The American Amusement Park: Its Inspiration and Evolution

Marilyn Liebrenz-Himes, The George Washington University, USA

The American amusement park is an institution familiar to virtually everyone living in the United States today. Some of the older generation members remember the heyday of the traditional amusement parks back in the first two decades of the 1900s. Today’s youth thinks of Disneyland, Disneyworld, Universal Parks, with a host of others, and consider amusement parks and theme parks to be one and the same. However, the initial growth of amusement parks in America, their ongoing transitions amid the events affecting the United States as well as the rest of the world, and their current transformation into today’s theme parks and regional entertainment centers is a lively yet convoluted story. This paper provides a glimpse behind the scenes into the history of amusement parks, starting with their inspiration traced back to the Middle Ages. It briefly describes the amusement parks at the start of the 1900s as well as exploring their downturns and the forces causing the demise of many of these parks. It then looks at the resurgence of the parks, greatly attributed to Disney’s inspiration and marketing insight, concluding with a look at the themed parks of today.

The history of amusement parks in America reflects the development of marketing over the past century. Marketing, as it has evolved, has been said to have three major eras or orientations: the product or production stage where the focus is upon producing sufficient products to meet demand; the sales or selling stage where satiated consumers are urged to buy through one means or another; and, finally, the marketing stage, as we know it today with the paramount focus upon the needs and wants of the consumer. The history of the amusement parks of America, many of which have branched out today as theme parks, reflects these three stages of marketing’s development. Although many of these parks have roots that go deep, dating back to medieval times, most of today’s parks are uniquely American. The following paper, with its depiction of the evolution of amusement parks over the past century, provides an intriguing example of marketing’s transition, as well as a peek into some of the forces which encouraged the amusement park transition from one stage to another.

What exactly IS an amusement park? The term, ‘amusement’ basically refers to the “many activities that entertain people or provide recreation for them” (World Book Encyclopedia). That fits, because most of these parks over the decades have both entertained and provided recreation. One dictionary definition of an amusement park is “a commercially operated enterprise that supplies refreshments and various forms of entertainment” (Morris, 45). Definitions vary here, however, as another dictionary describes such a park as “a place with such recreational devices as a Ferris wheel, or roller coaster” (Reed, 3). Over the past few years, two other definitions have come to be used; amusement centers and attractions. An amusement center is said to be a park providing a variety of interesting activities, usually revolving around a theme, such as a historical site which incorporates historical facts, artifacts, and other depictions, and well as possible games or electronic displays. An attraction is a place which offers something of interest (again, this could be a historical site), but does not provide any rides such as found in today’s major amusement parks. A more current definition of an amusement park is; “a commercially operated park offering various forms of entertainment, such as arcade games, carousels, roller coasters, and performers as well as food, drink and souvenirs” (The Expanded Columbia Electronic Encyclopedia) illustrates the difference between today’s parks and those of the past. The difference in the definitions is due, in part, to the reincarnation of amusement parks over the past century or more. While earlier parks were far simpler in their offerings, the amusement parks of today represent planned rides and games, most of which are technologically advanced, yet carefully controlled for both safety and profit reasons. The following description provides a review of the earlier offerings and activities which laid the foundation for today’s amusement parks.

Trade Fairs

The history of amusement parks begins far earlier than the age of the United States. Historian Judith Adams found “integral elements of the American amusement parks existing in medieval church-sponsored trade fairs” (Adams, 1-3). An example of such commercial fairs dating back to 1133 A.D. was the English 10-day trade fair, which traditionally started on August 24, Saint Bartholomew’s Day. Trade and business may have initially brought people to this Fair, but the entertainers, food and free-spirited atmosphere, kept them there. Adams pointed out that as the

257
length of such fairs grew to three weeks or more, additional
entertainment was added to the fair, and admission prices
began to be charged or increased, as well as prices added
for special offerings within the fair. Adams also noted that
these fairs continued to evolve throughout the centuries, but
the emphasis moved away from the business side and
toward the entertaining area, often accompanied,
unfortunately, by a criminal element as well. Thus, these
fairs grew increasingly "tawdry." One result was that the
last official Bartholomew Fair was held in 1855, with a
general decline in other trade fairs, although some trade fair
gatherings still continue to the present day. Regardless of
the changes and improvements over the years, however, the
'tawdry taint' seems to have clung to fairs and amusement
parks through the ages. Despite the years, and the
differences in the types of amusements provided; the
somewhat tarnished image, and the underlying concern
about criminal involvement has remained a threat and a
concern of most amusement parks to the present day
(Adams, 3).

Regardless, the early European fairs left their mark on
America. Having attended the trade fairs in Europe, the
colonists brought over the idea of such gatherings when
they came to America. By the late 1700s, colonial fairs in
America were in full swing, providing opportunities for
people to come together, show off their agricultural
products, livestock and riding skills, and engage in a variety
of other sports (Steiner, 3-6).

European Pleasure Gardens and Parks

As trade fair form of entertainment was fading in
Europe, another entertainment form was starting to expand.
Described as "pleasure gardens, or parks" these parks were
thought to have originated as gardens, some connected to
taverns and inns, although the need for them apparently
increased as the factories of the industrial revolution
polluted much of the surrounding land and communities
(Adams, 4). Unlike the trade or local fairs, which were
only held for brief periods of time, these gardens were often
accessible year-round. However, like the fairs, developers
began adding to the initial offerings in hopes of bring in
more customers. They enhanced the natural gardens with
artificial lights, as well as providing stages for theater and
musical performances. Apparently, only one of these parks
now remains. This is Bakken Park, located north of
Copenhagen. It opened in 1583, and "now enjoys the status
of the world's oldest operating amusement park (http://themeparks.about.com). Entertainment was provided
in many forms, and by the late 1700's, fireworks were
common. One garden park, located near London, was called
Jenny's Whim and was known for its mechanical monsters,
including huge fish and mermaids, which rose out of an
artificial lake.

These developing garden areas were among the
forerunners of today's amusement parks. Despite the
prevalence of the pleasure gardens throughout Europe, each
country appears to have had its own version. In France, the
gardens developed around flowerbeds and landscaped
lawns. In England, the gardens were located around inns
and taverns, providing a source for fresh vegetables and
herbs as well as places to walk or dine. The Vauxhall
Gardens, located near London, were built in 1661 and were
the first pleasure garden to be visited by others from the
European Continent (Beck, 2). Vauxhall's prime years
appeared to be generally from 1727 to 1821, when up to
60,000 lamps illuminated the evening walkways. Although
the Vauxhall Gardens continued to be open until 1859, they
became increasingly rundown until the Garden's closure.

The Prater Park in Austria was created when Joseph II
opened his hunting grounds to the people in 1766. Located
in Vienna, Joseph had the park landscaped, and allowed
booths and tents to be erected for food and entertainment.
Thus, the Prater was another one of the developed garden
parks appearing in the late 1700s. It included more than
2,000 acres of woods and entertainment areas, as well as
rides. These rides included carousels (hand-driven), and
another ride, which was a forerunner of today's Ferris
wheel. Indeed, a proper 200-foot high Ferris wheel was
installed in The Prater, but not until 1896. The Prater was
selected as the site of the 1873 World's Fair, and it is said
that this decision started the relationship between such
parks and World Fair sites (Onosko, 10). The Prater was
the source of more than one innovation or mechanical
wonder. The railroad train, now primarily a source of
transportation, was initially introduced as a ride at the
Prater in 1823 (Adams, 8).

