

LIFE IS A ROLLER COASTER:
A HISTORY OF DENVER'S LAKESIDE AMUSEMENT PARK

by

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores the history of Lakeside Amusement Park, built in 1908 in Denver, Colorado, through the context of Denver's social, economic, and political development over the course of a century. Originally constructed by Denver brewer Adolph Zang as an elite amusement park with fairly tame attractions, Denver quickly adopted the park as part of its City Beautiful program. The City Beautiful movement, which provided a blueprint for beautifying ugly and hastily built cities, was developed from the architectural design of the 1893 Columbian Exposition in Chicago. Lakeside's story is an important addition to amusement park history because it proves that an amusement park, despite what some historians have argued, could in fact play a role in City Beautiful programs. The story of Lakeside is also an important addition to the story of Denver's City Beautiful period because of the large role it played during that time. However, Denver's changing political climate and economic and social development changed the environment in which the park operated, forcing it to become less elite and more working class. Studying how the park adapted to such change offers a unique perspective from which to view Denver's development over the span of a century. Lakeside's history also offers a view on larger changes in society and the amusement park industry itself. Lakeside Amusement Park is an excellent mirror of a growing Western town's society between 1908 and 2008, and as such, it offers a unique perspective from which to view Denver's development during that time. The story of Lakeside comes from the pages of Denver's newspapers, Denver's official City

Beautiful publication entitled *Municipal Facts*, *Billboard* magazine, and interviews with people who were connected to the park from its earliest days until modern times.

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INTRODUCTION: THROUGH THE TURNSTILE

This is the story of Lakeside, which in turn is the stories of a town, a race track, a shopping mall, and most importantly, an amusement park. This is also the story of Denver. An early slogan for the park was “Denver Has Gone Lakeside,” and it fit well because the story of Lakeside truly is the story of Denver. The stories of Denver’s growth, economic ups and downs, and City Beautiful program all played vital roles Lakeside’s development and survival. The story of Lakeside is also the stories of a Denver beer baron, prohibition in Colorado, and even Walt Disney and the birth of the theme park. The story of Lakeside Amusement Park is also the story of a survivor. Lakeside Amusement Park was, and still is, a park like no other, and this is the story of how all of those pieces that make up the story of Lakeside have worked together to make it unique. So, while the story of Lakeside Amusement Park neatly fits under the heading of U.S. entertainment history, it involves much more than just that.

Between 1895 and 1910, nearly 5,000 amusement parks were built in the United States. Most major cities had at least one park, and in many cases two or three or even more. When Lakeside Amusement Park opened in 1908, Denver had four parks in operation and memories of a fifth that had gone out of business just a few years before were still fresh. Denver’s growing population easily supported the amusement parks, for a few years at least, and having so many amusement parks was beneficial to the city as it grew because they provided much needed beauty spots in the landscape. Denver in the early 1900s was a growing city struggling to find its identity. The city had grown big so quickly that civic leaders often neglected beautification in

favor of rapid development because of the economic benefits it would bring to Denver. Only after a break in the rapid growth did city officials suddenly realize that Denver had not only grown into a big city, but an ugly one as well. It desperately needed civic beautification.¹

Under the leadership of Mayor Robert Speer, Denver set out to become an embodiment of the City Beautiful movement that was sweeping the United States in the early part of the twentieth century. Municipal buildings, street paving, lighting, playgrounds, and most importantly parks were all important parts of Speer's program as he attempted to make Denver one of the most beautiful cities in the country. Speer was not by any means the first person to attempt to beautify Denver, but prior to him such efforts were haphazard and halfhearted at best. What made Speer different from the people before him was that he had spent years building up his political base before becoming mayor, and he came into office with enormous power. Of primary importance to both Speer and his predecessors was park space. In a crowded, dirty city, beautifully landscaped parks were a luxury, and Denver's residents eagerly latched onto anything that resembled a park in an effort to find a spot to which they could escape for rest and relaxation. The city's assortment of amusement parks readily filled that need.

The plans for Lakeside Amusement Park were first revealed in 1907, just as Speer took the first steps towards realizing his vision for Denver. Like Speer, Adolph Zang, the principal owner of Lakeside, had spent years building a reputation as a successful businessman working at his father's Denver brewery. Through his success and generosity he had managed to build an excellent reputation among Denver's citizens, almost certainly ensuring the success of nearly any project he decided to undertake. That he decided to build an amusement park was not at all strange. Many brewers, both before and after Zang, did exactly the same thing, providing ready markets for their products with amusement parks full of thirsty visitors. The difference between

Zang and other brewers who built parks was that his timing with Lakeside happened to be perfect. He built his amusement park, which was modeled on the City Beautiful ideal, just as Denver's first City Beautiful projects were getting underway. But, Zang's amusement park and Speer's City Beautiful shared more than just timing. Both projects shared a common ancestry with Chicago's Columbian Exposition in 1893. The amusement park boom of the late 1800s and early 1900s and the City Beautiful movement both owed their existence to one of the most important and dramatic events the world had yet seen.

Millions of people from around the world visited the Columbian Exposition, where they saw sights that were entertaining and awe-inspiring. One of those people was Robert Speer, then a rising figure in Denver politics, who found inspiration for his dream of the beautiful city that Denver could become at the Exposition. Another visitor might very well have been Denver brewer Adolph Zang. Although no evidence survives to say for certain that Zang was at the Exposition, it seems almost inconceivable that he would not have been because Carl Lammers, whose bottling company was the exclusive bottling agent for Zang Beer, had an exhibit there and won a prize for the best bottled beer. Surely Zang would have visited the booth manned by such a close business associate. Perhaps Zang, if he was indeed there, found his inspiration for the amusement park he would one day build.²

The Exposition, which honored the 400th Anniversary of Christopher Columbus's voyage, was one of the biggest events the United States, and the world, had ever seen. An estimated 27 million people attended the Exposition, which ran from May 1 to October 30, 1893. It was, for many who attended it, the most amazing experience of their lives. People urged relatives, who had often never left the town in which they lived, to find the time and money to make a trip to the Exposition, where they could see new and exciting mechanical wonders,

people from foreign lands, and have the ability to try new foods, among many other experiences. Many visitors left the Exposition thoroughly exhausted from trying to see and do it all, but were glad to have done so.³

The sheer number of sights that visitors could experience at the Exposition was indeed impressive, but just as stirring was the architecture of the grounds. The design was the creation of architect Daniel Burnham and landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted, Sr., and “the carefully designed neoclassical buildings set in spacious landscaping according to a comprehensive master plan became the stock prescription for America’s ugly cities.” The focal point was the Court of Honor, a set of similarly designed and constructed buildings around a central plaza, all of which implied “authority and imperialism...cultural stature, power, permanence, order, and unity.” Judith Adams, in her book on the American amusement park industry, writes that the Exposition and its architecture were in large part designed to assure Americans that the country’s national stature was “nearing preeminence.”⁴

The Columbian Exposition was just one in a long line of many such fairs that organizers put on in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Between 1876 and 1916 organizers held international expositions in Philadelphia (to honor the nation’s centennial), Chicago, New Orleans, Atlanta, Nashville, Omaha, Buffalo (at which President William McKinley was assassinated), Saint Louis, Portland, Seattle, San Francisco, and San Diego. Nearly one hundred million people from all classes visited these fairs, although Robert Rydell writes that the expositions, including the Columbian Exposition, were in fact “upper class creations initiated and controlled by locally or nationally prominent elites.” While the fairs might have been upper class creations, their promoters were unable to finance them completely with their own money. In order to provide ample financing, they turned to investors. The move created two groups of

people who were behind the fairs, each having very different goals. The investors wanted the fairs to succeed so that they could earn a profit on the stock which they purchased to help finance them. The elite promoters, on the other hand, hoped to win widespread acceptance of their social and political priorities and their leadership in those areas through successfully produced public events. Rydell even argues that the Midway, invented for the Columbian Exposition, was an attempt by elites to control popular culture.⁵

While all of the fairs were indeed awesome, the Columbian Exposition seemed to have the greatest impact on American culture. It sparked two developments, both of which were especially important to the future of Denver and Lakeside Amusement Park. The first development was the City Beautiful movement. While many scholars still debate whether or not the City Beautiful movement emerged directly from the fair, no one doubts the architectural influence that the Exposition had on it. Nearly everyone involved in the Exposition, from planners to visitors, viewed the Great White City of the Exposition as being in stark contrast to the Black City of Chicago. The White City was heavenly, clean, orderly, and safe, essentially everything American cities were supposed to be striving to become. The Black City of Chicago (and by extension, any major city in America) was chaotic, dark, dirty, and violent, everything people wanted to avoid.⁶

The great White City of the Columbian Exposition proved that architecture could in fact bring order out of the chaos of any city. The architecture was so inspirational that novelists wrote dozens of books and articles featuring the Exposition as the setting, even long after the buildings themselves had crumbled or burned. According to historian Daniel Berg, they saw the White City as “either a benign and elevating fairyland or an object lesson of what a desirable urban environment might be—or both.” Observers focused on the combination of architecture,

sculpture, and landscape design at the fair, long viewed as among the most impressive features of the event. The classically styled buildings of the Court of Honor, decorated with impressive sculptural pieces and murals, were all of similar height and design, and grouped around the central lagoon. Well planned paths and gardens covered the grounds and gave a sense of unity to the whole arrangement, while also allowing each building to have its own character within the general guidelines put forth by Exposition organizers. The people who designed and built the Exposition, according to Berg, managed to achieve the often contradictory result of “unity, diversity, and cooperation.”⁷

Fair goers embraced the Exposition’s style as the answer to the chaotic conditions that they found in most American cities. Large cities, like Denver, had often grown rapidly and with little concern for aesthetics, especially as they battled for survival amidst competition from other cities and difficult economic conditions. They were often physically dirty and dangerous to good health. With no sanitation systems in place, trash and waste was simply dumped in the streets. With little or no open space for relaxation and recreation, they were dangerous to mental and spiritual health as well, argued critics. But the fair, writes Eric Larson, taught people to see that cities did not have to be dark, soiled, and unsafe places; they had the potential to be beautiful. It was a lesson that Denver’s future leaders and Lakeside’s future builders remembered.⁸

With the realization that beauty in cities was possible, the City Beautiful movement and the concept of city planning was born. William Stead is often credited with launching the movement with the publication of his book *If Christ Came to Chicago*, in which he argued that American cities could be made equal with the great cities of Europe if people allowed designers to do it. Civic leaders quickly turned to Daniel Burnham, architect of the Exposition, in order to make idea a reality. Burnham understood that a great, even momentous, change was about to

take place in American architecture, and he organized a new company and hired hundreds of architects and draftsmen so that he would be ready to handle the coming onslaught of cities seeking new designs. Between 1902 and 1909 Burnham completed City Beautiful plans for Washington, D.C., Cleveland, San Francisco, Manila and Baguio in the Philippines, and, most notably, Chicago. All City Beautiful plans focused on creating a livable urban environment, with healthy and agreeable conditions, and abundant recreational facilities. The inspiration for such designs, Burnham said, was the White City and the World's Columbian Exposition.⁹

The movement was not without its critics, who also focused on the architectural style of the Exposition. They argued that Burnham's choice of classically styled buildings had killed budding American architectural styles, particularly the Chicago school. These critics, especially a bitter Louis Sullivan, argued that classical style buildings were already obsolete by the time planners began designing the Exposition but that Burnham and the Exposition organizers had forced the style on the public once again. Supporters countered that they were not necessarily pushing for the classical style but instead for the uniformity that marked the Exposition's architecture and that the classical style lent itself to such a design. A key element of City Beautiful planning, Burnham argued, was that "urban dignity and order... must be obtained through impressive and interrelated groupings of buildings..." By creating order out of chaos, improving the appearance of a city through unity, and introducing public art with sculpture and murals, the proponents of City Beautiful hoped to create a much better and healthier environment for people to live and work in. While many of the design decisions, such as constructing the buildings out of staff, were made with financial or practical concerns in mind, the architects of City Beautiful always held to a vision of moral uplift for residents of dark, dirty, crowded cities. Like the Exposition's designers, Denver and Lakeside's leaders also held to that vision.¹⁰

The second important development to come out of the Columbian Exposition for the story of Lakeside was the amusement park. The organizers of the Exposition wanted the central Court of Honor to remain a dignified area, free from what they considered to be the more vulgar devices, amusements, and people that often marked such gatherings. They were realistic enough to know, however, that amusement devices and other forms of popular entertainment were a necessary and expected part of any such undertaking. In order to maintain the Court of Honor's dignity but still entertain, they created the Midway Plaisance, the precursor of the American amusement park, to keep the "vulgar amusements" such as freak shows, recreated foreign villages, and rides like the Ferris wheel, away from the dignified Court of Honor. The Midway quickly became one of the most popular areas of the Exposition. At the Philadelphia Centennial Exposition, seventeen years earlier, fair officials had convinced city leaders to condemn and burn many of the "honky tonk amusements" that were built just outside of the fairgrounds in order to keep the fair pure. The presence of the planned Midway at the Columbian Exposition in 1893 was a clear sign that exposition officials had at least reluctantly accepted popular amusements, a significant shift from the far stricter attitude they had held in 1876. But, there limits to what they were willing to accept. In an unwise move, from a financial standpoint, organizers refused to allow Buffalo Bill to set up his Wild West show on the Exposition grounds; he set up shop a few blocks away and played to consistently packed houses. By the 1904 St. Louis World's Fair, organizers had become so enlightened that they incorporated the Midway into the main exposition grounds, signifying that promoters had fully accepted and even embraced the popular amusements the public so desired. For most, the Midway and its amusements were for fun, but Robert Rydell argues in his book *All the World's a Fair*, the Midways were a conscious effort by the upper class to control and influence popular culture. Carefully chosen, designed, and built

exhibits on the Midways reinforced political and social ideals that the elite wanted the rest of society to embrace. Lakeside's designers did not go quite that far with their park's design in 1907; they simply wanted a park that catered to the upper class.¹¹

The idea of the amusement park, according to historians Gary Cross and John Walton, was to move the Midway's attractions to a permanent location. One of the first attempts at doing so was Paul Boyton's Sea Lion Park, which opened on Coney Island in 1895. The initial success of Sea Lion sparked the amusement park boom in the United States. Sea Lion was followed by Steeplechase in 1897, Luna (which replaced the failed Sea Lion) in 1903, and Dreamland in 1904. Each of these parks constantly tried to outdo the others with bigger and flashier grounds, attractions, and rides, making Coney Island the most famous amusement area in the United States. While the Midway at the Columbian Exposition was the immediate inspiration behind the creation of the amusement, the parks had a very long and important tradition of public entertainment behind them, and it was in that history that the basis of much that became standard fare at parks was to be found.¹²

William F. Mangels was a very successful amusement ride manufacturer in the early 1900s. In addition to improving on rides, such as designing the device that created the galloping motion for horses on carousels, he invented many other rides, including the Whip and the Tickler, both of which were found at Lakeside. Given his very long and close involvement with the trade, by the 1950s, many considered him a unique authority on the history of the amusement industry due to his long and close involvement with it. While Mangels tried to open an amusement park museum in New York, the National Association of Amusement Parks, Pools and Beaches asked him to write a history of amusement parks. The resulting book, *The Outdoor Amusement Industry*, was published in 1952. As Mangels made clear, Lakeside Amusement

Park, like all other amusement parks in the country, including those on Coney Island, may have shared a common ancestor in the Columbian Exposition's Midway, but they also built on an entertainment history that stretched back hundreds of years.¹³

Mangels wrote that “public amusement is as old as recorded history.” The Greeks had the Olympics; Romans had chariot races; rural areas in Renaissance Europe had strolling players and carnivals. But, there were also more permanent amusement centers built just outside the limits of large cities as early as the 1600s. They of course did not include modern mechanical rides, but were similar in the layout of their grounds and variety of entertainment offerings. Many of these amusement centers offered acrobatic acts, zoos, bowling, shooting, athletic displays, games, puppet shows, and animal fights. As early as the 1790s, some of the parks offered balloon ascensions and parachute drops, both of which were still standard features in American amusement parks, including Lakeside, in the late 1890s and early 1900s. There was no admission charge at these early amusement parks because it was expected that visitors would “naturally spend a trifle for refreshments.” Beer gardens were another important early step in the development of amusement parks. Mangels wrote that “indeed, amusement and liquid refreshments seem to have been indissolubly linked...” Like the early parks, European beer gardens, without exception, offered some kind of entertainment to customers, whether it was music or otherwise. The offerings were simple at first but grew more elaborate as years passed. Mangels pointed out that in later years, American brewers often financed amusement parks where their products were sold, something Denver brewer Adolph Zang could relate to when he started building Lakeside in 1907.¹⁴

Entertainment was important, but another significant element of these early pleasure resorts was artificial illumination. Mangels wrote that “elaborate illumination was a novelty” to

people of the eighteenth century who were used to dim candlelight in their homes and dark streets at night. Most of the large pleasure gardens had as many as 20,000 oil fed lamps lighting their grounds at night; one park even went so far as to proclaim that its 60,000 lamps turned night into day. Elaborate electrical lighting became standard at any American amusement park, with hundreds of thousands of lights in use at each park on Coney Island. In 1908, Lakeside boasted that it had 100,000 lights on its grounds. In the mid-1700s, firework displays, another source of illumination, first appeared at many parks. These still remain a standard attraction at modern amusement parks, and for many years, Lakeside was known for its elaborate Fourth of July fireworks displays over the lake.¹⁵

Vauxhall, Ranelagh, and Marleybone Gardens were among the leading amusement centers of the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries in England. One of the most important developments as far as amusement parks were concerned was first seen at Vauxhall in 1728 when owners began charging an admission fee of one shilling along with offering the opportunity to buy a season ticket. On one day in 1833, more than a century after the admission fee went into effect, over 27,000 people paid to get into the park. Ranelagh featured an amphitheater and rotunda, and London's "fashionable chose it as the proper place to hold grand balls, dinners, parties and concerts." Marleybone featured a nightly volcanic eruption and a famous bakery. It was also famous for the fact that although the park was brightly lit, the dark roads around it became a haven for thieves. Jenny's Whim was another popular English center that operated for much of the second half of the Eighteenth century. Jenny's Whim was unique in that it featured a number of mechanical devices, including a giant monster that was activated when visitors stepped on a hidden spring. The park also had a set of distorted mirrors, a regular offering at amusement parks and carnivals even today.¹⁶

In France, the Ruggieri family led the way in developing amusement centers. Their first was Ruggieri Gardens, opened in 1766. Until 1815, the park was similar to the English gardens of the period, but that year the Ruggieris added an attraction called “Saut du Niagara” in which a boat full of passengers slid down a ramp into a pool of water. In American amusement parks, including Lakeside, the ride would be known as Shoot-the-Chutes. The most famous of the French parks, though, was the Tivoli, which the Ruggieris opened in 1798. In addition to the usual entertainment found at such resorts, the Tivoli included a roller coaster. In 1805, admission to the park was two francs, but ticketholders were entitled to one-third that amount in free beverages. Two other Ruggieri family parks, Jardin Beaujon and Jardin Marbeauf, featured elaborate nightly pyrotechnic displays. Jardin Marbeauf’s display, “Phaeton’s Fall,” was so costly that it was a financial failure despite enormous attendance. According to Mangels, the idea of the pleasure garden took hold in only one other place in Europe aside from England and France. The Prater in Vienna covered 2,000 acres, and in many ways was similar to Coney Island in New York. Mangels wrote that “All classes of Vienna society frequented the Prater,” each class of society keeping to their section of the park, very similar to the early years of the amusement parks on Coney Island.¹⁷

The early European pleasure gardens established unmistakable trends that would appear in the American amusement parks of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. They all included elaborate and beautiful gardens, water features, and walkways. Lighting was an important element as owners tried to make the grounds as bright as possible, both for enjoyment and security. There were sources of constant entertainment, and as amusement devices such as balloons and roller coasters were invented, they were added to reach park’s repertoire. And, importantly, the parks began charging an admission fee, though not until the advent of American

amusement parks on Coney Island would the admission fee be expressly for the purpose of keeping undesirables out of the parks.

The European-style pleasure parks found their way to the United States, but there, according to William Mangels, they built on the tradition of public picnic grounds rather than beer gardens. Entertainment at the picnic grounds was often limited to “athletic games, song festivals, target shooting, bowling, dancing, and the consumption of beer and other refreshments” as fraternal organizations and social societies held their annual gatherings there. Few, if any, mechanical devices were in use at them. If by chance they were in place, they were rarely anything more than simple swings or crude hand-operated merry-go-rounds. One of the best known of the early American resorts was Jones’s Woods in New York City. While it included many of the usual amusements found in such places, from athletic competitions to shooting ranges to bowling alleys, it had several unique attractions. Tents located throughout the grounds housed pictorial shows in which “wooden figures moved creakily through mechanical plays,” a true novelty at the time. Infants could ride on wooden horses designed especially for them while adults had the option of riding a real donkey. In addition, there were live acts throughout the grounds. And, Mangels wrote, “beer reigned supreme, the favorite potable.” Mangels wrote that evidence suggested that several breweries were behind Jones’s Wood, which the New York legislature attempted to make a public park in 1851. The site was later rejected in favor of the land that became Central Park.¹⁸

Another prominent early park was Parker’s Grove, later named Ohio Grove, located about twenty miles from Cincinnati. Parker’s Grove included many shaded picnic spots, a dance hall, swings, and a mule powered merry-go-round. In 1886 it was converted into an amusement park, and one of its biggest attractions at the turn of the century was an automobile ride over an

oval course. Because cars were still mostly a curiosity to people at the time, they waited patiently in long lines for their chance to ride in one at Parker's Grove. Similar pleasure grounds appeared in cities all over the United States, many of them converted by their owners into true amusement parks as the park boom took off in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Glen Echo Park in Maryland started as a national Chautauqua settlement in 1883; six years later it was converted into a trolley park and in 1911 reorganized as a modern amusement park. Riverview Park in Chicago started as a picnic grove used by the Sharpshooters Club in 1879. In 1904 it became an amusement park with regular stagings of common amusement park attractions, including the "Battle of the Monitor and Merrimac," "Sinking of the Titanic," and "Creation." Kennywood, in Pennsylvania, still one of the best known amusement parks in the United States, began in 1818 as a picnic grove established by Thomas Jenkins Kenny. In 1898 the Mellon family of Pittsburg leased 141 acres of the property build a trolley park, adding a merry-go-round and a Figure Eight roller coaster to the property. In 1907, new management took over and greatly expanded the park. Among the new attractions were screenings of the movie "The Great Train Robbery" and a live reenactment using a real train. Also prominent among these early gardens and picnic groves that were later converted to amusement parks, Mangels wrote, was Denver's Elitch Gardens, longtime rival to Lakeside.¹⁹

The picnic groves may have eventually transformed into amusement parks, but the tradition of picnicking at the parks never died out. In fact, it became one of the best known aspects of Lakeside Amusement Park. But, it was Coney Island where, William Mangels wrote, "the modern amusement park originated..." What set Boyton's Sea Lion Park apart from picnic groves and beer gardens of the time was the fact that it was enclosed by a fence and visitors had to pay an admission fee to get through the gate, just as they had done at Vauxhall in London

since 1728. Once inside, visitors experienced the standard amusements and devices they had come to expect from such places. The park took its name from the forty sea lions Boyton had in it who were trained to juggle balls and do other tricks. Other attractions at the park included water races, the first large-scale Shoot-the-Chutes in the country, an old mill water ride, a gee-way, and cages of live wolves. In 1899, Boyton added a ballroom. The key to it all, however, was the enclosed area and the gate fee.²⁰

While the gates and admission fees may have kept undesirables out, they did not necessarily make the new amusement parks exclusive. John Kasson, in his book on Coney Island, argues that the parks actually helped break down class barriers, if only temporarily. The late 1890s were a time of growing mass culture, expanding urban populations, and increased leisure time. Amusement parks, Kasson writes, were not only an expression of the new mass culture but also popular escapes from stuffy cities. The parks of Coney Island were especially popular among the working class, a fact that helped break down class barriers as they mixed with customers from all walks of life. With these people careening into each other on the Human Whirlpool at Steeplechase or sharing their fear and excitement on a roller coaster at any of the parks, it hardly mattered who made more money or did what job. The parks also helped break down barriers between men and women as they clung to and smashed into each other, and often saw more of each other exposed than polite society found decent.²¹

Historians often question whether it was possible for amusement parks to maintain an image of decency and respectability, or as Lakeside Amusement Park continually claimed to be, a place for the most conservative amusement seekers. LeRoy Ashby, in his book *With Amusement for All*, writes that such an emphasis on decency and respectability was misleading and was often cosmetic, involving nothing more than raising admission prices and “‘hirin’ a

blonde named Maudie to sell tickets instead of Mickey, the Bowery Bile.’’ Once customers were inside the decent and respectable park, social roles were leveled out and up for grabs as people from all classes shared the same experiences. What allowed people to do this was what Gary Cross and John Walton called the “moral cleanness” of the parks. Such behavior was okay as long as it was inside the safe and controlled environment of the amusement parks.²²

Parks like Lakeside were able to take hold in the United States because American society was changing rapidly at the end of the nineteenth century. Those changes played important roles in the development of amusement parks and other forms of recreation. Historian Nell Irvin Painter writes that by the time Theodore Roosevelt became president in 1901, the United States was throwing off the memories of the economic problems that had plagued much of the 1890s and “embracing prosperity.” People were leaving farms and small towns behind for big cities, which transformed the United States from a largely rural, agricultural country to one dominated by industry. The middle class began its rise during this period, and was dominated by two groups; one represented professional workers such as doctors and lawyers, while the other represented business, labor and agriculture. Not everyone was happy with the transition to industrialization, and reformers argued that newly wealthy industrialists had little concern for their workers. Progressive leaders, however, made sure to look out for the workers. The eight hour day, half-day Saturdays, and free Sundays, became standard for most jobs, leaving people with a lot of leisure time to enjoy as they saw fit. At the same time, social and moral leaders opposition to partaking in games and other amusement activities on Sundays softened, giving even those who only had Sundays off a chance to enjoy themselves without dire moral implications. Progressive reformers wanted to make sure that people had wholesome places, especially parks and playgrounds, in which to spend their new leisure time, but increasing

competition from new commercial amusements, especially movies, sports, and amusement parks, was a constant threat to the reformers' preferences.²³

Public parks were among the most important and desirable places where workers could spend their increased leisure time. Roy Rosenzweig writes in *Eight Hours For What We Will* that social reformers often depicted parks as “weapons in the...moral crusade against working-class disorder, degeneracy, and drinking...” For different groups parks meant different things. For the upper classes, they meant cultural enlightenment and refinement, while for the lower classes they meant fun and games. Eventually, however, the two sides began to converge on a shared definition of play as the upper classes dropped some of their opposition to competitive sports and outdoor recreation and, eventually, came to embrace them. The amusement park industry grew, in part, from the public park movement and the end of widespread opposition to certain forms of recreation.²⁴

New York's Central Park is arguably the most famous public park in the United States, and while they were built for very different purposes, Central Park and Lakeside Amusement Park followed very similar trajectories in how they developed. When Central Park opened to the public in 1858, it was an upper class park. Members of the working class did not have the free time available to spend there, or the money it would take to get to the park on the streetcars, which was necessary since their homes were nowhere near the park. Most visitors to Central Park arrived by carriage, and paraded through the grounds in their carriages in order to be seen by others, according to Ray Rosenzweig and Elizabeth Blackman in their book *The Park and The People*. This activity dictated that only the wealthy could take part in it because maintaining horses and carriages was expensive, and only the wealthy had the money to do so. Some even had multiple carriages for use in different seasons. The chance to join the carriage parade

through Central Park, which became one of the most common activities there, made the upper class among the park's first supporters when it was still in the planning stages. Middle class workers, who had Saturday afternoon and all day Sunday free for leisure time, also visited the park, either arriving on foot or streetcar. But, it was the rich who made up most of the park's visitors and were among the most visible people seen using it. Half a century later, Lakeside's owners specifically targeted automobile owners with their park, again mostly members of Denver's upper class at that time.²⁵

Although Central Park did not charge an admission fee and was not gated, key elements when amusement parks came on the scene, the nature of the park seemed to keep out those who might otherwise disturb the sedate setting. Some newspaper reporters grumbled when they spotted children dancing at free concerts, or when people came and went while a concert was in progress, but most found the park to be an orderly and respectable place given the array of people in it. According to Rosenzweig and Blackmar, newspapers "attributed the respectability of concert crowds to the absence of the city's lower orders." However, by the 1870s, with increased wages and eight hour days, working class patrons were more frequently finding their way to Central Park. Just as Lakeside would do when confronted with growing working class neighborhoods around it in the 1910s, Central Park evolved. New rules allowed once forbidden activities, including boat rentals, pony and goat carriage rides, and Sunday concerts. Commercial vehicles were allowed on the park's drives for the first time, and in a major break with the past, games such as football and baseball were allowed on the lawns. Courting couples, something City Beautiful Denver and Lakeside Amusement Park actually encouraged, even became a common sight. Just as Lakeside would do, Central park became an ever evolving place as it responded to life around it in order to remain relevant and survive.²⁶

There was, however, one major difference between Central Park and any amusement park. Central Park was a public park, owned by New York City, and therefore public property. As such, members of the public believed that their input was valuable in deciding how the city would maintain and operate the park. An amusement park was a public space but it was also privately owned, and the owners alone ultimately decided what went on within its gates although if they wanted to remain in business for long they did pay attention to what the public wanted. Additionally, the park owners could regulate access to the amusement parks by whatever means they chose. No matter how closely the City of Denver aligned itself with Lakeside Amusement Park, the owners of the park ruled supreme inside its gates. The fact that Lakeside occupied its own town with its own rules and means of enforcing those rules added a noteworthy twist rarely seen in the amusement park industry.²⁷

In his book *Going Out*, David Nasaw chronicles what he calls the rise and ultimate fall of public amusements in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. During this period, he argues, going out went from being an almost exclusive activity of the rich to something that people of all classes could enjoy. The new amusement venues of movie theaters, amusement parks, and ballparks emphasized social solidarities and blurred social distinctions. Only in public amusement areas, writes Nasaw, could white collar and blue collar workers exist in a world that “transcended this division.” Yet, it was difficult for a blue collar factory worker to decide whether or not to go out for a night of fun at an amusement park or theater as they often had to be at work early in the morning. If they chose to stay out late they would pay the price the next day. White collar workers, on the other hand, increasingly had more leisure time and looked to commercial amusements to fill their recreational needs. Still, as time passed, blue collar workers increasingly turned to these new forms of entertainment as well.²⁸

The advent of amusement parks, according to Nasaw, transformed cities from places that people wanted to escape in summer months to places that people wanted to visit. City residents flocked to the parks because they “provided the city’s residents with enclosed playgrounds isolated and insulated from the demands of everyday life.” And although air jets might blow off a man’s hat or raise a woman’s skirt, and rides such as the Human Roulette Wheel might throw men, women, and children into one jumbled pile, it was okay as long as they were inside the beautifully landscape and decorated park whose gates kept it free from troublemakers. The activities inside the park gates further added to the desirability of them. According to Judith Adams, “American preferences in amusement were characteristically passive.” Movies and riding in cars, for example, were things that required little physical activity. Similarly, waiting in line for a ride at an amusement park that the rider then sat down on to enjoy required very little stamina and therefore fit with that passive nature. The rides themselves very often mimicked the new modes of transportation to which people were adapting. Roller coasters, for instance, were simply modified streetcars that provided a sensation of speed and danger, and Ferris wheels simulated speed and flight. In a sense, amusement park rides allowed customers to “test themselves against the machines...that dominated daily urban life.” Riders were able to experience risk and danger under safe conditions, and the social release of the parks and the experiences within them provided an escape from drab and dreary city life.²⁹

Most people accepted the parks on Coney Island as relatively wholesome and beneficial amusement outlets, but a number of social critics did attack them as vile creations. John Kassen writes that critic James Gibbon Huneker was so disturbed by what he saw at Coney Island that he urged the immediate abolition of the park, fearful that the surrender of reason and repression that seemed to afflict the patrons of the parks would result in a barbaric new culture. Bruce Bliven,

of *The New Republic*, attacked the parks in the 1920s because of the growing number of immigrants who were among the customers. Bliven and other intellectuals and reformers believed that the parks reflected a disintegrating society as more people were living in large cities and turning to commercial entertainment like amusement parks for escape. Jane Addams and other reformers even wanted to tear down Coney's parks and replace them with public parks. At a time when social reformers were calling for self-control for adults and directed play for children, the free-for-all reputation of amusement parks was incredibly disturbing to them.³⁰

To the dismay of many, the free-for-all world of the amusement parks on Coney Island encouraged romance with rides like the Tunnel of Love or the Canals of Venice. George Tilyou's Steeplechase Park did this more openly than the others. His Wedding Ring and Barrel of Love rides "made instant acquaintances of strangers and gave men and women a perfect excuse to clutch each other." Steeplechase's famous Blow-Hole Theater featured compressed air jets that raised women's skirts and blew hats off unsuspecting men while previous victims watched from the theater seats. The amusement parks got away with working class flirtation, permissiveness, and sexual humor, writes Kathy Peiss, because they did so in a managed environment where such things were not allowed to cross lines. Contrary to most cities and parks, Denver and Lakeside actually embraced such behavior.³¹

Many parks attempted to eliminate the "sordid activities" that were associated with Coney Island. In Worcester, Massachusetts, as in other cities, amusement park owners wanted to keep their parks respectable. Charles Lalimere opened a skating rink in Worcester in the late 1870s and attempted to keep undesirables out by charging what many thought to be exceptionally high prices. Horace Bigelow built Bigelow's Gardens on the site of Lalimere's failed skating rink in 1882. Bigelow lowered prices and attracted much more business. He

attempted to have separate areas that catered to each class of people, which worked well but not perfectly. As with every other amusement park, Bigelow's Gardens was a controlled space but customers adapted it to suit their own needs and desires. Kansas City placed their amusement parks, Electric Park and Forest Park, under the supervision of Recreation Superintendent Fred McClure and Board of Public Welfare Investigator Fred Johnson. McClure and Johnson hated the parks and did everything they could to stop the influx of what they considered "degrading, unartistic, and crassly commercial" amusements. They were unsuccessful. Yet, as wild as critics claimed the parks to be, they were in fact controlled environments. The fences and gates around the parks and admission fees that customers had to pay in order to get through the gates did an excellent job of controlling who entered the parks and went a long way toward keeping undesirable customers out of them. And, while rides might break down the normal social positions occupied by men and women by forcing them to careen into each other in tangled heaps, they did so in a carefully planned and controlled environment.³²

Out of all of Coney Island's parks, Dreamland went the farthest in attempting to be morally pure and was perhaps the most like Lakeside in what its owners were trying to accomplish with it. From its religious themed attractions The Creation and The End, to its advocacy of virtue and abstinence and promotion of propriety, Dreamland would have easily existed alongside Lakeside during the City Beautiful period. But, the very attitudes it tried to promote meant that Dreamland was never as popular as Luna Park or Steeplechase. It burned down in 1911, after being open for just seven years, and the owner never rebuilt it. George Dobson, one of the directors of the park, explained that the "beautiful" and "edifying" park simply could not draw the customers that the other parks had, and each year a little more of the original Dreamland design was lost as it was popularized. Lakeside's owners stuck to their

original design as long as possible, but eventually even they realized that their park needed to adapt if it wanted to survive.³³

Critics and their concerns aside, amusement parks swept across the United States, providing entertainment and fun for millions of customers who passed through their gates. The pages of *Billboard* magazine from the early 1900s to the early 1960s are filled with the stories of these parks. Some of them lasted only a season or at best a few years, driven out of business by bigger and stronger competitors or owners unwilling to invest money to keep the parks viable. Others outlived the purpose for which they were built, such as the many amusement parks that were built specifically for black customers in the era of segregation. Changing economic conditions, such as the eventual closure of streetcar lines (which were responsible for building and operating many parks) or the Great Depression, wiped out hundreds of them. The advent of the theme park in the 1950s, with the opening of Disneyland, further isolated those parks that still survived. But survive they did, much to the delight of adults and children everywhere.

With their appearance nearly everywhere, amusement parks quickly captured the American imagination, becoming places of both fun and fear. *Billboard* magazine, which began in 1894 as a publication devoted to outdoor advertising, soon expanded to include an entire amusement park section and often devoted one issue each year to amusement parks alone. The magazine continued to include amusement park news until the early 1960s. Freddy “Boom Boom” Cannon informed listeners in his 1962 song “Palisades Park,” which celebrated the famous New Jersey Park of the same name, that they would “never know how great kiss can feel/when you stop at the top of a Ferris wheel” as his heart went “up like a rocket ship/down like a roller coaster/back like a loop-the-loop/and around like a merry-go-round.” In “Pinocchio,” Walt Disney’s 1940 movie, Pinocchio and the other boys are taken to the

amusement park Pleasure Island with the promise of unlimited freedom and fun. After overindulging they did as many critics of amusement parks feared people would do and literally turned into jackasses. Even the rise of theme parks and the threat they posed to traditional amusement parks played out in popular culture. In the 1977 movie “Rollercoaster,” a deranged man blows up a series of amusement park rides, including a roller coaster, while blackmailing amusement park owners to prevent further attacks. In a part of the story that was written but never filmed, the man is revealed to have been seeking revenge on the corporate-owned parks that were driving his parents’ family owned park out of business.³⁴

Nearly every trend that marked the rise and development of amusement parks heavily influenced Lakeside’s design and its operation. The park’s illumination, for example, was singled out for praise for many years after it opened and was one of the defining characteristics that linked it to Denver’s City Beautiful movement. The park was consistently promoted as a clean place, suitable for the most conservative amusement seekers, the result of both the high standards behind its design and the fact that it was open to all but marketed to Denver’s wealthy, especially its wealthy automobile owners. Even the fence around the park played an important role in its perception as first an elite resort and later as a working class haven. Constant innovation in rides and entertainment, stressed from the days of early pleasure parks to the rise of Coney Island, became a hallmark of Lakeside. Nearly every factor that appeared in Mangel’s history of amusement centers, the story of the Columbian Exposition, and the rise of both the City Beautiful movement and organized amusement parks, appeared at Lakeside.

Amusement parks reflected the larger world that existed around them, but that is magnified with the story of Lakeside. Lakeside was so tied into Denver’s fortunes that Denver’s ever changing political and economic landscapes had great impact on Lakeside. The collapse of

the City Beautiful movement, for example, forced an already struggling Lakeside to seek out a new identity if it wanted to survive. The Great Depression, which forced many amusement parks to close their gates, brought an ownership change to Lakeside that was one of the most important factors behind its long-term survival. Even the annexation battles that sprang up in Denver and other cities around the country played a role in Lakeside's existence. The park was, and is, an excellent mirror of the world around it and Lakeside's various owners demonstrated a remarkable ability to adapt the park to those changing conditions.

For all the similarities that Lakeside Amusement Park shared with its fellow amusement parks, it was, and is, a very unique park. Like every other amusement park, Lakeside was protected by a fence, but unlike all the other parks, it was further protected by occupying its own town. The town of Lakeside existed solely for the park, a status that no other park could claim. Being located in its own town gave the park's builders and owners enormous control over the rules and regulations that impacted the park, especially in its early years. Lakeside's close relationship with Denver during the City Beautiful movement was another important difference. Critics blasted the many parks that tried to claim they were part of the City Beautiful movement, arguing that the very nature of amusement parks flew against the values of City Beautiful. But, Lakeside and Denver's program were closely linked for many years. Other observers argued that amusement parks did nothing to educate or uplift, charges that Lakeside's owners might take issue with as they tried to do just that with their park. Lakeside, through the smart business sense of its owners, also demonstrated an exceptional skill at surviving changing times, an extremely important factor in the park's long life. Unlike thousands of other amusement parks, Lakeside Amusement Park not only survived, but thrived. It did so, in large part, by being an amusement park like no other.³⁵

Lakeside's first owners built on the knowledge and experience of the amusement parks came before it, while later owners of the park took notice of the developments that came after its initial construction. Sometimes they were more successful than their predecessors, and sometimes they failed to heed the lessons of the past. Lakeside's owners set out to create a beautiful amusement park to serve Denver's elite amusement seekers. With help from the City of Denver they did that and much more—they created a near-perfect model of Denver's City Beautiful goals. While it did not last forever, it lasted longer than most industry observers would have ever thought possible. When that image began to fail the park, new owners demonstrated their incredible ability to reimagine and reinvent the park, creating a typical working class amusement park that still managed to be a bit different. And, above all, they had an amusement park that managed to survive every challenge thrown at it.

Between 1887 and 1908, six amusement centers were built in Denver. The people behind each park counted on Denver's need for open space and recreation, attempting to provide both with beautiful and thrilling parks. Each park, in its own way, reflected national trends and amusement park developments. Some of the parks were pioneers, others simply built on an already successful idea. Like Lakeside's owners, the builders of each of these early parks attempted to capitalize on the successes and avoid the failures of the previous parks by making themselves just a bit different. Lakeside's owners had the benefit of following all of them, although it did not always work to their advantages. Most of Denver's amusement parks ended in failure. In its amusement park history, Denver was not so different than any other major city in the country, with one exception: Lakeside Amusement Park.

While this is primarily the story of an amusement park, it is also the story of much more than that. It is the story of a company town that survived even when many felt it no longer

should. It is the story of a race track that became nationally important. It is the story of the second shopping mall built in Denver, a mall that held the first Montgomery Ward's store built in a mall in the United States. It is the story of two families, the Zangs and the Krasners, whose passion and dedication have kept Lakeside Amusement Park alive for over a century. Without those other stories, there is no story of Lakeside Amusement Park.

Of the nearly 5,000 amusement parks that were built in the United States between 1895 and 1920, only one hundred of those parks still survived by 2008. Twenty-eight of them lived to be one hundred years old. This is the story of how one of those twenty-eight parks, Lakeside Amusement Park, a park like no other, endured.³⁶

CHAPTER ONE:
BEFORE THERE WAS LAKESIDE...

In March 1907, workers under the direction of Colorado brewer Adolph Zang began clearing a huge section of land at Forty-Sixth Avenue and Sheridan Boulevard in the new town of Lakeside, located in Jefferson County just across the county line from Denver. Six months later, the workers had laid out the grounds, including a thirty-seven acre lake, and started construction on several buildings in what would be Lakeside Amusement Park.* The Lakeside Realty and Amusement Company, the builder of the new park, owned the 160 acres that made up the site. Fifty-seven of those acres held the Denver area's newest amusement park. At the same time, a construction crew in Denver was working to complete the new Municipal Auditorium at Fourteenth and Curtis Streets. The new building was one part of Mayor Robert Speer's newly instituted City Beautiful program, designed to clean up and beautify Denver through small projects, such as installing sidewalks and paving streets, and larger ones, such as constructing parks and new public buildings.¹

The two projects—an amusement park and a theater—might seem at first to come from two very different worlds. An amusement park was meant for fun and frivolity, while the theater was part of a major civic beautification program meant to give Denver an improved appearance and greater national standing. And yet, the two projects were not as dissimilar as they might at first seem. Both trends, the amusement park boom of the late 1800s and early 1900s and the City Beautiful movement, shared a common beginning at Chicago's Columbian Exposition in 1893.

* While Lakeside Amusement Park was popularly referred to as the White City for about the first eight to ten years of its existence, this was only a nickname. Its official name was always Lakeside Amusement Park.

Furthermore, by the time Lakeside Amusement Park and Denver's Municipal Auditorium opened in 1908, they were both vital elements in the push to make Denver into a model of the City Beautiful ideal.

By the time construction of Lakeside Amusement Park started in March 1907, the two factors that would play important roles in its early development, the City Beautiful movement and the growth of amusement parks, were well established trends throughout the country. The City Beautiful movement was underway in cities across the United States, including Denver thanks to the personal efforts of Mayor Robert Speer. At the same time, amusement parks were springing up across the country. Some were on the sites of old picnic grounds or gardens, but others, like Lakeside, were entirely new ventures. But, unlike Lakeside, none of the other nearly 5,000 amusement parks built during this period would combine the two movements so successfully. Like Coney Island's Dreamland, Lakeside's period of being a high-class amusement park lasted seven years. Lakeside, however, had one major difference—it had the city of Denver behind it.

While it is impossible to judge how long the connection with Denver might have lasted had voters not turned their backs on Speer and his program in 1912, it is tempting to suggest that it probably would have continued at least until Speer's death. But, Lakeside's owners realized that for the park to survive and prosper it needed to face reality. They were, therefore, far more open to the idea of popularizing the park and moving away from its original design, so even had Speer remained in office, the relationship might not have lasted much longer than it did. Dreamland's owners grudgingly gave way a bit at a time, only to give up entirely when their park burned down. At Lakeside, owners went all out in their efforts to adapt the park to the social environment around it to insure that it would survive. Lakeside's owners were not

concerned with the role the park would play in shaping events on the world stage, as Robert Rydell argues the exposition planners were. But, they were concerned with the park's role in Denver's social life. In the park's early years, Lakeside's owners, all members of Denver's elite, catered to conservative, upper class amusement seekers and their social mores. Anyone else who visited Lakeside Amusement Park during its first years in business would have to abide by that upper class vision of amusement if they wanted to patronize the park.

