

Time Tracs

By Jim Ingram

Second in a series on Park Island

The roller-coaster "the thriller" was one of the main attractions on Park Island. It was located at the southwest corner of the island and towered above the trees adjacent to it. Much of it ran along the lake shore.

Barbara Benetti remembers, "the sound of it, as native to a summer evening as the wheeze of the merry-go-round or the brisk dance music that floated across the lake, when the cars hit the long drops, the metallic rattle of the acceleration carried across the water quite plainly, like a keg of nails being poured down a brick chute; and along with it came the high-pitched screams of the girls.

"These came out as one sound -- a long 'R-r-r' as the car fell and simultaneously a high 'E-e-e' trailing out behind like a ribbon."

Marie Shoup tells me her husband William's father Jess Shoup was the head carpenter who helped to build the roller-coaster and then had charge of its operation for many years. In the early spring Jess Shoup would inspect all buildings and equipment on the island and make needed repairs.

Marie said he would inspect the roller-coaster especially, inch by inch. It evidently paid off as in all the years of operation, Marie reports they had no serious accidents.

Dancing has always been one of Park Island's features since the first dance hall was built in 1874. I have a picture of the dance pavilion in 1910.

It was a very ordinary looking building on top of a slight rise on the island. According to Marie, there was a food concession on the first level of the pavilion.

Later, probably in the teens, a large much more elaborate dance pavilion was constructed and attracted major bands of the day.

Helen Goerlich recalls her brother had a summer job driving one of the launches on the lake. It seems one launch had to stay until the dance



The dance pavilion burned in 1936.

pavilion closed to drive the last of the dancers to their destinations around the lake.

As Helen's brother Bob was approaching Squaw Island in the middle of the lake, he fell asleep and drove the launch aground on the island. This added some further excitement to the evening.

On the Fourth of July weekend in 1936, the dance pavilion burned to the ground in the afternoon. Bill O'Brien says that it burned so fast the band didn't even get their instruments out.

It was said the fire was so hot that the pennies in the basement slot machines melted and ran out in little streams onto the ground. The pavilion was rebuilt and it continued to attract major bands into the 1940s.