Expositions

Expositions in the late 1800s appeared to be the
American adaptation of the old European Fair, but on a
much grander scale. It has been estimated that 100 million
people viewed the exhibits located in the twelve
International Expositions or Fairs held in America between
1876 in Philadelphia and San Diego in 1915-1916 (Rydell, x).
Despite the preceding Expositions, however, the
Chicago Fair, called the Columbian Exposition of 1893, has
been said to be the start of this new wave of Expositions.
Three elements of this 1893 'White City' Exposition, were
identified in this Fair that have appeared to affect American
amusement parks ever since; 'unity, magnitude, and
illusion.' (Schuyler, 292-301). The blend of these three
factors has remained the formula for success of modern
amusement enterprises. In the 1893 Exposition, Unity was
found in the coordinated sanitation and protective facilities
planned for the Exposition, including pure drinking water.
Magnitude was certainly evident in this Exposition, as it
eventually sported the highest Ferris wheel in the world
(264 feet) at that point. This Ferris wheel, with its 250-foot
diameter, could carry 2000 passengers, in 36 train-like cars.
Each car, it is said, even had its own telephone, so the
conductor could contact the ground if a problem arose.
The Romance of Marketing History

The Columbian Exposition has also been said to be the source of “The Midway.” This term was used to refer to the “rowdy ‘entertainment’ concessions” located on an outlying strip. The Exposition planners had identified a strip of land about halfway between the formal exposition and a nearby park, hence the name ‘midway.’ The challenge was to create an area of interest that would appeal to customers yet would also not cast a negative image over the rest of the exposition. A young entrepreneur, Sol Bloom, was hired to take charge of this midway strip, and, under his direction, “an exotic hodgepodge of reproductions of villages from around the world came into existence.” It turned out to be a great success, and this approach to the village reproduction concept “would become a staple entertainment venture that masqueraded amusement with ‘educational’ pretense” (Adams, 27). Bloom’s village reproduction scenery has been attributed as one of the key sources of inspiration for Disney’s amusement park creations, decades later. Amusement parks certainly owe (d) a debt of inspiration to Bloom for this midway concept, which became the planning foundation of such contemporary parks as Anheuser-Busch’s Dark Continent, and... even EPCOT Center” (Adams, 29). This Midway concept was said to be the inspiration for amusement park design for the next sixty years or more. It is known that Paul Boynton incorporated the midway concept into his 1894 Water Chutes Park, located on Chicago’s South Side. This park even charged admission (the trolley parks had been free, since their purpose was to encourage riders to buy tickets for the trolleys). Boynton’s park used the rides as its main attraction, not picnic sites or water as prior parks had done. Boynton’s Water Chutes Park with its midway attractions area was a great success, and Boynton went on to Coney Island in 1885 where he opened a similar facility (http://themeparks.about.com).

Gardens and Trolley Parks

In the United States, garden development and cultivation began as a necessity for food and survival among the early colonists and pioneers. However, by 1790, even college students were advised to turn to “garden cultivation or other manual labors for their hours of leisure and intermissions from study,” including suitable diversions among agricultural and mechanical employments” (Steiner, 4). Gardens or more specifically, parks grew in importance during the 1800s, especially as sports took on additional popularity and importance. It is beneficial to consider a distinction between a garden and a park here. The prior section has discussed the pleasure gardens found in Europe. While the ‘pleasure gardens’ in Europe were places for relaxation and entertainment, this term was not commonly used in the United States. It seems that the use of the term, garden, has a somewhat different connotation in the United States compared to the European usage. It appears that Americans used the term, garden, to refer to the areas used for more utilitarian food growing purposes, and used the term, ‘park’ to identify areas used for rest or recreation.

The Production Era’s Impact in Amusement Parks

The early inspiration for today’s amusement parks in America came from several sources. The trade fair held in Europe, dating back several centuries, was an activity brought to the United States by its early immigrants. It was the entertainment part of these trade fairs, particularly, that is seen as one of the inspirations for today’s parks. The pleasure gardens found in Europe again inspired their American counterparts through their entertainment and recreational areas. The Americans tended to call such areas ‘parks’ more than gardens, but the concept was similar—a place to rest, play, socialize, and be entertained. The Expositions or World Fairs that were periodically created in different cities not only had a sense of educational display but also inspired the development of a midway area, designed for entertainment more than education. These early midways also used a number of fantasy-type buildings or re-enactments of international villages, seen as an inspiration for many of today’s fantasy style parks.

All of these early activities appear to have been created or organized in response to consumer demands or desires. The early trade fairs served several consumer purposes. Trade exchanges were the original reason for such fairs, but the information exchanges may have been more valuable in the long run than even the sales which were accomplished. The expositions provided extensive information as well as entertainment. Overall, these activities provided individuals with products and information, just as the earliest stage of marketing provided consumers with the desired products and services. Companies and consumers both appeared comfortable with the arrangements, and happy with the benefits. The production orientation appeared to have satisfied the consumers, who were apparently seeking rest and recreation. However, as time continued to go by, and new inventions kept appearing, consumer desires also became different. Consumer needs may not have radically altered, since rest and recreation was still the goal, but the means of accomplishing this need changed drastically.

The Production Era’s Impact in Amusement Parks

The early inspiration for today’s amusement parks in America came from several sources. The trade fair held in Europe, dating back several centuries, was an activity brought to the United States by its early immigrants. It was the entertainment part of these trade fairs, particularly, that is seen as one of the inspirations for today’s parks. The pleasure gardens found in Europe again inspired their American counterparts through their entertainment and recreational areas. The Americans tended to call such areas ‘parks’ more than gardens, but the concept was similar—a place to rest, play, socialize, and be entertained. The Expositions or World Fairs that were periodically created in different cities not only had a sense of educational display but also inspired the development of a midway area, designed for entertainment more than education. These early midways also used a number of fantasy-type buildings or re-enactments of international villages, seen as an inspiration for many of today’s fantasy style parks.

All of these early activities appear to have been created or organized in response to consumer demands or desires. The early trade fairs served several consumer purposes. Trade exchanges were the original reason for such fairs, but the information exchanges may have been more valuable in the long run than even the sales which were accomplished. The expositions provided extensive information as well as entertainment. Overall, these activities provided individuals with products and information, just as the earliest stage of marketing provided consumers with the desired products and services. Companies and consumers both appeared comfortable with the arrangements, and happy with the benefits. The production orientation appeared to have satisfied the consumers, who were apparently seeking rest and recreation. However, as time continued to go by, and new inventions kept appearing, consumer desires also became different. Consumer needs may not have radically altered, since rest and recreation was still the goal, but the means of accomplishing this need changed drastically.
amusement parks also had gambling or quasi-gambling devices (Steiner, 116).

As America approached the nineteenth century, some changes became evident. While there had been a strong Puritan ethic against idleness in the past, this began to fade. By the start of the 1800s or so, it was found that the strict puritanical life style begun by the Pilgrims was gradually relaxing, and that “prejudice against idle leisure time was on the wane...once these inhibitions were shed, fun and recreation sites abounded...wherever trolley lines extended” (Goldstack, 1). The trolley companies established ‘trolley parks’ at the ends of their lines to attract weekend travelers. These parks were usually restful spots near rivers, lakes or seashores. At the seashores, to provide additional services for these travelers, large hotels and bathhouses were built along coastline bathing beaches, and a variety of different types of amusement enterprises began to be provided as well. The first real ride made it to a beach area in 1877, when the 300 foot tall observatory from the Philadelphia Centennial Exposition was moved to Coney Island and renamed The Iron Tower (O’Brien, xii).