Denver's amusement seekers, conservative or otherwise, sought entertainment long before Lakeside opened its gates. In the city's earlier days, rowdier crowds patronized saloons, gambling halls, and brothels in large numbers. But, by the 1880s the city was more settled and many residents wanted more family oriented entertainment options. Rest estate investor John Brisbane Walker attempted to create such a place with River Front Park, which he built between Fifteenth and Nineteenth Streets along the Platte River. The park, which opened on July 4, 1887, included beautifully landscaped grounds, a race track and baseball diamonds, a boating course on the Platte, and a permanent three-story exhibit hall that resembled an elaborate castle. In the winters, the Denver Toboggan Club built toboggan slides, some of which stretched for one thousand feet, at River Front, and the sleds reportedly reached speeds of 180 miles per hour. One summer, Walker dammed the Platte and floated a steamboat on the lake it created. Walker hired actors to stage plays on the boat, and at the first Sunday performance, Denver's town marshal and his deputies boarded the ship, watched the show, and then immediately afterwards arrested the manager for conducting business on a Sunday. A little over twenty years later, Lakeside's would understand the arrest only all too well. By 1890, Walker's business interests had shifted to New York and he offered to sell River Front Park to the city of Denver for \$1 million. The city refused, arguing that the lack of convenient access to the grounds and poor air

quality in the area made the land unsuitable for a city park. In 1891, the Union Pacific Railroad bought the property for \$1.2 million and rapidly expanded into it. The once stately park also served, in 1894, as the base for Denver's faction of Coxe's Army. When it came to classy entertainment options, Walker was simply ahead of his time.²

For ventures like River Front Park or Lakeside Amusement Park to survive, they needed a hospitable environment in which to operate and a stable foundation on which to build. By the time construction began on Lakeside the foundation for the marriage between the park and Denver's City Beautiful movement was in place, but it had not been easy to get there. One man in particular played an especially prominent role in the way it came about. Robert Speer arrived in Denver in 1878 as a twenty-two-year old tuberculosis victim, and like many others, he came to Colorado seeking a cure for the disease. Within two years of his arrival Speer was working for Cyrus H. McLaughlin, a prominent Denver real estate developer. Over the next ten years Speer rose to the top of the McLaughlin company, and in 1890 he founded his own, R.W. Speer and Company. He purchased and developed the Arlington Park subdivision, along the banks of Cherry Creek in Denver, including the amusement park of the same name. Fellow developers liked Speer and his cheerful attitude, and he developed close relationships with many of them, which later came in handy when he entered politics.³

In 1880, shortly after his arrival in Denver, voters elected Speer the city's clerk. Five years later he was appointed postmaster by President Grover Cleveland, who was known for personally approving such appointments. Six years later Governor John Routt appointed Speer as the lone Democrat on the city's three member Fire and Police Board; Speer was soon the board's president. By 1901, he was head of the Denver Board of Public Works. In many ways Speer was the typical boss politician that characterized much of the era's politics, and people

who did business with the city learned “it was wise to donate cash to the ‘Speer Club.’”⁴

As Colorado's capital, Denver had been under the control of the state government, but in 1902 voters approved an amendment to the state constitution that created the City and County of Denver and gave it home rule. Two years later, in 1904, voters elected Speer as mayor and also approved a new city charter, which Speer had heavily promoted, that provided a legal framework for civic beautification. The estimated 10,000 fraudulent votes that Speer received certainly helped make sure the man and his charter were approved. The new charter created a three member Art Commission, made up of an architect, an artist, and a sculptor. The mayor was an ex-officio member. Speer used the art commission, headed by Henry Read, an English artist who had come to Colorado for his health, as a planning office to help promote civic beautification. Financing for the major beautification projects that Speer had in mind was made possible by another charter provision that continued the parks commission that was established in 1893 and also created four different park districts. These four districts (South Denver, East Denver, Highland, and Montclair) could acquire and improve land, levy assessments, and issue bonds with voter approval.⁵

Like millions of others, Speer visited the Columbian Exposition in 1893, and also just like many others, he left it feeling inspired. By 1904, he had the political power to act on his sentiments. During Speer's three terms in office, civic improvements were visible nearly everywhere. More than three hundred miles of streets were graded and paved, and sandstone sidewalks and granite curbs installed. Decorative streetlamps replaced the seven 150-foot high arc light towers that had lit the city since 1883. In addition, many of downtown Denver's streets and buildings were covered with decorative lights, leading some to argue that Denver rivaled Paris as the City of Light. Millions of dollars went into building storm and sanitary sewers, and

in 1908 the city opened a municipal bath house at Twentieth and Curtis Streets. In its first year, more than 150,000 people bathed there. And, every night, city workers cleaned the streets and sidewalks. Speer's "proudest accomplishment" during his first term, however, was the Municipal Auditorium. The \$650,000, 12,000 seat auditorium was completed just in time to host the Democratic National Convention in July 1908. The auditorium hosted free Sunday afternoon and evening concerts and thousands flocked to it on other days for operas, gospel revivals, auto shows, and even Boy Scout exhibitions. The Municipal Auditorium put "Denver on the map as a convention and cultural center," according to historians Tom Noel and Barbara Norgren, which was good for a city trying to gain national notice.⁶

While Speer appreciated these projects and the benefits they brought to Denver, his first love was Denver's park system. In planning for Central Park, New York's mayor, Ambrose Kingsland, argued that the public places of the city were not in keeping with the city's character. New York needed a grand public park in order to provide visible proof to the world of the city's stature. More than fifty years later, Denver's Mayor Robert Speer would argue the same point. Speer and his followers wanted a city that reflected their belief that Denver was gaining in national prominence.⁷

By the early 1900s, Denver was a well-established city. Economically and politically sound, it seemed ready for a bright future. As Jerome Smiley wrote in his 1901 history of Denver, the city as it then existed was "an object lesson of what faith, courage, and energy have done in converting a remote frontier town, that had to fight for its right to live, into a great and growing metropolis..." According to Smiley, the city had a beautiful environment, notable architecture, and a healthy climate. But, it was also sorely lacking in other areas that would make it a truly world class city. Smiley argued that "Denver's noble surroundings should inspire

a high exaltation of municipal life.”⁸

Of particular importance to Smiley was a park system. Denver’s planners had not set aside any land for public parks in the city, and not until Mayor Joseph C. Bates called for acquisition of park land in 1872 did many people give it consideration. The government of Denver finally took action in 1881 under the administration of Mayor Richard Sopris, when the state legislature set aside 320 acres of school land and allowed Denver to buy it at a reduced price as park land. The original plan called for 640 acres along with an identical sized parcel at Sloan’s Lake but it met opposition in the state senate as well as from the public, the majority of which saw no need for parks. The city did go ahead with the purchase of the 320 acres, which became City Park. In the following years the city purchased other pieces of land to expand Denver’s park system. The Denver City Council initially controlled the parks, but in 1889 control passed to the Board of Public Works. It remained there until 1893, when it passed to a three member Park Commission.⁹

By 1901 Denver had twelve established parks covering 436 acres. City Park, at 320 acres, was the largest, followed by Congress Park’s forty acres. Washington, Park Avenue, Lincoln, Highland, Jefferson, Platt, Curtis, Dunham, Chaffee, and Fuller Parks made up the remainder. Washington, Jefferson, Highland, and Congress (which until recently had been used as a cemetery) were considered unimproved. City Park was the most developed, with a lake, buggy racing track, a small zoo, and the newly built Museum of Natural History. But, according to historians Tom Noel and Barbara Norgren, “fledgling parks and shabby attractions did not make Denver a beautiful or distinguished city.” There was little to be done however. The budget for the Parks Department in 1900 was just \$67,000.¹⁰

According to Jerome Smiley, none of Denver’s parks were suitable to making Denver

beautiful or distinguished, or for providing restful escapes for the city's residents, when first purchased. They were simply vast tracts of "weed-grown or barren areas" badly in need of improvement. The areas that had been improved were marvels, Smiley felt, and he wrote that the "application of intelligent landscape engineering, creation of artificial lakes, and lawn, tree, and flower cultures" had turned them into "blooming gardens." While Smiley believed this a good start, he argued that Denver needed to do much more. Its location in a favored setting among numerous resources and opportunities made it a necessity that Denver should be "an example, a standard, for other American municipalities."¹¹

With the park system so slow to take hold in Denver, residents seeking rest and relaxation often turned towards any open land that was readily available to them and resembled a park, including the city's cemeteries. Denver's earliest cemetery, located in the area of what is now Cheesman Park, quickly grew to be an unsightly mess. The *Rocky Mountain News* bemoaned the unfenced cemetery as a place where cattle roamed freely, overturning headstones and destroying the land. In addition to being an eyesore, the cemetery was also located on land that the City of Denver wanted to turn into a park. In the early 1900s, the order came to move bodies out of the old City and Mount Calvary Cemeteries in order to make way for the park. People had only a limited amount of time in which to move their deceased friends and relatives, and several hundred bodies were left behind when the land became a park.¹²

Riverside Cemetery, downstream from Denver along the Platte River, opened in 1876. Cemetery monuments were widely recognized as a reliable source of public sculpture by then, and Riverside's founders were intent on creating a fitting setting for the fine monuments they knew would soon come. The cemetery was laid out in a grid of avenues, drives, and walks, and the property was graded and planted with trees and shrubs in an effort to copy "the landscape or

park plan...” popularized by Frederick Law Olmsted. Fairmount Cemetery, located to the southeast of Denver, opened in 1890. The founders of Fairmount expanded on the concept of Riverside and invested \$30,000 in a stone chapel, gateway lodge, water system, graded streets, and a professional arborist to care for the many trees and shrubs inside the cemetery.

Throughout the 1890s Riverside and Fairmount were rivals and each cemetery attempted to gain an advantage over the other “through the greater beauty of their landscape and the higher artistic merit of their sculpture.” Fairmount ultimately won, but the larger point was that Denver now had two large, beautifully decorated parks outside of the city. These cities of the dead served the living as much as the people buried in them. It was not uncommon for families to take a carriage or streetcar to either cemetery on a Sunday afternoon and walk the grounds, admiring the magnificent headstones and other structures, and eat a picnic lunch. And, for the time being, they helped to fill Denver’s need for parks. Visiting cemeteries in search of park space was not limited to Denver. In New York, for example, picnickers frequently visited Brooklyn’s Greenwood Cemetery after it opened in 1838 to escape from the city.¹³

While cemeteries helped fill the need for park space, Smiley believed that Denver needed to stop delaying development of its actual park system. The city, in his opinion, needed to buy land in the northern and southern sections of the city for large parks. All of the parks needed to be connected by a system of boulevards in addition to a drive along the South Platte River. In addition to aiding transportation, this drive would improve the appearance of the river’s banks, which Smiley described as “neglected, unsightly, and forelorn.” Smiley also called for rerouting Cherry Creek, which he called an “avoidable and blighting blemish,” in order to reclaim land and improve the city’s appearance. Overall, Smiley wanted city government to be more involved in “making Denver the City Beautiful.”¹⁴

Smiley knew that changes such as he called for could not happen at once. In fact, Smiley argued that such projects “would properly require a long term of years,” perhaps as many as twenty-five. In the past, he wrote, Denver had faced great economic troubles, which had prevented it from doing anything but the bare necessities when it came to municipal projects. Smiley believed that those days were long gone, thankfully, and it was possible for the city to begin undertaking a long-term and costly project like beautification. By devoting one-tenth of its yearly income to municipal projects (the tithe as he referred to it), the city could immediately add to the “welfare, convenience, and pleasure of all its people.”¹⁵

Jerome Smiley was not alone in the things he wanted for Denver and the benefits he believed a park system would bring with it. Robert Speer, police commissioner and owner of Arlington Park, was three years away from becoming mayor of Denver when Smiley’s history was published in 1901. Speer shared Smiley’s desire for park land, and like Smiley, he believed that Denver could become the City Beautiful. But, Speer had a much broader vision of what could constitute City Beautiful than did many of his contemporaries. When it came to creating Denver’s parks, or even deciding what constituted a park, Mayor Speer took a much more relaxed approach to them than had the planners of the country’s most famous park, Central Park in New York. When Central Park opened in 1858, Frederick Law Olmsted insisted that people needed to be “trained to the proper use” of a park. One of his biggest concerns was the protection of grasses and other plants, which eventually led to the birth of the infamous “Keep Off the Grass” signs. Olmsted also created a group of elite park keepers who were trained in an almost military style. Mayor Speer wanted none of that. Although he did want his parks to be just as beautiful as Central Park, from the beginning of his program people were allowed to walk on the grass and play in the fountains, something that would have given Olmsted fits. Both cities

viewed their parks as valued open space that provided for relaxation and rejuvenation, but Denver took a far more permissive attitude from the start, while it took New York more than a decade to reach the same point.¹⁶

There were two reasons behind Speer's great interest in parks. One was very practical in that well landscaped park areas could provide flood control (floods were often problems in early Denver) and firebreaks. The second reason was more philosophical. Speer believed, as did many other progressive era thinkers, that "an improved environment would uplift the entire urban population..." And while parks served such practical and spiritual needs in Speer's vision, there was a physical aspect as well. One of Speer's more controversial decisions when it came to Denver's parks was to allow couples to spoon in them. Denver, according to the *Rocky Mountain News*, was in need of more people in the early 1900s. The newspaper proclaimed "The more young people to marry the better...if love-making in the parks will help it along, why then they can do all the love-making in the parks they want to."¹⁷

Speer's favorite park project during his time as mayor was Civic Center Park. He envisioned this as being very much like the Court of Honor at the Columbian Exposition with architecturally similar government buildings surrounding a central plaza. Speer believed that not only would Civic Center beautify Denver, but that it would also make government more efficient since all city, county, and state offices would be grouped in one area. Only part of this dream would be realized when the completion of the new City and County Building in the 1930s surrounded the park on three sides by it, the Denver Public Library, and the State Capitol.¹⁸

While Civic Center received much of Speer's attention, he was just as interested in building or completing parks throughout the city. George Kessler, who had worked with Frederick Law Olmsted, developed the city's park and parkway plan. Kessler envisioned a

network of parkways that radiated from Civic Center Park and connected all of Denver's parks by road. Included in the plan were three parks near Lakeside: Sloan's Lake (site of Manhattan Beach), Berkeley, and Inspiration Point. As with Civic Center, not all of the parkway and boulevard system was completed, but the plans definitely included the area that Lakeside Amusement Park occupied.¹⁹

Speer's City Beautiful envisioned a cleaned up and beautified Denver that was pleasant, healthy, and beautiful both for residents and for the visitors that such a city would surely attract. Lakeside Amusement Park, as designed, fit perfectly into the plan. Promoters argued that not only would it attract visitors to Denver, but it would also draw business from Denver's residents. A twenty-minute street car ride or an automobile trip over paved roads would leave visitors at Lakeside's front gates, where they could get away from the congested city and breathe fresh air cooled by breezes from the snowy mountains. There was certainly more to do and see at Lakeside than at City or Washington Parks, but it was still a park as far as Speer and his City Beautiful supporters were concerned. Critics could argue whether or not an amusement park could be part of the City Beautiful vision, but in Denver, Mayor Speer made the rules and he included Lakeside in his vision. Denver, then, was more than happy to unofficially adopt Lakeside and Lakeside was more than happy to have the relationship.

Later promotional material built around the strong relationship between Denver and Lakeside Amusement Park created the impression that it was the only amusement park in Denver, but that that was far from the case. The amusement park boom taking the United States by storm in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries swept into Denver just as strong as it did elsewhere. In his 1880 history of Denver, W.B. Vickers wrote that "Denver, it must be confessed, is sadly deficient in places of legitimate amusement..." Within fifteen years a series

of summer resorts and amusement parks would be built in Denver, but beautiful as they might be to the many who patronized them, they still were not to the satisfaction of all. In 1907, the *Denver Republican* argued that while Denver was well provided with winter activities, it was sorely in need of summer amusements. This pronouncement, made as Lakeside Amusement Park was under construction, must have come as somewhat of a blow to the three amusement parks then in operation in the city. By the time construction at Lakeside was underway, Denver had already been long experimenting with summer resorts.²⁰

The first major park in Denver, as well as Lakeside's longest-lasting competitor, was Elitch's Gardens, which opened May 1, 1890 and was operated by John and Mary Elitch, owners of The Elitch Palace Dining Room on Arapahoe Street in Denver. It was not initially an amusement park, but was rather a "summer gardens" with elaborate gardens, a zoo, and a theater. The Elitches had arrived in Denver in 1880 from San Francisco, and John found work at the Arcade Restaurant before buying his own establishment. In 1888, John Elitch purchased the old Chilcott farm in the Highlands northwest of Denver because he believed he and Mary could save money in the long run by growing their own produce for their restaurant. As the couple spent more time at the farm it increasingly reminded them of the time they had spent at San Francisco's Woodward Gardens, a popular playground for families there. In 1889, John proposed turning the farm into a park, similar to Woodward Gardens. Like the Gardens, the Elitch's new venture tolerated neither "rough company" nor sold liquor. The *Denver Republican* of May 2, 1890 called Elitch's a "great institution," and said that even after opening day the people of Denver were not fully aware of how great the park was. The *Republican* proclaimed that "From this time forth people intent upon recreation of a legitimate kind will go to Elitch's Gardens," a pronouncement seemingly forgotten when Lakeside opened nearly twenty years

later. The beautiful gardens, which earned Elitch's praise for the next century, were lauded as magnificent additions to Denver. The animal exhibits also received high accolades. The first animals arrived at the farm when P.T. Barnum, who was a friend of the family, and *Denver Post* owner Harry Tammen, who was also the new owner of the Sells-Floto Circus, each gave Mary Elitch extra baby circus animals. Most impressive, though, was the "elegant theater," another fixture at Elitch's for the next century.²¹

Thomas Edison's Vitascope, an early film projector installed at Elitch's in 1896, was the first major amusement park-type attraction added to the park. In the years that followed the attractions were added with increasing rapidity. In 1897, Ivy Baldwin, a local daredevil, began doing balloon ascensions at the park. In 1899, the Elitches added a penny arcade and a constructed a building that housed a reenactment of the battle between the Monitor and Merrimac, a popular attraction at amusement parks across the country. In 1900, a miniature train joined the list of attractions, followed by a Toboggan Coaster in 1904 and the first permanent carousel in 1906. By the early 1900s, then, Elitch's had become a true amusement park.²²

The second summer resort to open in Denver was Manhattan Beach on the shore of Sloan's Lake, south of Elitch's. Manhattan Beach, which replaced an earlier resort of the same name at Sloan's Lake, opened on June 13, 1891, and is often declared to be the first amusement park to open in the West. The *Denver Times* proclaimed that with the opening of the park, bathing beach, and menagerie, the city would have "one of the most beautiful resorts in the country." Like Elitch's, Manhattan Beach featured a zoo, the star attraction of which was a male and female hippopotamus. Also like Elitch's, Manhattan Beach had beautiful gardens and a theater. The *Denver Times* pointed out that one of the new park's most unique features was the fountain in Sloan's Lake. The center jet on the fountain shot water one hundred feet into the air,

while the three jets surrounding it reached seventy-five feet. A system of colored lights at the base of the fountain allowed it to “rise in many colors and one of the prettiest spectacles imaginable will be witnessed.” The newspaper stated that the only other such fountain to be found was in Paris.²³

The theater, a restaurant, a hotel, a bowling alley, and a gymnasium rounded out the buildings at the new Manhattan Beach. The boat house on the lake held canoes, row boats, barges, and a steam boat named the *City of Denver*. There also was a grandstand for watching aquatic events on the lake. The park soon added a dance pavilion and roller skating rink. In 1892 rumors circulated that Elitch’s and Manhattan Beach were going to merge. Dr. J.M. Foster, trustee of Manhattan Beach, and A.R. McGoffey, president of Elitch’s, denied that any such merger would take place. The two parks, however, announced that they would be charging identical admission fees as well as instituting reserved seating at the theaters. Despite the denials, rumors of the combination were in fact true, and Mary Elitch Long managed the Manhattan Beach theater for nearly twenty years. Surprisingly, given the praise heaped on the park and the fact that Mary Elitch was managing the theater, the park’s theater company came in for harsh criticism from the *Denver Republican* in 1902 because of what it called garish set colors and mediocre acting ability. The newspaper was careful to point out that it was unfair to criticize too much, though, as the company was new. The Elitch’s Theater, also under Mary Elitch's direction, was consistently praised during the same time and after. With the same management operating the two parks, Ivy Baldwin divided his balloon ascension act between Elitch’s and Manhattan Beach, adding to the attractions the newer park offered.²⁴

Over the next ten years, management continued adding to Manhattan Beach’s amusement devices, although in a somewhat strange move for an amusement park they did tear down the

roller coaster in 1902. The move deprived the park of what was by then a fairly standard amusement park device. Another major change at Manhattan Beach for the 1902 season involved admission fees. The Denver newspapers praised Elitch's, and later Lakeside, for charging high admission fees in order to keep undesirable customers out of the parks. Prior to 1902, Manhattan Beach charged a quarter for admission, but that year dropped the fee to just ten cents in an effort to "cater to the vast multitude instead of the chosen few," allowing "the masses an opportunity to spend a day away from the care and anxiety of labor, amid such surroundings as are conducive to health and pleasure." Speaking to the *Denver Times* about the new admission fee policy, the park's managers, Hellbrun and Mayer, were careful to point out that they did not allow the sale of liquor in the park and that they were determined that propriety would prevail and nothing would be allowed that would offend the sensibilities of women and children. Hellbrun and Mayer also revealed to the *Times* that they had a powerful weapon at their disposal to maintain order. A giant searchlight, another common feature at amusement parks, was in operation atop the park's observation tower. While the rays from the light reminded people all over Denver that the park existed, it also allowed management to shine light into every corner of the park, "so as to insure against any infraction of the rules laid down governing the general conduct of the place."²⁵

Lights, from searchlights to smaller bulbs on strings, were an important feature of any amusement park. For many years after its opening the city of Denver praised Lakeside Amusement Park for its lighting design. But, Manhattan Beach was the first amusement park in Denver to adopt elaborate lighting schemes, which were first introduced at the 1893 Columbian Exposition. Throughout the grounds of Manhattan Beach were arches with rows of colored lights, which made for a "magnificent illuminated promenade..." Although management

continually remodeled and expanded the park over the years from 1891 to 1904, disaster struck in 1909 when a fire destroyed Manhattan Beach. New management quickly rebuilt the park, which they renamed Luna Park, beginning in 1910. Many of the older amusements were carried over to the new park, but two new attractions were added, one being a movie theater. The other was a new roller coaster, named the Aero Coaster and designed by Denverites Harry L. Weber, Theodore Nollenberger, and W.W. McFarland. This coaster consisted of a sixty foot conical tower, 120 feet around at the base, with track running around the cone. Luna Park was never as popular as Manhattan Beach and as customers lost interest the park simply faded away. By the outbreak of World War I it had essentially been abandoned.²⁶

One other notable first was for Manhattan Beach was that it was the site of the first amusement park fatality in Denver. On July 5, 1891, six-year-old George W. Eaton and five other people were riding on Roger, the park's star elephant. Just as the elephant was about to begin his route, the hot air balloon began its ascension and a crowd of people rushed to see it. George, according to a witness, also stood up while on the elephant, lost his balance, and fell to the ground. Whether it was the balloon or the crowd that startled him, Roger the elephant broke away from his keeper and dashed through the crowd attempting to get to his corral. Sadly, the elephant trampled George as he lay on the ground, crushing the boy's head. The elephant was put to death soon after. The coverage of George Eaton's death is in stark contrast to the coverage of a potentially fatal accident on a ride under construction at Lakeside in 1908. The *Rocky Mountain News* described the carnage of George's death in detail, filling most of the front page of the newspaper with it, and noting that it was a "horrible sight." In 1908, not a single Denver newspaper printed one word about an accident on the Scenic Railway at Lakeside that might have cost one Denver woman her life.²⁷

The third amusement park built in Denver, and perhaps the park with the most significance to the future relationship between Denver and Lakeside Amusement Park, was Arlington Park. The Arlington Park Company began construction on the resort in February 1892. The thirty-five acre park was along the banks of Cherry Creek, between Pennsylvania and Downing Streets, and encompassed land known as Arlington Grove, which the *Colorado Sun* called “one of the nicest groves in the vicinity.” The ground, according to the newspaper, was very uneven, but the park's builders handled this by dredging the creek in order to straighten it and using the dirt from the dredging operation to level the ground. They also built a one-half mile long lake with an island at one end of the park. Like Elitch's and Manhattan Beach, Arlington Park also had a theater in addition to other amusements. The principle movers behind Arlington Park were Denver Postmaster Corcoran, H.W. Michall, and Police Commissioner Robert W. Speer.²⁸

According to an interview Police Commissioner Speer gave to the *Rocky Mountain News*, the plans for the park's “adornment are beautiful.” Descriptions of the early Arlington Park are difficult to find, but aside from the tennis courts, baseball field, and theater, the biggest attraction seems to have been a show entitled “The Last Days of Pompeii.” A large canvas depicting Mt. Vesuvius, at least fifty-two feet in height, was set up on the far side of the lake. In front of it were various buildings, including a temple and palace. Various openings in the stage allowed for smoke and flames to shoot up through the set, each series of events controlled electronically. In order to create the illusion of lava flowing down the sides of Vesuvius, a red light was set up behind the canvas and when turned on it showed through holes in it. The flow of lava was controlled by the man in charge of the light, who moved it around behind the screen. The *Denver Republican* found the whole show an impressive sight, but Mr. Wiley, general manager

of the park, said it was “the easiest thing in the world...when you know how.” As popular as the fall of Pompeii may have been to watch, by 1897 management was completely remodeling Arlington Park. Two new attractions became the centerpieces of the remade park. One was a 150 foot by 300 foot saltwater bathing tank, which the *Rocky Mountain News* said was the largest in the United States. Management expected the tank to accommodate about 4,000 people, although they intended to suppress the “small boy nuisance” by banning them except for on certain mornings “so as not to interfere with the ladies.” The other new attraction was a Shoot-the-Chutes, which ended in the lake. A favorite show on the new chutes was Professor Barnes and his diving elk, which would alternately slide down or dive off the chute.²⁹

In addition to these two major changes, the new management company also added a professional bicycle track around the lake, taking advantage of the bicycling boom then sweeping the nation, and redesigned the football, baseball, and tennis areas. A scenic railway depicting the route to the Klondike, a palace of illusions, a shooting gallery, burro rides, flying horses, mazes, and a haunted swing rounded out the new attractions under construction at Arlington for the 1898 season. In a nod to Colorado’s history, management also added a Mineral Exhibit building and invited all mining districts in Colorado to put ore samples on display. According to the *Rocky Mountain News*, everything at the new Arlington Park would “be run in a strictly first-class manner” as management attempted to make the park both entertaining and educational. The name of the park was changed to Chutes Park, but it never caught on and soon reverted to Arlington Park.³⁰

Over the next several years a number of attractions were added to the park, including a scenic railway, which was essentially an early roller coaster. In 1898, the *Denver Times* told the story of William McFarland, a ticket broker who rode the scenic railroad at Chutes Park.

According to the *Times*, McFarland and his fellow passengers were “more or less sober” when they got on the ride, but McFarland declared afterwards that he would not ride it again “for the prettiest \$500 bill in the world.” The ride up the incline was pleasant, but for him the fun stopped after that. He even missed seeing the tunnel that the car went through, so afraid was he, and he was never quite certain if he was “going to Heaven or the other place.” When he finally found himself on firm ground again he had to agree with a friend of his who called the scenic railway “the road of the Lost Soul.” Ten years later, when Lakeside opened with its own scenic railway, the ride was much more popular and acceptable and considered to be much tamer.³¹

The joy of the new Arlington Park was short-lived. On the night of January 21, 1901, a fire broke out in the engine room of the scenic railway. Firemen told the *Denver Times* that they believed tramps had started the blaze, and, within an hour of the first alarm at 11:00 p.m., the park was in ashes. According to the *Times*, nearby residents were thrilled to see the park burn because they had grown weary of the “noises emanating from it and the objectionable characters it drew there.” By the following summer portions of the park, renamed Riverside, had been rebuilt, but on June 4, 1902, another fire raged through it. Arlington Park never reopened. In 1903, the remains of Arlington/Chutes/Riverside Park were torn down. S and N Lumber Company (Sayre-Newton, which was actually one of the park's owners) bought the wood from the one mile of board fences that surrounded the grounds and from the still-standing scenic railway tower. The City of Denver paved Third Avenue through the grounds, and Speer and the other owners divided the land into building lots. In the 1920s Alamo Placita Park was built on the site of the former amusement park, with the flower beds occupying the filled-in lake.³²

The glee that Arlington Park's neighbors felt as the park burned in 1901 flew in the face of what the park's owners wanted for their creation. The amusement park itself covered thirty-

five acres, but the Arlington Park Land and Improvement Company owned 120 acres. The eighty-five acres of land not occupied by the park were sold as residential lots beginning in 1892. Anyone building a house or business on this land had to follow certain restrictions. Any house built had to cost at least \$2,000, an effort by Speer and his partners to control the kind of people living there. The rules also forbade the construction of bars and the selling of liquor in the area for five years. Speer and his associates firmly believed that the kind of amusement park they built would not only fit with the upscale neighborhood they were creating but would also be a welcome addition to it. The hopes of the Arlington Park Company when it came to controlling the area around the park foreshadowed what Lakeside's owners hoped to do fifteen years later. The success of Arlington Park's owners in doing so worked against them as residents enthusiastically watched the park burn. The class of people the new neighborhood readily attracted as residents simply did not want a noisy amusement park in their midst.³³

The last Denver area amusement park built before Lakeside was Tuileries Park, located at the end of South Broadway, between Floyd and Hampden, in Englewood. The park was patterned after Coney Island in Kansas City and managed by William Simpson, also of Kansas City. It was built on the site of Orchard Park, a popular beer garden in the 1890s. Tuileries, built by a group of men from Cripple Creek, opened on July 29, 1906. In the months before the park's opening the owners spent at least \$140,000 on construction at the thirty-five acre site. According to the *Denver Republican*, the park was "the most beautiful natural park in the state" and had "all the familiar amusements," including a lake, roller rink, baseball diamond, and miniature railroad. The dance pavilion was thought to be the largest west of Chicago, and the aerodrome where balloonists and aerialists performed was deemed impressive. The *Republican* reported that management intended to take special care that women and children found no cause for offense at

the park. Liquor sales were not permitted, and the grounds would be “amply policed.” The July 4, 1901 celebration at Tuileries was an impressive sight. Manager William Gillpatrick hosted five motorcycle races, a baseball game between the Tuileries team and another group, a race between two cowboys hoping to win a wife, dancing, and fireworks. Labor Day at the park featured a corn roast where 10,000 ears of corn, grown on the park grounds, were roasted and given away for free. While initially popular, Tuileries was short lived. Due to increasingly poor attendance the park closed in 1912.³⁴

Each of these amusement parks existed in a city desperate for parks and civic improvement. They stood out as showplaces in a city filled with undeveloped, weed strewn public parks. The success of two private developments, Riverside and Fairmount cemeteries, as parks, proved that Denver residents were willing to accept areas not traditionally thought of as parks as suitable areas for recreation. Like Riverside and Fairmount’s developers, the owners of Denver’s early amusement parks invested huge amounts of money in each of them to make them attractive and popular showplaces. Amusement attractions dominated each of the parks, obviously, but visitors found beautiful gardens, educational attractions, and fine theater performances as well, all vital elements of Denver’s City Beautiful program once it got underway. Newspapers praised Elitch’s gardens and statuary, Manhattan Beach’s lighting, and even Arlington Park’s educational mining exhibit. In a city starved for space for recreation and relaxation, the appearance of large, beautiful parks was a welcome sight that received a great deal of public notice in the press.

Yet, city officials rarely took notice of the first four parks when they opened. On May 1, 1890, when Elitch Gardens opened its gates for the first time, Denver Mayor Wolf Londoner attended the ceremonies to help show what the newspapers called proper appreciation for the

event. The mayor, “in his usual happy vein,” happily greeted friends in the crowd before speaking of his pride in both the gardens and in public spirited citizens such as John Elitch. Mayor Londoner declared that Elitch’s was the best advertisement Denver could hope to have for showing how far it had come since its founding in 1859. Only at Lakeside’s opening eighteen years later would listeners hear similar sentiments expressed. Then, however, they were on a scale that Elitch’s relatively simple opening in 1890 could never have come close to matching. Of the early parks, Elitch’s was the exception. No official governmental delegations attended the openings of Manhattan Beach, Arlington Park, or Tuileries. In the 1890s, Denver’s mayors simply had more pressing matters to deal with. The economic downturn that followed the collapse of the silver market in 1893 decimated Denver’s finances, and many feared that the city might not rebound from it. At the same time, reformers attacked the vice and corruption that they believed ruled the city. Promoting new amusement parks was just not as important as insuring Denver’s continued survival. Not until the 1900s, when the economic situation stabilized, could Denver’s leaders focus on civic improvement and development.³⁵

It fell to the newspapers, then, to promote the new amusement parks. The local newspaper coverage of the Grand Opening and subsequent reimagining of each of Denver's first amusement parks shared similar characteristics. Articles proclaimed each park a welcome and beneficial addition to Denver, unmatched by anything before it. Reporters highlighted each park’s beauty and praised each as being unlike any that might have preceded it. Flowers, paths, fountains, lakes, and picnic areas received detailed coverage in an effort to prepare readers for what they would see when visiting the parks. Newspapers also stressed the purity of each park. Articles trumpeted the fact that liquor sales were not permitted, that rowdy children were tolerated only on certain days or during certain times, or that powerful searchlights could

penetrate every corner of a dark park at night. Denver needed summer resorts for the enjoyment of its people and for the respectability of the city itself.

The limited coverage the construction and opening of these four parks received was nothing, however, compared to that attending the birth of Lakeside Amusement Park. Yet, each of these parks was incredibly important to the creation of Lakeside and taught Lakeside's builders valuable lessons, even if they sometimes chose to ignore them. First and foremost, Denver's first four amusement parks established a foundation on which Lakeside's owners could build. The four parks proved that Denver eagerly accepted the entertainment they offered and the type of space in which they offered it. Lakeside's builders could also see, first-hand, what the Denver public expected from an amusement park. Because Lakeside's builders consciously decided to cater to predominantly conservative amusement seekers in their park, they could also look to the various styles of Denver's amusement parks in deciding what to include or not. The somewhat outdated and seemingly sedate Scenic Railway, for example, was a perfect fit for Lakeside in 1908. Ten years earlier, before other roller coasters topped it, the Scenic Railway was a terrifying addition to Arlington Park.

In addition to being able to study twenty years of amusement park history as they prepared to build Lakeside, Adolph Zang also had the good fortune to build his park just as Mayor Speer's City Beautiful program was getting underway. With an accommodating mayor, a city eager for new playgrounds and accepting in the form those play grounds took, and a park design that took into account City Beautiful ideals, the stage was set for Lakeside Amusement Park's construction. When it came to amusement parks, Denver had seen nothing yet.



Fig. 1 Program from Arlington Park's production "Last Days of Pompeii," 1892.



Fig. 2 The Midway at Manhattan Beach, early 1900s.



Fig. 3 Lakeside's Builders.

CHAPTER TWO:
LAKESIDE, A NEW AMUSEMENT ENTERPRISE

Michele Bogart argues that amusement parks were the exact opposite of City Beautiful ideals. The parks were specifically designed to incite a “riotous, carnival atmosphere,” at odds with the ideas of order and stability that City Beautiful supporters were after. While the architecture of Coney Island’s parks was patterned after the White City, similarities ended there. Bogart writes that the amusement parks were filled with “wild rides and bizarre amusements,” the very things White City planners kept out of the main exhibit area of the Columbian Exposition by creating the Midway. On Coney Island, Luna Park was about as far from City Beautiful ideals as possible. Dreamland was closer, but only superficially so. The beautiful architecture of the park simply masked the usual amusement park attractions found inside the gates. Amusement parks, according to Bogart, presented a “bizarre theater context that would shock viewers by temporarily situating them in a fantastic, disorienting environment—one quite alien to the aesthetic ideals envisioned by City Beautiful advocates.”¹

Bogart’s opinion was not new. In fact, in writing about Denver’s parks more than eighty-five years earlier, Jerome Smiley expressed many of the same opinions. Smiley declared that Manhattan Beach “strains a point to be entitled to its name,” though he grudgingly admitted that it was in fact located on a beach on the shore of Sloan’s Lake. The lake, Smiley wrote, did the best it could toward “justifying the name its associate bears.” Arlington Park (then called Chutes Park) came in for even heavier criticism. According to Smiley, the park was designed for “those who enjoy spectacular things, and have a fondness for ‘roller coasters;’ a playground for grown-

up boys and girls.” Only Elitch’s escaped criticism in Smiley’s history. The presence of the theater, which was conducted “upon a high plane,” made Elitch’s a “worthily popular place of summer amusements.” At the time, however, Elitch’s was still more garden than amusement park. Had it not been, Smiley probably would have been just as critical of it.²

Lakeside Amusement Park’s builders did not initially set out to make their park a part of Denver’s City Beautiful program so they cared little for what critics had to say about such a marriage of ideas. While they wanted the amusement park to be an attractive, well built, well managed and well run operation that was different from the typical amusement park, that was about as far as they went. As with many amusement parks throughout the country, Lakeside was patterned after the Columbian Exposition's White City, and the park did in fact share a number of design elements with the Exposition. But, linking Lakeside to Denver’s City Beautiful program was not the intention of the park’s builders. While they happily accepted it and did their best to live up to it, the City of Denver was ultimately responsible for creating that connection.

Fortunately for Lakeside and its builders, Robert Speer disagreed with everyone who said that an amusement park and a beautiful city could not co-exist. Speer believed that an amusement park such as Lakeside most certainly had a place in his City Beautiful vision, and he went out of his way to make sure it was included. His ownership of Arlington Park, and the plans he had for both the amusement park and the neighborhood around it, most likely played a strong role in how he viewed Lakeside, whose builders wanted to do something very similar. The timing of Lakeside’s construction also played a crucial role in his inclusion of the park in his City Beautiful vision. Construction of the park, which was closely modeled on the White City at Chicago (which was in turn the inspiration for City Beautiful) got under way just as Speer was implementing his program for Denver. Under the circumstances, it was easy for Speer, then, to

welcome Lakeside Amusement Park into the City beautiful fold. And, because Speer was the driving force behind the City Beautiful program in Denver, what he said went.

While Speer was the man responsible for linking Lakeside and Denver, Lakeside Amusement Park was the creation of Adolph Zang, son of Philip Zang, a Denver brewing magnate. Philip Zang came to Denver in 1869 from Louisville, Kentucky, where he owned a brewery. His first wife refused to come west with him, so they divorced and she moved to Chicago where she could receive better medical care for the goiter that plagued her throughout her life. Once in Denver, Zang founded the Philip Zang Brewing Company. The brewery prospered and soon, according to his great-granddaughter Betty Arnold, nearly every German family in Denver had at least one person employed at the Zang Brewery. Soon after his arrival Zang also started grubstaking miners, taking parts of their claims as repayment, which got the family involved in the mining business. For nearly fifty years, the Zangs would be heavily involved in mining throughout Colorado.³

In 1870, Philip Zang married Anna Buck, who ran a dairy farm in the Westwood section of Denver. She had two grown children from her first marriage, a son named William and a daughter named Elizabeth. Both Philip and Adolph Zang treated the Buck children, and their relatives, as family. In 1884, Elizabeth married Peter Friederich, who at the time was a clerk in a real estate company. After his marriage, Friederich gave up his job with the real estate company and went to work for the Zang Brewery. Peter Friederich eventually rose to become assistant general manager and city manager of the Zang Brewery and was closely associated with Adolph Zang in a number of his business ventures, including Lakeside. Peter and Elizabeth had one son, Phillip, before Elizabeth died in 1894. William Buck also went to work for the Zang Brewery and played an important role in Lakeside's development as well. Buck and Friedrich

were associated in a number of real estate ventures on their own until Peter's death in 1911. These members of the Zang family played a crucial role in the first twenty-five years of Lakeside Amusement Park's existence.⁴

In 1881, Zang's son Adolph and his new wife Minnie arrived in Denver on their honeymoon. Adolph Zang had stayed with his mother when his father went to Denver in 1869. After completing the eighth grade, his mother took him to Heidelberg, Germany, to attend college. At the time that Adolph and Minnie married, Philip was trying to convince his son to come to Denver to help operate his brewery. After their wedding, Adolph told Minnie that they could go to Colorado on their honeymoon and see what it was like. If they liked it, they would stay, and if they did not, they would go back to Chicago. The couple decided to stay in Colorado and Adolph ended up taking an active role in his father's brewery. In 1895, Philip Zang retired and sold his brewery to an English syndicate, but Adolph Zang stayed on to manage the brewery for the new owners. Philip Zang died in 1899, three years after his wife Anna.⁵

Betty Arnold recalled her grandfather Adolph as a very smart businessman. He formalized and expanded his father's grubstaking business, which in 1905 led to the creation of the German American Trust Company. Zang hired Godfrey Schirmer, an experienced insurance and investment executive, as president of the bank. Schirmer later became the first secretary of Lakeside and his niece, Patricia Champion, eventually married Peter Friederich's son Phillip. During World War I the German American Trust Company became simply the American Trust Company in order to avoid German hatred, and in 1924 it received a national charter and became the American National Bank. Its headquarters was on Seventeenth Street across from the Daniels and Fisher department store. The bank would play a major role in the development of Lakeside. Zang also purchased a large ranch in what is now Broomfield, where he raised award

winning horses that were used to pull the brewery's beer wagons. Adolph Zang also worked to expand the market for his family's beer by building a number of hotels and bars throughout the state. These businesses served as perfect outlets for Zang beer. Among the best known of his early beer outlets was the Oxford Hotel at the corner of Seventeenth and Wazee, built in 1890. The Oxford's location, just up the street from Union Station, made it a popular stop for travelers. Nearly twenty years later, when Zang built Lakeside Amusement Park, he was still seeking outlets for Zang Beer.⁶

On April 18, 1907, the *Colorado Transcript* announced that Adolph Zang had incorporated the Lakeside Amusement Company, "An amusement enterprise of considerable interest..." Though Zang's plans were not entirely clear, the newspaper was certain they would involve construction of a large beer garden in the Berkeley area of Jefferson County. The *Transcript* was about a month behind in announcing the existence of the new company. The Lakeside Realty and Amusement Company was incorporated on March 20, 1907, by Adolph Zang, Peter J. Friedrich, Godfrey Schirmer, John A. Keefe, and Albert Lewin. The company's capital stock was set at \$250,000, divided into 2,500 shares worth \$100 a piece. Although the company was incorporated in Wyoming, the Articles of Incorporation stated that it would do business in Jefferson County and Denver, Colorado. During the first years of the park's existence, only co-founder Albert Lewin took a direct role in the day-to-day operations, serving as the park's first general manager. In announcing the new company, the *Transcript* assured readers that whatever venture the new company undertook, it would "be on a large scale, as the company is capitalized at \$200,000." A week later, with the announcement of the founding of the town of Lakeside, the intention became much clearer.⁷

On April 24, six days after the existence of the new company was revealed, the Lakeside

Realty and Amusement Company filed a plat with the State of Colorado for a new town they planned to incorporate in Jefferson County. Although the petition was signed by all forty-four residents of what would become the new town, it still required a vote of the residents for approval. By August 1907, as the company officers and new residents waited for the vote to take place, the *Colorado Transcript* reported that a number of Denver men had already “built handsome and comfortable homes in the new settlement.” Prominent among them was Marvin Adams, head waiter at The Famous, a Denver restaurant. The *Transcript* noted that it was “very probable” that Adams would be elected the first mayor of Lakeside if the town was incorporated. By September, a sufficient number of people had moved to the proposed town, allowing it to hold an election on incorporation. The petition was filed with the Jefferson County Court on October 21, 1907. Notice of an election, to be held in Berkeley Precinct Number Twenty-Three of Jefferson County, went out the same day. Twenty-two days later, on November 12, the election took place. Forty-one people voted in favor of incorporation and one against it, showing the town had already lost two residents from the forty-four it had the previous April. In the same election, John P. Yaeger, Marvin Adams, Kate Adams, Hugh O’Connell, and Elmer Allen were chosen as commissioners of the new town of Lakeside. With the town approved, the residents had to hold another election on December 10, 1907, in which the town elected its first officers. As predicted, Marvin Adams was elected mayor. He also would serve as police judge when necessary. Kate Adams, Ernest Allen, Hugh O’Connell, Chester Wenquist, and John Fashi were chosen as trustees. The *Transcript* reported that Mayor Adams, whose grandson was the first baby born in Lakeside, had great hopes for the new town and predicted that the new baby would one day be mayor when Lakeside was a great city.⁸

By the time the incorporation election took place, the reason for the town’s existence was

no longer a secret. Zang's Lakeside Realty and Amusement Company was already several months into construction on the Denver area's newest attraction, Lakeside Amusement Park. Zang certainly was not the only brewer in the United States to build an amusement park, and most did it, at least in part, to create a market for their product. Zang was no different. However, he chose to locate the park outside of the City and County of Denver in order to avoid Denver's blue laws that prohibited the sale of liquor on Sundays. But, Lakeside Amusement Park was far more than simply a brewer's marketing scheme. Zang and the City of Denver would attempt to do something at Lakeside that no other amusement park had done: marry the ideals of the City Beautiful program to the amusement park industry.⁹

From the beginning Lakeside was obviously different from other amusement parks in the country. After all, few, if any, amusement parks could claim to occupy their own towns. Lakeside was essentially a company town from the beginning, and after its incorporation the *Colorado Transcript*, ignoring the one vote against it, reported that not one vote was cast against incorporation because "A large majority of the residents are interested directly or indirectly in the Lakeside Amusement Company." Newspapers immediately started making sure that the public was aware that Lakeside would be a well-run and orderly resort. In August 1907, the *Transcript* reported that when the new government of Lakeside was eventually formed, it would "insist upon the best of conduct" at the park, but would "guard against the admission of puritanical ideas." In December, the *Transcript* reported that a town jail was already under construction (the two-cell block, essentially a steel cube, was located under the park's ballroom), and Mayor Adams gave "it out cold that any person refusing to comply with the laws of the land and the ordinances of Lakeside may bank on getting what's coming to him." According to the *Transcript*, this was an important point and showed that the new town's officials were

“determined to take the bull by the horns” from the get go in handling troublemakers. While it was acknowledged that there would be people who tried to cause trouble at the new park, the park’s owners and town’s officials were going to deal with them “promptly and emphatically” to guarantee that Lakeside was at all times a “place where the most fastidious man may take his wife and children in perfect safety.” Adams and the trustees immediately organized a police force, and the first town marshal was Albert Ezekiel, who resigned in March 1908 and was replaced by John Lindsey, who would be chief of police in Lakeside for many years. The first deputy marshal was Chas Snyder. When Mayor Adams presented him with his badge in February 1908 he told him to “use it, but not abuse it.”¹⁰

While the existence of a town dedicated solely to the park was impressive enough, the design of the park also suggested that it would be different from typical amusement parks. Few, if any, amusement parks could afford to match the outlandish architecture of Coney Island’s parks. Most of Coney Island’s amusement park structures, as well as the White City at the Columbian Exposition, were built of staff, which was a mixture of powdered gypsum, alumina, glycerine, dextrine, and fibers. It created a cheap material that was easy to work with and could create fantastic shapes, but it also decayed quickly, sometimes within a matter of months. The use of staff to construct buildings helped keep costs down, the primary reason it was first used at the Columbian Exposition, but most of the thousands of parks that sprang up from the 1890s to the 1920s were too small and had too little money to even attempt to copy the Coney style. Even many of the bigger, better funded parks could never come close to matching the Coney or Columbian Exposition style. In addition, a great number of parks lasted only a few years in business, gone almost as soon as they arrived. As a result, much of the construction at most early amusement parks was of a temporary nature with little thought of it lasting for long. For

most parks, staff was an ideal material.

The amusement park business demanded constant change and innovation, too, so most operators saw little need to invest heavily in expensive permanent structures. The need for change again recommended the use of staff for construction. As the builders at the Columbian Exposition discovered, staff was easy and quick to work with. Amusement park designers could mold elaborate shapes and create fantastical structures that would have been incredibly time-consuming and costly, as well as sometimes impossible to make out of stone or other materials. Staff's tendency to rapidly decay also worked in its favor at amusement parks. Most park owners and managers felt the need to change the appearance of their parks every couple of years in order to keep the public interested enough in them that they would be willing to make return trips. With staff, it was easy to tear down an entire building at the end of a season and have a completely new and oftentimes more elaborate structure ready by the start of the next season. Coney Island's parks were prime examples of this. John Kasson wrote that, at Luna Park, builder Frederic Thompson "threw off all sense of restraint to indulge in an orgy of ebullient forms, bright colors, and sumptuous ornament." Luna and Dreamland's structures were awe-inspiring, and created a "colorful holiday world." And, all were buildings that were gone in just a few years as the staff crumbled.¹¹

While the buildings were made from the same material as those found at the Columbian Exposition, the architectural style of most amusement parks, Kasson wrote, was about as far away from the White City as it could be. The Exposition was about discipline while amusement parks were about release. And while Lakeside was indeed an amusement park, and was all about release and having fun, it broke with the typical Coney Island style. Its buildings were meant to be permanent, with many of them, even small columned towers, with no purpose other than

being decorative, lasting for more than a century. Like Luna and Dreamland, Lakeside had a tower, but the architecture of it was more subdued and relied on lighting to create elaborate and dazzling effects. The style of the Casino, swimming pool building, and row of concessions along the Chutes pond was far more in keeping with the White City, and therefore City Beautiful style, than with Coney Island. While most amusement parks changed their appearance every few years, Lakeside maintained its White City style until a new owner started an Art Deco makeover in the 1930s, which nevertheless preserved some of the key elements of the original architecture, but also gave the park a new look which it still wears to this day. Even rival Elitch's underwent a number of changes, removing old rides and adding new ones, preserving some historic elements while letting others go. One of the best illustrations of this is Elitch's succession of entrance gates, which went from a log structure to an elaborate Victorian-style gate in the 1910s to a futuristic-looking metal structure in the 1960s. Lakeside's main entrance was always the Tower of Jewels. Unlike many amusement parks of the period, Lakeside did not have a massive and overly elaborate entrance gate. At Steeplechase on Coney Island, guests entered through massive plaster arches that depicted clowns and masks. Dreamland's entrance was through the outspread wings of a sculpture titled Creation. David Nasaw writes that such entryways helped assure visitors that they would be safe inside the park's walls. At Lakeside, visitors simply entered through the base of the Tower of Jewels. It was as if the park was saying that its reputation was the only assurance visitors needed in order to know that they were safe inside Lakeside's beautiful grounds.¹²

Lakeside's owners broke with most other amusement parks when they decided to spend money on long-lasting brick and wood structures. While they almost certainly hoped the park would last more than just a few years, they also were attempting to plant the idea that the park

would in fact be something different in the amusement business. The presence of permanent structures and rides demonstrated that. Lakeside's architecture certainly was understated compared to Luna or Dreamland, as was also the case at Manhattan Beach or Elitch's or Tuileries. But it also was elegant, with similarly styled white buildings clustered around the lake and the roofline of the Tower mimicked in smaller towers and structures throughout the grounds. While the Columbian Exposition's designers might not have approved of everything offered at Lakeside, they might have grudgingly admired the architectural scheme, which brought an appearance of unity and order to the park grounds.

On September 1, 1907, the *Denver Republican* reported that E.M. Moorman, the park's architect, had finished his design and was ready to commence construction of the buildings. Over the next several months, crews constructed fifteen buildings at the new park. The most prominent was the Casino and attached Tower of Jewels, the park's main entrance. The tower was thirty feet square and 150 feet high with an observation deck at the top from which visitors could "see the surrounding county for a radius of many miles." On top of the tower there was an 18,000 candle power searchlight, said to be the largest and brightest in the United States, which had been atop the Ferris Wheel at the 1904 World's Fair in St. Louis. Moorman's design encircled the Tower with lights and called for an elaborate lighting design on its walls. In fact, the *Republican* reported, Harry Weber, the park's chief electrician, was hard at work making sure all of the buildings and grounds were well and beautifully lit. In all, 100,000 lights dotted the grounds of Lakeside by the time it opened; 20,000 lights on poles and strings surrounded the lake alone.¹³

The lighting at the park was one of the most impressive things about it as far as most observers were concerned. In one article headlined "Lakeside Park Will Be a Maze of Lights,"

the *Colorado Transcript* reported that it was “The intention of Lakeside management to make the ground the best illuminated in the country outside of New York City.” The rays of the searchlight on the Tower would “sweep the city and foothills” every night of the season. More than 5,000 lights were going on the walls of the Tower of Jewels, and another 5,000 into the Casino building. Between 4,000 and 5,000 lights were strung on the Shoot-the-Chutes tower and slide, all of which were in addition to the 20,000 going up in clusters on poles around the lake. The overall estimate of 100,000 lights, according to the parks’ general manager, Albert Lewin, did not include any arc lights that would be used in the park. The *Transcript* proclaimed that “there will be few dark spots on the grounds,” hints at both beauty and safety. On May 26, 1908, four days before the park’s grand opening, Lewin ordered all of the lights turned on for the first time in a final test. The *Transcript* reported that the “spectacle was grand indeed,” and that management was giving the people of Colorado what they had promised, namely “the greatest and finest amusement park ever attempted West of Chicago.” During the week prior to testing the lights, the *Denver Republican* reported, Lewin had successfully tested the motors on all of the park’s rides.¹⁴

While the focus on lighting certainly fit with Mayor Speer's City Beautiful program, it also tied into the continually stressed idea that Lakeside would be a safe and orderly amusement park. Just a few years earlier, when the new owners of Manhattan Beach were rebuilding the park, they said that the searchlight they were installing there served the dual purposes of advertising the park and allowing them to probe every inch of the grounds with light to make sure that no inappropriate activities were taking place. With few, if any, dark corners in which to hide at Lakeside, management was creating a space in which improper conduct could find no place to hide.

