

Time Tracs

—By—

Jim Ingram

(Second in a series on Park Island)

In 1911, the Lake Orion Summer Homes Company, with John Winter as its head, purchased the bankrupt LO Power and Improvement Association and Park Island was inaugurated as an amusement center.

As Bill O'Brien remarked, "Park Island would be similar to Cedar Point of today."

By the late teens Bellevue Island and Park Island had taken on very different identities. Bellevue was the heart of the chautauqua of religion and the arts and Park Island was for fun, frolic and light entertainment.

Several years ago I made a copy (thanks to Jim Bushman who has the original) of an advertising flyer about Park Island, probably published about 1915. It provides a good overview of the island's various entertainments.

The flyer exulted, "Our amusement park comprises 15 acres packed with every desirable amusement including "the thriller," a sensational ride of surprises -- largest water toboggan in the state -- dancing pavilion with 5,000 square feet of floor space with Logan's Lansing Orchestra in Dance Features, unique -- roller skating -- excellent bathing -- new \$12,000 carousel."

The flyer also said there was an athletic park adjoining the amusement park with an area of 20 acres with a fine race track and baseball grounds. It would have to have been on the mainland.

The \$12,000 carousel must have been quite elaborate as that was a considerable sum those days.

Marie Shoup describes the carousel in very loving terms for as she says, "I love carousels and if I were rich my house would be full of honest-to-goodness merry-go-rounds."

The carousel on Park Island, according to Marie had very beautiful horses, some of which moved up and down and others fixed. On the outside were carriages in which people could ride. It also had benches where the less adventurous could sit.

Barbara Wilson Benetti from Wilson's Point on Bellevue Island in her column "That was the lake that was" which appeared in the Review in 1966 describes the carousel:

"The merry-go-round was a nickel, but we got to ride for five minutes or so. If you were brave enough and had long enough arms and a little luck, you could catch the brass ring that hung tantalizingly close and then you got another five minutes."

Helen Fuller Gorlich tells of going from the family cottage "Waconda Cottage" on Heights Road to the village for groceries. She and her siblings and their dog Jack would take a shortcut across Park Island using the foot bridge and the auto bridge. Jack would not leave the island until he had a ride on the carousel, sitting on the bench.