It has been said that, “the companies that built the trolley lines were directly responsible for the establishment of the amusement park as an American institution” (Adams, 57). Basically, it came down to money. Trolley lines ran on electricity, and these trolley companies were usually charged a monthly flat rate. Weekday business traffic was fine, but weekends needed some additional travelers. Transit companies wanted destinations at the end of the trolley lines that would attract weekend customers, and so encouraged the development of trolley or pleasure parks for leisure enjoyment. As noted earlier, by 1919, there was at least one such trolley park near every major city, creating between 1,500 and 2,000 amusement parks in the United States (Adams, 57). There was no fee to enter the trolley park, although people had to pay for any refreshments or rides. Trolley companies were anxious to encourage as many riders as possible because their profits came from the transportation tickets. The trolley parks at the end of the lines were just enticements to encourage more riders.

The American amusement park, as we know it today, was an outgrowth of a maze of leisure time options. Growing out of the roots of the trade fairs and expositions, the early amusement parks provided exhibits for viewing. However, other roots dating back to the earlier pleasure gardens provided these amusement parks with areas of formalized food and entertainment, as well as areas for picnics and resting. It was said that many of these parks combined nature, history, education, art, and amusements. Most of these parks had different rides, penny arcades, shooting galleries, ballrooms for dancing, and rinks for skating. Along with their sideshows, many of these amusement parks also had gambling or quasi-gambling devices (Steiner, 116). Many of these early parks were actually picnic groves, often with some food concessions, small zoos, boat rentals, and perhaps a carousel. Once established, more amenities were often added, including dance halls, theaters, roller coasters, carnival-type games, casinos, circus acts, and fireworks (Goldstack, 1-5). One source maintains that the first American amusement park was Jones’ Wood, which opened in the early 1800s in New York City along the East River around 70th Street (Beck, 3).

At least one amusement park in America did start out as a garden, a vegetable garden. Elitch’s Gardens in Denver, Colorado began as a vegetable garden for John Elitch’s restaurant. John’s wife, Mary, who loved gardening, kept enhancing their garden with flowers and landscapes until it attracted many visitors. Mary Elitch also loved animals, and had started adding animals to their garden area. P. T Barnum, who wintered some of the circus animals in near Denver, even took to giving Mary some of his excess circus animals (Hunt, 5). In 1890, the Elitch’s had enlarged the garden, added some birds and animals, enclosed the area, and opened it as a public park. By 1892, the Elitch Theater had been added, along with a formal zoo, additional flowers, and, eventually, a stock company. Finally, in 1916, amusement rides and devices were added, as well as recreational centers (Mangels, p. 26). Pretty soon, it was said, “Not to see Elitch’s is not to see Denver” (Hunt, Epilogue).

Another example of how selected amusement parks might have been goes back to the Chautauqua movement. The Chautauqua was a form of education and entertainment was to be found in the Northeast area of the United States. The Chautauqua movement was an educational and religious movement that began in upstate New York. A Methodist minister established a cultural retreat in western New York State in 1874. Although this retreat was originally intended to be a summer school for Sunday-school teachers, it became a resort “offering extensive programs to individuals and families alike in self improvement and education through classes, lectures, art shows, and concerts, open to everyone. (It is said that the Chautauqua movement has been one of the country’s chief venues for bringing culture to the American middle class during the late 19th and early 20th centuries)” (Rebori, 1993, 29). In 1883, the Baltzley brothers developed a twenty-acre settlement about twelve miles from Washington, DC, intending it to be a national Chautauqua settlement. Despite a magnificent building and the installation of the most magnificent organ in America, this settlement failed. In 1889, the property was acquired by a street railway company as a summer resort and the main building was converted into a fun house, able to seat 15,000. In 1911, the Glen Echo Park Company was organized, and took over the area, creating one of the most successful amusement parks in the country (Mangels, 21).

Examples of Trolley Parks

Trolley parks sprang up across the United States during the latter part of the 1800s, and several examples are included here. Some park locations stood out vividly. Coney Island was one of these locations. Coney Island
already a popular beach resort, complete with buried treasure, no less, but the creation of the amusement parks helped to make it a favorite destination for many years. Hershey Park was also well-known, but more for its chocolate factory than purely for its amusement park. Olympic Park and Riverview were known with local circles, but did not have the national publicity of some other parks. Brief descriptions of these parks are provided here, to enhance the flavor of this period in amusement park development.

Coney Island—an Amusement Park Heaven

Coney Island, from the 1890s to the mid-1950s, has been described as ‘the first ‘embodiment’ of the American amusement park tradition’ (Adams, 41). (Note: the designation, ‘America’s oldest amusement park,’ however, has been given to the Lake Compounce Park, in Bristol, Connecticut, which was started in 1846, according to Goldstock, 25). While the expositions periodically taking place throughout the United States and abroad provided a somewhat cultural setting along with the entertainment and concessions, other places were organized without any pretense of culture or education. Coney Island’s success with amusement parks probably owed its initial popularity to its desirable beaches, and, over time, the diminishing size of bathing costumes of the bathers coming to those beaches. Coney Island literally started out as the site of buried treasure from a seafaring mutiny in 1830. When much of the treasure actually washed ashore by 1838, droves of individuals started coming to the island. Another shipwreck in 1877, of a load of pineapples, symbol of hospitality, seemed to portend an unusual future for the island (McCullough, 13-16).

The island was a popular site for bathing and picnics during most of the 1800s, although by 1870, many areas on the island were already gaining a somewhat tawdry reputation. However, the beaches encouraged hotels to be built, with larger and larger ones taking shape. The competition among hotels eventually resulted even in the creation of a hotel shaped like an elephant around 1882. Unofficially, the elephant came to be known as the symbol of the American amusement park, based on this hotel (Beck, 8). As more people came to the island, more activities were sought to keep them occupied and entertained. Thus, different amusement parks sprang up on the Island. As a whole, however, Coney Island drew huge crowds. Over 20 million men, women and children came to Coney Island in 1909 alone. Adjusted for population increases, this is about 20 percent greater than the total number of visitors to Disney’s Anaheim and Orlando parks in 1989 (Nasaw, p.3).

Actually, Coney Island was not one amusement park as much as the destination. A number of different parks came to be located within the Coney Island area. The specific name of what is considered to be the first amusement park on Coney Island was called Sea Lion Park. Open from 1885 to 1902 when it was bought out by the developers of Luna Park, it is considered to be the first enclosed amusement park in the United States with an admission fee (Adams, 43). Prior to the creation of this enclosed amusement park, Coney Island had already been ‘discovered’ by trolley or railroad travelers heading out to the end of the line to go to the beach. These travelers would pay one fee for the trip, including the park at their destination. This “pay-one-price” ticket was designed to keep out the more undesirable individuals, but the desirability of the ‘one price for all attractions,’ model was adopted by a number of parks, and continues today for most amusement parks.