The first line of defense for any amusement park against improper conduct was fences. Fences that kept non-paying customers out were one of the key elements that differentiated amusement parks from other recreation areas, and Lakeside's planners were sure to build a fence that fit the park's image. Seven thousand five-hundred feet of rustic fence enclosed the park on three sides, with the lake serving as the barrier on the fourth side. The eight-foot high fence was constructed from a combination of slabs and trees, and Lewin had workers plant spreading vines alongside it. The *Denver Republican* wrote that the fence was very picturesque, and like the fence at Elitch's, it kept the non-paying public from seeing inside the park. Years later, both parks would do an about face and build fences that allowed the public to see inside.¹⁵

Attached to the Tower was the one hundred ninety foot by one hundred foot Casino building. The first Chief Steward of the Casino was Walter C. Ivers. From inside the park the Casino was three stories, with the lower floor exposed on the lake side, but from the Sheridan Boulevard side only two stories showed. The lower floor housed the rathskeller, "designed after the old German style," kitchen, ice cellar, and storage rooms. The second level held two dining rooms. One was enclosed and intended for winter dining as the original plans called for the Casino to be open year round. The main dining room was open and allowed for guests to dine while looking out on the lake and enjoying the "mountain breezes, cooled by 'the Snows five thousand summers old.'" The third level included a rooftop garden and a small theater. Brightly lit plazas stretched out on either side of the Tower and Casino. On the inside they were open for the public to promenade under, while on the outside, along Sheridan Boulevard, they provided covered automobile parking for the park's customers.¹⁶

The other buildings on the grounds included a rustic boathouse, skating rink, indoor swimming pool, boarding area for the Velvet Coaster, the Third Degree fun house, the El Patio

Ballroom, and the train station for the miniature railroad. The train station was modeled after Denver's first Union Station, which had burned down in 1895. The ballroom covered 15,000 square feet of floor space, and a number of local, national, and international bands played there during the years it was in operation. The park also included a Music Plaza with bandstand, where Dante's Italian Band, led by Dante Forcellato, played daily. The Natatorium, where the fifty by one hundred twenty-five foot swimming pool was located, sat beside the Casino. It was decorated inside with murals of nymphs and cherubs, and included a filter system that created a sensation similar to a waterfall hitting the water. In later years the park gave out spare tire covers that urged people to "Swim in Drinking Water" at Lakeside Park. The boathouse, which cost \$10,000, included 160 feet of pier. Three naphtha launches, which used naphtha as fuel for the motors, and a number of smaller boats, were available for use on the lake, where customers also found a diving tower and bathing beach.¹⁷

While construction proceeded on the park, the Town of Lakeside got on with the business of establishing itself as a functioning municipality. One of the most important early pieces of business the town of Lakeside's leaders took up came in February 1908 when Kate Adams presented a bill granting the Denver Tramway Company a right-of-way and franchise. With the Tramway Company rushing to build a new line to the park, they needed the town to give them permission to actually build and operate a streetcar line in the town. Consideration of the proposal at the February 27 meeting was delayed until the town's leaders could more fully inform residents as to what it involved. Present at the meeting where the bill was initially introduced was George Ribbet, an official with the Denver Tramway Company. Officials posted notices of the proposal throughout the town of Lakeside and two weeks later, on March 12, 1908, it was adopted unanimously. At Lakeside, Tramway trains would deliver guests right to the

park's front gate. It was a far different situation than Denver's other amusement parks faced in the past.¹⁸

Streetcar companies in cities across the United States were very fond of amusement parks. Many of them built amusement parks, which were called trolley parks, on large tracts of land they owned at the end of their lines. Their goal was to convince customers to pay the full fare to ride the cars to the end of the lines, and to increase ridership after the workday was done and on weekends. Denver never had trolley parks, though Manhattan Beach is sometimes mistakenly identified as one. The only amusement attraction the Denver Tramway company ever built in Denver was Merchants Park, a baseball field. Because all of Denver's amusement parks were privately built, the owners of each park had to convince the streetcar companies to build lines to their parks. In an age when few people had private transportation, a quick and reliable means of transportation to and from the parks was extremely important. Unfortunately, as Denver's park owners found, it was not always easy to secure it.¹⁹

By the 1890s, there were dozens of streetcar companies operating in Denver, but the two largest were the Denver City Railway Company and the Denver Tramway Company, which was still trying to perfect its electric railway. Denver Tramway eventually took over all the other companies and operated its system until June 1950. Jerome Smiley wrote in 1901 that no city had a "more comprehensive and efficient transportation system" than Denver, and that credit for keeping Denver from having anything like a "'tenement house district' ... that blight common to so many large cities," belonged to that system. Denver's streetcar system allowed people to spread themselves out over a large area rather than being housed "tier upon tier in congested localities," as was the case, Smiley believed, in so many large cities. However, the city's spread-out development pattern made it hard for residents to get to the amusement parks.²⁰

When Elitch's opened on May 1, 1890, it was two miles away from the nearest streetcar station, so in order to bring visitors from it to the park, John Elitch hired horse-drawn trolleys that ran at regular intervals. The West End Electric Car Company eventually built a horse-drawn line directly to the park, but it did not begin operating until the spring of 1891. The new line also allowed the streetcars to stop at Manhattan Beach, much to the delight of that park's owners. By 1892, when Elitch's took over management of Manhattan Beach, the streetcar companies were forcing people who wanted to visit both parks, which were only a few miles apart, to pay two fares. The *Denver Republican* found this practice unfair considering that people had to pay only one fare to reach "all sorts and kinds of entertainments of an ephemeral and transient nature" in other parts of Denver and that this situation was detrimental to the financial outlook of the "high class of attractions." The *Republican* hoped that the combination of the two parks would force the streetcar companies to consider a single fare to both parks if that was what people wanted. The Denver Tramway Company finally extended an electric line to Elitch's in 1899, nine years after the park opened.²¹

Arlington Park and Tuileries were a little more fortunate than Elitch's and Manhattan Beach. The Blue Line of the horse car road already served the area in which Arlington Park was located, but according to the *Rocky Mountain News*, the line was going to be abandoned and replaced by a branch of the Thirteenth Street electric line that would run down Sixth Avenue. Robert Speer, who was then rising through the ranks of Denver politics, may have used his political influence to get the electric streetcar line extended past his park early on. Still, it was not until 1897, six years after Arlington Park opened, that the Denver Tramway Company was running special cars to the park from Fifteenth and Arapahoe every fifteen minutes. At Tuileries, the Englewood car of the Denver Tramway system already ran to the beer garden that previously

occupied the site. The streetcar simply had to stop at the new park's entrance.²²

With the exception of Tuileries, which was simply lucky in the location its owners chose, Denver's other amusement parks struggled to ensure that customers could reach the parks easily on streetcars. The story of Lakeside's streetcar line was far different. There were no stop-gap measures, long, drawn out negotiations, or efforts at building a private road. As construction at Lakeside neared completion in 1908, the *Denver Republican* proudly pointed out that the Denver Tramway Company was rushing to finish its streetcar line to the park well in advance of opening day. The Denver Tramway Company was a private venture, but it was also one of the most powerful companies in the city with close connections to city government. That it was rushing to complete a line to Lakeside, before the park opened rather than many years after the fact, was a significant indicator of just how important the new park was to Denver. The West Forty-Fourth Avenue line was the direct line to Lakeside, and a spur allowed it to drop riders at the park's front gates. Return passengers waited for the streetcar to pick them up at a station nearer to Forty-Fourth Avenue, which ran along the south end of the park property. Promotional material claimed that passengers boarding a Tramway car in downtown Denver would be dropped off at Lakeside twenty minutes later. All Berkeley, Golden, Arvada, and Leyden streetcar lines also ran to the park once the new track was in place. The Denver Tramway Company, a source of pride to the City of Denver, was certainly doing its part to make sure customers got to Lakeside not only on opening day but every day of the season thereafter. It seemed that Denver's government and business leaders wanted to help Lakeside succeed.²³

Construction of the streetcar line highlighted a major difference between Lakeside and other amusement parks of the period, in addition to indicating the type of customer the park was hoping to attract. The authors of *Denver's Street Railways* write that even those people who

were able to afford their own transportation in the early days of the system still preferred to leave their carriages at home and take the streetcars. The streetcar was a fast, easy way to get around town, and nearly everyone going to Elitch's, Manhattan Beach, Arlington Park, and Tulleries took the streetcar to get there. But, as in so many other cases, Lakeside was different. Although there was a streetcar stop right outside the park's gates, the plans for Lakeside always included automobile parking.²⁴

When Lakeside opened in 1908, the automobile was still, for the most part, a plaything of the rich. Within two years, by 1910, all of that would change thanks to Henry Ford and the Model T. But, in 1906, it was millionaires such as Colorado mining magnate Eben Smith, buying cars. That year, Smith paid \$4,320 for a Packard Touring Car, nearly twice the amount Robert Speer wanted spent on homes built around Arlington Park fifteen years earlier. As late as 1915, the *Denver Automobile Directory* read like a Who's Who of Denver, with names such as Boettcher, Bonfils, and Evans appearing in it repeatedly, and they drove Packards and Pierce-Arrows. Denver's population was well over 200,000 people in 1915, but only 5,154 cars were registered in the city that year. The fact that Lakeside's owners expressly included automobile parking in their original plans for the park clearly showed that, while all customers were welcome at the park, they were catering to an upper class customer base. In 1908, the year Lakeside opened, the forty car dealerships in Denver sold a total of 1,550 cars. If the owner of every one of those cars showed up on opening day of the park they would not even come close to filling it. But, the fact that Lakeside's builders included space for automobile parking from the earliest stages, clearly demonstrated what segment of society they were hoping to attract. Other amusement parks, such as San Francisco's Playland at the Beach, which opened more than a decade after Lakeside, still struggled with space for car parking and encouraged patrons to use

alternate means of transportation, such as streetcars and buses, to reach the parks.²⁵

With transportation to the park secured, in April 1908, Lakeside held another election in which Mayor Adams and the six trustees were re-elected without opposition. In the same election, voters also had to decide if the town of Lakeside would become “anti-saloon territory.” Local option supporters had managed to get that question on ballots in several cities in Colorado. To have passed the measure in Lakeside, a town that existed solely to house a beer baron’s amusement park, would have been a major victory for prohibitionists. Although it passed in a few other cities, Lakeside’s voters defeated the measure and the town (and park) remained a safe place to have a drink. But, prohibitionists were not about to give up that easily, and before long would make alcohol sales in the park a major issue.²⁶

Perhaps the most surprising move from Lakeside’s government came on May 6, 1908, just three weeks and three days before Lakeside Amusement Park’s grand opening. The Board of Trustees amended Section 43 of the town’s General Ordinances to state that “No person or corporation shall conduct any roller coaster, scenic railway, or other amusement device of any kind whatsoever, within the Town of Lakeside” without first getting a license for each device. The fee for the license was set at \$200 per year per device, and each license was good for twenty years. If a person failed to obtain a license but still operated an amusement device “for which a fee or deposit is charged or made” they faced fines ranging from \$5 to \$100 per offense. It was an interesting law for the council to pass in a company town based around an amusement park. With fifty amusement devices ready to operate on opening day, the town stood to collect \$10,000. If park management objected to the fees, it was never reported in the newspapers, and they may have in fact approved of it as a way to support the town’s functions.²⁸

The failure to report on the outcome of the amusement device license issue aside, the

newspaper coverage of everything taking place at Lakeside during its construction was far more extensive than that that accompanied the construction of Denver's other summer resorts and amusement parks. Elitch Gardens' construction was briefly mentioned by the *Denver Republican* in one article. Manhattan Beach was the subject of two articles in the *Denver Times*. Construction of Tuileries was never mentioned in the Denver newspapers, and few newspaper articles appeared about the park after it opened. Of all the pre-Lakeside amusement parks, construction of Arlington Park received the most coverage. Articles on the park appeared in the *Rocky Mountain News*, *Denver Republican*, *Denver Times*, and *Colorado Sun*. This may have been due to the fact that the park's most visible owner, Robert Speer, was politically powerful. But, the coverage of Lakeside's construction far exceeded any that the construction of the other Denver amusement parks received. Even though Denver's newspapers were often opposed to Speer's City Beautiful program, they could not seem to bring themselves to condemn Lakeside, even if it was so closely linked to what was happening in Denver.

The newspapers of Denver and Jefferson County were so invested in the success of Lakeside that it fell to the *Daily Journal*, from far away Telluride, to report on a serious and potentially fatal accident involving Lakeside's Scenic Railway on February 23, 1908. The accident happened when a car jumped the tracks of the ride and "hurled the occupants" ten feet to the floor below. Sixteen people were injured, five seriously according to the newspaper. One rider, Mrs. Francis W. Bray, suffered what the newspaper thought to be a fatal skull fracture. The newspaper never followed up on whether or not Mrs. Bray died as a result of her injuries, but it was careful to point out that the Scenic Railway was not yet finished and lacked guardrails at the time of the accident. Tellingly, not one word of the accident ever appeared in the Denver area newspapers. This was particularly surprising because Denver newspapers of the time were

known for their often graphic stories about accidents and death. Newspaper historian Frank Luther Mott wrote that *The Denver Post* of the period was “sensational in content and treatment,” “ran wild in its attacks,” and was the “yellowest of the yellow journals,” and the publishers of the *Rocky Mountain News* did their best to keep up with the *Post*. The fact that both papers did not print one single line about the accident demonstrated the hands-off policy they adopted when it came to reporting anything that might tarnish the image of the new park.²⁸

It was not at all unusual that people were in the park and on the rides at the time the accident occurred. Throughout the winter and early spring of 1908, management allowed the public free access to the grounds and buildings so that people could see the park under construction. The *Transcript* estimated that between 10,000 and 15,000 people visited the park on Sundays when the weather was good. Even after the accident on the Scenic Railway, management continued to allow sightseers access to the grounds. Not until April 26 did Albert Lewin close the park to the public, and then only so workers could spend the next month laying walkways, planting lawns, shrubs, and flowerbeds, and putting the finishing touches on buildings, none of which could be “done to good advantage unless sightseers are temporarily excluded.” Even Mother Nature seemed to smile on the park as the *Transcript* pointed out that of the 875 trees Albert Lewin ordered for the park, only five died and had to be replaced. By May 17, the *Denver Republican* reported, “great strides” had been made in “the beautification of the grounds” in the few weeks the park had been closed to the public. The newspaper asserted that even those who had closely watched the progress being made in the months before April 26 would be “delightfully surprised” by what they saw when the grounds reopened to the public.²⁹

As workers rushed to get Lakeside Amusement Park done in time for opening day, the Denver newspapers began to sing the park’s praises even louder. Ignoring Elitch’s, Arlington

Park, Manhattan Beach, and Tuileries, the *Denver Republican* wrote that nothing like Lakeside had ever been planned or attempted in Denver and praised the park as the first non-winter entertainment “in keeping with the demands of its cosmopolitan and thoroughly discriminating population.” Lakeside would truly be the park of all the people, the newspaper declared, and was large enough for all classes, though “the park will be so carefully conducted that the most conservative pleasure-seeker will find nothing offensive and no undesirable elements will be catered to.” The entire family, proclaimed the *Republican*, would be able to find something to do at Lakeside. Of particular importance was that fact that even the minor concessions, which normally operated in “tents or improvised shacks,” were located in permanent and beautifully constructed buildings. The *Republican* wrote that the “The best has been none too good for the Lakeside constructionists” who were “courageous business men,” and the park was “a striking demonstration of their faith in Denver’s future.” Similarly strong and abundant praises were never sung in quite the same manner or number to Denver’s other amusement parks or their builders. Something was certainly differently, as far as most observers were concerned, about Lakeside Amusement Park.³⁰

The park of all the people was divided into three sections. Once through the Tower and down the Grand Stairway, visitors found themselves in the area known as Central Park. No rides were located in that area. The Casino building opened onto this area, and the Music Plaza was in Central Park as well. Garden areas included plentiful benches, each one with “Lakeside Park, Denver” stamped onto the metal legs. To the right of Central Park, when facing the lake, was the social area. This was where the ballroom, boat house, and skating rink were located. To the left of Central Park was the amusement area. This distinction remained in place until 1912, when the Derby Coaster opened in the area around the skating rink.³¹

When it opened, the park had “fifty different forms of amusement, a half-hundred sources of entertainment.” The miniature railroad, known as the Lakeshore Railway, encircled the entire thirty-seven acres of the lake and was reportedly the longest in the United States. It departed from the train station, which was complete with a clock tower. It took 93,000 pounds of rails from the Pueblo Steel Works to lay the track, and the train was pulled by the steam locomotive from the 1904 St. Louis World’s Fair. The Velvet Coaster, which ran along the southern edge of the lake, cost \$23,000, and was described as a “decided novelty in the roller coaster line” because it combined the Foster coaster from White City Amusement Park in Chicago with a figure eight. W.H. Labb, the park’s general contractor, designed and built the 3,600 foot ride. As its name implied, the Velvet Coaster was far tamer than modern coasters, with fairly gentle rises and dips, but for the time it was a thrilling piece of equipment. The park also included a mile-long scenic railway designed by LaMarcus A. Thompson, inventor of the scenic railways. Scenic railways were essentially roller coasters over which Thompson built dark tunnels “in which he arranged pretty scenery, startling grottos, and historical tableaux.” Before entering the tunnels the cars tripped a switch that flooded them with light. According to ride manufacturer William Mangels, Thompson Scenic Railways were “regarded as the leading amusement ride” at parks and expositions for many years.³²

To their left, as visitors entered the park through the Tower, across from the swimming pool, was the Shoot-the-Chutes. Rather than have the boats splash down into the lake, Labb and his crew constructed a separate lagoon for the ride. Spectators could stand around the lagoon or on a bridge over it and watch as boats full of people were towed to the top of the Chutes tower and then released to hurtle down a ramp into the pool. Riders on the Chutes had a spectacular view of the park grounds and beyond for a moment before they began their descent. In the same

area as the Chutes was an air ship and balloon ascension platform, the Ferris wheel, a row of food and game concessions, and a photography studio. The Chutes divided the amusement section of the park into Avenue A and Avenue B. Along Avenue A were the concessions, including a movie theater, shooting school, box ball alley, the airship, touring cars, “flying lady,” and the haunted swing. Avenue B included the Devil’s Palace, Third Degree, pony and burro track, train depot, and access to the other rides. The picnic grounds and free swings were accessible from Avenue A or B, which dead-ended at them. Near the entrance to the Velvet Coaster and Scenic Railway was the Third Degree, the park’s first funhouse. Third Degrees were found in several other amusement parks around the country, but no description of the interior appears to have survived. From photographs of the buildings, visitors seemed to have ascended steep ramps to get inside and after going through the attraction walked out the back on flat platforms.³³

Lakeside's merry-go-round, built by the C.W. Parker Company of Leavenworth, Kansas, may have been constructed from parts of other carousels. By the time Lakeside was under construction, carousels/merry-go-rounds had become expensive pieces of machinery due to the highly skilled engineering techniques, mechanical construction, elaborately carved figures, and bright illumination that went into them, in addition to the large carrying capacities they required. William Mangels wrote that despite the great cost, “no amusement resort, county fair or park of any magnitude ever lacks the always popular merry-go-round...” Unlike normal merry-go-rounds, which had only horses, the Lakeside installation included, among other animals, lions, rabbits, pigs, goats, dogs, gazelles, monkeys, and even a unicorn. Figures other than horses became popular additions to merry-go-rounds in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, largely because operators thought that the innovative figures would draw more business. The

opposite proved to be true. Young girls wanted to ride horses, not pigs or dogs. Many children were frightened by the strange animals and refused to go near them. The carousel may have been one of Lakeside's few missteps as it embraced the City Beautiful ideal. Yet, the carousel managed to survive every change ever made to the park.³⁴

The first Tickler, which was invented by William Mangels, was installed at Luna Park on Coney Island in 1906. Its inventor wrote that it was the first ride specifically designed to “jostle, jolt and jounce its riders about in their seats...” The ride was built on a large platform that sloped upwards, and a course defined by post and rails covered the platform. Cars full of riders were drawn to the top of the platform and then released. The rubber-ringed cars bounced off the posts and rails as they descended through the course, and “at the end of the journey, the five passengers were usually scrambled together so hopelessly that attendants had to help them disembark.” The ride cost \$6,000 to install, but Mangels wrote that the novelty soon wore off. The Tickler at Lakeside did not last long enough to lose its novelty. When riders began to suffer broken bones, management removed the ride. As permissive as Mayor Speer could be in his definition of what fit into City Beautiful, broken bones had no place in his vision.³⁵

Located in a quiet corner of the park, near the Grand Stairway that led up to the Tower, was another common amusement park attraction, the Baby Incubators. Dr. Martin Couney, a German born and trained physician, had exhibited premature babies in incubators at amusement parks and fairs around the country. Couney charged a twenty-five cent admission fee to see the babies and gave a lecture about his practices, which included taking their pulse with a gold pocket watch the size of a baseball and passing a gold wedding ring over a baby's fist and arm. The admission fee went to pay for the costs associated with caring for the babies. In addition to Couney, the staff at Lakeside included two other doctors and three pediatric nurses. An

amusement park might have seemed like a strange place to house premature babies in incubators, but Couney had long struggled to get doctors and hospitals to accept his ideas. By placing the incubators in amusement parks, where people congregated and expected to see the strange or shocking, Couney hoped to gain widespread public acceptance of his new device. Near the end of his life, Couney, who died in 1950, estimated that he saved 6,500 of the 8,000 premies under his care. The most famous of the Lakeside babies was Rosemary Fouts, who weighed twenty-eight ounces when she was born May 24, 1913. By the end of the summer she weighed 3 pounds, 1 ounce. Visitors to Lakeside that year cheered every advance Rosemary made and worried, along with her mother Carrie, at setbacks, such as when one of the other incubator babies died. Even after she left the park, the public kept track of Rosemary until she was eight years old, at which time she disappeared from public view.³⁶

By the end of May 1908 Lakeside Amusement Park was ready for its official debut. The buildings were up, the attractions were installed, and the Tramway line was complete. The newspaper were on board, promoting Lakeside as the greatest addition to Denver's amusement offerings yet. For their part, Lakeside's builders designed and constructed a beautiful amusement park that was easily compatible with the City Beautiful architectural style and decided to operate the park along lines that allowed Mayor Robert Speer to readily embrace it as part of his City Beautiful program for Denver. It was time for Lakeside Amusement Park to officially open to the public.

CHAPTER THREE:

OPEN FOR BUSINESS AT JOLLY LAKESIDE

The amusement park craze sweeping the country sparked a songwriting craze as well. Musicians composed thousands of songs for the new parks. Lakeside had two written in its honor—"The White City March" and "Just Take a Trip Out to Lakeside." The second song, written by Elmore Lee, urged listeners to do just what the title suggested. It also picked up on many of the things that made Lakeside such a valuable City Beautiful asset. It was a "nice trolley ride/out to jolly Lakeside," where the "sights there are pretty/its Denver's White City/with myriads of lights all aglow." With all of the attractions in place and running, two theme songs ready, and plenty of supporters behind it, the opened its gates for the first time.¹

Opening Day, May 30, 1908, found the "White City...complete. Its walks are gravelled; its shrubbery and trees set out; its benches in place; its police force adequate; its fountain playing; its lights all connected..." A crowd of 50,000 people watched as the gates swung open at the touch of a button by Denver Mayor Robert Speer, who was at his City Hall office in downtown Denver. Mayors Marvin Adams of Lakeside and John Vivian of Arvada were on the platform set up outside the tower, along with the managers and builders of the park and their families. Gertrude Zang, daughter of owner Adolph Zang, smashed a bottle of champagne against the Tower wall, and to the sounds of Dante's Italian Band playing "The Star Spangled Banner" and the newly and specially composed "White City March," the first paying customers entered the park grounds. Fittingly, for the most marvelous thing to ever hit Denver up to then, "Not a serious accident happened to mar the day. There was not the slightest display of

rowdyism nor intoxication. No complaints were received of pickpockets and not a single arrest was made.” The park’s opening attracted statewide attention. The *Fort Collins Weekly Courier* informed its readers that the park, with its “wealth of varied attractions,” added greatly to Denver’s sources of entertainment and reflected credit on the state in the mind of every visitor who saw it.²

In his welcoming speech, Mayor Adams said that he was certain that on opening day the town of Lakeside was surely the handsomest town in the state, and the gem of all the cities that encircled Denver. He compared the “spirit that undertook the enterprise” of Lakeside to be the same one as “the men who first sought gold in our mountains.” Adams was positive that Lakeside would be a favorite destination for men and women worn down by the strain of business, for tourists in search of health, and “all class of men, women, and children who need recreation and rest.” He predicted that tens of thousands of people would find their way to Lakeside, where they would find that rest and amusement, and would “go away felling [sic] stronger and better qualified to resume the business of life.” City Beautiful supporters, park planners, and progressive thinkers could not have better expressed what they all hoped that fine parks such as Lakeside would do for the people. While people from all walks of life were welcome at the park, those who visited experienced something very different from other amusement parks.³

“Lakeside,” the *Republican* wrote, “is the place!” The newspaper advised that it was worth multiple visits to the park just to watch “the whole glittering, moving, fascinating show,” but doing just that would deprive visitors from enjoying the park’s numerous other attractions. Once again, as was often the case with early coverage of the park, Lakeside earned special praise for its lighting design. The lights on poles around the lake were not single lights, the *Republican*

reported, but clusters of them, leaving little of the miniature railroad's route along the lake shore in darkness. The Scenic Railway and Velvet Coaster were "like serpents of fire" stretching along the lake, and the Tower of Jewels was a "pillar of captive fire" topped off by the massive searchlight. The view of the fully-lit park from the observation deck on top of the tower, according to the newspaper, was "one not soon forgotten."⁴

Once a visitor was sufficiently recovered from the awe-inspiring sight of the lights, there were the rides for "jarring, scaring, whirling, mystifying, transporting, and otherwise entertaining..." Every ride, according to the *Republican*, was well patronized on opening day and at 11:15 that night there were still seventy people in line for one more trip down the Chutes. The *Republican* estimated that a young man could take his "most particular friend" to Lakeside and after an afternoon and evening of swimming, roller skating, dancing, fishing, boat rides, dinner, visiting the concessions, and tackling the "dozens of hilarious other attractions," would come away about \$12 poorer. While it would certainly make for a wonderful, and inexpensive evening for the couple, the newspaper cautioned that no person could crowd all of those activities "into one afternoon and evening and still survive."⁵

Those people who did try to cram all the activities into one day, or who met with unfortunate accidents, found that they did not have to leave the park in order to seek medical attention. In early July, park visitor Frank Sedlmeyer was on the lake in a rowboat when a storm arose. Sedlemeyer rowed for the shore, and when he stepped out of his boat into the water he grabbed a light pole for support. The fact that he was still in the water created a complete circuit for the electricity, and it took a bystander several blows with a plank to knock Sedlemeyer free from the pole. Luckily for Sedlemeyer, Lakeside had its own hospital. From 1915 to 1929 it was under the direction of Dr. Kate Walker Beall, who became a doctor late in life. After

graduating from the Homeopathic Medical College of Missouri in 1899, Kate joined her daughter's medical practice, but in 1913, after the death of her husband, she moved to Denver. She opened her office in a house at Forty-Fifth Avenue and Zenobia Street, which was near Lakeside, and soon after became physician on duty at the park. She remained there until her death in 1929 at age 78, treating sick stomachs and minor cuts and scrapes. After his accident at the lake, Sedlemeyer was taken to the park hospital, where he spent three days recovering. The *Transcript* reported that Sedlmeyer spoke "in the highest terms of the care given him by the Lakeside officials."⁶

With dozens of amusements, the jail beneath the park's ballroom, and the hospital in full operation, Lakeside's management seemingly met every need their customers could conceivably have. They planned so well that only two minor incidents marred the otherwise perfect Opening Day. Management at the café and rathskeller had underestimated the size of the expected crowd and ran out of bread and beer at five o'clock in the afternoon. Workers went scrambling to neighborhood stores to buy sandwich making supplies and successfully managed to feed the rest of the hungry people at the park. The other difficulty came when ticket sellers "found themselves embarrassed by the prosperity of the Denver people" who paid in paper money and silver dollars instead of nickels and dimes. Admission to the park was ten cents, and each ride ticket cost an additional ten cents, and the ticket sellers wound up frantically searching for small coins after running out partway through the day. Overall, however, opening day was a huge success as far as everyone was concerned.⁷

In fact, aside from a few arrests for public intoxication, only one serious criminal event intruded on Lakeside's first summer. Near the end of June three men (Hugh Cline, Clarence Harris, and Edward Dixon) were arrested on charges of highway robbery and larceny for being

part of a pickpocket ring operating at the park. The men, who the newspapers identified as morphine addicts, were arrested by Lakeside's Sheriff John Lindsey on the outskirts of town in the act of robbing several streetcar passengers and the streetcar's conductor, Henry Hogen. The police estimated that the gang had stolen about \$1,500 in one day of working the park, including a large diamond from a tourist from New York. The men refused to name the ringleaders of the gang and were in jail awaiting trial when the *Colorado Transcript* reported the incident on June 25, 1908. The newspaper article on the arrests made two interesting points about the park. It noted that "A number of prominent persons of Denver" had notified Lindsey of their losses, emphasizing the elite nature of Lakeside's visitors when it first opened. The author of the article also attempted to do damage control by assuring readers that the quick arrests demonstrated the efficiency and skill of Lakeside's police force, and proved there was "no amusement enterprise in the country of the magnitude of Lakeside that is so free from the operation of criminals." Fate certainly seemed to be smiling on the new park that first summer.⁸

While fate smiled, Denver officials worked hard to make sure the park was a success. Just in case anyone missed the value that Denver placed on the new park located on the city's doorstep, they received confirmation of it soon after Lakeside's grand opening. In 1908, the City of Denver was set to host the Democratic National Convention. It was the first major convention held at Speer's new 12,000-seat Municipal Auditorium, and the city went all out in an effort to make sure delegates had a true Colorado experience. Planners even went so far as to truck in snow from the mountains so the delegates could have a snowball fight in July. Other activities for the delegates included performances by Apache Indians who demonstrated their war whoops and an excursion to the old mining towns of Gilpin County, where delegates rode open cars on the Gilpin Tramway, which had once hauled tons of ore from the county's mines. Mayor Speer

had \$30,000 with which to entertain the convention delegates and the attendees of the Odd Fellows convention to be held in Denver later that year. One of the most important stops for the Democrats was the glittering new Lakeside Amusement Park. City Beautiful Denver and the White City cemented their relationship on July 4, 1908, when Mayor Speer and Denver Fire and Police Board head Earl Hewitt hosted a dinner for 200 conventioners on the Casino balcony, praised for many years after for the stunning views of the mountains and Colorado sunsets that the location offered. The *Colorado Transcript* reported that several prominent Democrats, including National Committee Chairman Thomas Taggart of Indiana, were in attendance at the dinner. Although this was the first time that Denver officials led convention visitors to Lakeside, it was certainly not the last.⁹

Lakeside's management was thrilled to have convention visitors at the park, whether part of the Democratic National Convention or something smaller, and the park was an especially popular place for them that first summer. Cecil R. Conner, the press agent for Lakeside, was happy to escort groups through the park, especially if there was a chance such tours would result in good publicity. Two weeks before the Democrats were at the park, the Denver Press Club and the Writer's Club, the latter an organization of women who wrote for Denver newspapers and magazines, attended a luncheon hosted by the park. After dining and listening to speeches by Albert Lewin and other park officials, the 200 people in attendance toured the grounds and rode a number of rides. The *Transcript* reported that if they missed seeing anything, "it was not from any fault of the gentlemanly press agent or the Lakeside management." As friendly as park officials were, they were also certainly hoping that the writers would spread the word on what a wonderful place Lakeside was. The park also hosted the annual picnic for the Denver area Woodmen of the World camps that summer. The events included drills by degree teams, sawing

and chopping contests, and baseball games. All proceeds from ticket sales during the picnic went to the building fund of the Golden camp, which was in charge of it.¹⁰

As the first season at the wonderful new park neared its end the park hosted a “monster barbecue” on Labor Day, which 35,000 people attended. Newspapers proclaimed that it was the largest crowd that ever paid admission to an amusement park in the West. The official close of the first season came with a three day Corn Festival held from October 2nd to 4th, 1908, to which the entire state was invited. Throughout the festival, which was described as being mardi gras like, the park was decorated with arches and rows of ears of corn, corn stalks, pumpkins, and “other field products.” For the first night of the festival, workers hung thousands of Japanese lanterns throughout the park grounds and management put on a “spectacular” fireworks display over the lake. On the second night of the festival “mirth and frolic” reigned as the park hosted a masquerade carnival. Management awarded \$500 in prizes to the most creative costumes, and attendees paraded through the grounds in their costumes before taking part in an evening of dancing in the El Patio Ballroom. Newspapers reported that thousands of horns and ticklers were handed out to guests, and that “tons of confetti” were tossed about. On the final night of the event, every person in attendance at the park walked away with a souvenir of the festival. The “most unique affair in the history of Denver summer amusements” was a fitting end to the first summer at Denver’s most unique amusement park.¹¹

Lakeside Amusement Park’s first season in operation proved to be a great success. The new park even managed to grab the attention of a major national publication. *Billboard Magazine* originated in 1894 as a publication for the outdoor advertising industry, but it soon grew to include coverage of theater, radio, movies, and all outdoor amusements, including amusement parks. Until the 1960s it was the leading publication for anyone involved in the

outdoor amusement industry. Lakeside received its first write up in *Billboard* in June 1908, a month after the park opened. According to Julian Helber, the magazine's Denver correspondent, the park's first season was starting with a "buzz and whir." Sunday attendance was running on average at 15,000 people, Helber wrote, while the daily attendance was "in proportion" to that, although he did not put a number on it. All of the rides were "crowded to capacity limits," and the most popular outdoor attraction was the Dante Band. As did many other observers, Helber pointed out the lighting at the park, writing that "the gorgeous illumination of Lakeside is the admiration of every one of Denver's citizens."¹²

Helber's June 1908 article was the first on Lakeside to appear in *Billboard*. No article detailing Lakeside's construction appeared in the magazine prior to opening day, and no other article about the first season appeared throughout the rest of 1908. In fact, Lakeside had to wait until July 1909 before the park received a full write-up in the magazine. That year, *Billboard* reported that Denver was "claiming to have the largest and most modern outdoor amusement resort" between Chicago and the Pacific. The park was "exceptionally well supplied with riding devices," though no rides had apparently been added from the year before based on the list that appeared in the article. *Billboard* did point out one of the many things that set Lakeside apart from many of the other amusement parks of the time when it mentioned that all of the concessions (which included rides at the time) were "permanently housed in attractive buildings." At a time when most other amusement parks' buildings were constructed of staff, Lakeside was doing its best to show its permanence through wood and brick and publications such as *Billboard* were doing their best to make sure everyone knew about it.¹³

Throughout the rest of the 1909 season, *Billboard* continued to sing the praises of Frank Burt, who had replaced Albert Lewin as general manager of Lakeside that year. Lewin went on

to become general manager of Lakeside rival Luna Park (formerly known as Manhattan Beach) before opening his own outdoor market in Denver. On July 24, the magazine reported that Burt had “transformed things” so that all rides and concessions were doing great business. The next month, *Billboard* reported that Burt, who had “the reputation of doing things,” had changed the course of the “pay streak” at the park. By eliminating short cuts and keeping people on the newly laid out paved paths, he had insured that the crowds had to circle the concession stands, greatly improving business at them. In September, as the park prepared to close for the season, *Billboard* reported that it had been a good summer for Lakeside, and that Manager Burt was already planning to make a number of changes for the next year, the biggest of which was an expanded theater.¹⁴

Little news of new attractions or early season celebrations at the park was found in newspapers in the summer of 1909 because of other issues that were stealing attention from the park itself. Although visitors to the park saw no evidence of what was going on, 1909 proved to be a tough year for both the park and the town of Lakeside. None of the Denver area newspapers reported on exactly what was taking place, but the *Transcript* did report on April 29, 1909, that a “serious disruption among the stockholders” had been troubling the company for several months. The disruption most likely concerned a May 25, 1908, vote by the directors to increase the capital stock of the Lakeside Realty and Amusement Company \$250,000 to \$350,000. The vote was not unanimous and apparently caused dissent among the directors; the dispute found its way into the town’s election process when trustee John Yeager ran for mayor on the Citizens ticket against Republican Marvin Adams, who had sided with the stockholders who had voted in favor of the stock increase. Adams’s entire Republican ticket, including his wife Kate, then the town recorder, went down to defeat. Adams immediately threatened to dispute the election results in

court, charging that there were irregularities in the filing of the Citizens ticket and coercion used in the election itself. A Justice of the Peace swore Yeager and the rest of the Citizens ticket into office, but Adams and the Republicans refused to give up their offices, leaving the “smallest town in Jefferson county” with “more town officials than any of her sisters...” Adams eventually lost the lawsuit, and by August had moved to Denver, where he opened his own bar.¹⁵

The stockholders dispute and election controversy were minor when compared to a much bigger problem that Lakeside Amusement Park faced that year. The Anti-Saloon League, stinging from the defeat of their anti-drinking measure in Lakeside the year before, seemed to be out to get the park’s owners and managers. A number of people had alleged that the park was illegally selling liquor on Sundays since it had opened. Because one of the reasons Zang had specifically located the park in Jefferson County was to avoid Denver’s blue laws, the charge seemed somewhat silly. In July 1908, the *Transcript* editorialized that the park was in full compliance with the law and that “But for the free advertising of over jealous prohibits, few visitors to the White City would know that liquor is sold there at all.” The agitators, who the *Transcript* identified as “Denver busybodies,” needed to “turn their attention to some of the disreputable joints at home” rather than go after Lakeside in the opinion of the paper’s editors.¹⁶

A year later the allegations were still flying and the Jefferson County District Attorney, W.M. Morgan, instructed Deputy District Attorney John Livesay (who would soon buy Marvin Adams’s old house and move into the town of Lakeside) to investigate the matter. The investigation eventually cost Livesay his job. Livesay’s interpretation of the Sunday closing law, which Morgan initially agreed with, was that it applied only to saloons, not hotels, restaurants, or cafes. Livesay argued that Lakeside fell under the excluded categories, and again, Morgan

initially agreed with his assessment. However, E.E. McLaughlin, president of the Colorado Anti-Saloon League, wanted Lakeside punished. Morgan, according to the *Transcript*, continually pushed Livesay to investigate the park, apparently at the insistence of McLaughlin. The point of contention seemed to be the rathskeller, the restaurant on the lower level of the Casino. Morgan and Livesay told Frank Burt, who had just taken over as manager of the park at the time the investigation began, that if he would divide the restaurant in half with a partition and keep part of it closed on Sundays, the problem would be solved. Within a day Burt had the partition built. Yet Morgan, at the insistence of McLaughlin, continued to press Livesay to take further action against Lakeside. Livesay, who firmly believed that no one at the park was committing any crimes, refused to investigate any further without Morgan first telling him who was making the complaints against the park. As a result, Morgan fired him as deputy district attorney on July 1, 1909.¹⁷

On July 26, Sheriff Heater of Jefferson County arrested Adolph Zang, his brewery associate T.A. Fredericks, John Keefe, and Godfrey Schirmer, along with several others, for violating the liquor laws. Similar to the article on the Scenic Railway accident in February 1908, the article on the arrests, headlined “Millionaires Are Taken By Sheriff,” appeared only in the distant *Fort Collins Weekly Courier*. Although the *Transcript* covered the liquor cases in detail, they did not print any stories on the arrest of Zang and the others. At the beginning of August, the editors of the *Transcript* argued that the prosecution was starting to resemble a persecution, particularly when it resulted in the arrest of men like Zang. The newspaper again pointed out that Morgan had ruled the park in compliance with the law just a few weeks earlier. By making changes at the rathskeller, which Morgan approved, management had proven that it was willing to do whatever necessary to keep the park, which was a “rival institution to the finest hotels” in

Colorado, in compliance with the law. The police were unmoved by the newspapers arguments and, based on complaints signed by people who said they had been served liquor on Sundays, began arresting everyone from servers at the park to directors of the company.¹⁸

In addition to the four company directors, nine waiters (including G.C. Matthews, Fred Marks, E.P. Fritz, Red Drago, Harry Furlong, Ira Neice, and Hugh Doherty) and new general manager Frank Burt were eventually arrested. On August 10, 1909, the third case against the Lakeside group for violating the law went before Judge Ben Snyder. In a surprise move, the judge dismissed all fourteen cases when it was revealed that the complaining witness, Professor J.W. Hazard, had left the state. An angry Judge Snyder charged Hazard with the court costs for the day, and the fourteen Lakeside defendants “immediately began to talk of damage suits as balm for their feelings over what they claim is persecution.” The business community in nearby Golden also began to express concern over what they believed to be the unnecessary expense of the ongoing investigation and prosecution. Less than a week after the dismissal of the Hazard complaint, the directors of the Lakeside Company made good on their threat and instructed the company’s lawyer, J.W. Barnes, to file a \$100,000 lawsuit against Hazard for false arrest, defamation of character, and malicious annoyance, among other things. The *Transcript* fully supported the suit, arguing that the ongoing investigation had become “a fine example of legal buffoonery” and it was time to stop harassing the company, which was one of the largest taxpayers in the county, supported hundreds of families, and was operated by some of the richest and most influential men in the state of Colorado.¹⁹

When Adolph Zang went on trial in November 1909 on charges relating to a new complaint filed by Issac Hines of Arvada, it was revealed that nearly all the prosecution’s witnesses in the cases were employees of the Anti-Saloon League, hired for the sole purpose of

obtaining evidence against Lakeside. The hired witnesses included Frank Greene, center rush for the University of Denver football team. The *Transcript* reported that under cross-examination by J.W. Barnes, Greene “fumbled his testimony worse than he was ever known to fumble a pigskin.” Another witness testified that he had never tasted liquor in his life, but could distinguish whiskey, beer, or wine “at a reasonable distance.” After the witnesses finished testifying, Barnes tried to get the case against Zang dismissed, arguing that the park’s majority owner had nothing to do with the daily operation of the rathskeller. The judge refused and turned the case over to the jury, which promptly convicted Zang.²⁰

Five days later, on November 22, 1909, the defendants decided that they not only could not win, but were also tired of the ongoing cases. Under a plea agreement, the remaining thirteen defendants enter a plea of *nolo contendere*. J.W. Barnes asked the judge to overturn Zang’s conviction from the week before and grant him a new trial. With the request granted, Zang also entered a plea of *nolo contendere*. Judge McCall informed the defendants that the plea essentially meant they were guilty and that he could fine them, sentence them to jail, or both. Under the terms of the agreement, as long as they promised to not serve liquor in any manner at Lakeside on Sundays he would not impose either punishment. Godfrey Schirmer, who was secretary and treasurer of the Lakeside Realty and Amusement Company as well as president of the German American Trust Company, was especially concerned about pleading guilty and the effect it would have on his reputation and bank, and Judge McCall took special care to assure him that as long as the park remained dry on Sundays the matter was finished. In addition, the Lakeside people agreed to pay all costs associated with the case. With the plea deal in place, management at the park was free to put the issue behind them and look forward to 1910.²¹

No coverage of the liquor law issues at Lakeside appeared in the Denver newspapers.

The city was heavily invested in Lakeside as a major part of the City Beautiful program, and any controversy touching the park seemed to be off limits. Speer's realism when it came to strict interpretation of City Beautiful ideals may also have played a part in the lack of coverage. Just as Speer approved of spooning in the parks, he did not necessarily look down on alcohol consumption. The building regulations Speer and his partners established for the neighborhood around Arlington Park expressly prohibited the construction of saloons for five years. But, Speer was Denver's police commissioner at the time he built Arlington Park, and he took no action against prostitution, gambling, or saloons while in that position. Police Commissioner Speer considered organized vice a fact of life. By the time he became mayor, Speer still held that belief and argued that vice simply needed to be kept confined to certain areas and regulated.

Henry Buchtel, a Methodist teetotaler who served as chancellor of the University of Denver, was elected governor of Colorado in 1906. Surprisingly, given his religious views, the new governor agreed with the mayor of Denver, saying that "sinners existed as well as saints," and that Denver was better off with well-policed vice districts. The residents of Market Street, Denver's red light district, cheered Buchtel's election. Yet, some of Speer's City Beautiful programs were in fact designed to cut down on alcohol consumption. Many temperance advocates argued that people drank in order to "wet their whistles," and that the installation of public drinking fountains, one of Speer's many projects, would allow them to do so while avoiding saloons and alcohol. Speer only half-heartedly cracked down on saloons beginning in 1910, after temperance advocates grew increasingly louder in their calls for prohibition. Speer feared that if he did not do something to regulate saloons, they would force Denver to go dry. In fact, just five years later, in 1915, Denver fought vigorously to avoid statewide prohibition. In any other city, Speer's acceptance of alcohol would have conflicted with the City Beautiful movement's goals.

