgrounds around Lake Chautauqua to hear nationally-known acts and enter intellectual discussions with their neighbors, two past-times at the time uncommon in isolated farm communities.

Similar meetings began popping up across the country with towns organizing independent Chautauquas and building large tabernacles dedicated to the increasingly-involved summer events. Guests would create tent cities, camping out for the Chautauqua’s duration and forming communities between performances and seminars with games of shuffleboard and friendly athletic competitions. Even if families could not afford to take a week off and camp next to the Chautauqua grounds, many visited the spectacle for the day to see specific events or speaker. Circuit Chautauquas formed in the early 1900s and offered smaller cities the Chautauqua experience without the arduous planning or having to construct a building for the event. Troupes travelled to a town, erecting large white tents in open fields or city parks, and hosting seven days of proceedings. Once the Chautauqua concluded, the group would break down their tents, pack up their supplies, and start the process over again in the next scheduled town a few days later. These mobile operations boasted famous speakers such as former presidents Theodore Roosevelt and William Howard Taft, opera tenor Enrico Caruso, political leader William Jennings Bryan, and Hoosier temperance activist Billy Sunday, as well as opera companies, spiritualists, and folk bands eager to perform to crowds

Rural Indiana communities quickly embraced the Chautauqua concept, jumping at the chance to host one of the circuits traversing the country by rail or organize their own, independent gatherings. For many small-town residents, these events marked one of the only times they could see famous speakers address current events in relatively isolated framing communities. These week-long doings became the largest local social event beside the county fair, drawing people from neighboring towns and boosting the economies of downtowns. Between 1907 and 1932, the heyday of Chautauquas, 75 different Indiana communities hosted over 6,000 Chautauquas. One of the largest and longest-running took place in Remington, IN (Jasper Co.). Robert Parker, president of Remington Bank, dedicated land for the Fountain City Chautauqua in 1893 and by 1900 the site included a tabernacle, restaurant, hotel, permanent cottages and a small lake for boating and swimming. Rockville (Parke Co.) hosted its first Chautauqua in 1911, building an auditorium for the event in 1913. The town of Nappanee

(Elkhart Co) saw its first circuit Chautauqua in 1911, finally building the Nappanee West Pavilion in 1923.

Chautauquas were considered an integral part of the social and cultural fiber of farming communities until the 1930s, when the increased availability of cars allowed families to travel to urban areas for entertainment instead of waiting for the week when it came to their hometowns. Radio, movies, and later television brought political leaders and other prominent speakers into homes both within cities and farms across Indiana, making Chautauquas increasingly irrelevant and harder to financially support throughout the Great Depression of the 1930s. However, a few independent Chautauquas, including Indiana's Fountain City event, survived and continue to offer educational forums and other arts programming each summer.

### *Theaters*

Even if Hoosiers decided not to explore and enjoy the great outdoors during their leisure time, hometown theaters allowed citizens to use their free-time to escape the realities of city life in a comfortable, indoor setting. Beginning in the last decades of the nineteenth century, opera houses and theaters became community institutions, offering live plays, musical acts, and vaudeville shows by local performers as well as traveling troupes and national acts year-round and close to home. Smaller towns assuming the role of railroad or waterway transportation hubs and hosting numerous out-of-town visitors immediately embraced venues capable of evening entertainment. Buildings dedicated to the arts were constructed by private organizations or towns themselves and became community centers used to host a variety of civic meetings and events. Winamac's Vurpillat's Opera House (Pulaski County), built in 1883, welcomed opera productions on its third floor while the lower two stories housed doctors, dentist, photographers, and some county officials and hosted embroidery club meetings, church groups, and high school commencements. Melodeon Hall, designed to house live performances in Rushville (Rush County), opened its doors in 1872 and welcomed national performers like James Whitcomb Riley and Shakespearean actor Walter Whitesides as well as the Riley Opera Company and annual performances of "Uncle Tom's Cabin," a local favorite.

With the introduction of silent movies and later talking pictures during the early twentieth century, theaters showing the newest movies eclipsed opera houses as social hot-spots. Although some opera houses and performance theaters were converted to movie houses, many more theaters were constructed strictly for showing films and included notable architectural features. Large, elaborate entrances and neon signs beckoned the general public to come off the street and see a film. Exotic architecture using elements of Spanish Revival style and Oriental and Mediterranean design elements transported audiences to far-off locales and echoed the excitement associated with movies. Atmospheric

theaters, such as the Paramount in Anderson (Madison County), took the experience to another level, as stars twinkled and machines projected clouds onto the ceiling to create a convincing night sky. Danville's Royal Theater (Hendricks County), a two-story Tutor Revival building,



The Paramount, once an atmospheric theater, still stands in Anderson, Indiana and is now used as an event center.

theaters, such as the Paramount in Anderson (Madison County), took the experience to another level, as stars twinkled and machines projected clouds onto the ceiling to create a convincing night sky. Danville's Royal Theater (Hendricks County), a two-story Tutor Revival building,

conveyed the opulence and grandeur of Tutor England through rich, red velour draperies, staggered seating for 600, and a five-horsepower organ adding musical accompaniment to feature silent films.

Grand theaters lost their audience after television offered the wonders of motion pictures in the comforts of one's home. Some fell into disrepair and were destroyed during the twentieth century to make room for megaplexes, malls, or parking garages. Others were renovated to house modern technology and still show movies today. Some that were spared the wrecking ball have evolved into cultural and community centers, bringing together residents to enjoy the arts over a century after they were constructed. The Department of Historic Preservation and Archaeology is currently working on a Historic Theaters Survey with the hopes of documenting all of Indiana's past movie houses to help with their preservation and highlight their importance within communities.

### *Other Hot Spots*

Since many of organized groups and institutions perpetuated segregation, Gary (Lake County), which was considered a significant northwest Indiana African-American settlement, became the home of a strong, yet separate, Black culture. Pool halls and soda parlors became the



center of the city's social life, with restaurants like Louisiana May's Kitchen and Kelly's Club Derby becoming incredibly popular during the 1920s and 1930s. These establishments, as well as churches and social organizations help individual's gain a sense of identity during troubled times. Indianapolis's Indiana Avenue (Marion County), a main street dissecting downtown, became the hub of African-American social life in central Indiana. Sometimes compared to Harlem, the active New York neighborhood and center of African-American arts and culture, Indiana Avenue boasted Black-owned businesses offering food, housing, and consumer services otherwise denied to African Americans through *de facto* segregation. Jazz clubs along the street, such as the Cotton Club, the Sunset Terrace, the Missile Room, and the Red Keg, drew in Whites and Blacks alike to

The Indiana Avenue Historical Marker now stands at the corner of Indiana Ave. and West St. in downtown Indianapolis.

enjoy well-known acts including Freddie Hubbard, Wes Montgomery, J.J. Johnson, alongside talented local musicians throughout the 1940s and 1950s. During the 1970s Indiana Avenue lost some of its vibrancy as businesses moved out and the jazz clubs shut their doors. The Golden Age of the street is

not forgotten by any means, as many who enjoyed their nights out on the Avenue still talk about the performances and events that graced the street and an Indiana Historical Bureau commemorates the site's history.

Many aspects of Indiana life have changed over the last century or so, but sources of entertainment have remained remarkably consistent, with today's Hoosiers enjoying scores of activities enjoyed by their great-grandparents. The Progressive Era's preoccupation with physical activity, outdoor recreations, and incorporating new technology into leisure time can still be seen today whenever school children take advantage of a neighborhood playground, a family day-trips to one of Indiana's state parks, or business partners shoot a few rounds of golf on a local course.