A park larger than Sea Lion Park on Coney Island was created by George Tilyou and opened in 1887. Called Steeplechase Park, its approach was to provide ‘sanitized sexual fantasies,’ where intimate but innocent contact occurred among the revelers (Adams, 50). Tilyou accomplished this through such rides as the Barrel Roll and the Insanitarium. Essentially it can be said that the patrons of the park actually became the entertainment in some areas, since many rides included viewing windows or openings so that everyone else could observe the gyrations of the hapless guests being subjected to a variety of somewhat embarrassing situations. This park also offered two rides seen as being forerunners of many of the mechanical rides popular today in amusement parks around the world. The first ride, called the Steeplechase ride, consisted of track-bound, gravity powered metal horses. The second ride, Shoot the Chutes, was the predecessor of the mill chutes and log flume rides found in almost every amusement park today. The creators of these rides, Elmer ‘Skip’ Dundy and Frederic Thompson even continued to advance the idea of mechanical rides at the 1901 Buffalo World’s Fair (Onosko, 12). Steeplechase Park was extremely popular, but over time, it became rundown and customers moved on to more attractive offerings.

Fire was a common threat for these parks, especially because their wooden construction provided extensive flammable materials. While fires were a constant threat, parks appeared to become more susceptible as they deteriorated and upkeep of the park facilities fell away. One example is another enclosed park called Dreamland. Opened on Coney Island in 1904, this park reflected more of the educational aspects such as had been used in the Columbian Exposition. Unfortunately, possible patrons were looking for fun, not education, and Dreamland’s popularity was never very high. Finally, this park burned to the ground in 1911. Additionally unfortunate, this same fire destroyed the Sawyer Observatory, a 300-foot tall observation tower with steam-powered elevators that had been moved to Coney Island from the 1876 Philadelphia Centennial Exposition. Its loss was symbolic as well as tangible. It had been said that “this ‘iron tower’ prompted a race to introduce new and more lavish mechanical amusements,” making Coney Island more than a day resort (Onosko, 10). In fact, this competitive race for new rides encouraged the
construction of the ‘Switchback’ ride on Coney Island in 1884, which is viewed today as the first antecedent to the modern roller coaster (Onosko, 11).

Another amusement park on Coney Island was Luna Park, created by Bundy and Thompson. Opened in 1903, this Park depicted a lush, lighted, swirling community representative of the ancient city of Baghdad, and was described as offering clean fun and unique entertainment. It has been speculated that Luna Park was one of the major inspirations for Disneyland’s rides and ambiance (Onosko, 13). Its rides were considered spectacular, particularly its ‘trip to the moon.’ This ride utilized a mini dirigible with a cabin able to hold 80 passengers. Released from its moorings, the ship would rise until passengers could only see the lights of Coney Island far below them (Dufour, 3). One of the more amazing exhibitions in Luna Park was an actual, operating, premature baby incubator facility. Not only could guests view the infants in their incubator beds, the money from admissions was, in part, used to support the facility, offering infant care to those unable to afford it otherwise.

Despite its community service, popularity, and such attractions as its splendid oriental architecture, Luna Park gradually deteriorated. It had burned once, in 1911, but had been rebuilt. Finally, however, it also burned to the ground in 1946.

**Olympic Park, New Jersey**

One of the ‘classiest resorts’ in America at one time was said to be Olympic Park, located outside Newark, New Jersey. Opened in 1904 by German immigrants, it was a model trolley park, with many concessions and rides. Although the park faced some up and down periods, including one in 1914 when its opera house burned down just at the start of the season, it remained a popular park through the Depression. Known for having the largest pool in the East, it also had dance halls, and roller rinks. The park lasted until 1965, when it closed its doors forever, although it remained empty and deserted until 1979 when a light industrial park was established on the site (Siegel, 167).

**Riverview Park, Chicago, Illinois**

A very similar history is reflected in the story of Riverview Park, outside Chicago. Opened in 1904 also by German immigrants, this park took on the distinction for that time of “The World’s Largest Amusement Park.” As with Olympic Park, it survived the Great Depression, in part because of its numerous rides. The financial flows of the war years were solid. The number one ride was The Bobs, Riverview’s gigantic roller coaster, which was considered by many to be faster and rougher than the coaster at Coney Island. Speculation on the closure of the Park in 1967 is interesting because no one cause has been identified, although everything from racial problems to stockholder profits has been mentioned (Wlodarczyk, 48).

**Hersheypark**

Not all parks established in the earliest years of the 1900s have now vanished. Hersheypark, founded in 1907 by M.S. Hershey, was created as a park for Hershey town. The town, in turn, had been created as a place for employees to live, while working for Hershey’s chocolate plant. From the first, both railroads and trolley cars carried passengers to the park, which was used for picnics, sports, and other activities. The connection between the chocolate factory and the park has remained, with each benefiting from the relationship. Hershey’s goal was to create a park that provided a place for his employees to enjoy themselves, so over the years, the improvements, the rides, even the ice cream, in the park, reflected Hershey’s goal as well as his business. The only time that the park virtually stagnated was from 1920 to 1922, when Hershey was in severe financial straits. Once the chocolate business was back on a solid footing, however, Hershey continued to develop the park. One interesting innovation was to create a new golf course next to the park. Hershey’s park manager, John Sollenberger, felt that while the men were golfing, the ‘golf widows and children would have the park to themselves’ (Jacques 1997, 57). Even the depression did not greatly affect Hershey Park, because chocolate sales and the economic state of the town continued to be strong. As well, in the 1940s, the popularity of dancing kept people coming to the park more than the rides, although Hershey continued to add new and more enticing rides, including The Comet—the best roller coaster in central Pennsylvania. Founder M.S. Hershey passed away during this decade, but his park managers, who had been operating the facility since the 1920s were still in control. As with other parks, the trolley lines, and railroads ceased to operate by the 1950s, but customers arrived via bus and automobile. However, as with most amusement parks in America, by the 1950s, the customers were moving on to other activities, away from the traditional amusement parks of the past (Jacques 1997, 90-93).

**Impact of the Sales Era in the Trolley Park Chronicle**

The sales orientation in marketing essentially describes the efforts of marketers to encourage consumers to acquire goods and services. While certain levels of sales efforts are usually essential to any marketing transaction because of the need for information and opportunity, efforts that go beyond these points are usually done to drive a consumer to a purchase. This is in contradiction to the approach of just providing information about the available offerings, then letting the consumers come to their own decisions. For the most part, the trolley or destination parks had vested interests in getting as many consumers as possible to visit their facilities. The trolley parks were primarily designed to
satisfy the needs of the trolley companies to increase their revenue, although the trolley parks also had to satisfy the desires of the trolley riders or no one would have wanted to visit these parks. Trolley companies certainly increased the number of such parks or playgrounds, being motivated by obtaining additional ridership for the electric trolleys since their electric bills were on a monthly basis. Some of the selected "end of the line" locations were selected for their natural setting, such as the seashore, but other locations needed more development to be a desirable destination.

Examples of the 'selling efforts' done by owners or operators of the destination parks were usually evident by the extreme measures taken at many of these parks. These extreme measures were visible on Coney Island, through the efforts of the various amusement parks to outdo the competition. Tilyou's Steeplechase Park, with its sexual overtones or Luna Park with its electric Bagdad architecture, 250,000 lights and premature babies brought out a strong element of sensationalism, as an attention grabbing mechanism to get and keep the consumers (Adams, 514). It appeared that the greatest result of this behavior was to train consumers to look for, and expect, even greater sensational stunts for future visits. As the park offerings faded, the consumers disappeared even faster. The selling orientation of the destination parks became even more frenetic, and even less effective as the Industrial Revolution took effect.