However, in Denver, Speer set those goals, and was always realistic in his thinking on what people were like and would do. As a well-policed and regulated place, Lakeside was the perfect location for the sale and consumption of alcohol.²²

The *Colorado Transcript*, in its coverage of the alcohol investigation, increasingly took the position that it was a witch hunt and completely unjustified. In urging Jefferson County residents to think critically about the case and what was happening to the park and its employees, the newspaper first stated that employment at the park supported over 400 families, making it the largest employer in the county and one of the biggest tax payers as well. The park was “the beauty spot of the West,” “the favorite spot of the society of the state,” and was “pointed out to visitors from East and West as the show place of the Rocky Mountain region.” The *Transcript* went on to point out that the Jefferson County district attorney himself had ruled that the Casino was operated just like the finest hotels in the state, and the newspaper argued that it was no different from the Brown Palace or the Zang owned Oxford in Denver, the Hotel Colorado in Glenwood Springs, or the Antlers in Colorado Springs. All of these institutions did “more to advertise this state than anything else one can find,” and that anyone interested in the social and commercial advancement of Jefferson County and all of Colorado knew that to be the case. If nothing else, sentiments like these showed what an important role people assigned to Lakeside Amusement Park just one year after it had opened to the public. The case also demonstrated that as long as Denver was linking itself to the park and promoting it as part of the City Beautiful movement, Jefferson County was happy to have Denver be a part of it. But, when it came to something unpleasant like the Denver-based Anti-Saloon League interfering in the county’s business, many in Jefferson County were more than happy to tell the Denver intruders to mind their own business and worry about problems in their own town.²³

As if the election controversy and liquor prosecutions were not enough, the unions also stepped in to create trouble for the park in 1909. The Cook's, Bartender's, and Waiter's Union, backed by the Denver Trades and Labor Assembly, wanted to force the park to close on Sundays. The fight had been brewing ever since the park opened the year before, but it reached new heights when the larger Denver group advised management that it did not consider the park union as long as non-union employees worked there. Nothing ever came of the proposed boycott of Lakeside, and management paid little attention to the Sunday closing demand. They had a far bigger issue concerning Sundays with the liquor issue, and labor demands fell by the wayside. But, it was simply one more bit of trouble that park management felt they did not need during the troubled summer of 1909. Even the *Transcript* sympathized, writing that management at Lakeside seemed to be "having its share of trouble lately."²⁴

The trouble seemed never-ending as near the end of the 1909 season, the first vocal critic of the park itself appeared on the scene. J.F. White, the editor of the *Arvada Enterprise*, who the *Colorado Transcript* referred to as "Brother White," complained that it was a great injustice to his close friend Mrs. Anna Guth that the White City was allowed to operate without interference while Jefferson County police, in the past, had continually raided and eventually closed Mrs. Guth's pleasure resort. Her Northwestern Park, located near Lakeside's neighboring town of Mountain View, was in fact an illegal gambling and liquor establishment, and Jefferson County police arrested Guth numerous times when her resort was known as Pete's Place. Throughout 1907 Guth repeatedly claimed that she would close the place and leave the county, but continued to bribe Mountain View officials in order to stay in business. By 1909, Jefferson County officials had finally succeeded in driving her from the county but many, including White of the *Enterprise*, continued to fight for her. The editors of the *Transcript* found it "pathetic" that

White dared to compare Guth's resort to Lakeside, "the greatest amusement park West of Chicago," sarcastically writing, "it is to weep." Nothing ever came of White's agitation, though it was not the last time he would attempt to make trouble for the park.²⁵

Despite all of the trouble and criticism, the park did in fact have a good 1909 season. The feature attraction on opening day was a "moving picture spectacle" that depicted General Phil Sheridan's ride to the front during the Civil War, in addition to baseball, boating, dancing and "fun unrestrained at every amusement abode" according to the *Rocky Mountain News*. More than 30,000 people crowded the park on opening day, and the newspaper reported that, just as the year before, not a single thing happened to darken the great celebration. Frank Burt, the new general manager, told the *News* that from the moment he saw Lakeside for the first time he wanted to make the park, which was "different in every respect from others, with a high standard of honesty in giving the public its money's worth," one of the most important in the country. Not only would such a development be good for the park, but it would also be good for Denver. Burt argued that Lakeside would do more to "spread the fame" of Denver than anything else could and asked for the cooperation of every man, woman, and child in Denver in "making Denver talked about all over the country because of the attractiveness of one of her parks." The *Rocky Mountain News* reported that Denver seemed half mad for outdoor entertainment after the long winter, and that many were anxious to enjoy the "fresh air of Colorado's beauty spot" at Lakeside.²⁶

The biggest events at Lakeside that year came at the end of summer. On the final Children's Day near the end of August, Lady of the Lake Miss Naomi Alfrey directed the children in the play "The Brownies in Fairyland." The *Transcript* reported that the play was sure to be a success, largely because "practically every child of talent in Denver has been secured to

take part.” After the childrens’ play, the park hosted three Venetian nights in late August and early September to help wind down the regular season. The festivities included an illuminated boat parade on the lake, aquatic sports, and other activities. Workers spent two weeks constructing barges for the parade, and it took a dozen electricians to create the controls and wiring for the event. The *Transcript* reported that the new illuminations for the Venetian nights turned Lakeside into a “bewitching fairyland” and that the whole show would “go down into history as one of the most beautiful and thrilling spectacles ever seen at an amusement park in this country.” With the elaborate lighting and beautiful scenery, the show very much fit with Lakeside’s City Beautiful image.²⁷

The other big events at the end of the season were more civic minded in nature as Lakeside’s owners and managers sought to show that the park was a good neighbor. On Labor Day the park hosted its second annual free barbecue, which the *Transcript* described as “extensive.” Management planned for 50,000 people to attend, 15,000 more than the year before, all of whom would enter the park and eat for free between noon and eight o’clock at night. The newspaper urged readers to try the barbecue for themselves, writing “you have our permission.” Far more extensive than the barbecue, however, and more heavily promoted, was Good Roads Day at the park.²⁸

The Good Roads Day event took place at Lakeside on September 11, 1909. For a number of years boosters had been trying to build a road between Denver and Golden, often referred to as the Golden-Denver boulevard. Finally, in April 1909, the state legislature passed a bill appropriating money for the new road, but to the dismay of its supporters, the legislature approved only \$5,000, not the \$20,000 for which they hoped. The commission in charge of the road (made up of the governor of Colorado, mayor of Denver, and the Jefferson County

commissioners) set about deciding on a suitable location for the road while supporters tried to rest enough money to pay for its construction. The commission eventually chose Jefferson Avenue, or North Golden Road, as the route.²⁹

After months of fundraising, the boulevard committee's road fund was still \$1,400 short of its goal when Lakeside's management stepped in. First, they agreed to build a half-mile section of the road at their own expense. Next, they turned operation of the park over to the boulevard committee for one day. The committee raised the gate admission to twenty-five cents for September 11, and all proceeds from admissions and concessions went to the road fund. Management also put large blocks of tickets to the park on sale at various locations around Denver and Jefferson County, with all proceeds again going to the road fund. The *Transcript* cheered the park, writing that they proposed to do more than "simply wishing it well" to help get the road built. While the park was in fact proving itself a good neighbor, management was also motivated by the fact that a road between Denver and Golden would provide better access to the park for people from both towns.³⁰

The *Transcript* strongly urged its readers to patronize Lakeside on Good Roads Day because success that day meant "the boulevard between Golden and Denver, it means starting work immediately, and it means an absolute guarantee that it will be finished." Despite the newspapers pleas, however, attendance at the event was not as high as expected or hoped and when it was done the road fund was still \$400 short. Still, the newspaper praised the park's management for working so hard on the project. Regardless of the shortfall, work started on the boulevard the next year and continued until the state took over both construction and maintenance in 1911. But, as late as February 1911, Lakeside's owners were still willing to raise money in order to complete the project.³¹

The next civic event was Farmer's Day, held at Lakeside two weeks later on September 25. The event, which was reminiscent of a county fair, acknowledged the still largely rural nature of Jefferson County. Only Jefferson County residents were allowed to enter exhibits, and the Transcript viewed it as "the greatest opportunity the county has ever had to advertise its agricultural and horticultural resources." The organizers of the event went out of their way to also encourage farm wives to enter baked goods, canned goods, and textile work. Management held the fair inside the Casino building, keeping it safe from any bad weather that might strike. In addition to hosting Farmer's Day, the park also put up \$1,000 in prize money for various competitions. Ten dollars in gold went to Dorothy Thoma, voted winner of the baby contest. It was a tough decision, as the *Transcript* reported that the judges were "well nigh floored when it came to choosing from such an array of handsome and well behaved" children. Admission to the grounds was free on Farmer's Day, which allowed thousands of people to "get an idea of what our county soil will produce." Free admission to the grounds also allowed anyone who had yet to visit the park to see it for free, with the hope that they would come back as paying guests the next summer. As an added bonus, and to further promote the beauty of Lakeside, management turned on all the lights on the evening of Farmer's Day.³²

The organizers viewed Farmer's Day as a test case to see if a county fair would work in Jefferson County, and if successful they intended to put one on every year. An estimated 10,000 people entered the gates that day, and promoters sold \$750 worth of stock in the Jefferson County Fair Association. The day was so successful, and the fair organizers felt so confident, that they went ahead with their plans, and in early 1910 signed a contract with the Lakeside Realty and Amusement Company to hold the annual county fair there every year. The Fair association even paid for improvements to the park, including livestock stalls and a dirt track

solely for their use. The new contract once again brought condemnation of Lakeside from the editor of the *Arvada Enterprise*. J.F. White argued that the political machine of Jefferson County first used their influence to take the county fair away from Arvada and give it to Golden. Then, when organizers discovered that Golden lacked a suitable location for it, they moved it to Lakeside. White wrote that the organizers did not truly care where the fair was held just so long as they had “stolen it from Arvada.” White’s chief objection to holding the fair at the amusement park was because of liquor sales at the park, which was a somewhat laughable objection given his earlier defense of Anna Guth’s pleasure resort. The editors of the *Transcript* referred to White as one of the “disagreeable grouches” who had kept the face of his hammer “well polished by use on the White City.” They argued that had White, or anyone else, put forth a suitable location, the directors of the fair would have given it consideration, but no one did so. In addition to condemning “Brother White,” the *Transcript* also attacked his newspaper, which they said was published entirely in Denver while claiming to be a Jefferson County publication. In the end, the *Transcript*’s editors wrote, White’s criticism had little impact. Lakeside’s management failed to notice, and the park hosted the county fair for the next two years. White’s failure to unseat Lakeside as the host of the county fair seemingly silenced his vendetta against the amusement park.³³

After a spectacular first season, Lakeside Amusement Park certainly experienced its share of growing pains during the 1909 season. The local newspapers followed a pattern established when the Scenic Railway accident occurred in 1908 of keeping quiet about unpleasant things at Lakeside. The papers ignored the arrest of Adolph Zang and the other park directors and employees in July 1909 while the Fort Collins newspaper trumpeted the news. When it became impossible to ignore the situation that brought about the arrests, the *Transcript* jumped to the

park's defense, reminding anyone reading it of how great the park was and what an important institution it was for Denver and all of Colorado. Lakeside's management continued to offer high class entertainment throughout the troubled summer, and even hosted three events at the end of the summer designed to show the public how civic minded the park was. Despite the rocky season, Lakeside Amusement Park ended its second season very successfully.

As the amusement park successfully established itself, the town of Lakeside worked just as hard to prove that it was a growing and thriving community. Before leaving town in 1909, Mayor Marvin Adams played the role of civic booster almost non-stop, urging many of his relatives and fellow employees at The Famous to move to Lakeside. The *Transcript* proudly announced the news each time a new resident moved in, such as when Doctor Burgesser, formerly of Joplin, Missouri, arrived in late 1908. When a policeman named Sweeney moved his family to town in December 1908, the *Transcript* reported that the only problem it had with his arrival was that it gave the Democrats in Lakeside four more votes. Each new house constructed, or addition added to an existing house, was further cause for celebration. The newspaper reported that when Mayor Adams finished the addition to his house he intended to dedicate it in "good old Missouri style" and invited all Jefferson County residents to the party. Mayors from neighboring towns also paid official visits to the new town. Mayor Daniel Sutton of Englewood praised the architectural style of Lakeside's homes. He especially admired the Southern California bungalow style of Mayor Adams's house and told the *Transcript* that he intended to promote it in Englewood. Mayor Louis Cohen of Fairplay visited in order to observe the administration policies of Lakeside, which he intended to copy much of, but he also thought he had "the best town." The *Transcript* responded that everyone was entitled to their own opinion, but that Cohen "had another think coming."³⁴

The *Transcript* also made sure to cover the many social functions taking place in Lakeside. In August 1908, Mayor Adams's sister, Blanche Roberts, was the bride at the first wedding held in the town. The newspaper reported that the already pretty Adams home was "profusely decorated in white and pink," and that Blanche and her new husband, Albert McCabe, received many "handsome and costly" gifts after the ceremony. Kate Adams hosted the first Thanksgiving dinner in Lakeside in November 1908, followed by the first Christmas celebration the following month. Kate Adams also founded a Lakeside chapter of the Moonstone Thimble Club, which undertook charitable work. Albert Lewin addressed one of the first meetings of the club, held in January 1909, after which he and Marvin Adams took the women on a tour of the amusement park, making them, the *Transcript* reported, Lakeside's first visitors of 1909. New Year's Day 1909 was another big celebration, with the *Transcript* writing that Lakeside city jailer Dad Clow had a "hog killing time" and that after a few drinks Mayor Adams was seen "skipping around with the agility of a college athlete."³⁵

Just as the town of Lakeside worked towards becoming an established city during its first two years of existence, Lakeside Amusement Park did everything right to become an established part of Denver's City Beautiful movement. In January 1908, four months before Lakeside opened, the *Colorado Transcript* referred to it as "largest and most pretentious park in the West." During its first two seasons, Lakeside did its best to live up to that reputation. And, as 1909 ended, Denver laid the groundwork for the park's reputation to grow even brighter as it was even more solidly and visibly linked to Denver's City Beautiful movement. That year, Mayor Speer proposed that the City of Denver begin publishing a weekly municipal magazine. Speer argued that the public had a right to know what city government was doing, and a weekly magazine distributed for free would help to keep them informed. Speer also argued that "Official articles

on our Auditorium, Street Lighting, method of Street Cleaning, Museum, Free distribution of trees, Sunday concerts, Parks, Boulevards, etc., would be copied in Municipal Journals and prove valuable as an advertising medium” for the city of Denver. While he did not say it in his proposal to the City Council, Speer also wanted to use the new magazine to counter critics from the *Rocky Mountain News*, *The Denver Post*, and especially the *Denver Express*. The *Express* was founded in 1906 by Edward W. Scripps, who opposed Speer and accused him of running a corrupt administration. Scripps, who would buy the *Rocky Mountain News* in 1926, called for clean government in Denver, something he felt was not possible under Speer. The ““good news journal”” that Speer envisioned would show the good things he was doing for the city’s beautification. The first issue of the magazine, called *Denver Municipal Facts*, was published on February 20, 1909. By the time Lakeside’s 1910 season got underway *Municipal Facts* would do more than any other publication to make it clear that Lakeside Amusement Park was an important and welcome player as Denver beautified itself.³⁶



Fig. 4 The Tower of Jewels, a “pillar of fire” at night.

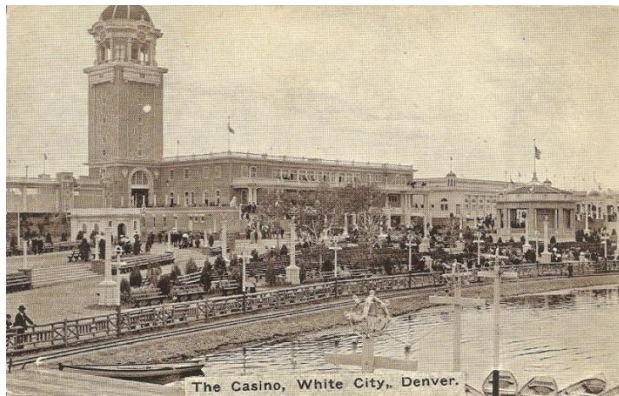


Fig. 5 Left to right, the Tower, Casino, and Swimming Pool.



Fig. 6 The Amusement Area of Lakeside.



Fig. 7 The Shoot-the-Chutes, with entrance to the Velvet Coaster and Scenic Railway to the right.



Fig. 8 The Chutes and Third Degree at night.

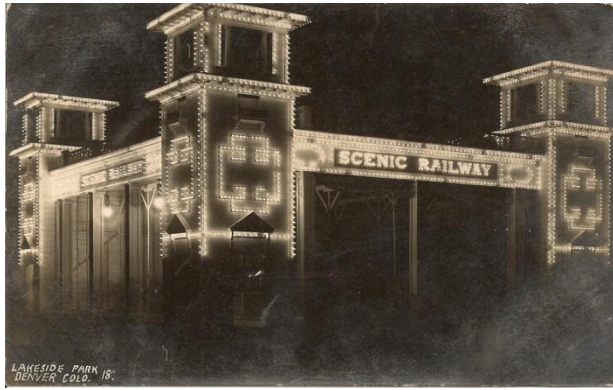


Fig. 9 The Scenic Railway building at night.

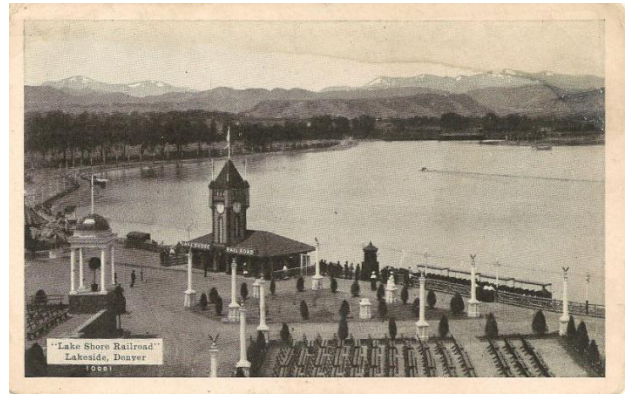


Fig. 12 The station for the Lake Shore Railway.

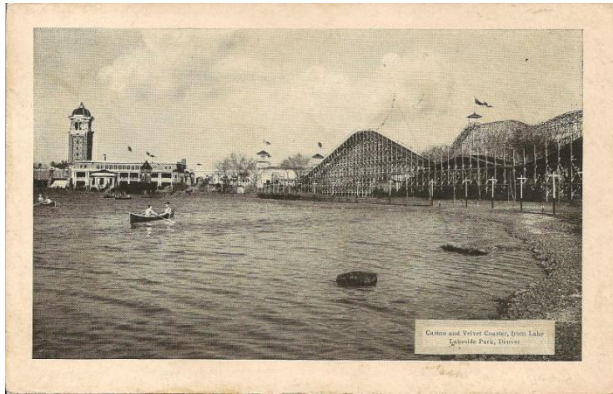


Fig. 10 Looking east at the Tower and Velvet Coaster.



Fig. 13 The Social Area of Lakeside, with the Boat House at left.



Fig. 11 Lakeside's short-lived Tickler ride.



Fig. 14 The El Patio Ballroom on left and Skating Rink on right.



Fig. 15 Lakeside's photo studio demonstrated the park's elite nature with its private train car prop...



Fig. 16 ...and car prop.



Fig. 17 Buttons from various events at Lakeside, 1908-1913.



Fig. 18 A spare tire cover given to Lakeside customers, probably from the 1920s.

CHAPTER FOUR: LAKESIDE, THE WHITE CITY BEAUTIFUL

The unique relationship between the White City of Lakeside and the City Beautiful of Denver was brief but intense. The strongest period of the relationship was from 1908 to 1912, when Denver officials proudly showed the park to Democratic National Convention delegates, real estate executives, and convention visitors, and continually promoted it in the city-published magazine *Municipal Facts*. And, Lakeside officials did their best to live up to Mayor Robert Speer's City Beautiful ideals during this period by keeping Lakeside a clean, safe, fun (but not too fun), educational, and well-managed enterprise. The two entities - a growing city in need of beautification and a beautiful amusement park occupying its own town - worked well together. After 1912, however, a number of factors drove the two apart. In Denver, political factors convinced Speer, always a shrewd politician, to decide against seeking a third term, effectively putting an end to his City Beautiful program for the time being. Economically, Lakeside's owners and managers realized that in order to survive the park needed to appeal to a broader customer base than it had previously done. Socially, even the prohibition movement played a role in dividing the two. While both sides clung to the relationship for as long as possible, by 1917 it was over due to their diverging business and political interests.

Denver Municipal Facts, the new magazine published by the City of Denver to highlight Mayor Robert Speer's accomplishments in civic beautification, became the primary link between Denver and Lakeside Amusement Park after 1909. Between 1909 and 1914 the magazine featured Lakeside twenty-five times, while Elitch's was mentioned fifteen times, Manhattan

Beach eleven times and Tuileries three times. Lakeside's first major appearance in *Municipal Facts* was on January 8, 1910, when a picture of the park graced the cover of the magazine. The next appearance was in the July 30, 1910 issue, when it was stated that Lakeside used enough electrical current each night during the summer to power any city in the state with the exception of Denver. The fact that lighting was such an important part of Denver's City Beautiful program made Lakeside's lighting scheme a desirable and noteworthy accomplishment. In fact, the article went on to say, visitors asserted that few other amusement parks in the United States "compare in beauty with Lakeside by night." Just three months later, as the city prepared to open Inspiration Point Park to the north of Lakeside, *Municipal Facts* proclaimed that the "brilliant spectacle" of the combined lights of Denver and Lakeside made for a breathtaking view from the new park. The magazine featured pictures of both Lakeside and Elitch's in the May 13, 1911 and August 24, 1912, issues. But, *Municipal Facts* did much more than just print pictures of the park.¹

During the week of July 17, 1911, the National Association of Real Estate Exchanges held their annual convention in Denver. City officials and local real estate leaders did everything they could to convince the attendees that Denver was not only the "most hospitable city in the world," but also rapidly becoming a world-class city. The hosts treated delegates to a fireworks show at City Park, automobile tours through the city, excursions to the Continental Divide, and a trip to Colorado Springs to see Pike's Peak and the Garden of the Gods. Officials also arranged for an evening barbecue at Lakeside, with the park in "gala attire" for the event and every attraction opened free to delegates. *Municipal Facts* declared that visitors would "never forget the wonderful pictures of nature that will pass before their view in a fleeting panorama as the shades of night descend over the purple foothills and snow-capped mountain peaks" as they

explored the fine amusement park. Lakeside clearly played a big part in the image that civic leaders wanted visitors to have of Denver.²

The strongest article linking Lakeside to Denver and the City Beautiful appeared in the July 6, 1912, issue of *Municipal Facts*. Proclaiming that Lakeside was recognized as one of the most beautiful summer resorts in the city and was one of the main reasons tourists visited Denver, the article stated that “to witness such a resort in the Far West is a revelation and surprise to every stranger.” The brilliant illumination, mountain and foothill views, and sunset dinners on the Casino balcony all combined to create Lakeside’s immense beauty. And the park was easily accessible by streetcar or automobile over improved city streets and boulevards, the article went on to say, subtle reminders of some of the other civic improvements brought about by Mayor Speer’s many projects. Lakeside, the article seemed to say, was a perfect poster child for everything Speer and City Beautiful supporters were trying to do--it was beautiful, it provided numerous kinds of relaxation and recreation, and best of all, it was easy for visitors to get there whatever their chosen mode of transportation.³

The fact that Denver had such a fine amusement park located nearby, when many larger cities did not, was a positive indicator of Denver’s growing national prominence, or so city leaders and promoters argued through articles such as this one in *Municipal Facts*. After singing the park's praises, the article stressed that Adolph Zang and his “patriotic associates” built Lakeside, which was the pride of every Coloradoan, out of “A spirit of civic betterment and improvement rather than hope of big financial gains...” The fact that Denver men financed and built the park on their own, without using outside sources of money, was another source of pride to the author of the article and further proof that many people, not least of all Zang and his associates, had a strong belief in Denver’s bright future. The park's owners, the article

concluded, were happy to have Lakeside simply “add to the glory of the municipality and to supply one more vital reason that Denver is the best residence city in the United States.” Adolph Zang, according to his granddaughter Betty Arnold, was a kind and generous man, known for taking neighborhood children to circuses and Fourth of July events and happily handing out quarters on Halloween. Generous as he might have been, and generous as Denver leaders made him and the other owners of Lakeside appear to be by declaring that they had built the park without any concern for profit, Lakeside was first and foremost a business investment for Zang. The city of Denver’s claims that the men built the park out of a spirit of civic betterment and improvement were certainly beneficial to the park’s image, but were solely the creation of Denver officials.⁴

The July 6 article also mentioned Elitch’s, Manhattan Beach, and Tuileries, but in nowhere near the glowing terms that it used to describe Lakeside. Elitch’s, according to the article, catered to only the “better classes” of people in Denver, and from the park’s beginning John and Mary Elitch wanted only good and clean entertainment. However, rather than focusing on the amusement attractions at Elitch’s, the article focused on the park’s famous theater and the number of well-known stars it attracted and the weekly symphony concerts. The park’s beautiful gardens and the fact that Elitch’s was the only amusement park in the country managed by a woman also were mentioned. *Municipal Facts* singled out Manhattan Beach for its beauty and for the fact that, despite “vicissitudes usually attendant upon resorts of this character,” management had succeeded in rejuvenating the park and making it a popular place once again. While the article also declared Tuileries a beautiful resort, the greatest attraction there was the motordrome where “speed demons” raced over the one-third mile board track. Tuileries was a nice park, the article said, but it catered to the masses with “liberal entertainment.” Lakeside and

Elitch's obviously were at the top of Denver's amusement attractions, based on the article in *Municipal Facts*, but Lakeside in 1912 was just a step above Elitch's. In a city-published magazine dedicated to promoting Mayor Speer's accomplishments in civic improvement, the article left readers with the distinct impression that there was no better advertisement for Denver's City Beautiful goals than Lakeside Amusement Park.⁵

Lakeside's owners and managers, who wanted a respectable and high-class amusement park, in addition to one that made money, were more than happy to have the connection to Denver. While Denver did its best to make Lakeside a desirable addition to Denver's City Beautiful program, the park's owners did their best to promote themselves as part of City Beautiful as well. In their 1910 brochure, they wrote that it was a delight and surprise for tourists to experience Lakeside, and "To find such a summer park in the 'Wild and Woolly West' is a distinct revelation to the 'tenderfoot.'" With the beauty of its surroundings, size of its grounds, and general attractiveness, the brochure proclaimed, there was "no prettier public playground than the resort in the shadows of the foothills, where blow the breezes from the Rockies, cooled by 'the snows five thousand summer old.'" The line about the snows was a favorite in early advertising for the park, and appeared in numerous brochures, advertisements, and newspaper articles. *Billboard* magazine agreed, writing in 1912 that the beautiful sunsets witnessed from the Casino balcony were as big a draw as any of the other attractions the park offered. The Denver Convention League in their 1910 brochure pointed to all of Denver's amusement parks as attractive proof of Denver's status as an up and coming city, but wrote that Lakeside offered visitors a chance to see "all of the sights that a 'White City' has to offer."⁶

Amusement parks throughout the country offered visitors just as many sights as did Lakeside, but in no other major city pursuing City Beautiful programs was an amusement park

adopted as a major element of those programs. The stories of San Francisco's, Chicago's, and Cleveland's amusement parks demonstrate this well. All three cities pursued major City Beautiful improvements. In San Francisco, amusement parks had never truly taken hold, in part because the city was destroyed by fire in 1906 at the height of the amusement park craze, and afterwards residents worried more about rebuilding their houses and businesses than they did about building amusement parks. When the situation stabilized by the late 1910s and early 1920s, John Friedle and Arthur Loof partnered to expand their separate operations at Ocean Beach, which became Playland at the Beach in 1921. The City of San Francisco assisted Loof and Friedle by widening and paving the road leading to the park and by extending the existing concrete esplanade on the beach all the way to the park. Streetcar lines leading to the park already existed so there was no need to convince streetcar companies to build new ones. Playland, the San Francisco Chronicle made clear, was something for everyone to enjoy but was a purely private enterprise that only came about when private developers felt financially secure enough to build it. Even had the City Beautiful movement not been on the downward side of its popularity in 1921, there is no indication it would have played a role in Playland.⁷

Chicago's most popular amusement park, Riverview, opened in 1904. Like Playland, it was built along an existing streetcar line, and also like Playland, Chicago's City Beautiful movement never adopted the park. In fact, in 1912, Chicago's building inspectors condemned the park's two-week-old observation tower, called the Eye-Full Tower, because they did not believe the elevators to be safe. Despite such problems, the city did not entirely object to the park. In 1920 Mayor William "Big Bill" Thompson started hosting annual Schoolkid Days, where he distributed free passes to the park to Chicago's public school students. Women's groups eventually forced Thompson to drop the program by complaining that closing schools for

a day only corrupted the children. Thompson defended the program, arguing that he gave away copies of the U.S. Constitution and biographies of George Washington and Abraham Lincoln to the children, but the mothers remained unmoved and Thompson gave in to their demands. Mayor Thompson also prevented Riverview from becoming a battleground for the Capone and O'Banion gangs, who enjoyed attacking each other's speakeasies near the park. Popular as the park may have been, speakeasies and gangsters hardly fit with the City Beautiful image.⁸

Cleveland's Euclid Beach was one of that city's earliest parks, opening in 1895. In 1901 it was purchased by the Humphrey family and was known after that as a "Sunday School" operation because the family did not permit alcohol in the park, refused to tolerate rowdy behavior, and did not allow any suggestive or gruesome attractions. The park even employed its own police force to make sure customers followed the rules. Euclid Beach stood the best chance of any of Cleveland's parks of being connected to the City Beautiful movement, but it never happened. Luna Park, which opened in 1903, served beer and catered to European immigrants. Suggestive attractions at Luna drew continuous criticism from Cleveland's religious leaders, who called the park a "School of Vice." Luna's management loved the publicity the criticism generated, but the park's public image made it impossible to link it to City Beautiful ideals if anyone had wanted to do so.⁹

Lakeside, then, was unique in its very close relationship to the City of Denver and its City Beautiful movement. The timing of Lakeside's construction, just as Denver's City Beautiful program was getting underway, certainly helped the connection, as did the park's design. But, other factors played into the close connection that Lakeside enjoyed. While Denver did not help build streets to Lakeside, as San Francisco did at Playland, the city did take a very active role in promoting the park, even going so far as to write about it favorably and at great length in city

sponsored publications, and reminding readers and visitors how easy it was to get to the park over Speer's new roads. While no proof exists, it also seems likely that the city may have pressured the Denver Tramway Company to build the streetcar line to Lakeside before the park opened. Mayor Speer never hosted free days for schoolchildren at Lakeside, as did Chicago's Mayor Thompson, but he did bring visitors to the park. Speer's visitors, such as members of the Democratic National Convention, just happened to be a bit more prominent. Like the Humphreys family at Cleveland's Euclid Beach, Lakeside had its own police force at the park. The Lakeside police, however, happened to have the power of a judge and jail behind them thanks to the park being located in its own town. The connection between Lakeside and Denver's City Beautiful never would have happened without Robert Speer's influence, but when it came time for it to happen, all of the pieces needed to make it possible were already in place, and Lakeside officials worked constantly to make sure it stayed that way.

The Denver Convention League felt that Lakeside had everything to offer that a White City should, but Lakeside's management believed there was more they could do and in 1910 they started expanding. In October 1909, the *Transcript* reported that big changes were in the works for the park's 1910 season. The biggest was at the Casino, where management converted the interior restaurant on the second floor into a much larger theater. The park's original theater had boomed during 1909 under the director of Walter Clarke Bellows, long-time Elitch's Theater manager, and management decided a bigger space was in order. On March 26, 1910, *Billboard* reported that a crew of 400 men was hard at work on the \$45,000 theater. Finished in ivory and old gold, and steam heated, the theater provided space for traveling companies to produce musical comedies and light operas. Management decided against keeping a stock company at the theater, arguing that it was "more in keeping with Denver's metropolitan importance" to

engage “quality...companies” from the East. Management stressed that they would not allow any vaudeville acts to perform there. To make up for the lost restaurant space, management expanded and enclosed the popular balcony restaurant with moveable glass walls and connected it to the theater with arched doorways. Another work crew was busily putting a fresh coat of paint on the rest of the park’s buildings. *Billboard* predicted that, with the changes, the 1910 season “bids fair to be the most profitable” one yet for the park.¹⁰

While the *Colorado Transcript* and *Billboard* reported that work on the new \$45,000 Casino Theater was progressing nicely, Scripp’s *Denver Express* painted a very different picture. Near the end of March 1910, work on the theater came to a halt when a fight broke out on the job site between members of the Independent Brotherhood of Structural Ironworkers and the International Structural Ironworkers No. 24. Members of No. 24 reported that Lakeside management had promised to use all union men on work at the theater and argued that, because the Independent Brotherhood was not a union, the job should have gone to them. When the No. 24 men were unable to convince Lakeside’s management of this they went to the park on March 25 and confronted both management and the men working there in an attempt to get the job. The Independent Brotherhood refused to leave and a fight broke out. Lakeside police responded to the disturbance, and witnesses reported to the *Express* that Chief James Lindsey was so badly beaten that he had to be rushed to St. Luke’s Hospital in Denver. The rest of the Lakeside police force found themselves helpless in the face of the overwhelming number of ironworkers and had no other choice but to let the fight wear itself out. Doing their best to maintain the City Beautiful image of the park, no other newspaper reported the disruption, just as no Denver area newspaper reported on the accident involving the Scenic Railway in 1908.¹¹

The disruption caused by the fight created such a delay in construction on the new theater

space that workers had to rush in order to get it done in time for the 1910 season. They barely made it, with the *Colorado Transcript* reporting on May 26, 1910, just two days before Opening Day, that the theater was finally done. The newspaper declared that the 1,700 seat theater “one of the prettiest and most comfortable playhouses in the West.” Allan K. Foster, credited with having more successes on the New York stages than any other director, was in charge of it. The well-known actors he brought with him included Lothe Kendell, Beth Tate, Alice Clifton, Georgia Harvey, Lew Kelly, Toney Hart, Arthur Dean, Carl Kaynor, Allen Carter, and “Bud” Ross. The *Transcript* reported that backing these actors, “all of whom have won enviable reputations with the larger Eastern companies,” was a chorus of twenty-five women and fifteen men. The newspaper assured its readers that they would see elaborate costumes and magnificent sets at each production. Ticket prices ranged from twenty-five cents for the balcony to seventy-five cents for the best seats. As promised, the plays staged at the theater that first summer were mostly musical comedies. They included “The Promoters” and “Not Yet But Soon” by Ward and Vokes, “Chinese Honeymoon,” “Evangeline,” “When Reuben Comes to Town,” “Jack and the Beanstalk,” and “Piff Poff Pouf.” The plays were not as serious as those produced at the Elitch’s Theater, which the Denver Convention League described as “high class summer theater,” but Lakeside’s visitors found the productions enjoyable and they were in fact a popular draw. And, the *Transcript* repeatedly pointed out, the very same plays were quite popular with New York audiences.¹²

Lakeside's new theater was not the only change for 1910. Management installed a new attraction, the Creation. An attraction of the same name at Coney Island’s Dreamland was described as a “quasireligious show. . .that recreated the first chapter of Genesis five times a day.” The same production at Riverview Park in Chicago, also copied from Dreamland, used

eighty-five feet of moving scenery, live organ and choir performances, and “appropriate sound effects.” Management also constructed a new athletic field and grandstand, which surrounded a half-mile race-track and baseball diamond, on the southeast corner of the Lakeside property. All of the changes, according to the *Transcript*, would surely transform Lakeside “into an even more elaborate amusement resort” than it then was. In addition, in November 1909, park managers Frank Burt of Lakeside and S.W. Gumpertz (one of the most famous amusement park managers in the country) of Dreamland on Coney Island, sailed to Europe together in order to find new attractions for the two parks.¹³

The new baseball field at Lakeside was very much in keeping with the park’s elite nature at the time that it was built. According to Stephen Reiss in his book *City Games*, early sportswriters promoted the “cultural fiction” that baseball encouraged social integration by giving people from all walks of life the chance to socialize at the ball field. In reality, though, it was white-collar workers who had the time and money to play the sport and attend the games. Early ballparks were often located in suburban areas, where land was cheaper than in the core part of town, and because of their great distance from the city center they were not easily accessible to blue-collar workers. It was not until the 1920s, when Lakeside was already shifting over to a more working class amusement park, that working class people began attending baseball games in considerable numbers. Despite Lakeside’s easy accessibility, which promoters frequently mentioned, the ball field was still in keeping with the park’s elite image.¹⁴

With all of the new attractions ready to go, it seemed as if *Billboard*’s prediction that 1910 would be a good season was a safe bet, and it did in fact get off to a good start. On July 16, 1910, *Billboard* reported that the Fourth of July crowd was the biggest the park had seen since opening day in 1908. The new theater, where a five week run of Gilbert and Sullivan comic

operas was playing, was doing a “tremendous business,” while Don Philippina and his band drew big crowds to the park’s ballroom. A week later, on July 23, *Billboard* reported that Lakeside was “enjoying a big patronage daily” and that the Casino, “known as the Girly Girly Show,” since few men were interested in attending the plays, was putting on clever comic operas. The skating rink, dance hall, Shoot-the-Chutes, roller coaster, and other attractions were also doing a “great business.”¹⁵

Just two weeks later the situation had taken a dramatic turn. On August 13, *Billboard* reported that business at Lakeside was “disappointing” and Frank Burt even went so far as to cancel a two-week engagement of the American Band, which was supposed to have started on August 14. The disappointing crowds did not prevent Denver from hosting an afternoon picnic and concert at Lakeside for the 4,000-5,000 people who attended the city’s first Railroad Day, held to honor the importance of the railroads in Colorado. Mayor Speer and Governor John Shafroth, a powerful Progressive, addressed the gathering. By the time the park closed in September, *Billboard* reported that the season had been “very good,” but that Burt was looking forward to putting the 1910 season behind him and getting ready for 1911 by looking to the big amusement parks of the East for ideas on what to do at Lakeside for the next year. It must have seemed like a bad omen, though, when, on May 13, just before the park opened for the 1911 season, Adolph Zang’s step-brother-in-law and park co-founder and vice president, Peter Friederich, died suddenly of a stroke at age 49. His funeral, under the direction of Denver Saloonkeeper’s Union No. 1, took place four days after his death. Upon Peter’s death his son Phillip inherited his father’s share of Lakeside, continuing the Friederich association with the park for many years to come.¹⁶

Despite the disappointing 1910 season and the bumpy start to 1911, Lakeside’s star shone

as bright as ever. The park was so prominent that Governor John Shafroth attended the season opener on May 28, 1911. After a brief speech, the governor signaled the park band, seated on the Casino balcony, to begin playing, marking the official opening of the park. According to the *Rocky Mountain News*, 15,000 people passed through the park's gates on opening day. In June the park and Denver hosted a three day Chamber of Commerce Carnival under the direction of the Greater Colorado Fair and Parade Committee. Organizers expected 75,000 people to attend the gathering. To entertain the large crowds descending on the park Frank Burt had a number of new attractions in store, and while it did not say what they were, *Billboard* reported that all were "new and novel." One of the new attractions not mentioned in any coverage of the park that year was the first appearance of Alligator Joe and his reptile collection, which was not exactly in keeping with the park's elite, White City image.¹⁷

Based on *Billboard's* coverage, the theater once again was the most popular attraction at Lakeside for 1911. The season opened with "The Bishop's Carriage." In an interesting change, and one that was contradictory to the restricted ticket policy adopted at Elitch's and Manhattan Beach just a few years earlier, Burt dropped the admission fee to the theater altogether. Reserved seats were still available for a price, but Burt's new policy was to "give the public a fine show for nothing..." Although the move seemed to go against the park's elite nature, it actually fit with City Beautiful values by bringing culture to the masses. The move also showed that the park was visited by more than Denver's upper class conservative amusement seekers. A month into the 1911 season the theater was "proving a good drawing card."¹⁸

While Lakeside management initially rejected the idea of keeping a stock company at the theater in favor of bringing in what they considered higher-class shows from New York, by 1911 they decided to use a combination of local and out-of-town performers. Management formed the

Lakeside Stock Company, but at its head was a visiting actress, the famed Beulah Poynter. According to *Billboard*, the “charming little actress” wrote, staged, and produced all of the plays she acted in wherever she was, and the quality of her work won her a large following of admirers. The magazine reported that Poynter was a “decided hit with the Denver public.” The 1911 theater season at Lakeside opened on June 3 with Poynter starring in “The Bishop’s Carriage,” and *Billboard* reported that the selection of that play started the season with a big hit and that the company was strong. After the end of Poynter’s run at the theater, which came on June 24, the Lakeside Stock Company finished out the season with plays of their own choosing, though no publication reported what they were.¹⁹

In a further effort to avoid the disappointment of 1910, Burt turned to a new advertising executive for the park in 1911. *Billboard* reported on June 17 that Cecil Connor, the “hustling” representative for Western Resources Publicity Service, was the new man in charge of publicity for the park. Although the magazine reported that Connor was “making matters hum” at the park, management also decided to experiment with using word of mouth to draw customers. In July, the park hosted a three day picnic for the Colorado Boosters. Attendance on the last night of the gathering filled the park to capacity, but more importantly, according to *Billboard*, was the advertising the park received for hosting the event. Lakeside closed out the 1911 season by hosting a White Dress Parade for girls under the age of 16. Participants were judged on the beauty and attractiveness of their white costumes, as well as their grace, neatness, and charm of personality. The first-place winner, crowned Queen, received a diamond ring. Overall, *Billboard* reported, the year had been “fairly profitable.”²⁰

While the 1911 season ended well for Lakeside, the year did not. On November 14, 1911, about two months after Lakeside closed for the season, a fire broke out at the park. The

blaze destroyed the Scenic Railway and Velvet Coaster before the Lakeside Fire Department, assisted by a fire company from Denver, could extinguish it. The fact that Denver willingly sent one of its own fire companies to battle a blaze at Lakeside, where heat from the flames was so intense that it melted a fire hose one hundred feet away, spoke a great deal about how devoted the city was to the amusement park. Lakeside's owners assured the public that they would repair the damage in time for the 1912 season. While the physical damage to the park was significant, much more important to Lakeside's future were the less visible changes the fire sparked as the relationship between Lakeside and Denver's City Beautiful started to unravel.²¹

On the Denver side of the relationship, political change played a big part in this as citizens became increasingly weary of the perceived corruption of the Speer administration. Frederick Bonfils of *The Denver Post* wrote in one of his columns that Speer would be remembered "as the most inefficient and corrupt mayor Denver ever had, as the stuffed prophet." The *Rocky Mountain News* jumped on the anti-Speer bandwagon and made sure to point out that the *Post* had once supported the mayor. The two papers agreeing was a rare occurrence. Speer freely admitted that he was a boss politician, but also maintained that he was a good boss, not the typical corrupt one that people associated with the description. Whether he was a good boss or not, Speer was a smart politician, and he knew that he was out of favor at the moment. He wisely decided not to run for a third term and voters elected reform candidate Henry Arnold as his successor. After one ineffective year as mayor, Arnold was replaced with a commission government. The commission government hired landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., to draw up plans for Civic Center, other new parks and parkways, and Denver's mountain park system, but little actual work was done and for the most part City Beautiful languished under the new administrations as they pursued other programs and projects. In 1916 voters abolished

commission government in Denver and returned Speer to office as mayor. Upon his return, he focused his attention on completing Civic Center and further developing the mountain parks. Speer died in office in 1918, and Denver's City Beautiful movement largely died out, too, as his successors, William Mills and Dewey Bailey, devoted their attention to other issues. Not until Benjamin Stapleton became mayor in 1923 did the program truly revive.²²

Meanwhile, for Lakeside's part, demographic change forced the park to make a number of alterations. By 1912 it was obvious that the exclusive homes that Zang and Albert Lewin hoped to see built around the park were not going to materialize. Lakeside's owners seemed to have forgotten the lesson of Arlington Park, whose residential neighbors had cheered as it burned in 1901. Wealthy people did not want to live around a noisy amusement park, no matter how well built and operated. When Denver's elite started moving out of the Capital Hill neighborhood in the 1910s and 1920s, they moved to the Denver Country Club and Denver Polo Club neighborhoods, not to Lakeside. A major stumbling block to realizing their dreams was the fact that Lakeside's owners were limited in the amount of land around the park that they actually controlled. Most of the land owned by the Lakeside Realty and Amusement Company was taken up by the park. The vacant land on the south side of the park, where the owners hoped the fine homes would one day stand, was used for many years to house the donkeys for the park's donkey ride before a shopping mall rose there in the 1950s. To the north and east of the park was Denver, to the west Arvada, and to the south Mountain View and Wheat Ridge. The only homes ever built in Lakeside were those that Marvin Adams and the other original settlers constructed along Sheridan Boulevard north of Forty-Fourth Avenue.²³

North of Lakeside was Denver's Inspiration Point Park, which meant there was little fear of any development taking place there. But, on the west side of Sheridan across the street from

the park, rose the Berkeley neighborhood. Unscrupulous real estate promoters described Berkeley as an ideal neighborhood for tuberculosis patients, and those who moved into Berkeley were not the upper class people for which Zang and others hoped. Colorado was long promoted as a healthy place for tuberculosis victims to live, and thousands upon thousands, including Mayor Speer, came to Denver for that reason. But, by the early 1900s healthy Coloradoans increasingly disliked TB sufferers coming into the state and a growing number of people willingly took advantage of them. Jerome Smiley expressed the opinion held by many Denverites against TB victims in his 1901 history of Denver, in which he argued that greedy innkeepers and transportation workers had falsely promoted Colorado's climate as being more beneficial to TB sufferers than it actually was. And, Smiley argued that the State's healthy residents had the right to protect themselves against disease carriers. The issue for Smiley was not one of sentiment but "the question as to whether the natural right of the healthy to retain health and be protected so far as may be against its impairment, is or is not one that should receive preference." In 1908, the same year that Lakeside opened, the State of Colorado banned the entry of indigent sick people into the state and even considered making consumptives wear bells around their necks. However, unscrupulous employers loved TB sufferers because they were willing to work for very little money, and cheating real estate agents preyed on their desperation in order to sell them false hope in neighborhoods such as Berkeley and Highlands. The end result was that Berkeley and Highlands, with populations of TB victims, were not neighborhoods in which Denver's wealthy wanted to live.²⁴

The other towns around the park similarly developed into working class enclaves. The town of Wheat Ridge had Colorado's first grange hall and a Lutheran Sanitarium by the end of the nineteenth century, in addition to a number of wheat farms, which gave the town its name. In

the 1920s, developers such as George Olinger, owner of a major Denver funeral home chain, transformed the town into a place of affordable suburban homes featuring six room houses for \$2,000. At the time Lakeside opened, the town of Arvada was an agricultural hub starting down the path to becoming a working class suburb. Mountain View, a small town to the south of the park, was also filled with working class homes. By the 1910s and 1920s, then, Lakeside was surrounded on all sides by working class developments rather than the elite neighborhoods the park's builders had hoped for.²⁵

Transportation played a critical role in this pattern of development in Denver and its suburbs. In the 1880s, business and residential developers based their decisions on where to build on the presence or absence of streetcar lines. If an area of new development did not have or was not near a line, developers either built one of their own or convinced an existing company to extend a line. Because of this, Denver had an extensive street railway system by the late 1800s and early 1900s. This system, Jerome Smiley wrote, allowed Denver to grow as it did because the street railway allowed “men of moderate means” to buy houses for themselves in “pleasant places away from the business center...” The “thousands of pretty dwellings and of suburban cottages” found on the outskirts of Denver and its neighboring towns allowed workers to live among trees and grass and flowers, rather than crowded into tenements, as they surely would be in other cities. This development for “prudent citizens even of limited means” was to the “great good of each and the common benefit and pleasure of all.” While Smiley acknowledged the economic value of these homes, through increased property values and higher tax receipts, he wrote that the emotional and health benefits were far greater and helped make Denver an outstanding place among U.S. cities. But, as Smiley repeatedly pointed out, pretty dwellings and suburban cottages were not occupied by Denver’s wealthy.²⁶

Even the town of Lakeside reflected this fact. Census records show how much the construction of the park changed the area it occupied, and even how the town changed depending on the time of year. At the time of the 1900 census, the town of Lakeside did not exist, and the area was largely rural and not included as a separate location on census records. In 1910, the census worker reached Lakeside on May 12, just as the park was getting ready to open for its third season. The town population had boomed to 103 people, most of them laborers who listed their occupation as “odd jobs.” A few, though, clearly worked at the park. Joseph Moore, skate man, and William Conklin, machinist, both worked at the park’s skating rink. Anna, Lillie, and Mable Gustafson, and Flora Lindstrom, worked as cashiers. Charles Reiss was the park’s bookkeeper, and James Lindsey was simply a laborer. Interestingly, two large gypsy families, the Adamses and the Buffaloes, took up residence in Lakeside that year as well. Whether or not they worked at the park is unclear from census or park records. In 1920, the census taker visited Lakeside on January 21. With the park’s opening still several months away, the population stood at only thirty-six people. Only two families remained from 1910. One was James Livesay, a lawyer who never worked for the park. The other was Alex Gustafson, whose three daughters had worked as cashiers at the park in 1910. No one in the town of Lakeside listed any job at the park as their occupation in 1920. In April 1930, the town’s population stood at forty-nine. James Livesay and his family were the only residents still there from 1920. Only one person, Joseph Moore, worked for the park; he was the general manager. The town lost ten residents by 1940, but more park employees were living in the town. Eight people listed the amusement park as their occupation that year. One, Benjamin Krasner, was the new owner of the park, and he was living in an apartment in the Casino Theater building with his sister Jennie and her husband Martin Ruttner. The census records show that, while always occupied, the town of Lakeside

only truly came alive when the park was open for business each summer.²⁷

The rise of working class neighborhoods around Lakeside Amusement Park slowly but surely changed the park's customer base, and the younger, less affluent people who increasingly constituted the parks visitors desired escape from life's cares, not the moral uplift the park's City Beautiful era customers sought. In coming years changes in the park reflecting the new customer base grew more noticeable, but in 1912 they were fairly subtle. To replace the destroyed Velvet Coaster management hired the father and son team of Josiah and Fred Pearce to build a Derby Racing Coaster at a cost of \$125,000. The massive 3,800 foot long coaster, which opened in time for the 1912 season, wrapped around the roller skating rink and ballroom and was a far more thrilling ride than anything the park had seen. Unlike most of the other concessions at the park, which the park itself owned, the Pearces owned and operated the Derby for a number of years before Lakeside bought the ride from them. The Derby Coaster marked the first time that an amusement attraction was located in what previously was strictly the social area of the park. It was a both clear demonstration that the park's new customers expected more thrilling rides, and a sign of what was soon to come as Lakeside Amusement Park began to shed its City Beautiful image.²⁸

While construction of the Derby showed that the park was moving towards more thrilling and typical amusement devices, advertising for the park took on a more carefree tone as well. The 1912 Western League Baseball schedule, published by Lakeside, still carried the exalted advertising style employed by the park in previous years. Short sayings at the bottom of each page reminded baseball fans that, after the final out of a game, there was still time to enjoy a Sunset Dinner on the Casino balcony, or that a man could "...make a hit/with your Lady Fair/if you take her often/to Lakeside Park!" But, other sayings urged baseball fans to "Sacrifice your

worries on Lakeside's Altar of Pleasure. Life is worth living and, remember, 'You'll be a long time Dead.'" The schedule also listed the White City's 1912 attractions, which included man-eating sharks and a motordrome. A far more daring and adventurous attitude took hold as park management realized that to survive they needed to cater to a more down-market crowd.²⁹

With the rest of the park starting to change, at the theater management finally gave in and turned over production to a stock company in 1912. The Fealy-Durkin Stock Company opened the 1912 season in June and continued their run at Lakeside's theater for the next several years. One of the principals, Maude Fealy, was a long-time Denver stage presence and had been involved with the Elitch's theater for many years. In 1911 her company, then just the Maude Fealy Stock Company, moved from Elitch's to the Orpheum Theater in Denver. For the move to Lakeside she partnered with another Denver theater man, James Durkin, who also happened to be her second husband. The featured actress for the 1912 season was Ann Sutherland, whom programs that season identified as "America's greatest star." *Billboard* reported that the theater, under the management of Fealy-Durkin, would be one of Lakeside's feature attractions for 1912. The change that took place in the type of plays produced at the theater under the direction of Fealy-Durkin was another sign that Lakeside and Denver's City Beautiful were growing apart as the plays took on a more fanciful air. The plays for 1912 ranged from serious to outright comical. One of the biggest productions that year was "Samson," which promoters cautioned was not the well-known Biblical story that patrons might have expected. Rather, it was the story of a rich man whose wife was forced to marry him in order to save her parents from bankruptcy. The other plays of 1912 included "A Colonial Girl," a love story set during the American Revolution; "The Lily," described in the program as "one of America's strongest plays" and starring Ann Sutherland; and "The Sign of the Cross," which was set "in Rome during the time

of Nero during the persecution of the Christians, and shows their wonderful belief in their Maker and their sacrifice for Him who creates all things.” One theater-goer noted on the front of her program for the July 14 production of “Fifty Miles From Boston” that the production was “So-So.” The odd mixture of shows, from comical to religious, was far from the high-class New York shows Lakeside management once sought. In an effort to appeal to their new, broader customer base they were casting a wider net when selecting plays.³⁰

Band concerts, another big draw for the 1912 season, were well supplied as management booked the Boston Marine Band, Creatore, Earent Williams, and the Na Vassar Ladies Band, a sixty piece group, to perform. A free circus roamed the grounds that summer, and Alligator Joe and his reptiles made a well-publicized return to Lakeside. The centerpiece of Alligator Joe’s exhibit was a live manatee shipped in from Florida. Alligator Joe and his crew constructed a large tank for the animal, which many were hopeful would be the first to survive so far north of its natural home. It took twenty men to unload the crate when it arrived in June 1912. *Billboard* reported that if the sea cow survived the season it would be sent back to Florida at the end of the summer, though the magazine never followed up on the story. Unfortunately, Alligator Joe’s wife did not survive the season. At the end of May, the *Rocky Mountain News* reported that she had disappeared with the couple’s young daughter and about \$2,000 in cash. Alligator Joe, whose real name was William Frazee, speculated that his wife enjoyed the liveliness of the amusement season but could not handle the off-season when the couple resided in the Florida Everglades. On a happier note, Lakeside added two new amusement attractions to the park that year. One was a fairly typical amusement park ride, a Tunnel of Love. The other, according to *Billboard*, was the Waltz Trip, described as a new innovation though the magazine did not elaborate on what it entailed.³¹

