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The [amusement] park was not founded for the culture of decorum;
it was founded for the culture of wild hilarity,
in which mission it brilliantly and gloriously succeeds.

—Rollin Lynde Hartt, *Atlantic Monthly*, May 1907

Take a Heart-Stopping Thrill Ride through Chicagoland's Amusement Park History

ELMHURST, Ill. – For most kids who grew up in the Chicago area in the mid to late 20th century, there was one ritual like no other that was the most-anticipated event of the summer: a trip to a local amusement park. The sights and sounds—all neon lights and screeching wheels on metal—filled the senses with awe, anticipation, and a dash of fear as park visitors stepped up to the ticket booth for that essential roll of paper stubs that was a passport to fun and adventure.

Whether it was a pilgrimage to Riverview, the mother of all Chicago parks on the north side of the city, for a daring drop on the Pair-O-Chutes, or a trip to a more family-focused suburban park like Kiddieland or Santa's Village—the thrills and chills experienced were a memorable part of growing up. A warm summer night spent at an amusement park was like an instant vacation.

But where did Chicago-area amusement parks begin, and who created all those zany rides, roller coasters, and side shows to entertain the masses? The Elmhurst History Museum sheds

light on the subject in a new exhibit, **“Worlds of Wonder: Remembering Chicagoland’s Amusement Parks”** which is open from May 17 through August 18, 2019. The exhibit takes visitors on a whirlwind ride that recalls many of the area’s favorite destinations for thrills and excitement—from the rotations of the first Ferris Wheel at the 1893 World’s Columbian Exhibition to the ups-and-downs of The Bobs at Riverview. The exhibit is sponsored by Classic Cinemas/York Theatre, Suburban Bank & Trust, and The Marke of Elmhurst by Opus.

Exhibit Themes and Interactives

“Worlds of Wonder” celebrates the early Chicago trolley parks as well as more modern suburban attractions. Visitors will learn about the signature rides and iconic venues that evolved over the years through rare photos, video, memorabilia, amusement park artifacts, and hands-on interactives. Museum patrons will enter the exhibit through an authentic turnstile and experience various themed sections exploring topics such as: the influence of the 1893 World’s Columbian Exposition and the first Ferris wheel, early 1900s parks, a history of carousels, and the evolution of various types of rides from roller coasters to chutes. Four popular amusement parks will be highlighted including Kiddieland, Dispensa’s Kiddie Kingdom, Riverview, and Santa’s Village.

The exhibit will have inter-generational appeal for kids of all ages with many interactive displays including:

- A full-size Skee-Ball game;
- A station where patrons can design their own marble run to simulate the physics of roller coasters;
- Video footage of amusement parks from the past;
- A virtual roller coaster experience where users have a view from the front car of coasters from various parks.

Amusement Park Artifacts

The Elmhurst History Museum reached out to amusement park owners and former employees as well as collectors to curate the exhibit, and an eclectic array of three-dimensional items will be on display:

- A huge, colorful canvas mural painted by Snap Wyatt, a prolific painter of circus banners in the 1940s and ‘50s, that touts Riverview’s Freak Show attraction;
- The inner workings of an original North Pole sign from Santa’s Village;
- Tickets, advertisements, signs, and tokens from various parks;

- Objects from the World's Columbian Exposition from the Elmhurst History Museum's collection.

Upcoming Exhibit-Related Programs

Roller coasters and amusement park themes are taking over the Elmhurst History Museum's calendar this summer with an interesting mix of lectures and family-friendly programs and special events on the schedule:

Sunday, June 2: *When the World Came to Chicago: The 1893 Columbian Exposition*, 2 p.m., Education Center, FREE to Members/\$5 Non-Members.

The World's Columbian Exposition is often credited with putting Chicago on the map, and citizens have long been fascinated with the spectacle of this amazing fair that welcomed more than 27 million visitors. Al Walavich, a lifelong Chicagoan, architectural tour guide, local historian, and collector will share stories about the planning, construction, and celebration of the fair along with his personal collection of photos and memorabilia. Registration required at elmhursthistory.org (Adult Programs section).

Monday, June 17: Museum Maker Monday, 1-4 p.m., FREE

Families can join in celebrating the 135th anniversary of the opening of the first roller coaster at Coney Island with a drop-in activity for kids and caregivers on a traditionally-closed day. Kids can explore the museum, and make a roller-coaster themed craft while supplies last (outdoors, weather permitting). Appropriate for elementary age children with an adult, no registration required.

Friday, July 12: *Family Fun Fair*, 5-8 p.m. FREE

Elmhurst History Museum is bringing back the old-school amusement park experience with a fun family-friendly evening on the museum grounds. Kids can ride a trackless train, play carnival games, ride a mini-Ferris wheel, take aim at the dunk tank, make a roller coaster-themed craft, and test out marble roller coaster runs. Live music provided by School of Rock and ice cream for sale by Kilwin's. The exhibit will be open for viewing during this event.

Thursday, July 18: *Lost Amusement Parks of Chicagoland*, Education Center, 3 p.m., FREE

Whether a favorite summer memory was riding The Bobs and Pair-O-Chutes at Riverview or the Little Dipper at Kiddieland, iconic Chicagoland amusement parks wind their way through our

childhoods. Join Craig Burda, Director of the National Amusement Park Historical Association; archivist Jim Abbate; and photographer Bruce Cassi as they share slides and stories from several Chicagoland parks of yesteryear. Registration required at elmhursthistory.org (Adult Programs section).

Sunday, August 11: *Gallery Talk with Curator Dan Bartlett*, 2 p.m., FREE

Museums learn much more during the research for an exhibit than can ever fit into the gallery. Join curator of exhibits, Dan Bartlett, as he shares details about some of Chicago's earliest "Worlds of Wonder" venues, their iconic rides, and their places in the lives of Chicagoland residents. Drop in program in the first floor gallery, no registration required.

More program information can be found on the Elmhurst History Museum's web site at www.elmhursthistory.org in the programs section or call 630-833-1457.

Be sure to put "Worlds of Wonder: Remembering Chicagoland's Amusement Parks" on the list of must-see things to do this summer. The exhibit runs through August 17, 2019. The Elmhurst History Museum is located at 120 E. Park Ave. in downtown Elmhurst. Exhibition hours are Sunday and Tuesday through Friday from 1 to 5 p.m., and Saturday from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. General admission is free, and limited free parking is available. For the latest exhibit and program information, please visit www.elmhursthistory.org or call (630) 833-1457.

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The Elmhurst History Museum is a department of the City of Elmhurst supported by the Elmhurst Heritage Foundation, a 501c3 non-profit organization. The Museum is located at 120 E. Park Ave. in downtown Elmhurst. General admission is free. For more information, call 630-833-1457 or visit our web site at www.elmhursthistory.org.

CAPTION: Kiddieland photo by Jeremy Thompson/Creative Commons