The Rise of the Industrial Revolution and the Demise of the Destination Park

By the early 1900s, the rise of the industrial revolution at first made the trolley parks even more desirable. As more of the work force moved from the agrarian countryside to the industrialized cities, workers sought to spend their increased leisure hours seeking respite from the factories. Looking for ways designed to heighten their entertainment and enjoyment; the amusement parks increased their rides and enjoyed a heightened increase in popularity. By 1919, it was estimated that there were at least 1500 such amusement parks in the United States. New England alone had almost 200 parks, alone, since 1890, although some of the parks had been developed by taking over the facilities or some portion of prior parks in the same areas. It was said that it was almost possible to ride from the East Coast to the West Coast on roller coasters (Siegel, p. 12).

Historian Jesse Steiner found that, by the 1930s, that a philosophical change had actually swept across the United States, underscoring the importance and desirability of recreation and leisure activities. This change encouraged people to obtain exercise or outside recreation, as a way of becoming refreshed and healthier. Sporting activities were encouraged. Cities and other governmental agencies undertook to create and maintain parks and other recreational areas for the use of their citizens. This was certainly an immense change from the early days of the Founding Fathers, who had generally viewed leisure time activities as wasteful, and often sinful (Steiner, 12-13).

The new public facilities included playgrounds for children, and other parks, at the local, county, state and even national levels. At the same time, the parks and other facilities for sports also increased, providing opportunities for different athletic games and contests. The result of this increased attention upon sporting events, however, both encouraged more individuals to participate, yet also created more demand for spectators who desired to watch other athletes. Thus, by the 1930s, commercialized athletic activities were competing with other types of offerings, such as moving pictures, theatrical performances, or arcade games. Nighttime entertainment options including commercial dance halls as well as cabarets, nightclubs and roadhouses continued to be popular. Finally, as automobile use increased, more nature-centered parks incorporated car parks and other amenities for the travelers by the mid 1950s. Many people now had numerous options open to them for their leisure time decisions. Some parks continued to be popular, but others started adding more amenities, such as different sporting areas, to continue to attract their customers. Overall, the increased competition, combined with the economic downturns of this period, made these years highly challenging.

If the trolley cars and, to some extent, railroad trains provided the mass transportation that brought consumers to the entertainment parks, the growing use of the automobile drew these same customers away from the same amusement centers. Starting about 1921, the automobile provided individuals the means for extended leisure travel. However, many of the trolley parks lacked adequate parking facilities, and customers went elsewhere. The Great Depression further inhibited customers from coming to these amusement parks, because of the general lack of money. Further, the more affluent residents moved to the suburbs of the cities, and did not want to share the use of these parks with the other less-well-off individuals who resided in the cities, and traveled out to the parks. By 1936, only about 500 parks were still in operation (Beck, 13). Finally, by the 1950s, television had been introduced. The customers who had previously been interested in traveling out of the cities for some entertainment now found it on their TV screens in their own homes. Further, other changes were taking place. The "whole industry was uncertain about how to deal with television, rock and roll, drive-in movies, one-parent families, a longer school year, and working mothers (Jacques 1997, 102).

The old trolley parks had been designed as family amusement centers, but family attendance slipped badly during the 1960s and 1970s, and teenagers emerged as the predominant customers (Goldstack, 5). Unfortunately, those years saw increased unrest in the United States, especially among young people, and the reputation of amusement parks continued to decline. Trolley companies sold their parks to private investors, but many of these investors merely ran the parks into the ground without proper repairs.
or upkeep. It looked like the end of the line for the American amusement parks. As these examples illustrate, even many of the most extensive ‘sales’ efforts on the part of the trolley parks could not get or keep the consumer if the consumer wanted to be elsewhere.

**Examples of Some Trolley Parks in Trouble**

**Bay Shore Park, Baltimore, MD**

The dilemmas facing so many amusement parks in the early to mid 1900s can be seen in the history of the following early amusement parks. Bay Shore Park, on the shores of the upper Chesapeake Bay, is just one example. Opened in 1906, it was the trolley park for inhabitants of Baltimore, Maryland. The park had its Crystal Pier overlooking its sandy beaches, as well as shooting galleries, a miniature train, and a bowling alley. It also had rides: a wooden rollercoaster called the Thingamajig, and a Whirl-A-Drome. It also had, at that time, the world’s largest carousel (Crensen, 1-6). However, by 1947, a steel company bought the park to use as land for a steel factory. The rides were sold off, the gates to the site padlocked, and the land remained deserted as factory plans changed. The land is still in limbo today (Crensen).

**Lakemont Park, PA**

Lakemont Park in Pennsylvania is a classic example of the impact of the external environment upon the early amusement parks. This Park actually began as a picnic area for the families of miners working nearby in the iron mines near Altoona in Blair County. When the Park was officially opened in 1894, there were still two mines located within the park itself. However, the Park actually started in 1892, when the electric trolley lines started bringing people to the grounds and the manmade lake (Pine, 15-16). The Park apparently was highly popular and attendance was high until the 1920s, when the automobile “allowed people to be independent of the trolley and soon they began to seek other amusement and recreation outside Blair County” (Pine, 16). Thereafter, the Park also suffered from the effects of the Great Depression in the late 1920s, and was almost destroyed by a flood in 1936 and other disastrous weather in the next decade or two. The Park even sold its carousel in 1982, trying to stay in business (Pine, 16). Unfortunately, the decline continued and Lakemont Park itself was sold at a bankruptcy auction to a developer in 1988. Unlike many developers who purchased such parks for other purposes, this developer has continued to operate it as an amusement park since that time. Some of the changes included encouraging visitors at that time through multiple pricing methods. Rides were given individual pricing, but a ‘ride-all-day’ ticket could also be purchased. Back in 1989, this ticket, including the waterslide, was priced at $7.95, with season passes available for $29.95, including the waterslide (Pine, 122).

**West View Park**

West View Park, outside of Pittsburgh, was one of the first amusement parks to have its rides built ‘on a production line basis.’ Its founder, T.M. Harton, had gotten his start by working on rides for different amusement parks, and had finally started his own ride production company by 1893. The company operated coasters and carousels in the Eastern United States, and by the early 1900s, the company had a worldwide reputation for amusement devices (Jacques 1885, 5). In 1905, Harton, a native of Pittsburgh, leased some land in the suburb of West View to create a ‘pleasure and amusement park,’ spending nearly a quarter of one million dollars on its construction (Jacques 1885, 4). The park was accessible by several trolley lines, although it was not technically a trolley park in that the owner was not connected with the transit company. The park enjoyed huge popularity through the 1910s and 1920s, despite the death of its founder and the impact of WW I. New rides were added to the park in the 1920s including the new Whippet roller coaster, as well as improvements to the buildings and expansion of the auto park. Dancing was popular and the dance pavilion featured different orchestras. One of the largest of the roller coasters at the park had been called The Dips, and this was remodeled ‘to break all speed records’ (Jacques 1885, 31).

The Depression in the early 1930s caused the park to lose money, but the T.M. Harton Company’s concessions at other parks were harder hit than West View Park’s operation. It was said that “dancing helped to keep West View Park afloat during the Great Depression,” and the park installed a new dance floor in 1937. Even World War II did not deter customers from coming to the park, although parts, labor, and new rides were difficult, if not impossible, to obtain. Through its motto, ‘Work then Play at West Park,’ the park kept going (Jacques 1885, 35-40). The park’s ‘golden age’ actually occurred after the end of WWII, from the mid 1940s through the mid 1960s. West View had established a kiddieland for the children of its customers in the 1940s after the war. As these children grew older, they helped to increase the attendance at West View. New rides were installed during this period, keeping West View Park a direct competitor of Pittsburgh’s other amusement park, Kennywood.