In another innovation, Lakeside did manage to go dry in 1912, but it was not due to any efforts by the Anti-Saloon League or the Jefferson County District Attorney. At the beginning of the season the five bartenders who worked the park went out on strike under the orders of the Cooks, Waiters and Bartender's unions. Earlier in the year the park announced that it would be fair to the unions, but J.A. Conkle, president of the Trades and Labor Assembly, unexpectedly ordered the bartenders out on strike without giving a reason. The cooks and waiters also went out, effectively shutting down the restaurant as well. While the representatives of the three unions went after Conkle, the park announced that the "drouth" of beer would continue all summer. Crowds on opening day could find no prepared food in the park, so concessionaire J.W. Miller opened the rathskeller and, with his assistants, cooked as best he could. The strike was a big blow to sales of Zang beer at Lakeside.³²

An even bigger blow hit the park in 1913. On November 22, 1913, the stockholders dissolved the Lakeside Realty and Amusement Company, but by then it had not been the owner of Lakeside for several months. Although insurance covered most of the cost of rebuilding after the fire that destroyed the Velvet Coast in 1911, the price of that insurance increased dramatically. Adolph Zang decided that he simply could no longer afford it and made the difficult decision to sell the park. In February 1913, William Burk (Adolph Zang's step-brother), John Keefe, Arnold Bloedt, Frank Kirchoff (one of the original builders), and Philip Friedrich (Adolph Zang's step-nephew) organized the Colorado Realty and Amusement Company, incorporated in Wyoming, to take over ownership of the park. The capital stock of the new company was \$200,000, divided into 2,000 \$100 shares. All officers of the new company had been officers and directors of Lakeside Realty and Amusement, and in some cases closely related to Zang, which kept the Zang family connection to the park. But, gone from active roles were

three of the most important and prominent men from the original company—Zang, Schirmer, and Lewin. Friedrich became general manager of the park, and according to *Billboard*, the park performed exceptionally well under his leadership. Although Adolph Zang was no longer in the picture, the Zang family was still a presence at the park as all members of the family had free passes, and Betty Arnold recalled spending many happy days there as a child with her father, cousins, and other relatives. The family often took a picnic lunch with them to eat on the picnic grounds, or dined at the park's restaurant, which Betty Arnold remembers as “wonderful.”³³

With the alterations taking place at the park, only two articles on Lakeside appeared in *Municipal Facts* in 1913, both dealing with Denver's hosting the German-American Bundes Turnfest, which in part aimed to preserve German culture in America, that year. The group built a large grandstand west of Lakeside's baseball field to host athletic events. It fell to *The Denver Post* to announce that management planned to stage genuine bullfights on the Lakeside athletic field that year. Management built a new 5,000 seat arena for the fights, which the newspaper stressed would have all the excitement of ordinary bullfights but none of the violence as the bulls' lives would be spared. The program also featured comedy bullfights in which bulls tossed the heavily padded matadors about. The eight matadors featured at Lakeside were Ostobina Acosta, Roberto H. Horano, R.C. Burbank, Antonio Rivas, Jose Avila, and Jose Rodriguis, and according to the *Post* the men made quite a sight as they paraded through Denver in their gold and silver trimmed costumes. Harry Burlew, a private detective, managed the new attraction. Although no blood was shed in Lakeside's bullfights, the show was more violent than previous offerings at the park, and the fact that it was managed by a private detective, not always the most reputable of professions in the public's opinion, may have added to its unsavory nature.³⁴

The 1913 season at the Casino Theater featured Fealy-Durkin produced plays such as

Cecily Hamilton's "Just to be Married," which *The Denver Post* referred to as a "caustic comedy." On the same page of the newspaper, the *Post* promoted society and children's matinees at Elitch's of "famous" plays such as "Sauce for the Goose," and James A. Heine's "Shore Acres." The *Denver Republican* described Fealy-Durkin's production of George Cohan's "Get Rich Quick Wallingford" "as breezy as a trip on the launch, as noisy as the terrifying derby, as exhilarating as a shoot down the chutes." In other words, the play was a perfect fit for a theater at an amusement park. But, more in keeping with City Beautiful ideals, which management still clung to, Lakeside's theater also produced a series of twelve concerts of pieces by famed composers such as Wagner, Tchaikovsky, and Schubert. The pieces were performed by the Cavallo Symphony Orchestra under the direction of Raffaello Cavallo, who happened to be Maude Fealy's step-father, and the programs for each concert included biographies of the composers and descriptions of how each piece was composed. One attendee noted on her program that the concerts were "delightful." The concerts were a rarity, however, as the plays took on a more popular and entertaining tone in order to keep customers returning.³⁵

The customers did keep returning to the park, but with each passing year, the changes at Lakeside seemed to come more rapidly. In preparing for the 1913 season, Lakeside advertised in *Billboard* that it was looking for new rides and novel shows, but that any new concessions needed to be clean. With five year contracts on concessions ready to expire, manager Frank Burt promised excellent locations to new concessions, as long as they had "the right kind of goods to deliver." While management clearly was taking the park in a new direction by 1912-1913, they were attempting to do so within the clean and orderly image the park had worked so long and hard to project and maintain. The next year, management added monoplanes to the aerial swing and a star shaped Ferris wheel style ride called the Staride. The eighty foot high ride, built

entirely of steel, had eight rounded cars, could carry forty-eight passengers at a time, and operated “at a high rate of speed.” Management also added William Mangel’s latest ride invention, The Whip, in which cars attached to cables by flexible arms swung out at curved ends of the track, simulating the snap of a whip. More thrilling attractions, lighter fare at the theater, and motorcycle races brought in the crowds. In 1915, park president Frank Kirchhoff announced that the park would feature forty-five days of motorcycle racing and that the theater would remain open the entire fifteen week season due to increased attendance. In one day that summer, the Denver Tramway reported that it carried 12,000 people to Lakeside alone. While not in keeping with the City Beautiful image, the new thrills enabled Lakeside to stay in business.³⁶

Through all the changes, customers still loved the park. In 1914, visitors composed a song in honor of the park and its attractions and employees. Each ride and employee at the park was singled out in verses of the song. The Old Mill, under the command of Mr. Riffle, sent its riders through a dream fairyland. Mr. Miller made sure visitors got through the House of Troubles, all thousand and one of them, “with many a laugh and joyous shout,” while Eddie Kline at The Whip made sure everyone who rode it had a laugh. Mr. Pomeroy and Marion at the Staride safely loaded passengers in the cars “And up you go clear out of sight” until the lights on the ride seemed to meet the stars in the sky. Mr. Branson at the Derby insured that each passenger enjoyed a “wonderful trip” on the coaster, while those seeking tamer adventures could visit Betty and Jean at the merry-go-round or Mr. Bush on the miniature train. Mr. Knoth at the Fun House “will be at your side” to make sure even the most fearful would be brave enough to get through it, and Johnny Miller oversaw the bumper cars, so everyone, the song urged, should “Shoot the Chutes at Lakeside, do!”³⁷

An article in the May 23, 1914, issue of *Municipal Facts* showed how rapidly Lakeside

was changing and how distasteful those changes were to Denver City Beautiful promoters. Only one new attraction at the park, a working model of the Panama Canal, reflected City Beautiful values in that it was educational and reflected American prominence in the world. The model, which *Municipal Facts* called “the most noteworthy one,” was under the direction of Captain Ernest Ruhl, who helped build the real canal. The other new attractions were less ideal. One was a minstrel show that featured “coontown melodies vieing with the strumming on banjo and guitar...” The Lakeside Museum housed prehistoric and antediluvian exhibits. *Municipal Facts* called these last two “extremes in the gamut” of what Lakeside offered to please all tastes. Perhaps the attraction that most differed from past offerings was the new Tango Lair, which replaced the rathskeller on the lower level of the Casino building. The featured act was Little Miss Dong Fung Gu and her “nimble” husband, “liliputian Chinese tango dancers” from Chicago. A picture of the Derby, which dominated the park's one-time social area, was the dominant feature of the article. This was the last major article about Lakeside to appear in *Municipal Facts*. The magazine mentioned Lakeside only once more that year, when it hosted an afternoon of entertainment for the Elks’ Convention, held in Denver in July 1914. After 1914 no further article on Lakeside appeared in *Municipal Facts*.³⁸

Municipal Facts barely concealed its distaste for what was happening at Lakeside, but the *Rocky Mountain News* seemed, generally, to be pleased. Like *Municipal Facts*, it mentioned the plantation show and Lakeside museum, but it referred to them as “preferred attractions.” It reported that one of the feature attractions at the park that summer was a painting of Christ, and that the most “interesting and timely” of the attractions was the working model of the Panama Canal, which management unveiled just as the U.S.S. *Denver* became the first American ship to pass through the canal. The *News* went on to stress that any children left at the children’s

playground were always under the care of a trained nurse, and that the new bathing beach introduced that year was an “ideal feature.” Where the *Municipal Facts* article featured a picture of the Derby coaster, showing how it dominated the park, the *News* article featured pictures of the Tower and Olympian Way, the walkway lined with sculptures that ran along the west side of the Chutes pond. So, just as the city of Denver, in its organ *Municipal Facts* had written off Lakeside as an expression of the City Beautiful, the Denver newspaper, which had always been somewhat reluctant in its coverage of the park, appeared to be unwilling to dismiss the park's links to the City Beautiful image just yet.³⁹

By 1914, political and economic factors severely strained the Lakeside-City Beautiful relationship, but it was a social movement that ultimately ripped it apart. The Anti-Saloon League never stopped trying to get every town in Colorado, including Lakeside, to go dry and in 1914, the reformers managed to get statewide prohibition on the ballot. Theater programs at Lakeside that year, where the plays included “The Maverick” and “The Lure,” featured ads for beer and ads stating that President Woodrow Wilson opposed statewide prohibition. When the election finally came in November, Denver voters overwhelmingly rejected the measure, but their opposition was not enough to overcome the support it enjoyed outside of Denver. The city tried to block the law from taking effect there, arguing that it had the right to permit liquor sales within city limits, but prohibitionists disagreed, and on January 1, 1916, the State of Colorado went dry, two years ahead of national prohibition. Patrons at the Heidelberg Café in downtown Denver sang “Last Night Was the End of the World” on New Year’s Eve 1915.⁴⁰

Prohibition hit Denver’s breweries hard. The Coors Brewery in Golden produced malted milk and near beer and relied heavily on its ceramics division to carry the business. The Zang Brewing Company was not so fortunate. Zang attempted to make ice cream and near beer, but

its efforts met with failure and before the year was out the brewery closed its doors. Although Adolph Zang had not been associated with the brewery since 1913, the same year he sold Lakeside to his step-brother and step-brother-in-law, its demise surely was a blow to him. He turned his attention to his mining properties, and in September went to inspect the Vindicator Mine in Goldfield, Colorado, just outside of Cripple Creek. While at the mine, he suffered a hemorrhage and needed immediate medical care. Though he was seriously ill and flat on his back when he arrived back in Denver, the nurse with him later recalled that he gave a wonderful tour of the city between Union Station and the Zang Mansion at 709 Clarkson Street. On September 28, 1916, the 60-year-old Zang died at his home in Denver from the hemorrhage and complications from diabetes.⁴¹

Adolph Zang's death seemingly signaled the official end of the City Beautiful era at Lakeside, but the signs of its impending demise were hard to ignore. At the theater that year the programs were filled with simple jokes and cautioned that theater goers should not tip theater employees as acceptance of gratuities was grounds for instant dismissal. Productions that year included "M'lle Modiste," an opera comedy in two acts, produced by Ira Hardy's New York Musical Comedy Company and starring Dorothy Maynard, and "The Spring Maid," an operetta. One of the biggest productions was the musical comedy "Sweethearts" by Victor Herbert. Though the Rocky Mountain News found the performance "pleasing," it cautioned that the singers needed to better gauge the acoustics of a people-packed auditorium and that the orchestra needed to be strengthened. Gone, though, were the days of fine and popular New York productions and concerts of works by great composers. By 1918 the theater was closed. With the park changing, the theater was unable to attract an audience as middle and upper class customers moved to Elitch's and the star power its theater offered, and working class customers

had little interest in theatrical offerings.⁴²

They did, however, have interest in one of the other marvels that Lakeside offered that summer. To officially kick off the season on May 27th, the park hired Harry Gardiner, better known as the “Human Fly,” to climb the walls of the Tower at 4 and 9:30 p.m. Gardiner had started climbing buildings in 1905, and during his lifetime ascended over 700 of them. The *Rocky Mountain News* referred to Gardiner’s visit to Lakeside as “an unusual free spectacular attraction,” sure to please what they expected to be the recording-breaking crowd it attendance when the park opened that day. As entertaining as the Human Fly might be, it was also a showy spectacle, something the park had avoided in the past.⁴³

An even more vivid sign of the break came in the way newspapers reported on Lakeside beginning in 1916. When the body of William A. Taylor was discovered at the park in June of 1910, the *Colorado Transcript* reported it in a small six-line story headlined “Death Amidst Gayety” and never followed up on the case. Six years later, in July 1916, when 30-year-old W.B. Mills of Iowa and 19-year-old Emma Dye of Denver drowned in the lake after their boat capsized, the *Transcript* headline screamed “Two Are Drowned in White City Lake.” The four-paragraph article went on to point out that Mills met Dye in Denver while attending the Locomotive Firemen and Engineers convention. The boat the two rented was found at closing time on the evening of June 30, but not until the next afternoon did a passenger on the miniature railroad spot their bodies in the lake. The article ended with the suggestive line that, according to the clerk at the hotel where Mills was staying, “Mills often spoke of his wife in Iowa.” Far from keeping any death or scandal at Lakeside quiet, as the Denver newspapers had done since the accident on the Scenic Railway in 1908, by 1916 such incidents were headline-making news. It had been two years since the City of Denver had mentioned Lakeside in its official

publications. Now, even the newspapers dropped the distinction. The image of the White City Beautiful was most assuredly gone.⁴⁴

That same year, the neighbors filed the first noise complaint against Lakeside. The *Transcript* wrote that residents near the park were making “vigorous protests” because of the noise produced when a naval battle was carried out at eleven o’clock each night. The people impacted by the noise planned to petition authorities to “abate the nuisance.” The complaints were reminiscent of those voiced by the neighbors of Arlington Park as they happily watched it burn in 1901.⁴⁵

During the City Beautiful period Lakeside Amusement Park did exactly what modern observers say no amusement park could do--it remained decent and respectable. The park’s builders and managers purposely attempted to attract a certain class of customer, as the planned automobile parking and repeated cautions that Lakeside was for conservative amusement seekers demonstrated. Just as with Central Park in New York, more than Denver’s upper class visited Lakeside of course, but they were not the targeted customers. The City of Denver certainly saw Lakeside as decent and respectable, as numerous articles in *Municipal Facts* and official visits to the park attest. The city also demonstrated visible distaste for the changes taking place at the park by 1914, as the final article on the park to appear in *Municipal Facts* made clear. The fact that no further articles about the park were published in *Municipal Facts* gives further evidence that Denver definitely perceived a change in the image of the park by 1914. Finally, the people of Denver themselves perceived the two major amusement parks in terms of decency and respectability. By the 1960s, Elitch’s was seen as the more elite and conservative of the parks, while Lakeside was seen as more working class and rowdy. But, in describing the parks that way, people noted that the images had in fact reversed themselves.⁴⁶

Even if Lakeside had not started to undergo such dramatic changes in the early 1910s, it was unlikely that the relationship between Denver's City Beautiful program and the park would have survived. Although Denver never entirely gave up on it, by the 1920s and 1930s the City Beautiful movement was beginning to fall out of favor both architecturally and socially. Critics condemned City Beautiful as a cosmetic fix to far more serious economic, social, and political problems, and charged that the movement favored form over function. By the 1940s, few people were followers of City Beautiful any longer. But, for fifty years, it had been one of the most prominent social movements in America, and "to unplanned, ugly and crowded cities, it brought order, beauty, and space." For amusement parks, staying relevant was vital to their survival and a park that clung to what many considered an outdated social movement would not have survived for long. It was time for Lakeside Amusement Park to reinvent itself.⁴⁷

CHAPTER FIVE: NO QUITTERS AT LAKESIDE

The late 1910s and early 1920s were rough years for amusement parks across the United States. Throughout those years the average age of the typical amusement park customer steadily dropped, and the far more “youthful crowd...was looking for thrills” instead of the gentler pastimes favored by the older customers of the previous era. Increased automobile ownership, according to Judith Adams, allowed those seeking a “more select and less outrageously crowded pleasure environment,” those older customers of the past, to travel outside of cities to parks or beaches that specifically catered to them. As automobile ownership rose, many amusement parks lacked parking lots, which left customers who owned cars feeling alienated from the parks. In an attempt to keep drivers coming, some amusement parks scrambled to create parking lot space, often by tearing down older rides or attractions to make room for cars. Even with increased automobile ownership, however, streetcars still ran to the parks, and those who could not afford cars still rode them. Inexpensive streetcar fares, combined with reduced entry fees at parks, allowed for what Gary Walton and John Cross call a more “down-market” crowd to visit the parks with increasing frequency. But, a national railroad strike in 1921 and 1922, which streetcar workers joined, hurt the ability of those who relied on the streetcars to reach the parks, and attendance dropped sharply in many locations. Prohibition hurt a number of parks as well, particular those owned by brewers. And, three years of poor summer weather in the early 1920s, a fact repeatedly noted by Billboard magazine, also hurt attendance at the parks. By the time the Great Depression began in 1929, hundreds of amusement parks had already closed their gates.¹

In order to avoid joining the ranks of failed amusement parks, Lakeside Amusement Park needed to adapt to the new business environment it faced after 1916. With the City of Denver rapidly moving away from its City Beautiful program, one major supporter of the park was gone. Another blow came with Adolph Zang's death in 1916. While no records survive to indicate how the involvement of Adolph Zang with the finances of both his family and Lakeside (even though he had sold the park in 1913), it is difficult to imagine that he was not closely associated with both given his long-standing financial support of his family. Within a few months of Zang's death, the park plunged into bankruptcy. At a Sheriff's Auction on February 13, 1917, Hibernia Bank and Trust of Denver, one of the bondholders from when the Colorado Realty and Amusement Company purchased the park in 1913, bought the one-time million-dollar Coney Island of the West for \$42,750.47. The only other bidder was the company's attorney, who offered just \$20,000, less than half the bank's bid. Gone from the scene were the civic-minded builders and owners who Denver area newspapers and *Municipal Facts* had praised as only wanting to add to Denver's glory by investing in Lakeside. The article announcing the sale of the park to Hibernia Bank and Trust was the last time that coverage of Lakeside Amusement Park appeared in the *Colorado Transcript*. Future, coverage of the park appeared only in *The Denver Post* and the *Rocky Mountain News*, newspapers that had usually been hostile to Mayor Speer and his City Beautiful program.²

The Zang family, however, was not done with Lakeside just yet. Their management team stayed in place, running the park for the bank while trying to arrange financing in order to redeem the property. They had until November 1917 to either repay the money that Hibernia bid at auction or lose Lakeside to the bank. In the nine months between February and November, management worked out a deal with the American National Bank, headed by former Lakeside

secretary Godfrey Schirmer, to borrow \$80,000 in order to pay off the park's debts. In November 1917, the Denver Park and Amusement Company became the new owner of Lakeside Amusement Park. The new company, again organized in Wyoming, was owned by Frank Kirchoff, William Buck, and Philip Friedrich, all men who had been involved with both the Lakeside Amusement and Realty Company and the Colorado Amusement and Realty Company, and in the cases of Buck and Friederich, related to Adolph Zang. In addition, John Keefe and Arnold Bloedt, men also connected to the previous two ownership companies, served as directors of the new company but were not listed as owners. The capital stock of the new company was \$100,000, divided into one thousand \$10 shares. Only one change in the team that had managed the park for so many years took place as long-time general manager Frank Burt left for a job in California. Beginning in 1912, when he secured an appointment as director general of concessions and admissions for the 1915 Panama-Pacific International Exposition in San Francisco, Burt had been dividing his time between Lakeside in the summer and San Francisco in the winter. Shortly after the sale of Lakeside to the Denver Park and Amusement Company, Burt left permanently and became resident director of Seal Beach in California.³

After repurchasing Lakeside in 1917, the owners struggled to reinvent it as a typical amusement park. Lakeside had enjoyed an exalted position among Denver parks ever since it opened in 1908, and the owners were reluctant to leave that position, along with the fame and glory that came with it, behind. While change had come rapidly to the park between 1914 and 1917, after 1917 it slowed down considerably as the owners had less money to invest and were hesitant to fully admit that the City Beautiful era was over entirely. Over the next ten years, Lakeside's owners, who once brought change to the park without flinching, seemed adrift as they tried to cling to the past while also attempting to embrace the future. Much as they might want

to hold onto the City Beautiful image, however, Lakeside's owners needed to give the park's customers what they demanded if they wanted the park to remain attractive to a changing customer base.

Lakeside's owners could have found inspiration had they chosen to look at the Panama-Pacific Exposition, where Frank Burt was in charge of concessions and admissions. The exposition's architects maintained some of the traditions that had marked previous fairs. The buildings they designed were grouped around courts, forming the centerpiece of the exposition grounds. And, there was still a wall around the grounds, which people had to pay an admission fee to get through. Those would never change. The architects, however, broke with tradition in several important ways. One was in the use of color. Unlike the Columbian Expositions white buildings, which had been the basis for the design of both Lakeside and the City Beautiful movement, the buildings in San Francisco were decorated in blues, browns, reds, and golds. Uniforms, banners, signs, and even tickets were color coordinated to match the buildings. The buildings themselves were built from travertine, an artificial stone first used in 1910 in Pennsylvania Station in New York City, not the impermanent staff of previous fairs. Visitors could watch movies, watch or participate in automobile and motorcycle races, and even fly in airplanes. Bakelite plastic in an endless array of colors even made its debut at the Panama-Pacific Exposition. As a whole, the exposition reflected a vibrancy that made the fairs before it pale in comparison. It was a lesson Lakeside's owners should have paid attention to as they struggled to remake the park.⁴

The Panama-Pacific Exposition influenced its customers, but they in turn influenced its design through their wants and desires. Customers shaping the character of their recreation space was not a phenomenon unique to amusement parks. In Worcester, Massachusetts, for

example, working class customers shaped the character of and rituals in commercially owned saloons. As business owners cracked down on the drinking, socializing, and singing that had once characterized the work day in Worcester's factories, workers simply moved those activities to the saloons that they increasingly frequented during their greater leisure time. As the saloon became an ever-more present part of society, leisure space also increasingly became defined as being separate from work and home. The rise of the saloon was simply the first of many such institutions that appeared to fill the growing need for leisure space and activities as work, home, and play became separate activities. In order to reinvent Lakeside successfully, the owners would have to fully embrace their new working class customer base and make the park into a facility that responded to their desires and provided them an escape from a sometimes drab and dreary way of life.⁵

Lakeside's owners were not alone in struggling with what to do in the 1920s. The City of Denver struggled with its identity, desperately wanting to prove that it was a "sophisticated metropolis, not a barren cow town." But, the city had its share of troubles through the 1920s. The mining and agricultural economies that once dominated both the city and all of Colorado were declining. Denver's role as a manufacturing center was also on the way down. Throughout the state, political leaders seemed worn out after years of swift and hard economic development and many wanted to simply "age gracefully" after frantically establishing the state over the previous fifty years. In Denver, despite the moral crusading of the Progressive period, the city was still wracked by vice as a violent illegal liquor trade and prostitution prospered in the city. Racial violence also rocked the city as bombs went off in the houses of blacks who moved a little too close to City Park or other parts of town for the comfort of whites. As more blacks, Hispanics, and Catholics moved into central Denver, middle- and upper-class residents fled for

new neighborhoods such as Bonnie Brae or Cherry Hills. Denver was marked by upheaval as it struggled to find its identity during a very rough period in its history.⁶

The other Denver parks had their share of troubles as well. Manhattan Beach and Tuileries both closed their gates for the last time before the outbreak of World War I, and Mary Elitch Long's beloved park was in serious financial trouble. Long paid the park's bills whenever she had the money to do so, but more often than not she simply put them aside. Finally, in 1909, she approached John Elitch's old friend, Denver Police Magistrate Benjamin Stapleton, the future mayor of Denver, seeking help. In the years that followed, Stapleton in turn approached several of his friends and political supporters, all prominent Denver businessmen, seeking assistance for the troubled park. The men helped as much as they could, given that they had no ownership stake in the park. But, by 1916, they feared that Mary Elitch Long had reached a breaking point and, in order to solve her financial woes, might sell the park to *The Denver Post* owner and political rival Frederick Bonfils, who also owned the Sells-Floto Circus. The businessmen formed a consortium and paid Elitch's bills and back taxes in exchange for stock in the park company. The group had no interest in managing an amusement park, however, so one of the members, Robert Speer, turned to his long-time friend John Mulvihill and persuaded him to take over management of Elitch's. Within a few months Mulvihill decided he wanted to buy the park. After giving Mulvihill's proposal a great deal of thought Mary Elitch Long agreed to the sale, much to the joy of the businessmen, who were thrilled to earn their money back so quickly. The sale to Mulvihill, whose family would own Elitch's for the next eighty years, insured that Elitch's survived, leaving it and Lakeside as Denver's only surviving amusement parks. Nearly a century later, Elitch's and Lakeside still were the only two amusement parks in Denver despite the best efforts of competitors to unseat them. Even though he was part owner of

Elitch's for a short time, Speer never tried to link it to the City of Denver when he returned to office as mayor in 1916, the same year he became part owner.⁷

Within a year of Speer's returning to office as mayor he had bigger things to worry about than amusement parks. The United States declared war on Germany in April 1917, just ahead of Lakeside's season opener that year. Mayor Speer turned his attention to the war effort, establishing a city-owned bakery and coal company in an effort to prevent profiteers from gouging Denverites as prices on goods soared during the conflict. Speer also established a military training school in Denver. Thousands of men from Denver either volunteered or were drafted to serve during the war, but the war had relatively little impact in Denver. For the most part people went about their business, which included visiting amusement parks.⁸

The management situation at both Lakeside and Elitch's stabilized after 1917, but the parks still faced serious threats to their survival. With *Denver Municipal Facts* no longer promoting Lakeside after 1914, the park needed a new champion. The *Rocky Mountain News*, which had first taken the role of promoter in 1914, stepped into the void. As Lakeside prepared to open for the 1917 season, the newspaper reported on May 27 that even though the last few seasons had indeed been poor at the park, the "men who have kept the bright lights of Lakeside shining for nine summers...are not quitters." The men had stood by the resort through good times and bad, and at the end of each poor season had gone "into their pockets" to pay the bills and open again for the next summer, which may have been a poke at the situation Mary Elitch Long had found herself in. In words that could have been taken directly from an issue of *Municipal Facts* just a few years earlier, the *Rocky Mountain News* wrote that the park's managers "deserve the cooperation of the public" as they ran one of the finest amusement parks in the country. The men who managed the park, and would soon own it again, had all of their

money invested in Denver, and it was only fitting, the newspaper seemed to be saying, to allow them to succeed in their endeavor.⁹

The newspaper singled out the theater for special praise, writing that it was “attractive and delightfully cool.” According to the May 27, 1917, article, the only reason the theater had failed to turn a profit the previous year was because of the large overhead involved in running it. For 1917, management engaged a new stock company and planned to once again produce musical comedies that were new to Denver audiences. The lead actress that season was Maybelle LaCouvre. The *Rocky Mountain News* described her as “decorative and a good singer and dancer,” who had had prominent roles in productions of “Alma, Where Do You Live?” and “The Girl Question” in New York. The lead actor was Frederick Dunham, a Denver native with long experience in musical theater but who had never appeared on stage in Denver. The opening production for the summer was the musical comedy “Bright Eyes.” The newspaper strongly urged readers to do their part and attend performances at the theater because the “economical management” the operators promised would not by itself allow the theater to turn a profit. The newspaper’s encouragement failed to produce the necessary attendance, however, and the 1917 season was the Casino Theater’s last.¹⁰

Park management certainly appreciated praise and backing from the *Rocky Mountain News*, but they also knew that they would have to continue to make changes to the park in order to draw customers. With the park’s finances fairly tight, however, the changes throughout 1917 and 1918 were done with the same economical management the owners were using at the theater and largely focused on reworking the park and improving on previous changes. Other than the new stock company at the theater, management made no additional changes at the park in 1917. However, one very important development did take place at Lakeside that summer. Benjamin

Krasner, a Russian immigrant from Binghamton, New York, arrived in Denver in 1917 and secured a concession contract at Lakeside. He had immigrated to the United States with his family at the age of four, and as a young man in New York worked as a “train butcher,” selling candies and sandwiches. Krasner worked at Lakeside for the next eighteen years, eventually becoming concession manager in 1931. In 1935, he would save the once-again bankrupt park.¹¹

Lakeside limped through the 1917 season in relatively good condition given the situation it was in, although the park's highly praised bright lights did go dark for one night near the end of the summer. It was not because of financial difficulties. Rather, a pheasant accidentally touched both the positive and negative electrical wires leading into the State Home located west of Arvada and the resulting short-circuit plunged all of Arvada and Lakeside into darkness. It was a fitting if not altogether welcome end to a difficult summer, but management took it in stride and at the end of the season set about totally rearranging the park for the 1918 season. Over the winter, workers made numerous changes to the park, though no publication reported on what most of them were other than to say that they were taking place. The one change that did receive notice was at the former theater, where the space was converted into a restaurant that featured stage shows and dancing. Management also added several new rides, though again no report of what they were appeared anywhere in print. Surprisingly, given the addition of rides and the other changes, the size of the park actually shrank during the renovations. Nevertheless, H.D. Hardigan, the general manager of the new park company, told *Billboard* that Lakeside would “be conducted on as large a scale as formerly.” The changes succeeded in drawing customers as *Billboard* reported that the park enjoyed good patronage as the 1918 season got underway.¹²

The improved business situation encouraged Lakeside's owners, and in 1919 they made additional changes to the park. The aging swings on the once popular Circle Swing, which

swung out over the lake, were replaced with more modern looking monoplanes. Park manager Phil Friedrich reported to *Billboard* that the addition of the monoplanes more than tripled the amount of money that Lakeside had been earning on just the Circle Swing alone. Management also reworked the bathing beach at the park, which first opened in 1915. The original beach was connected to the boathouse and dock by a long boardwalk, which the sand beach running alongside it. The boardwalk ended at the bathhouse, which had large, sand-covered verandas for bathers to sun themselves on. One section of the beach was reserved for women only. *Billboard* did not report on the exact changes management made to the bathing beach for 1919, but the magazine did say that the beach was new and a curiosity for the Mile High city. The magazine also cautioned that business at the Denver parks was not as good as it had once been, but that it was still better than it had been at any time during World War I.¹³

With each passing year Lakeside seemed to be getting better, and by the 1920s the owners felt confident enough in the park's future to increase the number of changes they made to it, but they still struggled with letting go of the past. Their unwillingness to be more aggressive in remaking the park proved to be risky in terms of Lakeside's future survival. The trends that had taken hold in the neighborhoods around Lakeside in the 1910s only continued, and by the 1920s, those neighborhoods were solidly working class. The businesses ringing the park reflected that fact as bars and pool halls, inexpensive restaurants, and small shops closed in on the park along Sheridan Boulevard and Forty-Fourth Avenue. These businesses, less than desirable by old City Beautiful standards, were in keeping with the character of the new neighborhoods. But, they were not attractive to the conservative amusements seekers and fastidious family men to whom the park once catered. And, the land on the south side of Lakeside that Zang and his associates believed was destined to be occupied by fine, expensive

homes still remained vacant except for the park's donkey pen. However, Lakeside was certainly not alone among amusement parks in experiencing this phenomenon. Walt Disney faced similar issues when cheap hotels and restaurants popped up around Disneyland in the 1950s and 1960s. When Disney addressed those problems with the construction of Walt Disney World in the 1960s, he did so in a way very similar to that which Lakeside's founders used, but on a much larger scale. Lakeside's owners, with their limited ability to control more land around the park, did their best to deal with the new circumstances.¹⁴

In the 1920s, Lakeside's owners still attempted to maintain many of the old City Beautiful standards in the park. Visitors found one very visible example of this in the park's live entertainment. For the 1920 season management again remodeled the former theater in the Casino building, though it still remained a restaurant and entertainment space. The new spot, named the Fountain Room, opened on June 5, 1920. The entertainment at the new venue was Emmet Vogan's 1920 Musical Review which, according to *Billboard*, furnished patrons "a high class of entertainment from 9 to 12 each night," with free dancing between acts. Vogan's company consisted of fifteen singers and dancers, and the performance changed weekly. Management also made a number of other improvements to the grounds of the park, *Billboard* reported, though the magazine did not specify what they were. Overall, however, the changes were good as *Billboard* stated that the park "appeared more beautiful than it has ever been in the past." The magazine made sure to point out that the Old Mill ride at the park was one of the longest rides of its kind in the world and that the crowds enjoyed it immensely. Business was so good that summer that the park even remained open an extra week to accommodate the crowds. *Billboard* reported that on one particular night at Lakeside, cars from sixteen different states were found parked there. With high-class entertainment, beautiful grounds, and distinctive rides,

Lakeside still drew visitors from near and far even though it may not have been as glamorous as it once was.¹⁵

The 1921 season brought even more reminders of the past. Articles in *Billboard* that summer reminded readers that Lakeside was perhaps most famous for its “wonderful scenic settings,” something that had received praise and attention since opening day in 1908. After closing at the end of the 1920 season the “painters, carpenters, decorators, mechanics, engineers, and entertainment specialists” busily prepared for the next season, with painting, cleaning, and working on the grounds. According to *Billboard*, most of the rides and buildings in the park were repainted white, which had helped give the park the early nickname of White City when it first opened. Special attention was given to the grounds, with *Billboard* reporting that they looked “prettier than ever before.” Workers also replaced the dance floor in the El Patio Ballroom. The new floor allowed dancers to move with the grain as they danced rather than against it. As the park opened for its fourteenth season, *Billboard* declared that Lakeside looked as “spick and span as a brand-new dollar” and should enjoy a good summer. The publicity was very reminiscent of articles in *Municipal Facts* a decade earlier and exhibited a concentrated effort to remind readers of the park’s glorious past. The season was in fact a good one. Dancing proved especially popular that summer, with the ballroom filled to capacity most nights. The Fountain Room, under the direction of Heinie Kintz for the summer, featured the Permitt’s Male Quartet and the Melvin Anthony Jazz Orchestra as well as a mystery show entitled “Just for Fun.” Management also eliminated the separate admission fee at the very popular bathing beach for customers who brought their own suits and towels.¹⁶

The next year management, and *Billboard*, emphasized yet another remnant of Lakeside’s City Beautiful past, the famous sunset dinners on the Casino balcony. Management

brought back J.W. Miller, who had managed the restaurant several years before, to operate it once again. Miller arrived at Lakeside several weeks before the season opener and immediately set to work renovating the space. Miller ordered new silverware, dinnerware, and linens for the restaurant, making sure that it would appear as fine and beautiful as it once had. He also supervised the enlargement of the kitchen and serving spaces, intent, *Billboard* reported, upon making sure the restaurant would “live up to the reputation he established in former years.” For 1922, the balcony restaurant was open from six o’clock until nine o’clock in the evening. After nine, the new Casino garden opened and offered free dancing, music, and entertainment for customers until midnight.¹⁷

Management also staged carnivals that were reminiscent of the elaborate affairs that marked the endings of Lakeside’s early seasons. In 1923, Sekedali (pronounced seek-a-dolly), a mid-summer carnival, was held August 8th to 14th. The entire park was decorated for the week, and the event drew big numbers. Opening night featured a costume contest at which \$200 in gold was divided among the winners of the fancy dress, comical, and novel categories. The second day was Kiddies’ Frolic, with free ride tickets and ice cream handed out to hundreds of children. The final event of the day was a drawing for children, with first prize being a live pony. On Eagles’ Day, thousands of attendees of the national convention of the Fraternal Order of Eagles, meeting in Denver at the same time as Sekedali was taking place at Lakeside, visited the park. Along with the Eagles, a number of other groups, including the DeMolay Society and the Sons and Daughters of Liberty, ventured to the park during Sekedali. The brightly decorated park and visits by attendees of national conventions could have been lifted directly from Lakeside’s City Beautiful era.¹⁸

Throughout the 1920s, management also maintained one of the most visible and

distinctive elements that had connected Lakeside to the City Beautiful program, its lighting scheme. In 1927, chief electrician John Flohr designed a colorful new lighting arrangement for the Tower of Jewels that was widely praised for its beauty. In fact, Lakeside's owners spent more than \$50,000 renovating the park for the 1927 season. The biggest project was remodeling the El Patio Ballroom, where they had new lighting effects and Spanish-style decorations installed. Workers also constructed a sound booth near the end of the ballroom to hold the equipment used for radio broadcasts from the building. Chief Gonzalez and his El Patians were the regular performers in the ballroom. Other changes included new cement walkways, a new athletic field, and expanded parking facilities. Two years later, John Flohr introduced yet another new lighting design for the Tower, and *Billboard* raved that the new scheme "excels all previous efforts...in dressing the park with a garb of electrical splendor." The Tower's lights changed yet again in 1931, when the bulbs colors went to scarlet and blue for the season.¹⁹

Yet, while Lakeside certainly maintained some of the most visible City Beautiful elements of the past as it struggled to find its new identity, in other areas it veered about as far from City Beautiful as possible. In 1920, for example, management leased the park to a movie studio. Yellowstone Pictures, incorporated in Cheyenne, Wyoming, planned to make six movies a year over the next three years, for a total of eighteen. The company was then in the process of remodeling the space in the skating rink and ballroom into studios, complete with dressing, drying, and cutting rooms and a laboratory. More than \$8,000 in electrical equipment was on its way to the park, bringing the total spent on the movie studio conversion to \$33,000.

Yellowstone would produce only Westerns, according to its manager, Charles Bartlett. Colorado, Bartlett told the *Rocky Mountain News*, was "ideal for picture work" because of its natural scenery. The movie industry, which had grown out of the vaudeville shows of the 1910s,

was struggling to establish itself in the 1920s. A series of scandals in the early 1920s rocked the public's perception of the industry, and as a result, studios formed the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America in 1922 to self-regulate and police the industry, and, the industry hoped, restore its credibility with the public. But a movie studio inside Lakeside was a far cry from the park's elite days. While the movie studio seems to have fizzled out fairly quickly, it showed that management was taking big if hesitant steps towards changing the park's image.²⁰

Another 1920s phenomenon also found its way to the park. With the flapper craze in full swing in the 1920s, a portion of Lakeside was renamed Flapper Lane. Flappers were post-World War I women who, writes historian Michael E. Parrish, "appeared eager to abandon all social restraints on their behavior by taking to heart the idea that equality meant enjoying the pleasures customarily reserved for men." Flappers were known for their short hair and androgynous dress, and according to popular culture engaged in too much drinking, smoking, and flirting. To older women, the flappers seemed to be abandoning the rights they had inherited from the older generation through self-indulgent behavior that reinforced gender stereotypes. Older women who had fought for equality thought the flappers should run settlement houses or continue to fight for suffrage rather than party non-stop. The *Wray Rattler* described a flapper as "a girl who refuses to use her own or anyone else's brains" and was "long on bobbed hair, short skirts, arms, neck, back, chatter and jazz" and argued that such women should be banned by constitutional amendment. The *Ouray Herald* printed advice from evangelist Mattie Crawford, who said that "the little flappers are flapping their souls away" and that she intended to save them. The flappers were one of the most visible and infamous symbols of the Jazz Age of the 1920s.²¹

Flappers, and their male friends (sometimes called sheiks or flippers), represented a startling new cultural phenomenon, setting them very much apart from Lakeside's staid City

Beautiful era patrons. But Lakeside welcomed them with open arms. On July 18, 1922, the park hosted a contest to name “Denver’s premier flapper.” More than 40,000 people, almost as big as the crowd that had been at the park on opening day in 1908, were in attendance to help choose the winner from the 7,000 contestants. Among the judges were Lieutenant Governor Earl Cooley and famed Denver judge Benjamin Lindsey, leading the *Telluride Daily Journal* to suggest that the contest had political significance. The winner was Marjorie Nichols of Denver, who Denver newspapers called “a decided blonde.” A flapper contest was far more in keeping with typical amusement park fare than it was with the elegance and beauty once associated with Lakeside Amusement Park.²²

As Lakeside’s owners felt more confident and financially secure in the 1920s they stepped up the pace of the physical change at the park as well. In addition to the changes in the former theater, management also booked a number of free acts to perform at the park. They also continued to add more rides. One of the most popular was the Old Mill, a water ride found at amusement parks throughout the country, including Lakeside’s rival, Elitch’s. Commonly known as the Tunnel of Love, Old Mill rides featured life-sized depictions of fairy tale scenes placed in alcoves along the ride’s route that riders passed in boats. A Hilarity Hall, built by Lakeside consulting engineer E.J. Lauterback, and a House of Troubles, provided more fun house-style entertainment and one or both may have replaced the park’s original fun house, the Third Degree. Management replaced the already aging, and therefore less popular monoplanes on the old Circle Swing, which dated to 1919, with more stylish seaplanes. Park management also purchased the Derby coaster in 1924 from the Pearce family, which had operated the ride since building it in 1912. In 1928, management built new and improved boating facilities, replacing the rustic style boathouse that had stood near the ballroom since 1908, and installed a

Grant orthophonic Victrola, which played new electrically recorded records rather than the acoustically recorded records that were previously available.²³

Adding new rides and attractions was not uncommon for any amusement park, especially one that wanted to stay in business. On Coney Island, entire buildings constructed of staff were torn down and replaced from season to season to keep the park fresh looking and to encourage customers to return year after year. The same was true, often on a less elaborate scale, for amusement parks throughout the country. What made Lakeside's addition of new rides and attractions different from those other amusement parks during this period was that each new ride or physical change showed the park clearly attempting to leave behind its unique past and embrace a traditional amusement park style that it had consciously avoided for so many years.

Restaurants at Lakeside also reflected the changed customer base and further emphasized both the attempt to cling to the past and move away from the City Beautiful era. The Jail restaurant opened in the Casino building in 1926. *Billboard* magazine praised the park's newest attraction as "providing a novelty that is filled with endless fun." Customers were referred to as inmates, and were served chicken dinners "prison style" on tin plates while vaudeville and dancing acts performed. Staff dressed as either prisoners or guards, and the walls of the restaurant were painted to look like stone with bars on the windows. A jail-themed restaurant was a far cry from the openness and uplift of well-designed parks and spaces that City Beautiful promoted. In a park where patrons once ate on fine china with the words Lakeside Casino painted on it, customers who survived their evening of incarceration in the Jail were given souvenir tin cups that proudly stated "Compliments Jail—Lakeside." The new restaurant came into being during a period when crime was often associated with the working class, the very customers Lakeside needed to attract in order to survive. Lurid stories of crime involving the

wealthy were rarely heard, historian Mary Frances Berry writes, because the wealthy never exposed such things to the public if they could avoid it. Poorer families were not as lucky. As early as the mid-1800s, wealthy pleasure seekers sought to separate themselves from the “rabble” that invaded the pit and gallery at early theaters by building new amusement centers that accommodated smaller crowds and charged higher prices. But, if any working class customers objected to The Jail at Lakeside, nothing was ever publicly said about it.²⁴

That same year The Plantation restaurant also opened in the Casino building. The Plantation served what Billboard magazine called “real Southern style chicken dinners” and advertisements for the restaurant included a picture of a stereotypical mammy figure cooking at a stove. The name of the restaurant as well as the promotional material for it played on a trend in advertising that took off in the 1920s as numerous companies turned to images of the South to sell their products, most famously Aunt Jemima pancake mix. To many Americans, the image of the old South was one of a place of leisure and comfort, where people were saved from work and worry by the former slaves who still willingly served their old masters. The persona of the mammy fit into this image, as she cooked for her white masters and helped make their lives easier. The entire purpose of using these fictional images of the old South in advertising was to create, writes historian M.M. Manring, an image of an upper-class lifestyle for consumers. Consumers who had to go to work every day, or who lacked servants to clean their houses, could for a moment pretend that a cheerful black woman was making their lives a bit easier and more glamorous. Class and racial condescension aside, the two new restaurants in the Casino clearly showed the mixed emotions Lakeside’s owners struggled with as they tried to remake the park. One restaurant was about as far as possible from the once elite image of the park, while the other purposely used imagery meant to recreate and sustain that elite image.²⁵

As a sign of just how much the image of Lakeside had changed since 1916, in 1925 the Clason's *Denver Map Guide* referred to Elitch's as a beautiful picnic ground, while at Lakeside, Denver's Coney Island, the dance hall (the ballroom) and cabaret (formerly the Casino theater) were emphasized rather than the park's beauty. A little more than a decade earlier, such map guides had listed Lakeside as one of the must-see attractions for out of town visitors. As Lakeside went about adding more thrilling rides to the park, Elitch's under John Mulvihill's management made its own thrilling changes. One of the biggest was the construction of the Wildcat rollercoaster in 1922. In addition, Mulvihill remodeled the Old Mill ride and added a haunted house as well. Aside from construction of the Wildcat, perhaps the most notable change Mulvihill made to the park was construction of the Trocadero Ballroom in 1917. Mary Elitch had always disapproved of public dancing and therefore never allowed a ballroom in the park while she owned it. The Trocadero became one of the most legendary attractions at Elitch's. For entertainment he hired Rudolph Ganz and his seventy-five piece symphony for evening concerts. With cars becoming more common, Mulvihill tore down several of the old zoo buildings at Elitch's to make way for a parking lot. That was one of the few problems that Lakeside's owners did not have to deal with because the park had always had automobile parking along Sheridan Boulevard. But, Denver's more conservative amusement park goers were using their cars to go to Elitch's, not Lakeside as they had once done. While Elitch's was located just a few blocks south and east of Lakeside, it was surrounded by a more middle class neighborhood and heavily shielded from the world around it by fences. Lakeside, while also surrounded by fencing, was in a more exposed location surrounded by less expensive homes and bars and pool halls. The streetcar line that ran directly to Lakeside, once a source of City Beautiful pride, helped bring less affluent customers right to the front gates of the park. Elitch's was still served

by a streetcar line as well, but its growing reputation as the white collar park was only enhanced by the customers who went there.²⁶

The one major improvement management made to Lakeside's grounds during the 1920s was the installation of the new cement walkways. Otherwise, most of the thrilling and adventurous new activities management brought to the park were taking place in the elegantly designed and permanently constructed buildings that had defined the White City. It made for a stark contrast between the old and the new at Lakeside. But, at least by all outward appearances, the park was surviving.

Behind the scenes, however, financial arrangements revealed that Lakeside was not healthy. In August 1927, the Denver Park and Amusement Company leased twenty-three acres of land northeast of Lakeside to Lusion Gibson Throckmorton, a greyhound racetrack developer. Throckmorton in turn leased the land to the Denver Greyhound Racing Association, which banked with American National Bank of Denver, which was founded by Adolph Zang. Godfrey Schirmer, who Zang hired to run the bank and was also the first secretary of the old Lakeside Realty and Amusement Company, had suggested that Throckmorton talk to Phillip Friederich at Lakeside about possibly leasing land at the park on which to build a greyhound racetrack. Construction started on the grandstand and track almost immediately after the lease was signed, and within a few months all but the roof on the grandstand was completed. But, the next year, nine lawsuits were filed against the Denver Park and Amusement Company, including one by Frank Kirchoff, president of Denver Park and Amusement, on behalf of his lumber company. The suits alleged that the Denver Greyhound Racing Association had defaulted on money due the nine companies that filed the lawsuits. The district court ruled in favor of the plaintiffs, who filed nine liens against Lakeside totaling nearly \$40,000, and ordered the park property sold in

order to satisfy the debts.²⁷

The Denver Park and Amusement Company, with the backing of American National Bank, which was still owed \$60,000 of the \$80,000 mortgage on the park, appealed the ruling to the Colorado Supreme Court. Company and bank officials argued that the court erred in allowing the liens to be considered primary obligations because American National's mortgage should have taken precedence. Company officials also argued that, because betting was allowed on the greyhound racing at the new track in violation of state law, the lease from Throckmorton to the Denver Greyhound Racing Association was invalid and they were therefore not responsible for any of that organization's debts. As the trial wore on, Frank Kirchoff found himself in the unusual position of testifying on behalf of Denver Park and Amusement while also arguing against it on behalf of his lumber company. The Colorado Supreme Court was unmoved by the new arguments and upheld the lower court's ruling in favor of the nine original plaintiffs, leaving Lakeside's owners with the choice of either paying off the debts or selling the park.²⁸

As the trial worked its way through the court system, Godfrey Schirmer died on November 15, 1928 at the age of sixty-five. His death removed yet another valued supporter of Lakeside from the scene. While Schirmer may have been gone, his bank decided to protect their interest in Lakeside and loaned the owners \$100,000 to refinance the bank's mortgage and pay off the debts from constructing the greyhound track. Once again the park survived, but within a few years the big loan would come back to haunt the park's owners.²⁹

For the 1929 season, management ordered new motorboats for the lake as well as modernization of the big launch. *Billboard* reported that both were heavily patronized on opening day and that the changes made to the boating facilities since 1928 were well received by the park's customers. The park's owners also made changes to the landscaping around the lake

that year, which allowed for a better view of the lake, according to *Billboard*. The owners made changes to the swimming pool as well, including a new filter system that changed the water three times in every twenty-four hour period. But, there were relatively few changes to the park for the 1929 season, especially given the precarious financial position the owners found themselves in by then. *Billboard* never reported whether or not Lakeside enjoyed a good 1929 season, but the park closed for the summer less than two months before the stock market crashed that October, plunging the United States into economic depression.³⁰

At first, the Great Depression had little impact in Denver except in the financial district, where many of the city's great millionaires saw their fortunes wiped out overnight. Until late 1931 the city seemed safe from the trouble engulfing the east, but when metal prices fell and industry slowed, Denver's economy sank along with the rest of the country's. As with cities, the Great Depression was brutal to amusement parks as patronage dried up and owners were unable to pay bills. Hundreds of parks closed their gates for the last time during the Depression years, unable to survive the severe economic turmoil. In Denver, both Lakeside and Elitch's managed to survive, but they fought hard for every customer and oftentimes tried their best to outdo each other in order to continue bringing customers to the parks.³¹

Lakeside's owners continued to make changes to the park in order to keep it relevant to its surroundings, but with finances tight change slowed to the pace seen in the late 1910s rather than the faster rate of the 1920s. Management installed two new attractions at the park in time for the 1930 season. One was the Lindy Loop, a ride which capitalized on Charles Lindbergh's famous solo flight across the Atlantic Ocean in 1927. The ride resembled a modern Tilt-a-Whirl in the way it operated. Each ride car was mounted on crescent shaped rails, and could freely slide from one end of the rails to the other. The ride consisted of eight such cars attached to a

circular track that then moved up and down over a series of hills, forcing each car to slide back and forth on the rails. The ride, built by the Herschel-Spillman Company of New York, was a popular attraction at amusement parks across the United States.³²

Lakeside also joined in on the miniature golf craze sweeping the country in 1930. The park's miniature golf course stretched between the fun house, which was located across from the train station, and the pony track, which was near the Derby coaster. The course was popular for many years but fell into disrepair and was abandoned in the 1960s. Miniature golf made its return to Lakeside in 2011, though, with the construction of a new course in Kiddieland.

Billboard reported that Lakeside, with its “extremely varied amusements diversified in appeal to boys young and old,” was very popular with families in 1930. Aside from rides, one of the chief attractions for families was the “well-shaded picnic grounds with a beautiful view of the distant mountains.” While the same article in *Billboard* proclaimed Elitch's to be as striking as ever, the chief attraction singled out for attention there was the theater. After more than a decade of remaking the park, the distinction was clear—Lakeside was for families who wanted to bring picnics with them rather than buy food at the park, while Elitch's and its theater was for the more serious minded amusement seekers.³³

A new band arrived at the El Patio Ballroom in 1930, and their arrival pointed out the racial barriers that had existed from the beginning at the White City despite its down marketing from the City Beautiful days. George Morrison was a very famous black bandleader from Denver, and his group, George Morrison and His Orchestra, performed for audiences worldwide. At one time Morrison and his band had an exclusive contract with Columbia Records “race records” division, which attempted to have black bands record popular jazz music to then sell to black customers. After his contract with Columbia was not renewed, Morrison and his band

returned to Denver, where they toured with actress Hattie McDaniel and performed in the city's vaudeville theaters. Eventually Morrison owned his own club, The Casino, on Welton Street in Denver's Five Points neighborhood. In 1930, Morrison and his band became the lead performers at Lakeside's El Patio. Park general manager Joseph Moore renamed the group George Morrison and His Rigadooners. Moore chose the name as a play on the French word rigodon, which meant a dance or music for a dance. Morrison and his band played the El Patio for a number of years after 1930, but no black customers were allowed inside the park in order to watch him perform. As much as the White City may have changed since 1908, only white customers were still allowed inside its gates. The same was also true at Elitch's. Among white customers, however, Morrison and the Rigadooners were enormously popular and customers filled Lakeside's ballroom nightly in order to hear them perform.³⁴

While the Depression's impact was still minimal in Denver and big bands and flashy attractions kept attendance at the park up, Lakeside put on a number of special events to help ensure big crowds during the 1930 season. Children were admitted to the park and given ice cream for free every Thursday, and on occasion Togo the Wonder Dog performed for them. Bob Graf, a comedy diver, was a regular feature at the swimming pool, along with pool parties and life-size swimming toys for children. Management also added a marble fountain covered with electric lights to the swimming pool as an "added feature" according to *Billboard*. The biggest draw of the summer was the fireworks show on July 3, which more than 35,000 people attended. Another 30,000 attended the Labor Day celebration, two weeks before the park closed for the summer. The Forresters of Colorado also held their annual gathering at the park, during which an airplane was given away, though *Billboard* did it not make it clear whether it was the park or the Forresters who gave it away. The final celebration of the season was on Labor Day, when

more than 30,000 people entered the park. Throughout the summer the weather cooperated, which according to *Billboard* brought record crowds on weekends and allowed the park to stay open two weeks later than usual. Overall, *Billboard* reported, 1930 was indeed an excellent season for Lakeside.³⁵

Lakeside enjoyed another successful season in 1931, with more than 650,000 people visiting. On the twelve free childrens' days, more than 96,000 entered the gates. The biggest draw that year, according to *Billboard*, was the El Patio Ballroom and the big-name bands that ballroom manager Roy Easter booked. The five bands for the 1931 season were the Coon-Sanders Orchestra, Jan Garba's Band, Wayne King, George Olson, and Irving Aaronson and His Commanders. *Billboard* declared that the five were among the best known bands in the country, and their presence in Denver gave Lakeside a huge boost during what was otherwise a bad economic year. In between each band, Morrison and his Rigadooners continued to play. Both park management and the Denver newspapers knew that the bands were what brought people in. When an especially well-known band played the park, not only did management take out big advertisements in the newspapers, but the papers themselves gave each appearance major coverage. In Depression era Denver, music was popular and the low prices at El Patio allowed many people the chance to see and hear famous bands live. The year also marked the brief return of Philip Friedrich, after a five year absence from the park, as an assistant to park manager Joseph Moore. Moore suggested that Friedrich may have been returning to assume the presidency of the Denver Park and Amusement Company. *Billboard* was pleased by the development, writing that under Friedrich's earlier leadership "Lakeside hummed with activity and bustled with many yearly innovations." Friedrich remained with the park over the next four years, but he did so relatively quietly and as secretary, not as president.³⁶

Despite Lakeside's successful 1930 and 1931 seasons, the Depression years were difficult times for amusement parks everywhere, and management at both Lakeside and Elitch's worked tirelessly to keep their parks open. The local musician's union pled with management at both parks to use local bands in their ballrooms, but big name bands continued to play at El Patio and the Trocadero because they drew many more customers than local bands did. Elitch's introduced a plan whereby dancing at the Trocadero was only one cent with paid admission to the park, while Lakeside introduced a two-for-one program at the El Patio. In 1932, Elitch's gave away one free car per week while Lakeside gave away free picnic lunches to every paying customer daily, cash prizes at special events such as the Mardis Gras celebration, and in 1933, free trips to the Chicago World's Fair. The gimmicks worked, and *Billboard* was able to report at the close of the 1933 season that business was not too bad at the two parks.³⁷

Business may not have been bad, but it also was not good enough to cover the \$100,000 loan the owners had taken out against the park in 1928. The loan became a major problem in early 1933 when American National Bank of Denver demanded full repayment. Lakeside's owners were unable to come up with any of the money and, when the bank foreclosed, it looked as if the park might actually close for good. The bank's officials quickly realized that if Lakeside did in fact fail to open in 1933 the odds of them ever seeing any money were slim, and so they went to court to get an order opening the park for the season. Judge Samuel Johnson of Golden appointed Harry Zimmerhackel, a Denver lawyer and former city council member, as receiver and Lakeside, bankrupt for the second time, opened on schedule for the 1933 season.³⁸

Between the end of the 1933 season and the start of 1934's, new general manager Linden K. Haney spent more than \$10,000 on improvements at Lakeside. The biggest change was at the swimming pool, where a glass enclosed sun bathing beach was built. Haney also installed new

bumper cars at the Skooter attraction and built a penny arcade. Thirty-two teams signed up to play in the softball league and semi-pro baseball teams played at the park's ball field on Saturdays and Sundays. In a significant change from previous years, big name bands were booked for one night stands only, filling in gaps between longer engagements by local musicians. *Billboard* reported that Lakeside could "easily regain its old-time popularity" with the changes. An increase in the number of tourists visiting Colorado that year helped, and by halfway through the 1934 season Haney reported that the park had already been visited by double the number of people than had come for all of 1933. Unfortunately, the improved business was not enough to save the park from the hit it had taken when it went bankrupt the year before. In 1934, the bondholders who backed American National Bank's loan to Lakeside grew weary of the bank's management of the park. A bondholder's protection committee, made up of Dr. J.M. Morris, J. Reimer Espy, Karl Koch, August Drumm, and H.L. Luchenback, took over operation of Lakeside, but financially the park fared no better under them than it had under Zimmerhackel.³⁹

Even though the men behind the Denver Park and Amusement Company had done their best to remake Lakeside Amusement Park in the years between 1917 and 1933, their efforts were not entirely successful. All of the men had been involved with the park since its opening in 1908, and had been with it at the height of its City Beautiful days. Change had come rapidly to the park between 1914 and 1917, but after that the owners were reluctant to completely let go of the City Beautiful glory the park had once enjoyed. They were simply too close to the park's history and too aware of what it had once been. In spite of their reluctance, the owners did go ahead with changes, but these changes reflected their ambivalence when it came to completely remaking Lakeside. And, while *Municipal Facts* and the City of Denver may not have approved of the changes, newspapers and other publications did. According to the series *Life in Denver*,

produced as a New Deal project during the Depression, Lakeside was one of the better outside amusement resorts in the Rocky Mountain Region. Lakeside also found new support in the pages of the *Rocky Mountain News*, which championed the park as heartily as *Municipal Facts* had a decade earlier. But, as the 1934 season ended, Lakeside truly needed a new image more than ever if it was going to survive. Luckily for Lakeside Amusement Park, Concession Manager Benjamin Krasner had a plan.⁴⁰



Fig. 19 Out with the old, in with the new. The Porch Dining Room on the Casino balcony from 1908 and The Jail Restaurant in the Casino, 1922.
(DPL, X-27402 and X-27619)



Fig. 20 The fine china of the Casino gave way to the tin cups of The Jail.

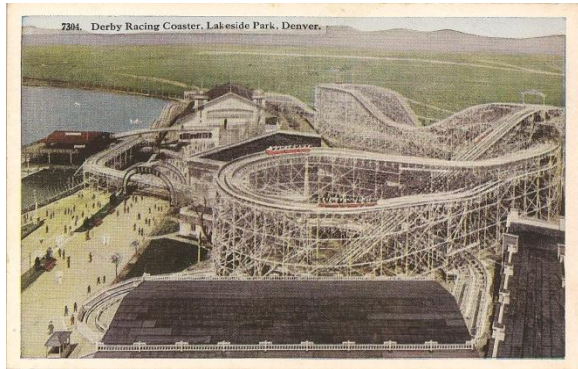


Fig. 21 The much wilder Derby coaster, which opened in the social area of Lakeside in 1914.



Fig. 22 Menu from The Plantation restaurant, 1926.

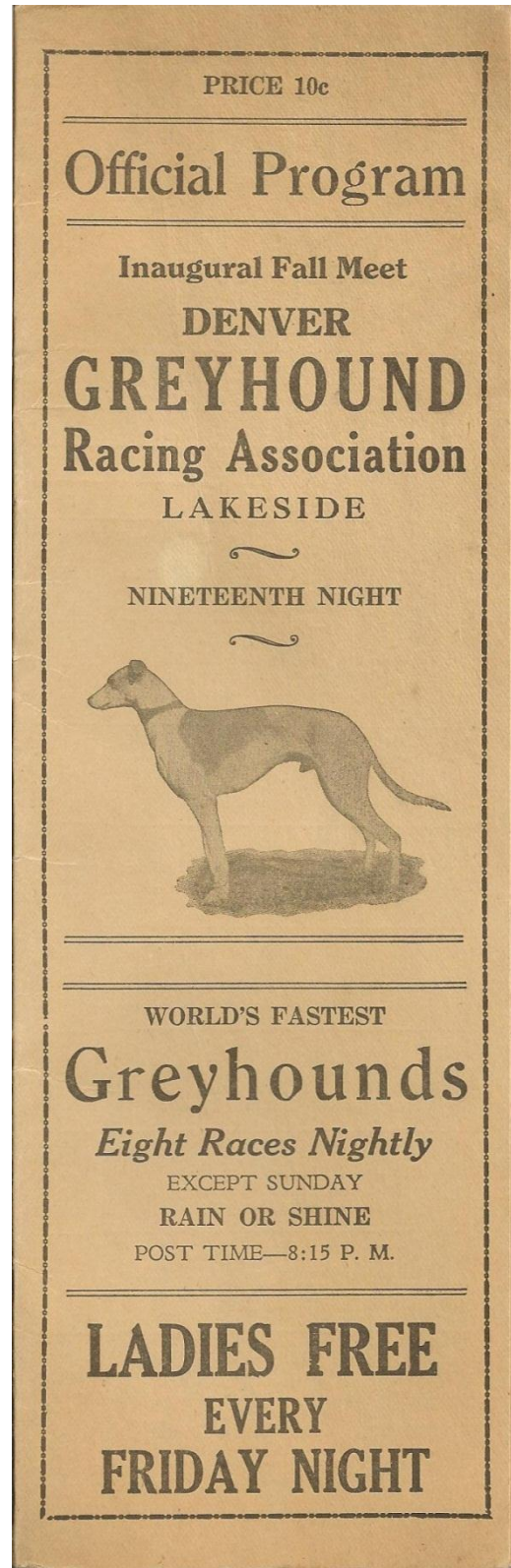


Fig. 23 Program from Lakeside's greyhound race track, late 1920s.

CHAPTER SIX:

BENJAMIN KRASNER'S LAKESIDE AMUSEMENT PARK

The Great Depression wreaked havoc on the United States as businesses failed, millions of people were unemployed, and the system struggled to alleviate their distress. President Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal programs attempted to fix the immediate problem by putting billions of dollars into circulation in an effort to get the economy going, while also looking at long term fixes such as Social Security. While people had less money to spend on entertainment, amusement parks, writes David Nasaw, survived the Depression in better shape than most other entertainment industries. With finances tight, the parks, he argues, underwent a retrenchment of their own in the 1920s as many of the smaller trolley parks were closed or sold by the streetcar companies that owned them. Those that were sold to new owners competed for customers with the larger parks that had always been in private hands, driving some of both the larger and smaller parks out of business. Those amusement parks that survived into the 1930s saw owners investing less money in new rides and improvements to the grounds. Instead, the owners heavily promoted beaches, picnic grounds, and ballrooms, all activities that were relatively inexpensive. Cleveland's Euclid Beach Park and Pittsburgh's Kennywood, for example, survived by hosting company picnics and family oriented events. At Coney Island, the "era of the 'dripper'" began as visitors who were unable to afford to rent a bathhouse at the beach wore their dry bathing suits under their clothes on the trip out and the wet suit on the way home. The amusement parks on Coney grew seedier each year as money grew tighter, with some even sinking so low as to hold cockroach races. The crowds still came, however, ready to enjoy a day of relatively inexpensive

entertainment.¹

But, Lakeside Amusement Park went against this trend in the 1930s as new owner Benjamin Krasner's invested heavily in new rides and attractions, along with a total makeover of the park's grounds. In the thirty years that he owned the park, Benjamin Krasner spent enormous sums of money almost every year on new rides and improvements to the grounds in order to keep the park competitive.

Those in the amusement industry in the 1930s witnessed the retrenchment that Nasaw wrote about, and they did not like it. In the March 2, 1935 issue of *Billboard*, publicist Ernest Anderson urged his readers to do the exact opposite. Anderson pointed out that President Franklin D. Roosevelt was about to pump several billion dollars into the American economy through government works projects in an effort to get money circulating and the economy going once again. Anderson wanted park owners and managers to adopt a similar policy. He condemned "Mr. Average Park Manager" who refused to spend money on paint, advertising, new rides and concessions, and shows, and instead simply threw open the gates to their parks while "muttering feebly, 'Well, boys, she's open!'" To him, park managers who thought that way were better off closing their parks or calling a junk dealer to haul everything away. Not all park managers acted this way, but Anderson could point to only a handful who had managed to turn their parks around. These men came in for high praise for their ability to develop an "Arabian Nights Dream from a city sewer dump." More owners and managers needed to follow their examples. If an attraction at a park was not producing, then the owners should tear it down, he wrote, and replace it with something better. Billions of dollars were about to go into circulation, Anderson repeatedly reminded his readers, and he wanted park owners and managers to do the same while also readying their parks for the influx of customers who were sure to come

once the government's money was in circulation.²

Lakeside Amusement Park Concession Manager Benjamin Krasner was one of those who wanted to spend money on his amusement park. But, first, he had to buy it. As soon as the 1934 season at Lakeside ended, Krasner entered into purchase negotiations with the bondholders' protective committee that had operated Lakeside Amusement Park for the past season. Financing was not an issue as Krasner's family and friends who still lived on the East coast loaned him the money to buy the park. But, the negotiations were "considerable" according to *Billboard*, and went on for several months. Finally, on February 23, 1935, the deal was completed and Krasner became the new owner and general manager of Lakeside. Joining Krasner in the new ownership company, the Lakeside Park Company, was Albert W. Johnson, Robert R. Mullen, and park electrician John Flohr. Krasner was president of the new company in addition to being general manager of the park. Johnson was general superintendent, and Mullen was in charge of advertising. Immediately after completing the purchase, Krasner went to Chicago to meet with executives at the Music Corporation of America (MCA) to negotiate a new contract to have name bands play at the park for the 1935 season.³

Krasner planned a multi-pronged approach to remaking Lakeside, and having big name bands appear at the park was a vital part of it. The introduction of lower priced records by Decca during the Depression made music a much more popular pastime than it had been, and people of all ages swarmed ballrooms for the chance to hear favorite bands perform live and to dance. For younger people, dancing was a chance to meet members of the opposite sex. In 1928, nineteen year old Ned Stout was injured while riding the Derby coaster at Lakeside. Stout sued the park over his injuries, and in his testimony he said that the only reason he was on the coaster the day he was hurt was because he and a friend had met a couple of girls while dancing at El Patio and

the girls wanted to ride the coaster. While the younger crowd had always been target customers for ballrooms, the introduction of Swing and Big Band style music drew an older crowd. Older customers soon flocked to dance halls, often crowding out the younger crowds who had once dominated them. Whether drawing the young or the old, if Krasner could book famous bands to play Lakeside's ballroom, it seemed a sure way to increase business.⁴

Breaking with past management, Krasner booked the bands for much earlier in the season, which *Billboard* credited with giving a good start to Lakeside's summers. One of Krasner's biggest scores was signing Kay Kyser and his band, who performed at the El Patio Ballroom for several years. Kyser was a major recording star of the late 1930s and early 1940s, recording over four hundred songs, appearing in several movies, and starting in 1938, hosting a weekly radio show on NBC called "Kay Kyser's Kollege of Musical Knowledge," for eleven years starting in 1938. Kyser was so popular at Lakeside that his name was permanently painted above the bandstand in the El Patio and was featured prominently on billboards for the park. Another major star who performed at Lakeside was Glenn Miller, an appearance that stung rival Elitch's, whose management desperately wanted the famed musician to perform there. In 1942, Duke Ellington played Lakeside (and hosted a catered dinner for Benjamin and Miriam Krasner on the porch of the ballroom), followed by Denver-born Paul Whiteman and his orchestra. During the late 1930s and early 1940s, if people wanted to see famous actors they went to Elitch's theater; for famous musicians, they went to Lakeside's El Patio.⁵

In another big change from past management, Krasner started heavily advertising Lakeside, something *Billboard* noted the previous owners of the park had not done for many years. Krasner coined a new slogan for the park, Denver Has Gone Lakeside, and hired Derby Sproul and William Robertson to promote it. Large billboards soon appeared alongside roads all

over Denver announcing opening day for the season, with one square on each board holding nothing but a question mark. The question marks drew great attention from the public as people tried to figure out what would eventually take its place. On May 26, the day after the park opened for the 1935 season, the new slogan replaced the question marks. Newspaper ads carried the slogan too, and it was printed on hundreds of spare tire covers given to visitors at the park on opening day. The advertising, combined with a busier than average tourist season, greatly improved business at Lakeside that year. Picnics remained a popular draw at the park, the largest attracting 27,000 customers. *The Denver Post* sponsored two picnics that drew 12,000 and 11,000 respectively. The two fireworks displays, on July 3 and August 1, drew upwards of 20,000 people each. Krasner also continued the free Children's Days, during which children were admitted to the park for free and given free ice cream. With its low prices and popular offerings Lakeside was a popular escape during hard economic times, but *Billboard* made sure to point out that much of the credit for the successful season, in its opinion, belonged to Benjamin Krasner and the changes he was making to the park, headlining its September 21, 1935 article on the season, "Lakeside's New Setup by Krasner in Denver Has Big Public Appeal."⁶

Famous bands and advertising were great for business, but Krasner planned to do much more now that he owned the park. Shortly before leaving for Chicago to talk with MCA, Krasner also announced that he was planning to spend \$12,000 on physical improvements to the park before opening day of the 1935. Some of the money went to improvements to the grounds, such as the two large rose beds that Krasner had built on either side of the auto entrance along Sheridan Boulevard, while the rest went to changes to the attractions. They were the first of many changes that the new owner would make to Lakeside in the coming years.⁷

One area where Krasner spent a great deal of money was new rides. Throughout the

1930s and 1940s several new rides were added to the park's list of attractions, many of which became fixtures there for decades after. The Octopus, similar to a modern Spider ride, consisted of eight arms with two cars attached to each arm. Once the ride started, the arms traveled a circular path while also rising up and down, and each car spun around as well. The Loop-O-Plane consisted of two cars, each attached to a separate arm with counterweights on the top of each arm. Each arm spun in an opposite direction until the cars flipped completely over, each arm traveling in a complete circle. The Octopus and Loop-O-Plane were both built by the Eyerly Company, one of the best known amusement ride manufacturers in the country. The Hurricane ride resembled an airplane, with riders controlling the lift of the car by turning the sail at the front in or out as the cars swung around the center shaft of the ride. One of the most popular rides Krasner added during this period was the Tumble Bug. Cars on the ride resembled bugs, and traveled counterclockwise on a circular path that rose and fell. In 1927, a six-car Tumble Bug sold for about \$12,000, with three or four car versions costing a bit less. All of these rides definitely were more thrilling attractions than Lakeside had seen in the past, and signs of what was to come with future rides at the park.⁸

Installing new rides certainly was a smart business move, but with his purchase of Lakeside, Benjamin Krasner also began a major remodeling program to give the grounds a more up-to-date look to complement the new rides. Krasner wanted the park taken from its very traditional and old fashioned appearance, to a much more streamlined and modern appearance. He hired California-based architect Richard Crowther to do the job. In a 1992 interview with Stuart Leuthner of *American Heritage* magazine, Crowther said that while he believed Krasner himself was a very conservative man, “he understood the amusement business and realized the park needed a new look.” The only structure off-limits to Crowther’s imagination was the Tower

of Jewels and attached Casino. Crowther wanted to do something new and different with the Tower, but Krasner told him it was too much of a landmark and would not allow him to touch it. Krasner certainly loved Lakeside Amusement Park, but it was much easier for him to change it than it had been for the previous owners, especially William Buck and Phillip Friederich. Buck and Friederich had been involved with the park since its City Beautiful days, and their emotional connection was simply too much for them to overcome. Krasner had been connected with Lakeside for eighteen years by the time he purchased it, but he had never known it at the height of its glory. Krasner simply saw a park that needed a new image if it was going to survive. And, especially after he bought it, he wanted Lakeside to survive.⁹

Lakeside's new look, created over several years in the late 1930s and early 1940s, was an Art Deco masterpiece. The style, which grew out of the 1925 Paris Exhibition, already was on the downside of its popularity as Krasner and Crowther started the makeover. The term Art Deco was not used to describe the style at the time; rather, it was often referred to as zig-zag, jazz modern, and Moderne. The style emerged at a time of growing disillusionment with historically based design, such as the style that marked Lakeside and City Beautiful, and a feeling that the new century should have a new style. Art Deco, according to art historians Bevis Hiller and Stephen Escritt, was "self-consciously new." Art Deco combined elements of the other two major modernity movements of the time, Modernity and neo-classicism. Unlike Modernity, though, Art Deco called for decoration and stylization rather than unadorned simplicity, and like neo-classicism, it acknowledged historical influence and design.¹⁰

Zig-zag Art Deco, seen for example in Radio City Music Hall or the Chrysler Building, consisted of ornate designs and sharp features. Moderne, which heavily influenced automobile designs of the 1930s, was sleeker and smoother, and was the format that Crowther used at

Lakeside. No matter what form it took, though, Art Deco was most “often seen to be at best frivolous, at worst immoral” write Hiller and Escritt. Strict modernists dismissed Art Deco as commercially driven and therefore not a true art form. Coming at a time of both increased mass production and consumption, the style lent itself to new consumer items, from women’s jewelry to radios to kitchen appliances. Its popularity in movie set designs of the 1920s and 1930s also introduced it to a much wider audience in the United States than elsewhere. In movies, Art Deco often was used to depict sinister locations such as night clubs or dens of prostitution, while at the same time it also was used to suggest industrial and business settings. Wherever it appeared, the style suggested luxury, and millions of movie goers saw it and liked it. The escapist nature of movies required matching buildings in which to show the movies, and Art Deco architecture became the norm for those theaters. Advertisements for products as varied as coffee, needles, and shoes, also picked up on the Art Deco trend and used images such as skyscrapers, planes, and streamlined trains to promote their products. Soon, products designed in the Art Deco style were even appearing in the Sears catalog, which Hillier and Escritt argue “brought modernity to even the most remote parts of America...” With all of its characteristics, the style seemingly was made for an amusement park in search of a new image.¹¹

As popular as Art Deco may have been in the 1930s, it was most assuredly not the high-brow architecture that once characterized Lakeside. But, where Buck and Friederich were unable to completely get past the old City Beautiful days at Lakeside, Benjamin Krasner knew that those days had long since ended. In order for the park to not just survive but once again thrive, it needed a new and popular look that would once again attract customers. Over the next several years, Crowther and Krasner gave it just that.¹²

Among the most visible and immediate changes were the ticket booths at Lakeside.

Crowther designed and built new tickets booths for each ride at the park. According to one article on the remodel, the architect took great care in the design of each booth, with the character and style he used “often mirroring the style of the ride itself.” True to the Moderne style, the ticket booths were sleek and often included curved lines and a great deal of glass. As was traditional at amusement parks, lighting was important in the new design. But, rather than use incandescent lights, as earlier designers had done, Crowther used neon and “created sinuous signs and etched his buildings with the rainbow-hued tubes.” Each new ticket booth was declared “delightful...as sleek and stylized as the Bakelite radios of the era, and not so very much larger.” Perhaps among the most impressive of the booths were those for the Hurricane, Cyclone, and the Whip. Each time a new ride appeared at the park in the years after Crowther completed his initial makeover, it received its own ticket booth designed to match the older ones. Many of the rides at the park were also covered in new, multi-colored fluorescent lights.¹³

The original 1908 Parker merry-go-round was still in operation at the park when the makeover started. Krasner and Crowther decided to move the merry-go-round into an entirely new building, its third home at the park, rather than remodel the old one. As part of the move, Krasner had all of the animals, which were painted white, stripped and repainted in more life-like colors. The new building, which was revealed to the public on opening day in May of 1942, was not the typical “domed, lattice-worked, curlicued” structure found in most parks said one article. Covered with purple, pink, and blue neon lights and blue tile, it was described as unique and angular with a “futuristic charm.” Attached to the new Merry-Go-Round Building structure, which was built on the site of the second building that had housed the ride, was one of the new main ticket booths for the park. Crowther also made changes to the El Patio Ballroom, installing new signage and railings on the front of the building, but leaving the exterior of the main

structure and interior resembling a Mexican village relatively untouched. The transformation, wrote Stuart Leuthner in an article in *American Heritage* in 1992, produced a “remarkably uniform and pleasing group of High Deco buildings,” and even the addition of European rides after World War II did little to alter the park's appearance.¹⁴

While Crowther was busily giving Lakeside's buildings a new look, Krasner continued to change rides and other attractions. By the beginning of the 1937 season he had spent more than \$60,000 on improvements at Lakeside. In comparison, Elitch's spent slightly more, \$75,000, on improvements for the same year. The largest project at Lakeside for 1937 was remodeling the rathskeller, then called the Old Heidelberg Room, in the basement of the Casino. The new \$25,000 restaurant, called the College Inn, was built to resemble a softly-lighted, Gothic-arched night club and served sandwiches and other refreshments, but no liquor (though it did later serve Coors beer), in addition to having space for dancing. Although Prohibition had ended in 1933, long gone were the days when a brewer-owned the park and the beer freely flowed. A new roadbed was constructed for the miniature railroad (still one of the longest in the world), new rails installed on the Derby coaster, and new Dodge and Chris Craft speedboats launched on the lake. In addition, Krasner had all of the concession stands rebuilt or remodeled, and yet again renovated the swimming pool. Overall, *Billboard* reported, business at the park was up by about thirty percent at the end of the 1937 season. National conventions even returned to the park when the Elks held their annual gathering there on July 14, 1937, further evidence that Krasner's renovation of the park was making it a popular amusement place once again.¹⁵

Lakeside remained a popular picnic spot, and Krasner hosted picnics for Denver area newspaper and radio stations, which, according to *Billboard*, “resulted in columns of valuable free publicity.” Picnics proved such a popular draw that for 1938, Krasner built a \$15,000 picnic

pavilion, complete with two kitchens, coffee urns, and free gas ranges, that could accommodate large groups. The new structure, on the southern edge of the park, was known as Casa Mañana. The picnic grounds around the pavilion were re-landscaped and improved, including installation of outdoor ovens. The park provided free wood for the new cooking facilities. By 1941, Lakeside hosted an average of four big picnics a week, sponsored by department stores, fraternal orders, and businesses, and also continued the traditional Labor Day celebration. In addition to the new picnic pavilion, other changes at the park for 1938 included opening the pool for night swimming. Management added new underwater lights to the pool, and remodeled the men's shower room in black and ivory tile. The women's shower room received new tile showers the year before. Three years later, attendance at the remodeled pool set a new record when 1,873 people paid the thirty-five cent admission fee and passed through the turnstile. On the lake, crews built a new boat dock, complete with a nautically themed ticket booth and a lighthouse. Painting and remodeling of older structures continued as well. Workers reconditioned the Funhouse, which included installing what would become the park's most infamous resident, Laffing Sal, a 6'10" tall mannequin that stood on a one foot high pedestal. Her "raucous belly laugh," recorded on 78 RPM records, echoed throughout the park for years as she both greeted visitors to the Funhouse and terrified small children and she remains one of the most asked after former attractions at the park. Another crew worked for two and half months and used 2,000 pounds of paint to repaint the Tower of Jewels. The Tower remained a remnant of the park's City Beautiful era and, *Billboard* reported, its "16,000 lights make it visible for miles." At the end of July, *Billboard* reported that the park was "meeting marked success," with all attractions drawing large crowds as Denver enjoyed another good tourist season.¹⁶

Krasner tried unsuccessfully to add one new attraction to Lakeside for 1938, a Lucky

Kick Donkey Ball game from the Philadelphia Toboggan Company. The game was a ball throwing game with a mechanical mule that, when hit properly, kicked out a prize.

Unfortunately, Krasner's timing was off as H.P. Schmelk of the Philadelphia Toboggan Company had already promised the exclusive contract for the attraction to Arnold Gurtler of Elitch's for 1938. A few years later, Krasner would pull off a much bigger coup against a much bigger rival than Elitch's.¹⁷

Undaunted by this minor setback, Krasner forged ahead in 1939 with his remake of Lakeside. Perhaps the biggest change at the park for 1939 was the construction of an automobile race track on the southwestern edge of the park property. The introduction of auto racing at the park was a major change from Lakeside's City Beautiful days and a sure sign the park was heading in new directions. Krasner also added a new restaurant on the north side of the Tower called the Gayway Inn. Two of the most notable decorative features of the new restaurant were a large, multi-colored fluorescent light fixture that ran the length of the ceiling and an ornate back bar that Krasner had saved from Denver's Union Station. Krasner told Billboard that 1939 was his best year at the park so far.¹⁸

With every change at the park seemingly leading to increased business, Krasner spent an estimated \$95,000 on improvements for 1940. The baseball field was finally dismantled, giving way to a parking lot that could accommodate 8,000 cars. The race track was expanded, with a second grandstand added and the curves on the track banked higher than they had been previously. Inside the park itself, the old seaplanes on the circle swing were replaced with stainless steel rocket ship shaped cars. The new ride joined the Roll-O-Plane, which was added in 1939, and the Octopus, which was added in 1938, as some of the newest and most thrilling rides at the park. The Denver and Rio Grande Western Railroad continued working on the

miniature railroad as well, installing a new block signal and building a new tunnel, said to resemble the Moffat Tunnel. According to *Billboard*, eighty percent of the riders on the miniature railroad were adults.¹⁹

The most thrilling change at the park for 1940, however, was the Cyclone, Lakeside's new roller coaster. Edward Vettel who, along with his brother Erwin, was among the country's premier roller coaster builders in the 1930s and 1940s, designed the massive wooden coaster, which replaced the Derby. Benjamin Krasner had spent a great deal of time touring amusement parks in the late 1930s as he planned what he wanted to do at Lakeside, and he was particularly impressed by the Zephyr coaster at Pontchartrain Beach in New Orleans. He contacted Vettel, who had designed the Zephyr, and asked him to design a coaster for his park. One reporter later wrote that the Cyclone was the "biggest, scariest, loopest and queasiest" coaster Vettel had built to that point. Vettel himself said at the time, "I don't know what we'll do with the younger generation. You just can't seem to give them a coaster with dips deep enough nor curves sharp and daring enough to scare them."²⁰

The eighty-five foot high Cyclone "brought a new level of thrills and excitement" to Lakeside according to the National Amusement Park Historical Association. Riders left the station and traveled through a dark, 200-foot-long tunnel before emerging to climb the eight-five feet to the coaster's first drop, which then sent them on a dizzying route of twists and turns, rises and falls that ran over 4,300 feet. The coaster's station was built to fit with the rest of the park's new Art Deco look, and like all of the other rides, it was given its own ticket booth, a curvilinear glass block building. On the platform was an "inverted ziggurat-like" booth for the operator. For many years customers could ride the Cyclone as many times as they wanted by simply handing additional money to the operator in the booth without ever getting out of their seat. The

first ride cost fifteen cents, and additional rides were ten cents each. Large red levers on the platform operated the train's brakes and a light-up board above the tunnel entrance showed waiting riders where on the track the cars from the previous train were at the moment. The finishing touch at the station was the cast-iron handrail, complete with miniature coaster cars and riders pressed into the design. As with all of the other Art Deco buildings at the park, the Cyclone station was covered in neon lights. The Cyclone's grand opening on May 17, 1940, put Lakeside at the top of coaster enthusiast's lists both locally and nationally for many years, with it being consistently ranked among the best wooden coasters in the country for decades. One writer later pointed out that it also made Lakeside the winner of the roller coaster wars in Denver for more than two decades, until Elitch's built its Twister roller coaster in 1964.²¹

By 1940, Krasner had also started hosting a dizzying number of special events at the park in order to draw even more customers. In August, a Pageant of Youth, sponsored by the North Denver Civic Association, drew 4,000 people and culminated with the crowning of Miss North Denver. A series of college nights throughout the summer ended on September 4 with the crowning of Miss Colorado Co-Ed. The park also hosted several special dances and even a free circus that summer. Business was up by fourteen percent over the previous year, according to *Billboard*, and Krasner even kept the park open an extra week. The special events proved so popular that Krasner continued them for the 1941 and 1942 seasons. By 1942, *Billboard* noted that the college nights were "well plugged" at all colleges in Colorado and drew many students. At the end of the year, as he readied for the 1941 season, Krasner announced that he would continue his renovation program at Lakeside into the next year.²²

Generally speaking, the financial situation at Lakeside by the 1940s was dramatically better than it had been in the last years of the 1920s as the park enjoyed its renewed popularity.

But, some of the old issues from the park's past still lingered. The long-standing issue of segregation at the park was finally exposed to the public on August 23, 1940, when the *Colorado Statesmen*, a black newspaper, reported that Mr. and Mrs. Robert Barber, staff members of the *Kansas City Call*, were barred from entering Lakeside. The newspaper reported that park officials stated that "Negroes are not allowed in the amusement section, the dance hall, or the swimming pool." Segregation at Lakeside dated back to opening day in 1908, and even as the neighborhoods around the park changed in the 1920s the ban on black customers remained in effect. Lakeside was not alone in its policy. Although blacks made up only 2.4% of Denver's population in 1920, segregation was seemingly the rule almost everywhere in the city—pools, theaters, military posts, clubs, and restaurants. In the 1920s, the Ku Klux Klan rose to great political power in Denver. By 1925, Denver Mayor Benjamin Stapleton, Governor Clarence Morley, and U.S. Senator Rice Means were among Colorado's politically powerful Klan members. It was common to see crosses burning at night on Ruby Hill in Denver and South Table Mountain in Golden during these years. And, in 1925, during the height of their power, the Klan held one of their rallies at Lakeside, which thousands of members attended.²³

And yet, Lakeside was widely known as a place where black bands were allowed to perform. In the late 1970s, historian Corrinne Bailey Hunt recorded an oral history with Elitch Gardens owner Jack Gurtler, grandson of John Mulvihill. In the oral history, Gurtler made only two statements concerning Elitch's long-time rival, Lakeside. One was that he believed it was not as well kept as Elitch's was by the 1930s and 1940s. The other statement, made with some distaste, was that black bands were allowed to play in the El Patio Ballroom. Gurtler seemingly ignored the fact that the same was true of the Trocadero at Elitch's (and was true of amusement parks throughout the country as well). Management apparently saw no contradiction in allowing

black bands to play the ballroom while banning blacks from actually patronizing the park. And, blacks were the only group excluded at Lakeside, especially as the neighborhoods around the park became populated with Jewish, Italian, and Russian families. The publicity from the Barber incident must have proved too much, however, as the segregationist entrance policy was quietly dropped soon after in every area of the park except the swimming pool. The pool remained segregated until the day it closed in 1964 or 1965, not an uncommon occurrence for amusement park swimming pools.²⁴

While Benjamin Krasner was busily turning Lakeside into an Art Deco paradise, rival Elitch's was undergoing its own changes. John Mulvihill died in 1930 and his son-in-law, Arnold Gurtler, took over as president and general manager. Gurtler's new slogan for his park was "Come to Elitch Gardens where a quarter can buy a day of dreams!" One of Gurtler's first changes was replacing the solid wooden fence around the park with a wire fence so that the public could see all of the fun things to do in the park as they passed by on the street. Gurtler also continued his father-in-law's expansion of Mary Elitch's famous flower beds. And, at a time when Lakeside was turning its athletic field into a parking lot, Gurtler revived and expanded John Elitch's original baseball field on the southwest corner of the park grounds in order to accommodate semi-professional teams, including one sponsored by Elitch's. Like Krasner, Gurtler worked with MCA to get big bands at the Trocadero because they drew the customers. Overall the competition between Lakeside and Elitch's was usually friendly, in part because they drew different groups of customers, but that was not always the case. In 1954, filming began in Denver on "The Glenn Miller Story," about the life of the famous bandleader, who had grown up and attended college in Colorado. Portions of the movie, starring Jimmy Stewart and June Allison, were filmed at the Trocadero Ballroom at Elitch's, even though Miller never performed

there. Miller had, however, played at Lakeside, a fact that remained a sore subject with the Gurtler family more than a decade after the fact.²⁵

The bands at the El Patio Ballroom remained as popular as ever as the park went through change after change, and Krasner continued to book as many famous bands as he could. Phil Harris, the popular bandleader on “The Jack Benny Program” and star of his own radio show, played the park twice. When Harris returned to Lakeside for a one night engagement in 1939, two years after his first appearance there, *The Denver Post* reported that the park charged the lowest price it had ever set for a one night band attraction in an effort to allow as many people as possible to see the popular band leader and radio star. The programs at Lakeside’s and Elitch’s ballrooms proved so popular that they were even broadcast live on the radio. Elitch’s program, entitled “An Evening at the Troc,” went out live over KOA every Saturday night. Teen-ager Gene Amole, who eventually became a legend in Denver radio and a widely read columnist for the *Rocky Mountain News*, broadcast from Lakeside’s El Patio on station KYMR.²⁶

By 1940, Lakeside’s new identity as a blue collar amusement park was secure. More thrilling rides, popular restaurants, an Art Deco makeover, and a stock car race track cemented the park’s new image and allowed it to survive during a difficult period when numerous other parks around the country went bankrupt and closed. And, the customers loved it. As the 1940 season came to end, Benjamin Krasner promised to continue his remodeling of Lakeside in 1941, but he did so knowing that war might erupt at any time. Events in Europe seemed to be spiraling out of control as Adolph Hitler wreaked havoc, and many feared that war was coming.

Many in the amusement park industry wondered how the parks would fit in wartime and if people would still want to visit them. Julian Bamberger, head of Lagoon Resort in Salt Lake City, addressed the issue at the December 1940 meeting of the National Association of

Amusement Parks, Pools, and Beaches. He argued that not only would the American public still want to visit amusement parks, but that the need for escape would be greater than ever as tensions increased. Bamberger argued that operators “should not let the public down,” and that they should “as never before, give them the best we can offer...” Amusement parks offered a perfect escape from stressful times, he said. With more people returning to work and earning money, but with fewer goods to spend that money on, amusement parks were the ideal places to spend free time and excess money. Bamberger wanted the parks to play a role during the war, and both Lakeside and Elitch’s would do their best to follow his advice and assist people “in the gentle art of funmaking.”²⁷

As the world waited for what would happen next, Benjamin Krasner forged ahead with his personal life and on February 9, 1941, married Miriam Caplan of Kansas City, Missouri. After their wedding, at the B.M.H. Synagogue in Denver, the couple honeymooned in California. They eventually had one child, a daughter named Rhoda. Krasner, a proud father, renamed the lake at the park Lake Rhoda in her honor.²⁸

The outbreak of war on December 7, 1941, put a stop to normal operations at amusement parks throughout the country. Yet, World War II was a mixed time for amusement parks in general and for Lakeside in particular. Wartime rationing often made it nearly impossible for parks to keep up with anything but basic maintenance, and adding new rides was a sometimes extremely difficult objective to accomplish. But, at the same time, record crowds appeared at the parks. The war created jobs for millions of people, and with money to spend but few goods to buy, they often found their way to amusement parks for escape and relaxation, which provided both at relatively low prices. In 1943, for example, a record 43 million people visited the amusement parks on Coney Island.²⁹

The war had been underway for several months when Lakeside opened for its 1942 season. The previous season had seen business up by twelve percent, with the biggest opening week attendance in a decade. Krasner reported to *Billboard* that during the first week of the 1941 season business was up by twenty percent, but intermittent poor weather throughout the rest of the season kept the numbers down a bit. Even with the war on, park owners hoped for a good 1942 season. Articles in *Billboard* even urged park owners to make wartime blackouts a game rather than something to fear. At Lakeside, material and labor shortages caused by the war slowed down progress on Krasner's ongoing renovations, but he forged ahead with them as best he could. The park did eventually close a few attractions for the duration of the war, most notably the stock car races at the Speedway. At first races were cut to one night a week when it grew difficult to get tires for the cars, but the imposition of gasoline rationing closed the races altogether. In order to keep the race track active, Krasner teamed with promoter Johnny Atkins to stage outdoor wrestling and boxing matches. The first show, on July 4, drew a disappointingly small crowd but the two men predicted attendance would improve as the summer went on. *Billboard* reported that the matches were the first time Denver had had outdoor wrestling in many years. For the most part, however, the park attempted to operate as normally as possible. Management even advertised in *Billboard* in April 1942 for a new superintendent who needed to be "experienced, capable of handling help," and able to "take charge of twelve rides." They also needed a roller coaster operator to take charge of the one-year-old Cyclone. In addition to the new Merry-Go-Round Building that was unveiled that summer, visitors also found extensive changes in rides, according to *Billboard*, and got to enjoy the debut of the Henry Busse band at the El Patio Ballroom.³⁰

The war years were profitable for Lakeside, largely because an influx of military

personnel and war workers into the Denver area gave the park a massive new customer base. Before the war started, Denver's leaders, struggling with the effects of the Depression, realized there was money to be made in the defense industry. In 1937, the city convinced the army to locate an Air Corps training center in the area by floating \$750,000 in bonds to buy the 880 acre Agnes Memorial Sanitarium at East Sixth Avenue and Quebec Street. The city added 960 acres of land to the property, and it became Lowry Air Base. Within six years, thousands of men were on the base learning aerial techniques. The war build up was so fast and large, however, that the base was soon inadequate, and in May 1942 construction began on another base, Buckley Field, southeast of Lowry. It opened six weeks later. Fitzsimmons Army Hospital, left over from World War I, underwent an extensive renovation right before the war. Other military installations, including the Rocky Mountain Arsenal, the Remington Denver Ordnance Plant, and even the Carothers-Clark Egg Dehydration Plant, all employed tens of thousands of people. All of the war work transformed Denver into a city facing a huge labor shortage, and people looking for work flooded the city.³¹

In addition to war workers, Denver was also inundated with soldiers. Aside from the air bases, soldiers also were stationed and trained at Camp George West in Golden, Fort Logan on the southwestern edge of Denver, and the Medical Supply Depot at Thirty-Eighth and York. An estimated four million servicemen and women passed through Denver during World War II. And, Denver tried to be a good host. USO clubs sprang up through the city. Private individuals greeted trains and took soldiers out to eat at local restaurants. Firemen were known to stop people bound for the mountains for the day in order to convince them to take along bored soldiers who had nothing to do.³²

To help transport the large numbers of new people, and to ease problems caused by gas

and rubber shortages, the city also revived the tramway system. And, conveniently, both Lakeside and Elitch's were on tramway lines. By 1943, the number of military personnel located in Denver was up dramatically, and *Billboard* wrote that both parks expected "hefty play" for the summer in large part because of their locations on the tramway lines. As was the case in past years, Lakeside heavily promoted the bands in its ballroom, especially with some of its attractions closed for the war. At Lakeside, management gave between 3,000 and 6,000 tickets to soldiers each week during the war. The tickets allowed for free entry to the park and entitled the bearer to pay half price for rides. Even after the war ended, Krasner continued the policy for the 1946 season, giving 3,000 tickets a week to the local USO. Elitch's management went a bit farther, and every soldier in uniform was admitted to the park and allowed on every ride for free for the duration of the war.³³

During the war, crowds at Lakeside even had their chance to show their disgust with Adolph Hitler. Management attached a picture of the German leader to an outside wall of the Funhouse, across the walkway from the train station, and allowed guests to throw baseballs at it. The park, though, tried to stay focused on fun, the eventual end of the war, and the bright future that was sure to follow. The park's slogan for 1942 was "For Fun in '42, Just Make it Lakeside." One advertisement from 1944 stated that "Lakeside looks ahead to the end of the war..." and the completion of an improvement program that would make it "the greatest amusement park in the entire West." Sadly, two tragedies less than ten days apart marred the 1944 season at Denver's amusement parks. For two parks trying to provide fun and escape during a terrible war, the tragedies were grim starts to their seasons. On June 25, eighteen-year-old Bonnie Hicks of Denver was killed at Lakeside when the brakes on the Cyclone coaster failed and a fully loaded train crashed into another train at the loading platform. Seven other people were injured, but

Hicks, who was in the third car, either jumped or was thrown from the train and suffered a fatal skull fracture. Park employees William Haffner and Purlie Douglas grabbed onto the train and tried to stop it when they realized the brakes had failed, but it still managed to travel seventy-five feet past its normal stopping point. Police and park officials eventually concluded that Hicks became frightened when the ride failed to stop and jumped from it, striking a support beam before falling to the ground.³⁴

An even worse accident had occurred at Elitch's nine days earlier. On June 16, 1944, one of the worst amusement park tragedies in Denver occurred when fire broke out in the Old Mill ride. Within minutes, the fire was out of control with smoke 150 feet in the air. Six people became trapped in the ride and died when park employees and firefighters were unable to reach them. Horrified by the tragedy, many people questioned if the attraction was safe and why it had taken so long for anyone at the park to report the fire. The 135-page report from the coroner's inquest blamed the age of the attraction, ignorance, neglect, and carelessness for the tragedy, which happened on the exact site of an attraction destroyed by fire in 1914. Elitch's historian Betty Hull wrote that Arnold Gurtler heard the victims' screams until the day he died.³⁵

The war in Europe ended just before Lakeside opened for the 1945 season, but the war against Japan still raged. The highlight of the last wartime season at Lakeside was a limited time appearance by Tony Pastor and his band. The famous bandleader had recorded such juke box hits as "Let's Do It" and "Paradiddle Joy." According to *The Denver Post*, the "all season clamor" at Lakeside that year had been "We want Pastor." The *Post* reported that in his first week at the park, which ended just as peace was declared in the Pacific, crowds flocked to see the man who once had "a caddy to carry his sax case." The caddy, who had long since formed his own band, was Artie Shaw. With the war over, Pastor's appearance was a sign that the good

times at Lakeside were only going to get better. The park even managed to host its usual “flashy fireworks display” under the supervision of longtime park electrician John Flohr. Krasner reported that attendance was up twenty percent over the 1944 season.³⁶

The end of the war also brought the return of midget racing to the Speedway, though it would not resume until the 1946 season. With wartime rationing coming to end, Krasner also was free to charge forward with more remodeling at the park, and he spent \$125,000 on landscaping, painting, and other projects in time for the 1946 season. The new season got off to an interesting start as a storm dumped five inches of snow on Denver just in time for opening day, May 19, 1946. The snow did little to deter the crowds, however, who bundled up in heavy coats and turned out to watch Krasner turn on the Tower lights and officially open the park for the season. Two days later, with the snow gone, 24,000 people passed through the gates.³⁷

The Lakeside that opened on that snowy day in 1946 operated in a very different city than the one it had served before the war began. The war changed Denver immensely. The city's population boomed as military personnel remembered Denver as a friendly town and returned to it after the war in order to attend school and start families. One survey reported that as many as 92% of the military men stationed in Denver wanted to come back. The influx of newcomers, along with the return of longtime residents, transformed Denver from a “drowsy provincial city into a sprawling metropolis.” Between 1940 and 1950, Denver grew from 322,000 people to over 415,000. In 1946, the city issued a record 5,198 building permits. The fast-growing city needed new leadership with new ideas. The next year, 35-year-old Quigg Newton, who promised to reform City Hall, defeated 77-year-old, four term incumbent Mayor Benjamin Stapleton. Newton got to work quickly to implement his reform agenda, creating the Career Service Authority, redrawing City Council districts, reforming trash collection, and revamping

Denver General Hospital. Newton also reorganized the city planning office in an effort to deal with a “rapidly growing city that lacked a vision for its future...”³⁸

Many things were unclear when it came to Denver’s future, including whether or not the City Beautiful vision had a place in that future. By the mid-1940s, the City Beautiful movement had fallen on hard times in Denver, one of the few cities where it still survived. Like Lakeside, the once stately Civic Center Park, the most visible symbol of the City Beautiful movement, was surrounded by less than desirable businesses, including “bars, strip joints, and even a mortuary.” City planner Maxine Kurtz decided to take on the challenge of the park and clean it up. As part of this effort, the city tried to complete Mayor Robert Speer’s vision of surrounding it with government offices. In 1955 the new Denver Public Library opened on the southwest side of the park, followed by the Denver Art Museum. Kurtz also encouraged the clustering of new state office buildings on the east side of the park. While Speer's vision for the park was never fully completed, the clean-up and reorganization went a long way toward achieving it. The work helped reinvent Civic Center as a gathering place, just as Benjamin Krasner’s reinvention of Lakeside once again made it a thriving business.³⁹

Just as the old guard was giving way in Denver to new leaders and new ideas, two deaths in the second half of the 1940s signaled the final passing of Lakeside's early leadership. On January 8, 1947, long-time park owner and manager Philip Friederich died in a Fredericksburg, Texas hospital at the age of fifty-six from injuries he sustained in a car accident several days earlier. Two and half years later, on July 7, 1949, his uncle, William Buck, died in Denver at age eighty-nine. Friederich and Buck were the last two of Lakeside’s owners from the early days. Obituaries for both men noted that, among there many other accomplishments, they were instrumental in founding and running the park for many years even though they had not been

associated with it for a long while. Their deaths left Lakeside electrician John Flohr as the only person with any connection to its City Beautiful days still working at the park.⁴⁰

Throughout the rest of the 1940s, Krasner continued making modifications to the park in a never-ending effort to keep it thriving. With the Art Deco makeover largely complete by the end of the war, Krasner could focus his efforts on rides and attractions rather than remodeling buildings. The parking lot was paved for the first time, a move *Billboard* said would be “pleasing” to the drivers of the thousands of cars it could hold. Krasner actually had to scale back on one of his most successful ventures, the number of picnics and other special events the park hosted. Even with the vastly improved picnic facilities, the park was simply unable to handle the picnic crowds that descended on it. As a result, Krasner booked only school picnics in an effort to help the schools with their special events. Perhaps the biggest change in the final years of the 1940s came when the Shoot-the-Chutes ride disappeared from the park. Skoota Boats, newly imported from England, appeared on the lagoon that once served the Chutes. The gas powered boats were described by *The Denver Post* as “the same idea as the scooter cars—you whiz around the water bumping into other customers.” The boats were a novelty in the United States, and the only other ride like it was in New York City. The Skoota Boats were the first of several European rides that Krasner imported in the following years.⁴¹

By 1949, the pattern at both Lakeside and Ely's was well established. Constant innovation along with big-name bands seemed to be the formula by which both parks could survive. Lakeside booked famed trumpet player Sonny Dunham and pianist Frankie Carle, while Ely's had the likes of Dick Jurgens and Lawrence Welk. Redesigned landscaping, new rides, heavy advertising, and special picnics characterized both parks' business models as they competed for every customer. And, by the end of the 1940s, they were not just competing

against each other. New venues, such as the Denver area's first legal dog track, Mile High Greyhound Park in Commerce City, helped pull customers away from the amusement parks. With the new competition, Arnold Gurtler's son Jack believed that business at Elitch's would be down eight to ten percent for the 1949 season and even resorted to placing Day-Glo signs advertising Elitch's on the fronts of Denver's streetcars.⁴²

David Nasaw began his book *Going Out* observing that "They are all gone now." The stately movie theaters, baseball parks, and "amusement parks with their acres of roller coasters, tilt-a-whirls, chutes, and carousels," all had disappeared long ago. Racial issues, seedy reputations, and competition from theme parks, had driven most of the old time amusement parks out of business. Those that survived, such as Kennywood or Cedar Point, did so because "they were not linked to the central city by mass transit." The easy accessibility provided by mass transit, once a key element for an amusement park's success, had suddenly turned against them. With older customers believing that streetcars and buses allowed poorer and unrulier elements of society, who could not afford cars, easy access to the park, they fled for new venues. Yet, Lakeside, linked by streetcar to Denver until 1950 and then by bus, did survive, as did Elitch's. Why had Denver's amusement parks, especially Lakeside, defied the trend and not only survived but prospered? Benajmain Krasner's ability and willingness to adapt Lakeside to changing times and conditions clearly worked well for his amusement park, and it continued to delight and entertain when others built in the same period were no more than distant memories. With Benjamin Krasner in charge, Lakeside Amusement Park was ready for a new decade, which would come complete with its own surprising challenges, including those from a famous soon-to-be competitor.⁴³



Fig. 24 Benjamin Krasner
(Krasner Family Collection)

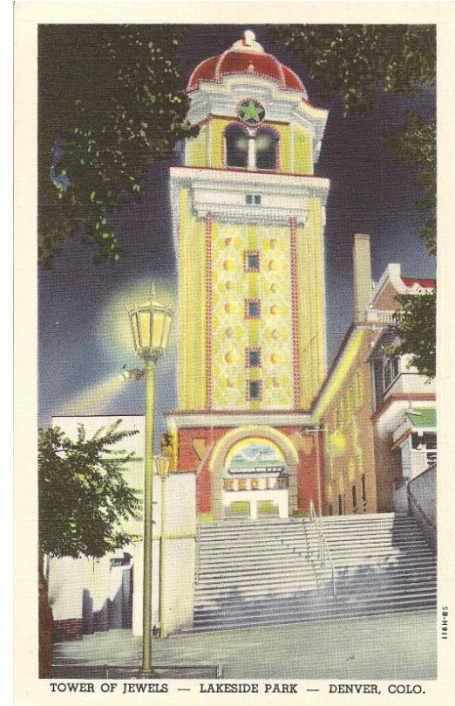


Fig. 26 The Tower of Jewels in the 1940s.