However, when the George Harton III, nephew of the original owner and President of West View, died in 1966, the park was without the day-to-day control of a family member. No major changes were made at West View after that time, but serious changes were taking place in Pittsburgh, which greatly affected the park. The trolley lines ceased to run to the park, although automobiles and buses were used. The school population was in a decline in the 1970s, and the dance business was in a decline as well. When West View’s Danceland pavilion burned in 1973, the park decided not to rebuild it. It is ironic that some of the new theme parks were adding dancing facilities at this same
The Romance of Marketing History

time. Further, Kennywood Park was continuing to update its rides, including remodeling one of its roller coasters called The Thunderbolt. When this ride was called the 'best roller coaster in the United States,' more customers left West View for Kennywood (Jacques 1885, 84-86). Other small amusement parks siphoned off some of the picnic business. Finally, other regional parks, including Cedar Point, and Hersheypark, 'grew up,' and West View was not as desirable. Even the location turned against West View, as the other parks were located along the Interstates, while West View's access was a crowded, two lane roadway. If the gasoline shortage of 1973 had continued, the park's access might have been an advantage, but cheaper gas, higher inflation, and no room for expansion, even if the park could have afforded it, caused its final demise. West View closed in 1977 (Jacques 1885, 86-88).

Enter Disney, with a New and Improved Amusement Park Design

It may have looked as if the American amusement park was disappearing, but it turned out to be a transformation instead of a funeral. As the old traditional amusement parks were fading in the mid 1900s, a new type of park came onto the scene. A revolutionary new type of park emerged in 1955 when Walt Disney opened Disneyland in Anaheim, California. Disney provided an entirely new type of amusement park experience, but he had been impacted by prior amusement parks. Some he had probably experienced while growing up in Kansas prior to his move to California. He had probably also been inspired by some aspects of the Columbian Exposition near Chicago, where Disney's father had worked while his children were very young. Disney utilized corporate support for many of the historical elements within Disneyland, just as the earlier expositions and world fairs had provided an educational element as well as entertainment. Disney's vision for his park had been developing for many years before Disneyland opened its gates. On one European trip, Walt had stated to his friends, "Someday I am going to build a family entertainment center and this place (Tivoli Gardens in Copenhagen) is more like what I envision than anything I have seen. It's clean; it's directed to the entire family and is a mix of fun, entertainment and education (Koenig, 11).

But the major impetus for Disneyland, and the features in it, grew more from Disney's work in advertising, motion pictures, and his love of animated cartoon characters, including Mickey Mouse. Disney incorporated his fascination with television into a channel to promote Disneyland to the mass market, just as he used technological innovations to make the rides and exhibits at Disneyland more captivating to his guests. Disney had a strong sense of customer needs and desires that went far beyond entertaining rides. According to legend, "Disney was dissatisfied as he watched his daughters at a local kiddieland park. His dissatisfaction led to the creation of a park where there was no age limit, nor any limit to the pursuit or fun" (Onosko, 17). One of the strategies that he employed in designing Disneyland was to create a landscaped 'berm' around the perimeter, so that guests would feel totally immersed in a more exotic or different place, away from other reality. Disney applied the same scrutiny to the landscape and buildings within this boundary. Most of the buildings within the park have been constructed so that the upper stories are increasingly smaller, to give guests a sense of being in a far larger world than is actually the case. At the same time, Disney drew from his own past and memories. It is said that Main Street, Disneyland, is modeled after his own main street in Marceline, Missouri (Dunlop, 13). Disney lived in Missouri for about the first 12 years of his life, but then his family moved to Kansas City.

The enormous crowds which stormed Disneyland's opening could have pulled the park and its offerings down. However, it may be that the huge crowds coming to the opening of Disneyland, which overloaded the park and its services, caused him to become even more determined to provide an enjoyable experience for the guests. Disneyland suffered from a wide variety of challenges and mistakes, yet the aura of magic that Disney had carefully built into the park's creation managed to overcome and even obscure the problems. Disney's perfectionism and determination to have everything working toward the satisfaction of the guests provided the guiding principles for the park's operation. His theme park eventually included numerous drinking fountains, clean restrooms, and employees carefully trained to cater to the needs of its guests. The term 'cast members' used to refer to the employees created different expectations, and made the employees feel more like actors and actresses instead of just employees at yet just another amusement park. Customers became guests, and even the clothing because costumes, not uniforms. The one-price at the entrance plan provided guests with a more carefree experience once inside the park.

The time was right for Disneyland as well. It has been noted that Alvin Toffler, in his book, The Third Wave, established "the year 1955 as the time when America left its industrial society identity behind in the 'leisure service revolution.' Most (American) people had more money and more leisure time than at any time in our history (France, 7). The strong financial wave that swept over the United States after World War II provided sufficient discretionary income, as well as a need for seeking out new experiences. Not everyone could fly to the moon, but that rocket ship mentality made many think he or she could tackle new heights. Disney gave credit to the Imagineers, that is, the combination of imagination with engineering (Imagineers, 11). The coined term, imagineers, merged the creative thought of the animator with the mechanical skill of the engineer, basically providing someone who could imagine something, and then had the technical skills to build it. It was also speculated "if Disneyland had been built five years earlier, it probably would have failed. Disney used the new medium of television to turn his enterprise into the nation's
park...Disney was one of the first persons to use (television) to create a national desire. The whole country saw Disneyland being built" (Jacques 1997, 102).

The success of Disneyland did help some of the more conventional amusement parks in America. However, many of the older parks had not been on a sound financial footing, and had sold many of their assets. Other parks just did not have the financial reserves to update their facilities. It appeared that only the well-endowed parks with new rides and attractions had been able to survive the downturn, and were able to take advantage of the new interest in amusement parks.

Example of a Survivor

Cedar Point

Cedar Point is an excellent example of the early American amusement park that survived the transition of the mid 1950s. It is located on Lake Erie, between Cleveland and Toledo in Ohio. In 1897, George Boeckling purchased a picnic grove and bathhouse with the idea of making them into a major attraction. He completed the first wing of the Hotel Breakers by 1905, leased midway spots to concessionaires, and built such classic rides as the carousel, roller coaster, and miniature train. (Everett, i.) In those first 30 years before the Great Depression, Boeckling made Cedar Point into one of the most notable parks in America. Notice that the park began as a picnic grove, with the beaches of Lake Erie as a key attraction. Once the bathhouses and large hotel were available for travelers, attention was placed on adding other attractions and entertainment in Cedar Park.

After its heydays in the early 1900s, Cedar Park fell into the same decline faced by numerous amusement parks across the United States. The Depression and then World War II deprived customers, and Cedar Point Park of critical revenues. Cedar Park fell into serious disrepair by 1931. The Park tried various strategies to attract customers, including sexy entertainers and its Freak Show along the Midway, but even these questionable acts could not keep the Park afloat financially. In fact, Cedar Park was about to be razed for a housing development when purchased by “enterprising new owners who built it into the modern theme park that it is today” (Everett, i).

The great renaissance of Cedar Point started in 1961, as new midway rides, and attractions were being provided. By the 1970s, it began to be known as the ‘Amazement Park’ in great measure because of the new steel roller coasters being added to its ride collections. It also acquired a German-built Ferris wheel in 1972 that, at 168 feet, was the largest wheel since Ferris’s original one in 1893. New rides kept being added, including the Magnum roller coaster in 1989, at that time the tallest roller coaster ever built. Cedar Point is now known internationally for also having more roller coasters than any other park, although roller coasters have been a tradition in this park since 1892 when its first one was built (Francis, 8).