Fig. 25 Lakeside from Sheridan Boulevard
with a Denver Tramway car
passing in front, late 1940s.



Fig. 27 The new Cyclone Roller Coaster
with its Art Deco ticket booth.

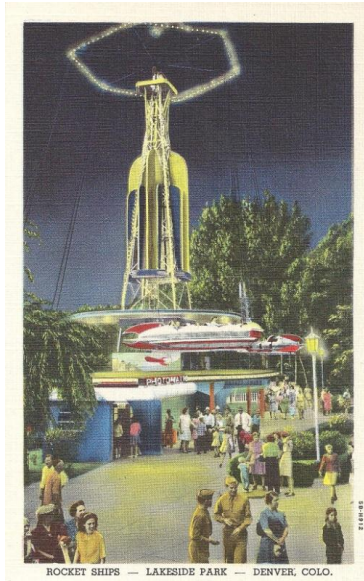


Fig. 28 The rocket ship ride.



Fig. 29 The new Merry-Go-Round building, 1942.

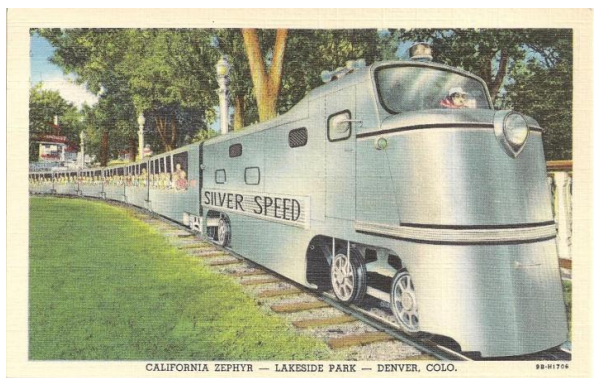


Fig. 30 The diesel engine and cars on the Lake Shore Railway, 1950.



Fig. 31 Exterior of the El Patio Ballroom after the Art Deco makeover.



Fig. 32 Interior of El Patio, 1940s.



Fig. 33 Lakeside's auto entrance on Sheridan Boulevard. The Speedway is visible through the gate.
(DPL, Richard Crowther Collection)

CHAPTER SEVEN:
LAKESIDE SPEEDWAY, THE MIDGET YEARS

Popular as the big name bands may have been at Lakeside, a few of them began to notice a puzzling phenomenon at Lakeside Amusement Park on Sunday nights in the late 1940s. The big crowds that had jammed the El Patio Ballroom every other night of the week suddenly were nowhere to be found on Sunday nights, yet the park was still doing a booming business. Even though they may not have been in the ballroom listening to the bands playing there, customers were by no means abandoning the park. Rather, they were packing the seats at another one of the park's attractions that saw its popularity surge in the years after World War II. That spot was the Lakeside Speedway.

The biggest, loudest, and most visible sign of just how much Lakeside Amusement Park had changed from its City Beautiful days, and just how different its customer base had become, came in 1938 with the construction of the Lakeside Speedway, a one-fifth mile oval race track on the south side of the park. Within a matter of weeks of its grand opening, the Speedway became one of the top attractions at Lakeside, consistently drawing upwards of six or seven thousand customers every Sunday in the early years of its existence. As the race track became more established, it was not uncommon to find ten or eleven thousand people in the stands on race night at the peak of its popularity. Lakeside had been becoming a more working class-oriented amusement park for nearly twenty years before the Speedway opened, but the race track did more than almost anything else to cement its new reputation. As driver Wayne Arner said, the Speedway was “very blue collar.”¹

The first race cars at Lakeside Speedway in 1938 were midgets, which were then rapidly gaining in popularity. The earliest midget racers, built by teenagers for the most part, first appeared around 1914 in California. The cars essentially small were replicas of regulation-sized race cars with wheel bases of about sixty inches and weighing around 500 pounds (they would later increase in weight to close to 1,000 pounds). The early cars never amounted to much more than a hobby for those who owned them, and World War I temporarily put an end to the fledgling sport. Midget racing revived in the 1920s, but was, midget racing historian John Fox writes, “disorganized at best.” It did not truly take off until the 1930s. In 1933, two Californians who built midget cars, Ken Brenneman and “Hap” Woodman, met and quickly realized that they were not alone. People throughout the state were building their own midget cars and looking for places to race them. Brenneman and Woodman organized the midget builders and convinced the managers of the Santa Ana Municipal Stadium and the Oakland Speedway to allow them to hold races. The early midget races were little more than sideshows sandwiched between the more elaborate motorcycle and large car races, but despite their shaky start the midget racers steadily gained in popularity throughout California. The number of teenagers building their own cars and entering them in competitions grew rapidly. With the sport seemingly operating on a permanent basis near the end of 1933, construction of the cars became big business and several of the early drivers, including Brenneman, went into the business of building them rather than racing them.²

Finding reliable engines for the midgets was a special concern for drivers in the early days of the sport. Builders tried to use various motorcycle, automobile and marine engines in their cars, none of which, according to Fox, performed exceptionally well all the time. By the mid-1930s, a few drivers began exploring the possibility of building an engine designed specifically for midgets. They turned to Fred Offenhauser to solve their problem. Offenhauser

had gone to work for Harry Miller, a Los Angeles-based engine builder in 1913. When Miller went bankrupt during the Depression, Offenhauser purchased his shop and engine designs and went into business for himself. He and his designer, Leo Goossen, designed a ninety-seven cubic inch, eight valve, double overhead cam engine specifically for midgets. It became the most desirable and sought after engine for the cars. Car owners were even known to sell only the bodies of old cars equipped with Offy engines, as they came to be known, keeping the engine to put in their next car. At Lakeside, as at race tracks around the country, Offy-powered midgets were very often the champs.³

In 1934, oilman Earl Gilmore built Gilmore Stadium in Los Angeles and opened it to the midget racers. Having a permanent home secured the sport's popularity in California and allowed it to start its spread across the United States. By the end of 1934, organized midget racing had reached New York, New Jersey, Ohio, Wisconsin, Missouri, and Illinois. Throughout 1935, midget racing continued its march through the country, even reaching as far as Hawaii. It reached Denver twice. The first time, in 1935, turned out to be a bust. It came to Denver for the second, and much more successful time, in 1937.⁴

Denver already had a long tradition of automobile racing when the midget racers first arrived in 1935. According to historian Louisa Ward Arps, in the early days of racing, automobile owners raced on tracks all over the city and even up and down Federal Boulevard or South Logan Street. Perhaps the most famous of the early tracks was at Overland Park in southwest Denver. Originally named Jewell Park, the Denver Circle Railroad built the area increase use of the line. The park included a one-mile oval shaped dirt track. The first races at Overland were horse races, followed by an attempt at bicycle racing. The sand in the track prevented the bicycles from getting anywhere, but it was perfect for motorcycle racing, which

became the next big draw there. But, from the time the first cars took to the streets of Denver, their owners raced them at Overland. In the early days, mechanics often built their own cars and engines, which were sometimes nothing more than wagons with two-cylinder engines attached. As cars became more sophisticated, the stunts attempted at Overland became crazier. Ivy Baldwin, who had taken part in hot air balloon ascensions at Elitch's and Manhattan Beach, attempted to tie a balloon to a Stanley Steamer before having the car race at top speed around the track. The scheme bombed when Baldwin's gas generator failed on the first day and filled the balloon until it burst on the second day. Famed driver Barney Oldfield, the first man to drive a car at sixty miles per hour, even attempted to race an airplane around the Overland track, but called it off after the plane did one loop and then encountered mechanical problems. Oldfield's stunt started the era of airplane demonstrations at Overland however, and in November 1910 three Wright biplanes visited the park. One of the pilots, Arch Hoxsey, even flew one of the planes all the way to Lakeside and back. After World War I, the City of Denver bought Overland and turned it into an automobile camp. The last big race at Overland was in July 1925, when the Denver Press Club sponsored a one hundred mile race and offered \$10,000 in prizes. When Denver closed the auto camp in 1930, it also tore up the race track to make way for the golf course that now occupies the site.⁵

Overland may have been gone, but the sport of automobile racing had taken hold in Denver. Tracks soon sprang up everywhere. One of the biggest was the DuPont Speedway in Commerce City, which had a half-mile dirt oval and a five-eighths mile paved oval track. The School of Mines in Golden had a one-fifth mile dirt oval track constructed at its stadium in 1938. Another one-fifth mile dirt track was located near Higley Airport at Twenty-Sixth Avenue and Oneida Street in 1936. By the late 1930s there were tracks as far as away as Akron, Alamosa,

Colorado Springs, Glenwood Springs, Greeley, Pueblo, Sterling, and Trinidad.⁶

Billy Betteridge, one of the pioneers of California midget racing, staged a midget exhibition at DuPont Speedway in Commerce City in 1933, but the first true midget races in Denver took place in 1935 at Lakeside Amusement Park on the Bundes Turnfest stadium grounds. The event's organizers scheduled a total of six programs for the summer, with eleven races per program. Other than a few articles in the *Rocky Mountain News*, no records of the races exist. The first races were held on June 19. The *News* reported that the races had "the spectators on their toes thruout [sic] the evening" although only ten drivers competed the first night. Lou Erwin, the only local driver, was the crowd favorite and it proved to be the biggest disappointment of the evening when, after doing well in the time trials, he bent a wheel and pulled a tire on his Bugatti-powered car, eliminating him from the rest of the races. Pat Cunningham, a driver from California, was an experienced midget racer and the odds-on favorite to win the final twenty-lap event after winning four races prior to it. During the last race, however, the chain drive on his car broke and Bill Werner, driving the Henderson Special, won. Jimmy Robins came in second, followed by Salt Lake City driver Spec Hemminger. The other drivers at the first event included Chuck Boyer, Cliff Moyer, Swede Williams, Jim Roberts, and Theodore Hemberger.⁷

Two days later, the drivers ran the second series of races at Lakeside, and another local driver, Romey Pedroza, joined the list of those participating. Pedroza's driving career was short-lived, but he gained greater fame for his mechanical expertise, especially with the Offenhauser engines. Cunningham was again the odds-on favorite to win the final event as he "puffed away nonchalantly on his cigaret [sic] and pushed the throttle to the floorboard" to win four of the ten races. But, as with the first round, during the final twenty-five lap race his car "sputtered,

popped once or twice and called it quits for the night,” and he lost to Jimmy Robins. In fact, Robins was the only driver who finished the final race after all the others cars developed engine trouble that kept them from completing it. The *Rocky Mountain News* described the midgets as “roaring motor bugs of speed, spitting blue fire in the straight-away and skidding perilously around curves,” but with so few competitors they failed to hold the public’s attention. After running the first two programs, the organizers shut down the races for a few weeks so that the drivers could revamp the track.⁸

A brief article in the *Rocky Mountain News* on July 12, 1935, describing the new Lakeside track, implied that fans found the old track boring, and assured readers that “for the benefit of cash customers demanding a few more thrills” the track was far more hazardous. The changes the drivers made included lengthening it to accommodate shorter curves and increasing “its trickiness.” When the races resumed on July 13, five more cars joined the field, including another local driver, Ted Dumbauld, bringing the total to fifteen. The “roaring bugs” may have returned in force, but the *News* never reported the results of any of the races at Lakeside.⁹

At the next week’s races at Lakeside, Pat Cunningham remained the favorite to win. The newspaper described him as “heavy footed and fearing nothing” once he was in the cockpit of his car, which for the July 18 race was a newer and faster car. Given the amount of coverage he received, Cunningham obviously was the star among the “nerveless drivers” at Lakeside. The same field of drivers from the week before competed, joined by a few new ones, though the paper failed to include their names. Fans also witnessed the first midget racing accident in Denver history when Ted Dumbauld’s Bugatti-powered car flipped over head first. Dumbauld was not seriously injured, but the wreck eliminated him from the race and gave the victory to Cunningham. The *News* reported, with some uncertainty, that the races were expected to return

the following week with seven drivers from Omaha joining. But, even the redesigned track failed to attract increased attention and Lakeside's first attempt at midget racing proved disappointing. With few cars and drivers, the public seems to have quickly lost interest in the new sport, and the newspaper coverage of the races all but disappeared. In fact, baseball and softball games at Lakeside received more coverage in the newspaper than did the final four midget races. In the space of two weeks, the *News* ran seven articles on the ball games compared to less than half that for the races. Heavy rains that summer may have also kept customers away from the races, as was the case with several other major sporting events. When the amusement park closed at the end of the summer, the first attempt at organized midget racing in Denver ended as well.¹⁰

Two years later, promoters decided to make a second attempt at bringing midget racing to Denver. When it returned, on May 9, 1937, it was at Merchant's Park, the old baseball field at Center Avenue and Broadway. In its second go round the sport proved much more popular than it had been two years earlier. One of the biggest differences the second time around was that a "real promoter," Tom Holden, got behind the races. Holden had been running big car races in Kansas prior to arriving at Merchant's. The midget track at Merchant's Park was a one-fifth mile dirt oval, with a 90-degree turn at what was home plate. The new track was popular, but not everyone was happy with it. A growing number of drivers, disappointed with the small engines allowed at Merchant's Park, wanted a new track where they could use bigger and more powerful motors. Midget driver Lloyd Axel and his racing partner Vic Felt became the leaders of the drivers seeking a new track. Axel happened to be a friend of Lakeside's new owner, Benjamin Krasner, and he convinced Krasner that Lakeside would be an ideal spot for a second track in the Denver area. It was not difficult for Axel to win Krasner over. Drivers Jerry Brown and Sonny

Coleman remembered that Krasner loved race cars, and was thrilled with the idea of once again having them at his park. As soon as Krasner gave his approval, Axel and his friends built the one-fifth mile track in “no time at all.” Lakeside Speedway opened on April 24, 1938.¹¹

The Speedway was built just west of the park’s baseball field on the site of the arena built for the German-American Bundes Turnfest in 1913, the same spot the 1935 races had taken place. Portions of the grandstands from the arena still stood on the site, which when enlarged and covered served as ideal seating for the races. The track was dirt for the first season of racing. There was a small guardrail around it to keep the cars from crashing into the stands. The guardrail was initially one rail high, but by 1953 it had three rails on it, which were supported by wooden posts driven deep into the ground. The flagman’s area at the start/finish line (which was hit by cars more than once over the years) was protected by the same type of guardrail, and the track eventually added a green/yellow/red light system at the end of each straightaway to alert drivers to track conditions. The pits were located at the south end of the stands and separated from the track by a board fence. The entrance to the pits from the track was at the end of turn two, while the entrance to the track from the pits was located at the end of the front straight in turn one. The main grandstands were on the west side of the track, which was also the location of the announcers’ and race officials’ booths. The northeast stands were part of the original Bundes Turnfest arena, and the announcer’s booth there, located above turn four of the race track, served as a music booth. Krasner made various additions to the grandstands over the years that he operated the Speedway, most of them in the same covered style as the original grandstands and with backs on the seats for comfort. In the late 1950s, Krasner filled in a small portion of the pits with open bleacher seating. The main entrance to the Speedway was on the north end, where the ticket booth and main concession stand were located. There were

additional concession stands south of the east stands and in the pits. The car entrance was on the south end of the track. Eventually, a heavy chain link fence was installed all along the front of the grandstands to protect spectators from flying debris, a common hazard at the races.¹²

The track itself was, as driver Bob Olds called it, “a pain in the ass.” At only one-fifth of a mile long, the track was both short and narrow, although not as narrow as some other tracks the same size. It was a challenge to drivers, especially those who were not familiar with it. The track ran from north to south, with the back straightaway going downhill while the front straightaway went uphill. The north turn of the track was banked, and the south turn was flat, which was unusual as most tracks in the country either had two banked or two flat turns. Sonny Coleman said that the story at the time of the track’s construction was that workers dug down to build the south turn and were doing the same on the north turn when they ran into an underground river, preventing them from having two flat turns. In order to take advantage of the unusual track design, cars needed to run high on the north turn of the track and slow down on the south turn and a lot of accidents, according to Leroy Byers, happened when drivers were coming out of the south turn. Very few drivers ever mastered passing on the south turn, said Coleman, but if a driver could stay alongside the car he wanted to pass while in the south turn, he “had him beat.” The width of the track allowed for passing, but it was, according to drivers, a tough track to pass on. But, according to driver Charlie Gottschalck, for the drivers who learned to race at Lakeside, it was an easy track to drive on. In fact, many drivers said, learning on Lakeside’s challenging track made any other track the men raced on easier for them. Gene Pastor was one of the few drivers who remembered Lakeside as anything but a difficult track. To him, it was a “fun track.” Pastor was only seventeen when he rolled a midget at Lakeside in 1958, well under the minimum driving age of twenty-one. Pastor’s father was well aware of the fact that his son

was underage, remembered Wayne Arner. But, all of the other drivers were afraid of the elder Pastor so they let his son go ahead and race. Sonny Coleman also remembered the Speedway as a fun but challenging track.¹³

The rules of the park applied to the Speedway, including the rule against allowing blacks inside. There was, however, one exception to this. Frank Buford, a black pit man at the Speedway, had a special dispensation to get through the gates. Wayne Arner called Buford a “knowledgeable and important guy,” and his presence in the pits was deemed a necessity by many drivers. He worked with several championship winners, including in 1942, 1947, and 1948, before eventually becoming flagman for the RMMRA in 1962, “pioneering in an era when blacks in motorsports were more a rarity than today” writes Bill Hill. Bob Campbell remembered that his father, driver Foster “Foss” Campbell, played a large part in getting permission for Buford to enter the park, essentially forcing management to let him in. Most drivers remembered Buford as the only black employee at Lakeside Amusement Park at the time. Women also were excluded from the pits until the 1980s. The one exception was Krasner’s daughter Rhoda, who sometimes worked the concession stand located in the pits in later years. Even the Powder Puff girls, who raced cars belonging to their husbands or boyfriends, had to stay out of the pits for many years when they did race.¹⁴

Lloyd Axel won the opening race in 1938 in front of a crowd of 3,000 people. As news of the new track spread, the crowds grew larger with each week’s races. According to racing historian Bill Hill, Krasner became a “staunch supporter” of the sport and the fact that the races drew huge crowds was certainly beneficial to the amusement park. With their close proximity, Merchant’s Park and Lakeside became competitors in the midget racing business. By July, it was obvious that Lakeside was outdrawing Merchant’s Park on Sundays, so the Sunday races at

Merchant's stopped. Promoter Tom Holden tried Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, without success. In mid-August he halted the races at Merchant's Park and waited for Lakeside's season to end in September, after which he staged eight more races at the old track. Even with the heavy competition from Lakeside, and the break in the season it caused, Holden considered Merchant Park's 1938 season a success. It was the last successful one it would have.¹⁵

The races at Lakeside Speedway proved immediately popular with both the park's regular customers and racing fans around the state. Unlike the earlier attempt in 1935, in 1938 the races were better promoted and organized, and there was a much bigger field of drivers, all of which served to increase interest in the venture. One of the earliest advertisements for the Speedway proclaimed that there were "plenty of thrills when these speed-mad drivers race for first place." Watching the races became a popular Sunday afternoon and evening activity for families, who would go to church in the morning and then spend the rest of the day at Lakeside watching the cars. Interestingly, admission to the races was forty cents while admission to the park was only ten cents. With the surging popularity of the races, Krasner invested an additional \$25,000 in the Speedway in 1939. The track was paved for the first time, and the newly enlarged grandstands were capable of holding 5,000 spectators. On opening day of the season, May 14, a standing room only crowd packed the Speedway's newly enlarged grandstands. Two weeks later, five of the thirty-seven Offenhauser-powered midgets that existed in the United States appeared at Lakeside, including one owned by Denverite Judd Pickup. It was the first Offy-powered car in Denver. Spectators watching the speed-mad drivers that summer got to see one of the most remarkable accidents that had taken place up to that point. Driver Bob Vorbeck was attempting to pass another car when he hit one of the hay bales that lined the track, which sent him bouncing back into the car he was trying to pass. Vorbeck's car flipped several times, at one point

launching twenty feet into the air, before coming to a stop. Incredibly, Vorbeck was uninjured. After an exciting run, the racing season ended on October 1 with a one hundred-lap finale.¹⁶

The American Automobile Association (AAA) also became the first sanctioning body for the midget races that year. No true sanctioning existed in Denver at the time, so, according to Bill Hill, it was easy for AAA to “get in.” The next year, though, the racers voted to remove AAA and formed their own club, the Rocky Mountain Midget Racing Association (RMMRA), which became the new sanctioning body. Lloyd Axel was elected the first president.

Unable to compete with the larger, popular, and more organized Lakeside Speedway, Merchant’s Park lost the race track war as fans and drivers abandoned the old ball field in favor of Lakeside and DuPont Speedways. Tom Holden, who was both promoter and flagman at Merchant’s Park, struggled to come up with a winning program for the 1939 season, but in September he gave up and midget racing never returned to the field. A big part of Lakeside’s appeal, aside from the quality of the track, was its location. Many of the drivers lived in North Denver or the northern suburbs of Denver, and, as Foster Campbell’s son Bob said, Lakeside Speedway’s location was “convenient” if drivers needed to go home and get parts or other things during races.¹⁷

According to most of the drivers who raced at Lakeside, the Speedway helped carry the amusement park through a number of very tough years in the 1930s and 1940s, with one driver estimating that the park earned between \$100,000 and \$300,000 per year from the track alone. And, according to the drivers, Krasner knew exactly how important the Speedway was. Leroy Byers, a well-known midget racing photographer and historian, said that Krasner willingly paid appearance money in order to get big drivers to race at the Speedway. In 1947, for example, the Jimmie James Team appeared at Lakeside. James owned three black midgets, numbered 28, 38,

and 48, and hauled them on a matching black trailer. More than sixty years later, other midget drivers remembered the impressive sight of those three cars and their matching trailer appearing at Lakeside. Out-of-towners drove two of the cars, with pre-war midget champion Ernie Gessell driving 48 and Californian Johnnie Parsons driving 38. Denver driver Aaron Woodard was fortunate enough to drive the 28 car. The appearance of the Jimmie James Team at Lakeside also resulted in a big article in the *Denver Post*, which not only promoted the appearance but the Speedway (and the amusement park) as well. The James cars were in town for three days, and after Gessell and Parsons lost their first races, Woodard got permission from Krasner to go out during the day and set the cars up to race on the Speedway's difficult track, providing better entertainment for the crowds in the stands. Driver Wayne Arner remembered Krasner as a "mover and shaker" who used whatever connections he may have had with the *Post* to make sure his park and Speedway were promoted heavily.¹⁸

Lakeside's location, and dominance, sometimes meant that it required little effort on Krasner's part to get drivers to the Speedway. For drivers heading from the Midwest to the West Coast, and for drivers from the West heading east, Lakeside was not only a convenient stopping point along their routes but was also almost the only track at which they could stop. And, as Lakeside Speedway's reputation grew, it became a destination rather than simply a stopping point. Drivers coming from the West Coast even made sure to carry canvas to cover their cars with as they drove over Loveland Pass in order to prevent gravel and rocks from damaging them. As driver Gene Pastor remembered, the track was "talked about all over the country."¹⁹

The track also became the undoing of many out of state drivers who were used to what Pastor called "pretty tracks." Arrogant out of town drivers believed that Lakeside would be an easy track for them to win on. According to Wayne Arner, they referred to it as "picking

cherries” because they expected to go in, handily defeat local drivers, and win points and prize money. As both Arner and Leroy Byers said, however, the “local drivers suckered them.” They simply could not do things at Lakeside Speedway that they were able to do at other tracks. Local drivers knew, for example, that they needed to slow down on the south turn of the track and stay to the inside. Out of town drivers would see them doing this and mistakenly believe that they could pass the locals by speeding up and staying high on the turn, which resulted in most of them spinning out, allowing the local drivers to pull ahead. Local drivers also knew how to place the weight in their car to take advantage of the Speedway track, something out of state drivers did not learn until they had been at the track for two or three weeks. Locals also knew how to modify the chassis of their car to handle the track (as Leroy Byers said, Lakeside “didn’t take much of a motor but you had to have a chassis you could handle”) and what tires to put on their cars (Avon Junior Formula 1). The key, according to Sonny Coleman, was the tires. Tires were so important because the asphalt at the Speedway was different from what drivers at bigger tracks knew, and the time of day and position of the sun further altered the consistency of the track as it heated and cooled. Dempsey Wilson, a big-name midget driver, appeared at Lakeside and simply could not get his car to run until a few locals helped him out with some tips on how to set up his car. A few other “smart drivers,” as Coleman referred to them, figured it out as well, but they were rare. As late as the 1970s and 1980s, big-name race car drivers came to Lakeside for the Rocky Mountain Classic as they sought points in their run for the national championships. Almost without exception they failed at Lakeside. The local fans loved it.²⁰

Krasner was certainly willing to pay to get famous drivers to the Speedway, but he was just as generous, if not more so, to the local drivers. Sonny Coleman said that if not for Krasner and his generosity, half of the midgets in Denver would never have been able to run for a full

season. Coleman, Bob Olds, and Leroy Byers vividly remembered Krasner helping out the local drivers as much as possible. It was not uncommon, according to Olds, for Krasner to slip a driver twenty or fifty dollars to help keep their cars running. In some cases, Krasner even went so far as to buy new motors for drivers who needed them, usually loaning them money and almost always getting paid back. Miles Spickler raced a Kurtis Kraft car that originally had a Drake engine in it, which was essentially a souped up motorcycle engine. He blew the engine at Colorado Springs and, unable to buy a new one outright, started collecting parts to build a new engine. In 1947 he put an Offy engine in the car, but even it soon needed parts to keep running. Anxious to have Spickler and his car at the Speedway, Krasner loaned him the money to make the necessary repairs. Krasner even loaned Lloyd Axel the money to buy a new car (perhaps as much as \$3,800) based on just a phone call that Axel made from California. At the same time, according to Wayne Arner, Krasner “never cheated anybody,” and when a driver won a race on race night “Ben paid what he said” the prize money for the night would be. All drivers remembered Krasner’s heavy involvement with every aspect of the Speedway. As Bob Olds recalled, Krasner “ran the pay window, he ran the pit gate, he knew what was coming in and going out.” Krasner’s generosity and honesty earned him enormous respect from the drivers. And, while Krasner enjoyed the sport and respected the drivers, he also had an additional motivation behind the way he operated the Speedway—keeping the cars in running order and the drivers happy also kept the races competitive, which only served to increase the crowds at the Speedway (and hopefully the amusement park) every Sunday night.²¹

Many famous drivers passed through the Lakeside Speedway in the years it operated (including Al and Bobby Unser), and many of the men who began their racing careers there went on to become famous drivers in other parts of the country. But, two of the men who dominated

the sport at the Speedway became true legends in Denver racing. Lloyd Axel was a Denver native, born in June 1905. Axel's first entry into automobile racing came in 1925 at Ord, Nebraska, when he drove a regulation size car owned by Vic Felt. Over the next twelve years, Axel won main events at trace tracks all over the country. In 1937, midget driver Burton Spickler let Axel drive his midget at Merchant's Park. Axel fell in love with the "Lilliputian racecars," so much so that he was the leader when the racers defected to Lakeside in 1938. In 1940, Axel partnered with Denver race fan Herman Mapelli, owner of Mapelli Meat Company, who bought an Offy engine for Axel's new car. Axel went on to win the 1940 and 1941 Rocky Mountain Midget Racing Association championships. He also came in second to Louie Unser (part of the famous racing family) in the 1941 Pike's Peak Auto Hill Climb. When the 1942 season was cut short by war, Axel sold his two race cars and devoted himself to the war effort while also making sure that the RMMRA was ready to resume racing when the war ended.²²

Axel resumed midget racing with the 1946 season, purchasing two new cars, but he never won another championship. In 1946, he came in second behind Johnny Tolan. Axel traveled for the next two years, and when he returned to Denver in 1950 he formed his own club, the Mile High Racing Association and helped run the rival Englewood Speedway, much to the dismay of many longtime Denver racers. After one season, the MHRA folded and Axel largely retired from active racing. He died in 1971. He is remembered as the bad guy of Lakeside racing, the consequence of winning so much of the time.²³

Johnny Tolan, another Colorado native, "probably did more to put Denver midget racing in front of a national audience than any other single competitor from the Mile High State," writes Bill Hill. Tolan was born in Victor, Colorado in 1918 and eventually moved with his family to Denver, where he became a football star at St. Francis High School. After graduating, he worked

in his father's plumbing business and had no intention of becoming a racing star, until he saw his first "big car" race at DuPont Speedway in 1938. Convinced to try it himself, Tolan decided to start with the midgets, which were then taking off in Denver. He built his own car and debuted in 1939 at both Lakeside Speedway and Merchant's Park. He won the first race in which he competed, which also happened to be his only win that season. By 1941, Tolan had advanced to driving one of owner Charlie Allen's cars, but shortly after World War II broke out he left racing to join the Marines.²⁴

Tolan returned to Denver, and Lakeside Speedway, in 1946 and went on to win the 1946 and 1947 RMMRA championships. He started the 1948 season with several wins in car number 1, which Roy Leslie, who sponsored the car Tolan drove in 1947, purchased for him, but left before the season ended to compete in bigger venues. After forty-three career wins in Denver, he never again won a race in Denver after 1948 although he returned to the city several times. Tolan moved to racing big cars, competing in three Indianapolis 500s in the 1950s. According to Wayne Arner, Tolan's good looks made him enormously popular among women who attended the races, which happened more frequently when he was racing, and more of his headshots were handed out to them at Lakeside Speedway than those of any other driver.²⁵

While drivers like Axel and Tolan helped draw crowds, the sound of the track also helped alert people to its existence. The races at Lakeside Speedway were loud, so much so that they could be heard for miles around the park. Rhoda Krasner remembered hearing the roar of the engines from the family's home near Sloan's Lake, about twenty blocks south of the park. She called the sound "powerful and inviting." The roar of the engines at the Speedway quickly became one of the most distinctive features of the park, but during intermissions or other quiet moments the noise of the amusement park took the place of the engine noise. The sound of the

racing cars soon became a familiar sound to residents around the park. As one driver said, “the sounds, the smell, everything about it attracted people.” The only other sound from Lakeside remembered as vividly as the roar of the engines at the Speedway is that of Laffing Sal’s laughter reverberating across the lake.²⁶

Although there were several race tracks in Denver at the time, it was hard to beat the dominance of Lakeside Speedway. Photographs from the 1940s attest to both the popularity and the danger of the sport at Lakeside. A scrapbook kept by Vera Hawks, wife of driver Leon Hawks, is filled with pictures of the midgets and their proud drivers. In each picture, the stands are nearly filled to capacity on race nights. Between twenty-five and thirty cars competed each race night there were races, with twelve to fourteen cars per event, a far better field than the handful of cars and drivers that were there for the first attempt in 1935. And the crowds were there with them. If people were not in line for tickets by 5 p.m., they simply did not get a seat for that night’s program.²⁷

Photographer Jerry Miller said that the goal was to get through a race without an accident, but the races could be quite dangerous. The first major accident of any kind at the Lakeside Speedway happened in May 1940 when a wheel came off Lloyd Axel’s car and flew into the stands, injuring three people. Even though one of the people was seriously injured, the accident did nothing to diminish the popularity of the races, and on May 4, 1941, the first day of racing for that season, over 4,000 people filled the grandstands. The first midget racing fatality in Denver happened that season when, on August 10, Carroll Kelly swerved to miss an accident in front of him and rolled his car several times. His injuries included a fractured skull, crushed chest, and broken shoulder. He died from his injuries the following February. The 1942 season opened under the threat that the government would shut down auto racing to save on rubber and

gasoline usage during wartime, but over 7,000 people packed the stands at the Speedway nightly until the government order came through on July 29. The order did not come in time to save popular driver Vic Schey, who was fatally injured on July 4. Schey and his brother Buddy Shay (the name is pronounced Shy, and Buddy changed the way he spelled it to help racing announcers with their pronunciation), who also drove, were popular at Lakeside. At the time of his fatal accident, Schey had a broken right leg so he and his brother rigged up a midget with the foot throttle on the left. Buddy Shay was never sure if his brother's foot got tangled in the throttle or if the throttle itself got stuck, but he crashed the car into the fence, flipped over on the guardrail, and then rolled several times. He died from his injuries three days later. The next week's race, held to benefit Vic Schey's family, drew the largest crowd to date at the Speedway, with 7,095 people in the stands. With many of the drivers leaving to join the military, the 1942 season witnessed a steadily decreasing number of cars competing in the races. Only eleven cars competed in the final one hundred lap race on July 29, with a record seven actually completing it. After the abbreviated 1942 season, racing did not resume at Lakeside until 1946.²⁸

Vera Hawks's pictures not only show how popular the Speedway was; they also show how deadly the sport could be. When thumbing through her scrapbook, it is not uncommon to see a picture of a driver and a few pages later a picture of the accident in which he was killed. In one example, a driver was ejected from his car as he lost control on one of the track's turns. He survived, only to be run over by the cars behind him. His wife and children sat helpless and horrified in the stands as he died on the track. It was also not uncommon for fans to be injured by flying debris from the cars, although the injuries usually were not serious. Sonny Coleman said it was not unusual to lose one or two drivers a year to accidents at Lakeside. The addition of safety equipment in the 1950s and 1960s for both fans and drivers helped cut down on injuries.

Of particular importance for the drivers were roll bars, which were attached just behind the cockpit on midget cars. For the fans, the installation of the chain link fence on the grandstands helped protect them and cut down on injuries. One race official commented in the 1980s that the chain link fence protecting fans was one of the safest around. The first spectator fatality in the track's history ultimately brought about the demise of the Speedway, but it operated for fifty years prior to that unfortunate event.²⁹

Krasner attempted to keep the track active during the war years, most notably by staging boxing matches, but none of his efforts met with much success. It was racing that people wanted, and Lloyd Axel worked hard to keep the RMMRA ready to resume racing once the war ended. The end of the war in 1945 finally brought the return of midget racing to the Lakeside Speedway, which reopened for its regular season on May 22, 1946. Racing's absence during the war had not diminished interest in it, and the sport proved more popular than ever. Between 1946 and 1950, midget racing reached the height of its popularity in Denver. Over 11,000 people came to opening night in 1946, seriously overcrowding the stands and overwhelming the police who were trying to direct traffic around the park. People in cars who were heading to the Speedway eventually gave up on trying to get any closer to Lakeside and started parking their cars wherever they could and walking, sometimes up to two miles, to the park. When the races were over that night, the crowd even ripped down part of the fence around Lakeside to create another exit from the parking lot. Many people claimed that the resulting mess was Denver's first traffic jam.³⁰

The overcrowded stands and Denver's first traffic jam demonstrated just how deep America's love affair with the car had become by 1946. The affair was slow to start, especially when only the rich could afford a car when they were first manufactured, but once Henry Ford

introduced the Model T in 1908, all of that changed. By 1929, there were 24 million cars on the road, an extraordinary increase from the 8,000 of 1900. The Great Depression and World War II nearly wrecked the affair. Car sales dropped dramatically in the 1930s as people struggled to survive, and when the economy finally began recovering during the war people could then afford to buy new cars. There were none to be found, however, with all domestic automobile production shut down for the duration of the war. After sixteen years of struggling to survive, automobile manufacturers found themselves struggling to meet demand after 1945.