Enter the Theme Park—on the Mouse Tail of Disney

Basically, a theme park is said to be an amusement park divided into various sections, with each section given a ‘theme.’ This theme is carried out through the rides, scenery, exhibits, and other elements within its location. All the different themed sections are loosely grouped together, to form an entire park. The Marriott Corporation describes a theme park as “a family entertainment complex oriented to a particular subject or historical area, combining the continuity of costuming and architecture with entertainment and merchandise to create a fantasy-provoking atmosphere (Cameron, 11).” While it is preferable to build a theme park from scratch, some of the more traditional amusement parks have added themed areas to their parks, such as Hersheypark in Hershey, Pennsylvania. Starting with its name change (Hershey Park to Hersheypark) in 1972, it embarked upon a multimillion-dollar development to become a theme park (Jacques 1997, 124). The advantage of the different themed sections, it appears, is that this approach gives the park a sense of history or substance, appealing to different family members, because such a park provides something for each guest. A general theme park consists of several different areas, usually three to six; with each area having its “own unique theme or motif. The realistic theming adds a lot of intriguing atmosphere to the area a sets the mood for fun and adventure” (Cartwright, 9).

Different themes commonly reflect different cultural areas of the globe, or stepping into a different time zone or sphere. It does not sound overly complex to have a variety of different themes within one part, with accompanying concessions for each area, but the benefits can accumulate rapidly. For example, think of the children who now want to bring home a toy from each different themed area.

Disneyland, which opened in 1955, is “frequently credited for being the first pure Theme Park...Since the advent of Disneyland, nearly 20 new multimillion dollar Theme Parks have opened their gates...Most of America’s huge modern theme parks are less than 25 years old” (Cartwright, 7). Disneyland actually had six different themed areas: Tomorrowland, Frontierland, Fantasyland, Adventureland, Bear Country, and New Orleans Square. The Walt Disney World Resort complex in Orlando has several different themed parks under the Disney brand: Magic Kingdom (1971); EPCOT (1982); MGM Studios (1989); Animal Kingdom (1998).

Building on the popularity of Disneyland, more amusement parks emerged during the 1960s and 1970s. However, the immediate rush in the late 1950s and early 1960s included a number of parks across America that attempted to duplicate Disneyland but failed miserably. Some of these parks installed too many educational exhibits, when customers just wanted to have fun. Other parks did not have the financial reserves to provide the
The Romance of Marketing History

Disney Expansion

Disneyland's success encouraged duplication. However, the popularity of California's Disneyland, combined with the shortage of land around this Park prevented its expansion. This encouraged Disney to set up his second park in central Florida in the Orlando area. Since Disney's father had originally come from Kissimmee, this may have had some role in the site selection, but the geographic appeal here also had to be part of the reason.

Apparentiyly, Disney was not going to be trapped by a shortage of land again, and he secretly purchased 43 square miles, or 27,000 acres (an area approximately twice the size of Manhattan), before announcing his intentions to build a resort near Orlando. Officially known as The Walt Disney World Resort, this complex started with The Magic Kingdom in 1971, but continued to add additional parks, including EPCOT, MGM Studios and, most recently, The Animal Kingdom. The death of Walt Disney shortly after the intention to open the Orlando Park complex was a severe blow, but his brother, Roy Disney, stepped in and carried on with Walt's ideas and vision. Some of Walt's plans had to be drastically modified. EPCOT, the Experimental Prototype Community of Tomorrow, envisioned by Walt to be an experiment in new town planning, became more of a traditional theme park instead. Regardless, the Walt Disney World Resort in Florida has been recognized as the world's number one tourist destination (Rebori, 4).

Numerous other entertainment areas continue to be added to The Walt Disney World Resort, as well as numerous hotels and other facilities. Part of the reason that Disney sought to acquire more land for his parks in Orlando is that he intended, from the start, to incorporate housing and hospitality services as part of the total offering. Back in California, Disney had realized that the numerous motel and souvenir stand operators surrounding Disneyland were not only not as concerned about quality as he was, he also realized that they were making almost twice as much in revenue, primarily because of their nearby location (Rebori, 3). Disney resorts began to be created outside the United States, too, starting with Tokyo Disneyland (1983) and continuing with Euro Disneyland (1992) and renamed Disneyland Paris. Already in 1994, the world wide Disney empire was attracting more than 65 million visitors annually (Oertley, 28).

Despite the ongoing success of the Disney parks, the early 1980s saw a decrease in attendance in the bigger, destination-type parks. It was felt that this was due to the economic downturn facing the United States, where families were unable or unwilling to spend much to travel to a large park. Instead, they stayed home and traveled to the park around the proverbial corner. At the same time, the local close-to-home parks were thriving, "proving that people still wanted a thrill, but had to seek a little less expensive one closer to home" (Norris, 4) This period was also a time of growth for water parks, and the mini indoor recreation parks for children seen in fast food restaurants and shopping malls. More marine life parks, as well as naturalistic and safari parks were also developed during this time. As of late 1988 and into the 1990s, Europe had been experiencing more of a growth in the different types of entertainment parks, than the United States. It was as if the frenzied growth in America in the 1960s and 1970s had spread to Europe over a decade later (Tosetto, p. 9).
Overall, by the 1976, there were over 800 permanent parks in America, with about 450 qualifying as attraction parks. Attraction parks are basically theme parks, but usually without the rides. Instead, the parks are built around a theme that is, in itself, the attraction. Knott's Berry Farm had been just such an attraction park, with its old West historic aura, ghost town, haunted shack and gold mine where guests could actually pan for gold. However, in 1970, several thrill rides were added to Knott's, transforming it into a themed amusement park. Another 150 of these 800 total parks in 1976 were picnic grounds with just a few rides or kiddielands. Kiddielands are considered to be tiny amusement parks with about 15 miniature rides for the six and under children, usually located near major shopping centers. There were also some fairylands parks. These are similar to kiddielands but with a fairytale theme and usually located in a more rural or woods area (Kyriazi, 217).

The high cost of creating a new theme park has been a high barrier to the development of such parks, despite the surge of popularity. The year 1977, for example, had no ground broken for a new park, but other parks continued their renovations and improvements. Demographics did not offer much encouragement to investors at this point either. The 1980s were predicted to have a decline in the teenage population numbers, with the baby boomer bulge in the 22-44 age category. One prediction was that most parks would move toward year-round openings and overcome weather problems through creating indoor simulation rides and experiences instead (Onosko, 3). While simulation rides have become more commonplace, and many rides incorporate a form of simulation, the overall ride preferences appear to have remained fairly similar to the past. As technology continues to advance, however, such rides may well be the greatest attraction in the future. EPCOT, for example, plans a ride called ‘Mission: SPACE’ slated to open in 2003 which will simulate not only flight by rocket ship, but weightlessness (Klorman, 2).

One tally of the number of amusement parks in the United States in the early 1980s found that there were 158 amusement parks meeting the criteria of being open year-round for a full season, with at least eight adult rides (Reed, 5). Obviously, the ‘full-season’ criterion is a difficult one, because many areas of America fall into a temperate climate, and thus many parks are only open during the warmer months. Further, no distinction was made here between amusement parks and theme parks.

As of 1980, there were considered to be 22 major theme parks in the United States, open all year or just part of the year. The criteria for these large parks are as follows:

1) Approximately one million or more visitors a year (most have 2-3 million);
2) Park has a wide assortment of rides, shows, and other attractions;
3) A sizeable portion of the park is themed;
4) Park has a capital investment of over $15 million (many have investments of over $50 million). (Cartwright, 55)

The rides of a theme park often reflect the types of thrill rides found at the more traditional amusement parks, although the rides are often named or described in such a way as to support the theme or style of a certain area of the park. Often the most spectacular ride at the park is provided by a roller coaster. While many parks still have a wooden rollercoaster, the steel roller coasters usually offer a broader spectrum of thrills, including the 360-degree roll, as well as being smoother and quieter than the wooden coasters. Another common ride in most parks is a water flume ride. Many parks today are incorporating a sky tram or sky ride, as well as the more conventional ground train or tram ride. If water is available, boat rides are common, as are dodgem cars. The old ‘tunnel of love’ rides, rides in the dark with scary occurrences, have generally been upgraded, but are still a common offering in most parks in one form or another. Many parks also offer live entertainment, usually as frequent shows in amphitheaters, and, again, these shows are usually designed to carry out the theme of the area or park.

Destination Parks

It has been said that today’s theme parks “serve as contemporary museums and history parks, fulfilling even better than museums their mandate ‘to endow knowledge, incite pleasure, and stimulate curiosity.’ Through the device of ‘theming’ and its short hand stylizations of person, place, and thing, an archive of collective memory...has emerged” (King, 6-7). The larger theme parks, such as the Disney parks, have become known as destination parks, while the smaller, more local ones are termed regional amusement or theme parks. Actually, the ‘destination park’ concept dates back to the growing use of the automobile in the early 1900s. Even back then, the availability of the auto had encouraged customers to bypass their small, local amusement park in favor of driving to the larger, regional parks of the day (O’Brien, xi).

Certain places, such as Orlando, Florida, have become key destinations in general, because of the growing number of theme parks in one general location. Despite the lead held by Disney in its Orlando location, Universal has continued to expand its presence since its initial opening in 1990 there. It has gone from ‘just being the other movie park on the block, to reinventing itself as a destination resort. Its Islands of Adventure addition, which opened in 1999, has been supported by several ‘themed’ hotels. To overcome one of the major drawbacks of large theme parks, long lines and endless waiting, Universal has implemented the ‘instant access’ service for guests of its Universal Resorts (Klorman, 3).
Parks are changing with the times, and a "major concern of park owners and officials today is the declining number of youth in the marketplace and the so-called graying of America. As a result, park officials have been reevaluating their priorities and making their parks a more comfortable place for older people to visit" (O'Brien, xiv). Some of these changes have included a higher quality of food, more places to sit, expanded air conditioned areas if needed, and more shows or Broadway-style revues included in the admission price.

The distinction of an amusement park as a separate entity is blurring today, because some amusement parks have left their 'stand alone' image to become part of an overall retail mix. For example, the world's first enclosed amusement park and shopping center, Old Chicago, opened in July 1974, built around the theme of the 1893 Chicago Columbian Exposition (Cameron, 15). The West Edmonton Mall in Alberta, Canada, still carries the distinction of being the largest shopping mall in the world, and also having the "World's Largest Indoor Amusement Park" (Sorkin, 3). The Mall of America in Minnesota includes Camp Snoopy, which is the largest indoor amusement park in the United States. Furthermore, Camp Snoopy is part of the California-based, Knott's Berry Farm theme park enterprise, which is considering surprising the fact that Minneapolis is half way across the United States from California.

The technological advancements in the amusement park industry have also spread outside the borders of the parks. For example, Las Vegas has utilized amusement park technology to create more and more of a fantasy amid its gambling casinos and floorshows in hopes of enticing ever more customers. The success of the festival marketplace concept, a wide variety of shops and restaurants grouped together under one large roof, has encouraged the growth of urban entertainment centers, with the idea that customers will come if they are able to have fun (Brill, 1). Regardless of these urban entertainment options and entertaining shopping malls, however, amusement parks remain, at least so far, as an appealing option for individuals seeking entertainment or recreation in an interactive or experiential manner.

In general, it has been noted that attendance at amusement parks may act as a barometer of the nation's economic status. In a booming economy, destination parks tend to thrive. However, in more recessionary times, the regional parks or even the small, 'traditional amusement parks,' become the more desirable choice for many guests, because the ticket price is less expensive, and the park is usually more locally accessible. Many of the smaller, traditional parks do not have the new, superlative rides of the destination parks, but provide, instead, history, quaintness, and nostalgia (O'Brien, xiii).

Amusement parks in America have gone through several periods of great success as well as times of downturns and depression. The impact of recent events has been no exception. The terrorist actions of 9/11 affected the amusement park industry in America in several ways. First, during the immediate days following the 9/11 crashes, additional security was implemented particularly at the Disney parks, because it was felt that these parks particularly personified America and might be particularly likely targets for terrorists. This concern continues, but the additional security measures at park gates have helped to restore consumer confidence in this regard. The overall downturn in travel, especially plane travel, however, has been an even greater threat to the larger, destination parks. At first, the public did not want to venture into amusement parks at all, feeling that possible threats facing America removed the desire for thrill rides and outside entertainment. Then, over time, consumers returned to the parks, but sought out parks within driving distance. The international consumers, however, generally sought to avoid travel to the United States, affected by the demise of many dot.com enterprises as well as terrorist activities, also decreased the amount of discretionary income available for such park attendance. Smaller park ticket prices were more palatable than the high prices of the larger theme parks. The larger parks attempted a variety of inducements, but were unable to reduce ticket prices substantially, because their constant improvements and new rides had cost too much to permit price reductions. It seems unlikely that such huge theme parks will vanish, as did many of the traditional amusement parks by the end of the Great Depression, but the additional revenue for those future improvements will be affected by the downturn.

The current status of American amusement parks appears to be in a holding pattern, waiting for improvements in global peace and security. Many larger parks are also waiting for the upturn in the economy, bringing both domestic and international guests back to their gates. The good news is that American amusement parks have come back from adversity in the past, and each time, they have been better than ever before. Hopefully, this time will be the same.

The Impact of the Marketing Stage for Amusement Parks

The advent of Disneyland, and the subsequent Disney parks in the United States and abroad are excellent examples of the third orientation or era in the development of marketing—that of a marketing orientation. Walt Disney's dedication to the desires of his customers has been the spearhead behind this movement, and the directions taken by the amusement park companies have followed his lead. Disney's foremost focus was on the customer, and the Magic Kingdom was constructed (and renovated) to provide that desired experience. The three concepts of marketing have been stated as having a focus on the needs and wants of the consumer, having a systematic approach to monitoring the offering, and providing for a suitable profit level for the organization. Disney's entire approach to the structural design of his parks, the incorporation of the
themed material, and the training of all personnel connected with the parks is evidence of the marketing orientation. This contrasts greatly with the prior two stages in the development of the American amusement park, where the customer was at first, just trying to find out what happening, and in the second stage, where the customer was viewed as a source of profit for the organization, but where the customer's preferences were not researched as much as speculated upon.

The future for amusement parks? Marketing practices continue to stress relationship marketing, which appears as a stronger bond than just the marketing stage. It should appear that amusement parks will seek this deeper connection.

References


The Romance of Marketing History


Online Sources

http://themeparks.about.com/cs/tradepubs/index.htm
(developed by the National Amusement Park Historical Association).