Reconversion to peacetime production took time, and customers eagerly snapped up every new car they managed to produce. By 1950, car companies were producing between five and six million cars a year and, even at that, were barely able to keep up with demand. People who had never been able to afford a car prior to 1929 had earned enough money during the war to buy one afterwards, and they wanted to join the car culture. Everything associated with cars exploded after the war as well—highways, hotels and motels for travelers, gas stations, and racing.³¹

The surging popularity of midget racing led to the creation of the first midget racing circuit in Colorado in 1946 with the opening of tracks in Fort Collins and Colorado Springs. The year also saw the formation of the Colorado Automobile Racing Club, which would play an important role in Lakeside Speedway's future once the stock cars arrived. The Englewood Speedway, located at West Oxford and Clay Streets, opened the next year, but the RMMRA refused to sanction the track and threatened to fine and suspend any of its members who raced there. Drivers who wanted to race at Englewood formed a new club, the Mile High Racing Association (later known as the Colorado Midget Racing Association), and a number of drivers defected from the RMMRA to join it.³²

A major factor behind Lakeside Speedway's popularity was the fact that there simply was

nothing else in town that could compete against it. Denver's only professional sports team was the Denver Bears baseball club, which starting in 1948 began playing at the new Bears Stadium (later renamed Mile High Stadium). But, according to Leroy Byers, a Bears game in the late 1940s might draw eight hundred or a thousand spectators (during the 1947 season, for example, about 125,000 people total attended all the games that season), while a race at the Speedway regularly drew several thousand a night. Even the greyhound races at Mile High Greyhound Park, which Elitch's manager Jack Gurtler feared would negatively impact attendance at the amusement parks and which Krasner feared was the one thing that might kill the Speedway, failed to make a dent in the racing crowds. With no widespread television ownership, no major sporting competitors, and little else to keep people entertained, the Lakeside Speedway dominated leisure time in Denver.³³

A new crop of drivers also helped drive the popularity of the sport. Driver Sonny Coleman, who won the 1950 RMMRA championship at Lakeside, came home from the Navy after World War II and was unable to find a job at first. He got into racing to "make a few bucks," although he added that race car drivers were always broke and looking for money. Coleman drove for owner Roy Leslie, taking car 62, which was powered by a Ford V8-60. Drivers typically earned forty percent of whatever the car won, but because Coleman agreed to stay with the Ford, Leslie gave him fifty percent. He felt comfortable with the Ford, and remembered it as a reliable car that never finished worse than fifth place in the races. The Ford was not supposed to be as fast as the Offys, although according to Coleman it was fast enough to beat all of the Offys some of the time but never all the time. He had to run it hard to keep up with them, however, and he had a few crashes with it. The most dramatic came when the car spun out on some freshly laid oil on the track and ended up hitting a telephone pole outside the

track. Coleman was not severely injured, fortunately, and when Krasner heard about the accident he called Roy Leslie and apologized profusely. The car was consistent throughout the 1950 season, and it came as somewhat of a surprise when Coleman won the championship that year. A Ford engine had never won a championship at Lakeside until then, a big deal for the owners of the car.³⁴

By the late 1940s, the midget racing circuit had grown to include tracks in Fort Collins, La Junta, Englewood, Colorado Springs, Pueblo, and even Scottsbluff, Nebraska (though the Scottsbluff track lasted only part of a season in the RMMR). In 1947, Lloyd Axel, who had led the defection to Lakeside in 1938, led a new group of drivers that broke away from the RMMRA and based itself at Englewood Speedway, which opened that year. Englewood management hoped that they would draw big crowds, but found that it was still impossible to compete against Lakeside. Englewood Speedway's management also found out that better crowds turned out for stock car races, a disturbing trend as far as midget racing was concerned. Over the next few years, tracks around the state shuffled between the RMMRA and CMRA, but Lakeside always remained with the RMMRA. Attendance was down slightly from the 7,000 that had been common just a few years earlier, but the midget races remained popular and it was not unusual to find five or six thousand people paying fifty cents for a ticket to sit in the stands at Lakeside on race nights, which were now only on Wednesdays and Sundays.³⁵

It was obvious by 1950, however, that fans were starting to lose interest in the midgets as attendance at the races steadily dropped. The mighty RMMRA, which had once reached across Colorado, had only one track left under its control—Lakeside Speedway. Several things were to blame for the decline. Television ownership became more widespread; camping became popular, especially when people had the ability to put campers on the backs of their trucks;

baseball grew in popularity as well, with the attendance at Bears games climbing steadily, reaching a total of 463,039 for the 1949 season. Young men who had gone off to fight in the war now were marrying and starting families and had to spend money that previously went towards entertainment on other purposes. Drivers Bob Olds and Charlie Gottschalck blamed changes in the midgets themselves for the declining popularity as well. By 1950, according to them, the cars were all getting to be the same. Prior to that, each builder, owner, and driver imprinted their personality on the cars, which more often than not they built themselves or heavily customized. With each car becoming identical, it seemed to make the competition between them less exciting. Running races three nights a week may have oversaturated the market, and it got to be expensive for families to attend that many races each week. Sonny Coleman placed some of the blame for the decline on the midget drivers themselves, saying that they “got too big for their britches.” In his opinion, the RMMRA tried to dictate to Krasner how to run the track, going so far as attempting to force him to bring AAA back as a sanctioning body. Krasner refused, telling the drivers that there simply was not enough money to pay \$800 a night to AAA and that he would either close the track or run only stock cars if they persisted with their demands.³⁶

Krasner and the track managers attempted to revive interest in the midgets with a number of changes. They inverted the order of the cars in heat races, with the fastest car starting at the back, but when it came to the feature race the fastest car started on the pole and went on to win the race most of the time. The other cars simply fell in line behind the leader and rarely tried to pass, creating a definite lack of action that would have helped keep spectators entertained. Driver Roy Bowe did a lot of passing on the outside, something Sonny Coleman tried to do in his Ford-powered car as well, much to the surprise of many, but it was not enough. The one exception to the follow the leader type of racing was the car sponsored by Eddie Bohn’s Pig ‘n’

Whistle restaurant. Made to look like a pig, with a horn that oinked, the car was what Lakeside visitor Frank Jamison called “the joke car.” It always came in last, but Bohn’s restaurant and hotel received a lot of advertising from the stunt. Seeking to revive interest in the Speedway, as an experiment, Krasner scheduled a stock car race for the program on August 6, 1950. The crowd went wild for it. The new cars were such a big hit that he added one stock car race to the rest of the scheduled midget programs for the season. Bob Olds remembered thinking that the first night the stock cars ran at Lakeside was “the beginning of the end” for the midgets.³⁷

In an effort to boost the midgets for the 1950 season, Krasner hired two West Coast promoters, Bob Ware and Bill Asay, to help publicize the midget races, but the results were not spectacular. Crowds at Lakeside Speedway held steady at three or four thousand people a night, but that number was down from the average of five or six thousand from the year before. The success of the first stock car race in August clearly indicated what direction the Speedway would go in the future. The RMMRA limped through the 1951 season at Lakeside before losing the Speedway, which was its last track. By the end of the 1951 season, the stock cars were the clear favorites at Lakeside as many of the midget fans switched their loyalties to the new cars. Their “slam bang style of competition” had proven more popular than the midget races, and stock car drivers did not demand as big a purse as midget racers.³⁸

Between 1952 and 1958, the RMMRA all but ceased to exist. With no tracks to race on and little interest in the sport, there was no need for the once powerful group. Two drivers formed the Denver Midget Racing Club in 1952, running at Englewood Speedway, but after six programs it was done. The Colorado Automobile Racing Club, which sanctioned the stock car races, expanded to promote midgets in 1956, including ten races at Lakeside. The public’s declining interest in midget racing was not limited to just Lakeside Speedway however. Its

popularity dropped at tracks all over the country, so much so that the sport itself almost ceased to exist. It would have done so, writes racing fan and historian Allan Brown, if not for the “efforts of obstinate, yet courageous individuals” who kept it alive until times got better.³⁹

The midgets never regained the popularity they once enjoyed, but they also never fully disappeared from the Lakeside Speedway. They continued to race there until the track closed in 1988. A special Fiftieth Anniversary midget race was held on May 7, 1988, won by driver Tom Evans, followed by another on July 16, 1988, which Randy Roberts won. The last midget race ever at Lakeside Speedway was July 27, 1988, three days after a spectator fatality during a stock car race at the track. But, after 1951 the midgets were never again the big draw they had once been as the stock cars took over and dominated the Speedway until the end. In the nearly twenty years that the midgets ruled the Speedway, they not only helped sustain Lakeside Amusement Park, but they also helped the Speedway establish a national presence. Nearly every driver who raced at Lakeside Speedway emphasizes how important the track was to both Denver and the sport. Sonny Coleman referred to the Speedway as the ultimate race track for midgets in the area, while Leroy Byers called it one of the best midget racing tracks in the country. Like Lakeside Amusement Park, however, Lakeside Speedway needed to adapt to changing times and tastes if it wanted to survive. Like the amusement park, the Speedway did both very well.⁴⁰

CHAPTER EIGHT:
LAKESIDE AMUSEMENT PARK VS. THE MOUSE

Lakeside Amusement Park's last true connection with its old City Beautiful days came to an end in 1950. That year, long-time park electrician John Flohr retired after thirty-nine years with the park. Flohr was the only park employee who had witnessed first-hand Lakeside's transformation from an elite park to a blue collar park. He left the scene just as amusement parks began to experience some of their most turbulent years in the 1950s. Or, at least those that still survived did. Many of the parks built at the turn of the century had long since closed their gates, driven out of business by overabundant competition, financial disasters during the Depression, and undesirable locations. Those that still survived faced a whole new set of troubles.¹

Desegregation killed many amusements in the 1950s and 1960s as many white customers simply stayed away from the newly integrated parks. As the parks aged, other customers stayed away out of concern over the grimy appearances and safety of the aging rides at the parks. The close proximity of older amusement parks to bus and tramway lines created even more problems as many older customers believed that public transportation allowed less than desirable customers to overrun the parks, which was a complete reversal of the once highly prized link to public transportation that most parks desired. It was in this amusement environment of the 1950s that the theme park first appeared, the forerunner of which was Disneyland in California, which opened in July 1955. Theme parks soon spread across the country, perhaps the biggest challenge yet to the traditional amusement parks that once played such a key role in American entertainment. But, Lakeside Amusement Park, which had proven time and again to be a

survivor, was ready to take on the challenge.²

Benjamin Krasner had never shied away from the challenges of operating an amusement park, but no one would have blamed him if he had been shaken up by the challenges he confronted in the new decade. Early in the morning of August 19, 1951, Krasner and his wife Miriam were returning home after closing up for the night at Lakeside when two men emerged from the shadows. They forced Krasner, who had gotten out of his car to open his garage door, back in at gunpoint and then drove the Krasners around for over an hour, apparently unable to find their way back to Lakeside, which they intended to rob. When they finally reached the park, the two men marched the Krasners at gunpoint through the gate and to the main office. While walking to the office the group was confronted by night watchman H.M. McGee, who the robbers relieved of his gun and blackjack and took hostage as well. One man accompanied Krasner to the office to empty the two safes there, while the other one kept watch over Miriam Krasner and McGee. A second night watchman, Albert W. Stickrod, saw Miriam Krasner sitting in the telephone operator's chair as he made his rounds, but being used to seeing the Krasners at the park at all hours, thought nothing of it and even mistook the sport-shirt clad robber for Benjamin Krasner. The safes held \$5,566 in cash, which the thieves took, and about \$1,000 in coins, which they were unable to carry. With the cash in their possession, the two men left Miriam Krasner and McGee in the office with instructions to not call the police and forced Krasner back into his car, which they drove about three and a half miles southeast of the park. They told Krasner to get out and walk two blocks to the east, where they would leave his car, but when he was unable to find his car he woke up a nearby resident and called police. Two men were later tried and convicted of several robberies, including the one at Lakeside, but were never charged with kidnapping the Krasners because of an error made in filing that charge.³

The front page of the next day's *Rocky Mountain News* told readers in bold headlines of the Krasners' ordeal. The headline, complete with an exclamation mark, indicated just how disturbing it was to Denver that a well-respected, prominent member of the business community and his wife, who also happened to run one of the area's favorite playgrounds, had been kidnapped and robbed in such a daring manner. The crime also sent shockwaves through the amusement park industry, with an article on it even appearing in the September 1 issues of *Billboard*. The magazine rarely, if ever, printed articles involving crimes such as this one, but did so this time, perhaps meaning it to serve as a warning to other amusement park owners that criminals were potentially getting bolder than the common pickpockets that had roamed the parks since the day they first opened. For the publicity shy Krasners, the attention the crime received was not at all welcome.⁴

Other incidents throughout the decade served as reminders that amusement parks were going through a rough period. On June 18, 1954, death visited the Cyclone for the second time when 22-year-old Airman Third Class Dan Coleman, who was stationed at Lowry and worked as a brakeman on the Cyclone, was thrown from one of the cars. He was not working at the time, but rather just enjoying a ride on the coaster. The train had just gone down the first hill and was making a 90-degree turn when Coleman, who was sitting on the back of his seat, was thrown from it. He struck two support posts with such force that all of the blood vessels in his body above the waist ruptured, and he died instantly from a fractured skull and broken spine. Coleman bragged to friends before getting on the coaster that he liked to ride while standing up because he "got more kick out of it that way." A coroner's jury later ruled that Coleman died because he disobeyed and disregarded safety rules. Eight years later, almost to the day, 19-year-old Airman Second Class Barry Lindsey, also stationed at Lowry, died on the Cyclone when he

stood up and struck his head against a plank that supported a walkway that ran alongside the track that park employees used to inspect the track for safety hazards.⁵

Lakeside also faced a lawsuit, filed by Flora Hook, wife of Denver City Councilman Irving Hook, that dragged on from 1955 to 1960. Hook claimed that she was injured on August 12, 1955, allegedly when she was thrown to the floor of a Loop-O-Plane car because the ride operator failed to properly fasten the leather strap that was supposed to hold her in her seat. She sought \$20,000 in damages. Lakeside's attorneys argued that Hook was injured because she failed to hold onto the metal bar that went across her lap and that there was no evidence to show that the leather strap was not properly fastened. The Denver District Court dismissed the suit, which Hook then appealed to the Colorado Supreme Court. That court upheld the dismissal, ruling that amusement park customers who went on thrill rides had to accept responsibility for any injuries they sustained. Justices Albert Franz and Frank Hall dissented, arguing that customers had a right to assume that they would not be injured on rides and that the case should have gone to a jury because "negligence could have been inferred." Injury lawsuits were by no means new to Lakeside; one of the earliest had been filed in 1927. But, to have a suit drag on for five years was unnerving, and even though the park won, it was just one more sign that amusement parks were not enjoying the smooth sailing they once had.⁶

And yet, difficult as times might have been, Krasner did not retreat. His passion for Lakeside Amusement Park was as strong as ever, and he was just as active, if not more so, in the 1950s at updating and adding to Lakeside's attractions as he was in the 1940s. By 1950, he had nearly perfected the mix of constant innovation, more thrilling rides, and special gimmicks that kept Lakeside thriving at a time when other parks were dying rapidly. Trains had always been a passion of Krasner's, recalled his daughter Rhoda in a 2000 interview. In his free time he

studied timetables and routes, fascinated by the machines. The Lakeshore Railway was his chance to indulge that passion while also making his park stand out. By the 1950s, the forty-six year old steam engine from the 1904 World's Fair was still pulling passengers around Lake Rhoda as it had done since the park opened in 1908. Joining it in 1950 was a new \$25,000 diesel-powered California Zephyr built by Joseph Ruth, a Denver-based diesel equipment manufacturer. The miniature diesel engine, the first of its kind in the country, was a gleaming stainless steel train complete with air horn, air brakes, and matching stainless steel passenger cars. The stainless steel construction reflected both sunlight and the park's lights at night as it traveled around the lake, and a special device in the engine built up exhaust until the train sounded exactly like a full-size diesel. The new train was immediately popular, with over 10,000 people witnessing its debut, and *The Denver Post* reported that the new train carried "capacity loads of passengers" the entire first week that it ran. Three years later, a second steam engine, named The Prospector, built by park superintendent Hugh Thornsberry and park mechanic Pete Giovanni, was added to the park's collection of trains. The train included six new passenger cars painted yellow and silver. Unveiling the new steam engine was such a big deal that Denver, Rio Grande, and Western Railroad president Judge Wilson McCarthy was the engineer for the first run of the new train. Krasner later renamed the older steam engine Whistling Tom and the new one Puffing Billie after characters from one of his daughter Rhoda's favorite books.⁷

Other new attractions for the 1950 season included the park's first Tilt-a-Whirl and the Rock-o-Plane, a Ferris wheel type ride with enclosed cars that riders could flip upside down if they so desired. For adult customers, Krasner opened the Riviera Club, an "ultra-modern cocktail lounge," on the west side of the El Patio Ballroom. It immediately became a popular gathering place. Becoming less popular was the ballroom itself, where attendance was below

expectations even though it boasted appearances by Jimmy Dorsey, Les Brown, Tex Beneke, and other well-known bands. Disappointed by attendance numbers, Krasner told *Billboard* in September 1950 that he was considering dropping the park's long-standing name band policy in favor of having a house band. The picnic business at Lakeside posted far more impressive numbers for 1950 than the ballroom, with a record crowd of 17,000 people attending the Gates Rubber Company outing. Picnics held by the Denver Public Schools' ROTC, radio station KLZ, *The Denver Post* for Back to School in September, and the Colorado Federation of Labor on Labor Day 1950 drew at least 10,000 people each. Picnic customers were strictly working class, a far different group than the crowds that descended on rival Elitch's summer theater, but exactly the customer base Lakeside had been appealing to since 1935. Overall attendance at Lakeside was at least equal to 1949 levels, according to Krasner, but the ride business was down by five percent as bands, picnics, and midget races brought bigger crowds than the rides themselves.⁸

Benjamin Krasner aggressively expanded Lakeside's adult offerings in the 1950s, but when rival Elitch's started focusing more on younger customers, he had to follow their lead in order to remain competitive. Park owner Arnold Gurtler's sons Jack and Budd began taking a more active role in Elitch's management when they returned from the Marines in 1945 in preparation for the day when they would eventually be in charge of the park. One of their first major projects was KiddieLand, designed with a storybook theme, which opened in 1952. At the opening ceremony, cowboy star Hopalong Cassidy welcomed a record crowd of children to the new play area. Recognizing a good idea when he saw it, and not to be outdone, Krasner opened his own KiddieLand shortly thereafter. Lakeside's version was somewhat unique in that the fourteen rides it contained were miniature versions of the adult rides at the park, including a child-sized Whip, manufactured by William F. Mangels, creator of the original Whip, and a steel

version of the Cyclone. Perhaps the most unique ride, however, was the new carousel, installed in 1960. Rather than horses, children got to ride on airplanes, motorcycles, helicopters, fire engines, buses, and cars. Each vehicle was equipped with lights and horns, and when the ride was in full operation it resembled “a Paris traffic jam” according to *The Denver Post* reporter covering it. The opening of the dueling KiddieLands was simply another step in the long rivalry between the two parks.⁹

Although many people, including Jack Gurtler, characterized the rivalry between Lakeside and Elitch’s as friendly, there were many times when that was not the case. Only once, however, did the two parks actually work together. It took a national convention to accomplish that when Lakeside and Elitch’s found themselves in the odd position in 1952 of having to put their rivalry aside in order to serve as co-hosts for the summer conference of the National Association of Amusement Parks, Pools, and Beaches, held in Denver that year. The gathering, which drew one hundred amusement park operators, began at Lakeside on the evening of August 6th, where visitors were suitably impressed by the lighting, the lake, and the recently built Art Deco ticket booths for each ride. The next day began with a Western-themed gathering at Elitch’s, where the visitors received cowboy hats, ties, and kerchiefs, before heading back to Lakeside for a Western-style lunch hosted by Benjamin and Miriam Krasner. Following afternoon visits to Buffalo Bill’s grave and Red Rocks Amphitheater, the day ended with a gala party at Elitch’s hosted by the Gurtlers, who had transformed the park into a Western town for the evening. The meeting was a huge success, declared *Billboard*, and gave the park operators a chance to discuss the problems they faced without convening a formal business meeting. The Gurtlers and the Krasners and their respective parks earned special praise from *Billboard* for their handling of events, a rare moment of cooperation between the two parks.¹⁰

Krasner's co-hosting of the NAAPPB conference was not the only activity that earned him high praise from his fellow amusement park owners and managers during the 1950s. He had worked tirelessly since 1935 to both revive Lakeside and keep it prosperous, but even with all of his hard work he still had to face the fact that honky tonks, pawn shops, pool halls, and other less desirable working class entertainments had been creeping in on the park's borders for decades. Like the park's owners before him, Krasner was unable to control development outside the town of Lakeside, but inside was another story. He was hopeful that what he could do within the town would benefit both the park and its neighbors while helping to drive some of the seedier businesses from the area. The large tract of land on the southwest side of the park, where Adolph Zang had long ago hoped to see upper class homes materialize, was still vacant as the 1950s began. In 1953, Krasner made his biggest and boldest move yet to protect his park as he sold the land to a group of investors who wanted to build a shopping mall.

Shopping malls, writes historian James Farrell, were simply a reworking of an older retail idea. Shopping centers made up of grouped stores, usually anchored by a grocery store surrounded by a few other shops, had long existed. The first step towards shopping malls came when new shopping centers turned the stores inwards, rather than having them face the street, as was the case with the older shopping centers. Whether facing the street or away from it, strip malls, as they were called, appealed to drivers in the first decades of the 1900s because they allowed them to get in, get the things they needed, and get back on the road quickly. Their success, however, doomed them as "heavy traffic, random placement, and visual chaos" soon led to their falling from favor among selective customers. Community shopping centers, designed to meet the needs of entire suburban neighborhoods, attempted to address those problems. Kansas City architect J.C. Nichols designed and built Country Club Plaza there in 1922. It

included parks, fountains, benches, and community art and activities. Community shopping centers took off throughout the 1920s and 1930s, but the Depression and World War II halted their spread until the post war housing boom and construction of the interstate highway system led to the development of the regional shopping center. These new shopping areas built entirely on past developments in the industry. They were usually anchored by at least one major department store with smaller, sometimes less well-known stores filling the rest of the space. All of the stores were under one roof, and the buildings housing them had a central interior courtyard, were climate controlled, and created a total separation between car and pedestrian movement. The best example of the new design was Southdale Center in Edina, Minnesota, which opened in 1956 and was the country's first enclosed shopping mall, but forerunners of the new concept had appeared as early as 1950.¹¹

In 1951, developer Gerri Von Frellich and his associates hired Seattle-based Larry Smith and Company to explore the Denver area in order to find an ideal community in which to build a shopping center. The company, which had completed similar surveys for Macy's, Gimbel's, Hudson Company, and several major shopping center developments throughout the country, soon focused on the Lakeside/Arvada/Wheat Ridge area, which they concluded was ideal. The researchers concluded that there were 200,000 people within a ten-mile radius who did not have enough in the way of local stores to fulfill their needs or convenient access to downtown Denver shops. The researchers even speculated that people as far away as Boulder would visit the mall. Von Frellich and his associates initially wanted to build their mall in Arvada, but after the town rejected the idea, they turned to the neighboring town of Lakeside. In late 1953, Von Frellich and his company, Markets, Inc., entered into negotiations with Benjamin Krasner to buy sixty-two acres of land on the southwest side of Lake Rhoda; the rest of the Lakeside property

remained under the control of the amusement park company.¹²

Luckily for the developers, plans were also in place to build a new highway connecting Denver to Golden, which offered easy access to the Lakeside area. In announcing construction of the mall, tentatively named Lakeside Village, Von Frellich told the *Rocky Mountain News* that it would be a “complete duplication in services and products” as those found in downtown Denver. Prominent and long-time Denver retailer Denver Dry Goods had already signed a contract to be the anchor store of the new mall. The 400,000 square foot center also planned to include, among many stories, the largest King Soopers grocery store in the Denver area, the largest Woolworth’s in the five state region, a White’s home and automobile supply store, along with a Fashion Bar, Lerner’s, Maternity Mode, and Fontius Shoes. The \$12,000,000 shopping center was reported to be about one-fourth the size of downtown Denver and forty percent larger than the recently completed Cherry Creek Shopping Center, the creation of noted Denver architect Temple Buell. The mall also included a three-block long tunnel used for deliveries underneath it, which was meant to keep pedestrians safe from truck traffic at the mall but could also double as a fall-out shelter in the event of a nuclear attack. The site also included a seven story office building.¹³

The Denver newspapers proclaimed the mall the largest between Chicago and the Pacific Coast, and to make sure people knew just how immense it was, the *Rocky Mountain News* in an August 12, 1956 article detailed just how much material had gone into its construction. According to the article, workers had used enough steel to build forty-two large Army tanks, in addition to six acres of roofing material, 21,000 acres of glass, and a mile of street curbing. Nearly 958 tons of air-conditioning equipment cooled the building, and there was eleven and a half miles of piping and 12,500 light fixtures. And, just as Lakeside’s builders had planned for

car parking in 1908, the malls designers allowed space for 4,500 cars around the new structure (which turned out to be insufficient as on opening day in 1956, the parking lot was filled to capacity and people in cars flooded the streets around the mall and amusement park looking for places to park their cars). The mall employed 1,600 people, 300 of whom worked at the Denver Dry Goods store alone. Another *Rocky Mountain News* article reported that most mall employees lived in the neighborhoods around the amusement park and were “being hired in shifts to fit their own hours.” Financially, Lakeside Center (as it was then called) was a “boon to the economy of Northwest Denver and Jefferson County.” What did not make it into any of the newspaper coverage of the size of the mall or the number of people working there was the fact that the entire project created a half-mile long barrier on the west side of the park and, when combined with the Speedway, a half-mile barrier along the south side of the park. With Inspiration Point Park on the north side of the Lakeside property, the amusement park was surrounded on three sides by barriers that prevented outside business from moving closer to the park. It was not ideal, but it was the best Krasner could do.¹⁴

The grand opening of Lakeside Shopping Center took place over the three day period from August 30 to September 1, 1956, and more than 50,000 people attended the ceremonies, the same number that helped open Lakeside Amusement Park in 1908. The shopping center opening was reminiscent of the opening day ceremonies for the park almost fifty years early in more ways than just the number of people there for it. Denver Mayor Will Nicholson spoke and “praised the ‘foresight which made the brilliant new institution possible.’” According to *The Denver Post*, “most of Denver’s Who’s Who” were seen at the opening, including U.S. Representative Byron Rogers of Denver and Jefferson County Commissioners Emil Schneider, Walter True, and Clarence Koch. Ten “pretty hostesses” dressed in blue escorted guests through

the mall, while each individual store held ribbon cutting ceremonies and offered prizes and gifts. Entertainment included Ringling Bros. famous Bozo the Clown, Al Balater's band, Kent Bailey's Western Band, and the Lakewood Westernairs. As was the case at Lakeside Amusement Park's grand opening, no crime or other problems marred the day. Lakeside Police Chief Leo Peterson declared the gathering "the most orderly crowd I've ever handled."¹⁵

Within four months of the grand opening, Von Frellich already started expanding the center section of the mall to include more stores. Over the next year more than a dozen new stores moved into the mall, and the shopping center continued its policy of hiring from the surrounding neighborhoods, which meant that the "people who serve customers at Lakeside Center are neighbors in the largest sense of the word and they extend their cordial hospitality to their work." The friendly mall certainly served as a contrast to the bars and pool halls and small restaurants around the park, but it could not hide the fact that the park was very much surrounded by working class neighborhoods, and like the park itself, the mall had to take note of that fact. In August 1958 John Barr, president of Montgomery Ward and Company, arrived in Denver to open the new Montgomery Ward's store at Lakeside Shopping Center. The store, the first ever built by the company in a shopping mall in the United States, was part of an \$84,000,000 expansion the company was undergoing. The store was designed for "the outdoor man, the do-it-yourself fan, and the professional carpenter and mechanic," which was not the kind of customer that Denver Dry Goods, which for many years had been one of the premier stores among Denver's elite, attracted. About 4,500 people attended the opening ceremony for Ward's where Cynthia Cullen, Miss Colorado 1958, cut the ribbon; within the next half hour about 6,500 people had passed through the new store. After Montgomery Ward's grand opening came the 1959 opening of Lakeside National Bank, the first bank to receive a national charter since 1937.

Dozens of other stores moved in and out of the mall over the next several years. Special sales lured thousands of customers to the fifth birthday celebration in 1961, and the next year the center was declared a “Shopper’s Dream” and a “model for shopping centers all over the country and in Canada” and posted annual sales of \$30 million. Thousands of people, from as close as across the street to as far away as Broomfield and Boulder, visited the mall each day, just as the builders predicted. And, every time they looked across the parking lot, they were looking at Lakeside Amusement Park. Krasner could not have asked for better advertising.¹⁶

While Denver shoppers appreciated the new mall’s convenience and flocked to it, the amusement park industry took note of what having those thousands of customers at the mall did for attendance at Lakeside Amusement Park. In a September 22, 1956, article headlined “Krasner Spot Extends Run, Gains Biz,” *Billboard Magazine* reported that the mall's opening had “brought the park more transient traffic and scored good advertising and publicity for the amusement zone.” Krasner’s gamble in selling Lakeside's undeveloped land to Von Frellich had paid off. Not only was the park now insulated on its southern and western sides, but it had improved its business at the same time. It was a move that more famous amusement parks would undertake in the future, such as when Disneyland planners completed the Downtown Disney zone around that park in 2001 or on a much larger scale at Walt Disney World in Florida.¹⁷

As construction at the mall progressed, Lakeside Amusement Park went about business as usual. By 1953, business at the ballroom was up as the El Patio was “jammed with dancers” eager to hear the Dorsey brothers and Woody Herman, the leading acts for that summer. The increasingly popular stock car races at the Speedway brought additional crowds, with *Billboard* informing readers that Krasner and Lakeside were “using stock car and midget racing to good results.” Krasner was so happy with the results that he told *Billboard* that he planned to bring in

additional rides for the 1954 season. However, he did make one major change at the ballroom the next year, as, after more than twenty-five years of relying on big name bands to draw crowds, Lakeside went with a house band. Krasner hired Eddy Rogers, a former star of the radio favorite, “Your Hit Parade,” as its leader. The move proved popular at first, with ballroom manager Lou Clark reporting steady crowds, and Krasner telling *Billboard* that house bands might be a good move for struggling ballrooms everywhere. But, the hope that the early results seemed to promise soon evaporated, and by 1955 Krasner was back to using name bands at the ballroom. Krasner also introduced family days, convention rates, and group package prices for organizations looking to hold events at Lakeside in 1954 in an effort to both keep Lakeside’s prices attractive and drum up more business.¹⁸

The big name bands and stock car races continued to be the greatest regular draw at Lakeside for the 1955 season, followed by picnics. The return of name bands boosted business at the ballroom, but not to the level it had once enjoyed. Lou Clark suggested to *Billboard* that business was down at ballrooms everywhere, but the coat and tie policy that had always been in place at El Patio (and at Elitch’s Trocadero) may have kept some customers away as Denver was experiencing a hotter than normal summer. Other longtime ballroom visitors suggested that the park’s policy of charging even those who wanted just to listen to the bands, as opposed to those who just wanted to dance as was the case at Elitch’s, was to blame for the downturn. The picnic business was much better. King Soopers rented the entire park and then gave tickets to any customer who bought at least \$20 worth of goods from its stores, eventually drawing 20,000 people to its event. Not to be outdone, Safeway hosted a picnic of its own but had only 5,000 people in attendance, while the Star Supermarket chain of Colorado Springs chartered forty buses to bring its customers to the park. The Gates Rubber Company picnic drew 13,000, and

the Union Pacific and Public Service Company picnics drew 7,000 each. If all else failed, Krasner could plan on packing his park with picnic customers from Denver's blue collar industries.¹⁹

The Cyclone and the miniature railroad were the top rides for the summer, followed by the newly introduced Rotor ride. The Rotor, similar to a modern Round-Up ride, consisted of a large barrel with a retractable floor. Riders stood along the outside edge of the barrel as it started to spin and rise into the air at an angle, relying on centrifugal force to hold them against the walls once the floor retracted. Another popular ride introduced that year was a new steel roller coaster, located next to a stretch of the Cyclone's track. Architect Richard Crowther designed the entire installation for the ride, and Krasner gave him complete control over everything from the choice of colors to the placement of lights and benches. In most parks the coaster was known as a Wild Mouse, but Krasner thought that seemed like a poor name for a coaster in the Rocky Mountains, which were teeming with chipmunks, as he had noted on family trips to the mountains. With that in mind, he decided to name Lakeside's version of the ride the Wild Chipmunk. Once cars on the ride reached the top of the ramp, they followed a sharply curved path that gave the impression the car would go over the edge at each turn before descending a series of steep hills. *The Denver Post* described the ride as a "darting, twisting, dipping ride." Business at Lakeside was good as Krasner gave his customers what they wanted, *Billboard* made sure to inform its readers. But, on the very same pages of the magazine that told of Lakeside's success that summer was the story of a brand new park that would play a significant park in the future of nearly every amusement park, including Lakeside.²⁰

Within a year of Lakeside Shopping Center's grand opening, the biggest challenge ever to confront amusement parks opened a thousand miles away in California. Benjamin Krasner

worked hard to make sure Lakeside Amusement Park remained a clean and desirable place, but not all parks were as careful. One California businessman's work related travel provided him the opportunity to visit amusement parks across the country, and he shared the feelings of many that amusement parks in general had become messy, run-down places. As a father, he spent numerous afternoons watching his daughters ride the merry-go-round at Griffith Park in Los Angeles. While sitting on a bench watching them, he often thought that an amusement park should have more for families to do together, and so Walt Disney decided to do something about it. Disneyland's grand opening on July 17, 1955, forever and dramatically changed the amusement park industry in the United States. Walt Disney's new venture was, writes Judith Adams, "an amusement park different from all other such parks, where there would be none of the dirtiness, sham, deterioration, and menacing atmosphere that dominated all existing amusement enterprises."²¹

In many ways, Disneyland successfully did what Adolph Zang and his associates had tried to do with Lakeside Amusement Park. "Control," writes Judith Adams, "is the overriding element not only in the design but in the experiencing of the park" when it came to theme parks, and Disneyland was the prototype. Disneyland officials were in charge of security, parking, sanitation, and hundreds of other small details at the park, all designed to create a happy and satisfying visitor experience. The park itself was located behind an earthen wall covered with plants, hiding it from public view. After quickly realizing that requiring visitors to pay for each ride tended to bog down customer traffic, Disneyland introduced ride ticket books and eventually a gate fee that covered all attractions in the park. Unlike early amusement parks, it was nowhere near public transportation, requiring long trips in airplanes or cars to get there, thereby weeding out the sometimes rowdier customers who seemed to be crowding into older amusement parks

after arriving on public transportation. It was a clean environment where visitors could live out fantasies, free from worry. The creation of Disneyland also ushered in the era of large-scale corporate ownership of amusement parks. Unlike Lakeside's owners, however, Disney was not able to control land outside of his amusement park. Disneyland, located in the city of Anaheim, was helpless to stop the undesirable businesses that soon crowded in around it, ready to take advantage of the millions of people visiting the park each year. It was a problem that Disney would not find an answer to until he started planning Walt Disney World in Florida, where he gained the kind of control that Lakeside had enjoyed since 1908, though on a larger scale.²²

In the first six months that Disneyland was open, more than a million people passed through its gates. Four million visited in 1956. In July 1965, ten years after it opened, the park hosted its fifty-millionth guest. By comparison, it took Lakeside sixty-five years to reach the fifty million visitor mark, which it did in 1973. Disneyland was a huge success, and although it took several years for competitors to start copying the concept, it sparked a whole new generation of theme parks that dominated the amusement park industry from then on. Most notable, along with the Disney empire, was the Six Flags chain, which would own Elitch Gardens from 1998 to 2006. Yet, for most of the still operating traditional amusement parks in the United States, the Disney challenge was a distant threat. Disneyland was a destination that families might have to wait years to reach. However, the heavy advertising of Disneyland, especially on Walt Disney's weekly television program on ABC, sparked interest in visiting local parks as well. Interest in Elitch's and Lakeside definitely surged after Disneyland's opening, but for Denver's parks the Disney challenge was a much more direct threat because, unlike most parks in the country, they found Disney practically at their front gates.²³

Disney publicists predicted that parks designed on the Disneyland model would spring up

across the country in the years after that park opened. The concept was slower to take hold than they expected, but not for lack of developers trying. In 1957, a group of developers announced their plans to build Magic Mountain, west of Denver in Golden. According to an offering circular for the new theme park, the time was right for such a venture in Colorado. The project would bring back the Old West of 1858 with an old western village, cavalry post, and stockade. It would also look to the future with a Magic of Industry exposition area in addition to thrill and educational rides. The amusement aspect of the new park was complete with a Storybook Lane and, as usual for an amusement park, a narrow gauge railroad. Denver businessman Walter F. Cobb and sculptor John Calvin Sutton were the men behind Magic Mountain, but they hired Los Angeles based Marco Engineering to build it. Marco was the creation of C.V. Wood, Jr., who had helped supervise the construction of Disneyland before going on to manage it for six months after it opened in 1955. He then quit the park in order to go into the theme park business for himself, and hired more than a dozen members of Disney's staff to help him spread the Disneyland concept throughout the United States. Wood's involvement with Magic Mountain left many with the mistaken impression that Walt Disney himself was involved with the project. Stories about the construction of Magic Mountain soon filled the pages of *Billboard*, letting everyone know that the project was in fact a major development in the amusement park world.²⁴

Unlike Lakeside's dedication in 1908, which 50,000 people attended, only 2,500 people showed up for the dedication of the Calvary Post and stockade at Magic Mountain on February 1, 1958. The builders finished the rest of the entrance area to the park in 1959. Marco based the old west village, named Centennial City, on historic Colorado architectural styles, and used the famed Disneyland technique of forced perspective to make the buildings appear taller than they actually were. The Victorian-style train depot, however, was "far more impressive than any

depot Jefferson County had yet seen,” and the narrow gauge train was pulled by Denver and Rio Grande Engine #420, built in 1889. But, despite its grandeur, Magic Mountain was never financially successful. According to Judith Adams, the project was doomed from the start because the backers “collectively lacked any enthusiasm for the amusement business.” By 1959, the financial situation had deteriorated so badly that Cobb even stepped down as president when he realized it was no longer a good investment for him to be involved with. The park went into foreclosure and further construction stopped; the Storybook Village, fairgrounds, Outer Space Ride, and Magic of Industry Exposition were never built. Several people tried to save the property, including New York developer William Zeckendorf and Walter Cobb himself, but late in 1960, Magic Mountain was sold at auction. It successfully reopened in 1971 as Heritage Square, but was known as much for its stores and theater as it was for its amusement devices.²⁵

A second entertainment development in Denver in the 1950s actually brought Walt Disney himself to town. While the *Denver Republican* had praised Lakeside in 1907 as a sorely needed addition to Denver’s summer amusement options, by the late 1950s a different attitude seemed to prevail and Denver newspapers asserted that residents needed more activities that people could enjoy year round, regardless of weather conditions. Walt Disney was ready and willing to step in with his potential solution for the problem. Bowling alleys and swimming pools enjoyed renewed popularity in the 1950s as family friendly entertainment venues. Bowling in particular had come to have a very sleazy reputation by the early 1900s, but a careful marketing campaign in the 1940s and early 1950s that stressed clean, air conditioned buildings and automatic pinsetters succeeded in overcoming that reputation and making the sport a family-friendly form of entertainment. In late 1958, Walt Disney’s lawyer, Loyd Wright, Sr., approached him with a proposal for a recreation complex that would include a large bowling

alley and swimming pool. Disney not only convinced most of his family to invest in the project, but several other celebrities as well, including George Burns and Gracie Allen, Jack Benny, Burl Ives, Spike Jones, Art Linkletter, and John Payne. After months of study, the investors decided to locate their project on seven acres of land on South Colorado Boulevard and Kentucky Avenue in the Denver suburb of Glendale. Construction on the new venture, appropriately named Celebrity Lanes, was already underway when Disney, Jack Benny, Spike Jones, and John Payne arrived in Denver on December 14, 1959, for the groundbreaking ceremony. At a reception at the Brown Palace afterwards, Benny joked that although he knew "as much about bowling as Zsa Zsa Gabor does about housekeeping," he was not going to miss the chance to make money on what he was sure would be a successful venture. Disney, in his remarks, promoted the center as a perfect place to fill the recreational needs of adults and children, something that had been one of his primary concerns with Disneyland.²⁶

As built, the Celebrity Lanes complex featured an eighty-lane bowling alley, Colorado's largest indoor pool (it held 500,000 gallons of water and Mickey Mouse and Goofy were known to water ski behind speedboats in it), a massive video game arcade, slot car track, restaurants, and even a health spa. The bowling alley opened in 1960, with other elements of the complex opening over the next year until the swimming pool officially opened in July 1961, completing the project. The initial investment proved disappointing for the celebrity investors, so The Walt Disney Company bought them out in 1962 and renamed the complex Celebrity Sports Center. The Disney Company owned Celebrity until 1979, when it sold it to a group of Denver bankers and real estate investors. For the final fifteen years under Disney ownership, Celebrity was used as a training ground for future managers of Walt Disney World because it gave them experience at managing a family resort. The only experience they did not gain at Celebrity was in managing

a hotel (the original plans for the complex called for a hotel, but it was never built), so Disney leased a Hilton hotel in Florida and turned over management of it to Disney staff. Celebrity Sports Center remained in operation until June 1994, when it succumbed to developers eager for the land and pressure from Glendale residents who came to perceive it as a haven for delinquents. At the height of its popularity, Celebrity drew millions of visitors, from regular customers to nationally known sports figures. Lakeside's attendance figures kept up with it, with Krasner expecting the park to draw between 600,000 and 700,000 visitors during its four month season in 1960.²⁷

Thirty-five years passed between the day Magic Mountain closed its gates and the day Celebrity Sports Center hosted its last bowlers and swimmers. In the amusement industry, that amount of time could be ten times the life span of some amusement parks. Yet, when both closed their doors, Lakeside Amusement Park was still going strong. Most observers would have expected almost any amusement park to fold in the face of direct Disney competition, but Lakeside had spent years perfecting its business model and building a loyal customer base. At one point, a reporter for the *Rocky Mountain News* even wrote that Lakeside “offers in the original much of the same kind of architecture the late Walt Disney paid untold sums to recreate in his Main Street entry of Disneyland and more recently in Florida.” Lakeside had stood toe-to-toe with the new giant of the amusement park industry and had actually won.²⁸

Lakeside's victory was thanks in large part to Benjamin Krasner, who responded to the Disney challenge by stepping up his efforts at keeping Lakeside a thriving venture. With business at the park booming after the mall's opening, Krasner embarked on another expansion, and in February 1958 he started filling in fifty feet of Lake Rhoda on the northeast side of the lake. Two new rides filled the space: the Scrambler, which simulated an egg beater by spinning

riders past each other, and the Satellite, a German-made rocket ship ride that allowed riders to control their own craft. Krasner spent \$100,000 for the location, installation, and equipping of the Satellite alone. The Satellite was the first ride of its kind in the United States, and in an amusing twist, his purchase of it allowed Krasner to one-up Disneyland, which had to settle for getting the second Satellite, which arrived later that year. The Scramble and Satellite both threatened to beat out the Cyclone as the top attraction in the park, with *Billboard* reporting that the line for the Scrambler formed at 6 p.m. and never stopped until the park closed. Another new attraction at the park that year was a 160-foot by fifty-foot dirt track constructed on the edge of the lake, where people could rent miniature gasoline-powered sports cars imported from Germany. The cars, which were completely under the control of riders, were a popular new addition. Additionally, Krasner replaced the aging bumper cars with twenty new Auto Skooters, also imported from Germany. The addition of the Scrambler, Satellite, and race cars brought the total number of adult rides at Lakeside to twenty-three. When the season ended, however, the Cyclone remained the champion, with the *Rocky Mountain News* referring to it as “the daddy of all roller coasters.”²⁹

New bands, free acts, and special performances provided entertainment for the growing crowds that descended on the park. In July 1955, Lakeside hosted Countess Agnes Van Rosen’s Tournament of Thrills, a three day series of bullfights with top bullfighters from Mexico. It was the first time since 1913 that bullfights had taken place at Lakeside, and over four thousand people were in attendance at one performance when Rafael Lorrea was knocked down and trampled by a bull. Lorrea’s injuries were not serious, but they did aggravate an older injury from a goring in Mexico earlier that year. An appearance by Gene Holter’s Wild Animal Show highlighted the opening of the 1956 season, and his act included camel races, Si Otis and his

trick mule, Big Babe the performing elephant, and zebra and donkey polo games. The animal show was reminiscent of similar scenes at Manhattan Beach or Arlington Park decades earlier, though fortunately no bystanders were killed by elephants as had happened many years earlier at Manhattan Beach.³⁰

The El Patio Ballroom, newly renovated and renamed Moonlight Gardens Ballroom in 1956, hosted the world premiere of Al Galante's band, though the ballroom craze was slowly but surely on its way out at amusement parks across the country. Galante had been a singer with Dick Jurgen's band, regular performers at Elitch's Trocadero ballroom. Krasner also started booking popular recording bands, including the Four Lads (whose hits included "Istanbul" and "Moments to Remember") and the Diamonds (who were a year away from releasing one of their biggest hits, "Little Darlin'"), in an effort to entice younger people to visit. *Billboard* referred to the competition between Lakeside and Elitch's as "the battle of the bandstands," although Elitch's seemed to have a slight edge as the Trocadero was crowded to near capacity nightly. There was, however, a "definite increase" in the business at Lakeside's Moonlight Gardens once the changes were in place. But, by 1958, Moonlight Gardens was open only on weekends and Krasner had gone back to using a house band once again. Elitch's also continued to be singled out for the performances at its theater, a bit higher class than Lakeside's race cars, and yet both attractions drew enormous crowds to their respective parks.³¹

By the 1958 season, the *Rocky Mountain News* reported that "Lakeside's entire operation is planned for family fun," and an article in the June 2, 1958 issue of *Billboard* described how the park went after this customer base in the 1950s. School groups held picnics at the park at the end of school years, while industrial, church, and civic groups and service clubs made up the overall picnic traffic through Lakeside. Many groups also took advantage of a reduced ride fare

policy that allowed them to sell tickets as fundraisers. Krasner also had coupons in more than 300 hotels in the Denver area that allowed free admission to the park, after which customers had to purchase tickets for each individual ride. The coupons had a place for the motels to stamp their names, making it appear as if they were the ones paying for their guests to get into the park, which in turn promoted goodwill towards the hotels. Businesses, unions, and numerous other groups provided company days for employees and their families at Lakeside. The Public Service Company of Colorado, Denver's power company, for example, continued holding its annual picnic at Lakeside, drawing thousands of employees and their families to the park. With lower admission costs than Ely's and ample picnic grounds, Lakeside promoted itself as an inexpensive place for families to escape their cares and worries for a short while.³²

As the 1950s came to a close, one final mishap served as a reminder of what a difficult decade it had been. On September 13, 1959, two days before Lakeside closed for the season, a car carrying two brothers, Don and Jim Christiansen, came to a stop on the Wild Chipmunk. The ride operator, Don Saxon, an airman from Lowry, pulled the emergency brake to stop the cars that were coming up behind the stopped car but the brake failed. Four other cars hit the stopped car, resulting in broken bones and bruises for some of those involved in the accident though no one was seriously hurt.³³

The pace of change at Lakeside Amusement Park slowed considerably in the 1960s, a welcome break for Krasner after the frenzied pace he had kept up in the 1940s and 1950s, but he was far from done with the park. As late as 1961, he still had Richard Crowther planning improvements for Lakeside. That year, Crowther came up with designs for new ticket booths at the ballroom and the Staride, along with a new sign for the Satellite ride. Krasner had tried to keep Lakeside fresh, and Crowther's new designs were no exception as the Staride booth would

have featured a very 1960s-looking gold star and the Satellite sign would have resembled a rocket and been topped with a large grey plastic globe. The new booths and sign were never built. Changes in rides were less frequent in the 1960s. After selling the park's thirty-five year old Lindy Loop ride in 1964, Krasner purchased three more new rides from Germany. On the Matterhorn ride, the cars, which resembled bobsleds, traveled a circular path that went up and down, simulating a ride on a bobsled. *The Denver Post* noted that ride was as impressive for its beauty as its thrills, with artists hand-painting the exterior of the ride with scenes of sledders, skiers, skaters, and mountaineers. On the interior of the ride, blinking lights helped further the impression of moving through snowstorms. Krasner also added new Scoota boats to the pond that year and a Trabant, where riders sat on a rotating disc as it spun while rising and falling. The new rides, according to the *Post*, were incredibly popular with Lakeside visitors.³⁴

Just as a daring robbery had marked the beginning of a demanding era for Lakeside, a second one seemed to mark its end. On September 8, 1964, three masked men, armed with guns, entered the park's main offices at 3:15 in the afternoon and emptied the safe and cashier's cage of over \$36,000, proceeds from the Labor Day weekend at the park and Speedway. Krasner later told reporters that the robbers came half an hour before an armored car was scheduled to pick up the money and take it to the bank, strong evidence they had been planning the heist for a while. The theft naturally led the Denver newspapers to compare it to the time in 1951 when Krasner and his wife were kidnapped and robbed, but just as he had done in 1951 Krasner put the robbery behind him and moved into the 1965 season raring to go. On opening day that year, a record crowd turned out, including thousands of high school students who came for their traditional Color Day. The Devil's Joy Ride, a dark ride, so named because the attraction was inside a building rather than out in the open, was the new attraction for the summer. According to an

advertisement for the ride, it was eighty feet by forty feet and the exterior was decorated with devils and other grim looking figures. The installation at Lakeside was the first in the United States, and marked the first time since the 1910s that a new dark ride was located in the park. With its wide variety of attractions, *The Denver Post* reported that the park could handle 10,000 riders an hour. One of the biggest crowds ever visited the park over Memorial Day weekend that season, and the park was so popular that Krasner even returned the ballroom to a nightly schedule instead of weekends only.³⁵

By 1965, Lakeside Amusement Park had survived the collapse of the City Beautiful movement, successfully reinvented itself as a working class amusement park, faced down competition from one-time Disney employees and Walt Disney himself, and withstood tragedy. With its transition to blue collar park complete, Lakeside seemed ready to enter a new period where it simply needed to keep up with changing tastes in order to prosper. The park survived largely thanks to Benjamin Krasner's constant experimentation with new and novel ways to keep customers entertained and coming back for more, in addition to his willingness to try new methods of protecting the park, especially with the shopping mall. With a formula that worked, Lakeside survived the troublesome 1950s, a rare feat for an amusement park of its age. As the park entered the 1960s, it even became somewhat of a Denver legend. Articles in *The Denver Post* attempted to find the origins of the famous carousel, a story that appeared to be lost, the newspaper reported. Krasner and his brother-in-law, Martin Ruttner, who was helping him run the park by then, told the newspaper that no records existed as to where the ride came from or when it was installed. Even the park's oldest employees, said the *Post*, simply remembered it just "being there when they came." Another article profiled the two engineers who ran the trains in 1962. K.C. Watkins, then 79, had retired after forty-two years with the Rio Grande Southern and

Union Pacific Railroads, while Percy Perkins, 74, had spent forty-eight years with the Burlington, Colorado and Southern, Denver and Rio Grande Western, Southern Pacific, and the Los Angeles, San Pedro and Salt Lake. When the men retired, Krasner hired them, believing that their knowledge was simply too valuable to lose. The legend also began that both trains were from the 1904 St. Louis World's Fair, even though the one known as Puffing Bill was built in 1953. The details may have been off just a bit or shrouded in haze, but it did not matter as much because a sense of nostalgia had taken hold when it came to Lakeside. The park was a rare survivor, and it remained so year after year. But, as the 1965 season at Lakeside Amusement Park came to an end, death would once again visit the park. This time, however, it seemingly signified the arrival of a whole new set of problems that left many wondering if Lakeside Amusement Park could survive much longer.³⁶

CHAPTER NINE:

LAKESIDE SPEEDWAY, THE STOCKERS TAKE OVER

As blue collar as Lakeside Speedway and the midget races might have been, the stock car races were even more so. Tom Wolfe, in his collection of essays, *The Kandy-Kolored Tangerine-Flake Streamline Baby*, wrote that stock cars were the invention of people whose lives had been “practically invisible” before World War II. The war allowed those people to earn the money to build “monuments to their own styles.” By the 1960s, stock car racing had replaced baseball as the most popular sport in the South, but for most of what Wolfe called the “educated classes in the country,” stock cars were “beneath serious consideration, still the preserve of ratty people with ratty hair and dermatitis.” In the essay that gave the book its title, Wolfe described his discovery of the custom car culture of the 1950s and 1960s, which, like stock cars, had spread like wildfire since 1945. In writing about the type of kid, as he referred to them, who was so passionate about cars that were meant to be both art and speed machines, Wolfe said that they were “not from the levels of society that produce children who write sensitive analytical prose.” Yet, the very people who created stock cars and made stock car racing a popular sport were constantly creating new things and changing the way of life in the United States even if they were not among the elites. Stock car racing reinforced Lakeside Amusement Park’s working class character and made it even more visible.¹

Stock cars evolved from the roadsters of an earlier era in automobile racing and were, as the name implies, strictly stock cars. The cars were equipped as purchased, with no modifications for racing allowed. The stock car division later grew to include modifieds, which

allowed for some modifications, especially to the engines, and Late Model, which were cars built especially for racing. All three classes raced at Lakeside Speedway in the nearly forty years that stock cars dominated the track. As the new racing culture spread, people who had formerly ignored racing suddenly began to take notice, especially automobile manufacturers who saw a great deal of money to be made. Automotive historian Leon Mandel writes that, by the mid-1950s, automakers in Detroit had recognized the growing phenomenon and began to specifically build and market cars with drag racing or stock car racing in mind. For many years, Ford ruled the industry in this area, but Chevrolet, Chrysler, and especially Pontiac did their best to unseat the king. As hard as the other automakers tried, it was difficult to beat Ford, which was the most popular car for many years at Lakeside Speedway.²

Lakeside Speedway did not play as prominent a role in the development of stock car racing in Colorado as it had with the midgets, but when the stock cars first arrived at the park they were building on what was already a very long tradition of racing them. Some historians suggest that the first stock car race took place in 1907, but racing historian Allen Brown places it in 1909 with the running of the 22.75 mile Long Island Stock Car Classic. Stock car racing had a long history by the 1930s, but it was not until then that it became truly popular for the first time. In 1934, the Oakland Speedway scheduled a 250-mile stock car race, and two years later, AAA sanctioned a 200 mile race in Daytona Beach. The stock cars returned to the Oakland Speedway in 1938 with a 500-mile race. The end result was that stock car racing had gained a firm foothold in the United States by 1939. By the time the country entered World War II, organized stock car races had spread to Indiana, Pennsylvania, and Georgia.³

As it had done with the midgets, the war put a stop to stock car racing for the duration of the conflict. Drivers began racing as soon as they could after the war ended and rationing was

lifted, but not everyone was happy with how it was progressing. Some fans argued that the sport was not spreading as rapidly as they had hoped it would. In response, a group of men led by driver and promoter Bill France formed the National Association for Stock Car Auto Racing, better known as NASCAR, in 1947 to promote and sanction stock car races. Within a few years of NASCAR's formation, fans around the country had established several other sanctioning bodies, including the Central State Racing Association, the Midwest Auto Racing Club, and the Automotive Racing Club of America. AAA, which had sanctioned midget races for years, finally joined the stock car movement in 1950. The first major race for the stock cars under the new sanctioning bodies was a 500-mile event at the new one-and-a-quarter mile Darling Raceway in South Carolina.⁴

While NASCAR got underway, in Colorado, a group of drivers organized the Colorado Automobile Racing Club (CARC) in 1946. Their primary goal was to get roadsters, which were then gaining in popularity, off the streets and onto a track, mostly for safety reasons. Prior to CARC's formation, the only place drivers had to race their roadsters was the streets of Denver, which was very unsafe for the other motorists they encountered on the road. With the club's backing, the first sanctioned roadster races took place at the Jefferson County Fairgrounds' rodeo grounds on Table Mountain in 1946. The club easily achieved their initial goal of getting the races off of Denver's streets, but the rodeo grounds were not an ideal location for the races. Seeking a better spot, the group moved the races to the five-eighths mile track at Brighton Speedway, where spectators soon filled the grandstands to capacity for each race. It was at Brighton that the CARC started charging a small admission fee in order to "form a hospital fund" for the drivers. The club quickly realized, however, that Brighton Speedway lacked adequate protection for spectators, and by the end of 1947 had moved the races to Englewood Speedway,

which was then attempting to challenge Lakeside Speedway's dominance in the midget races.⁵

The quarter-mile asphalt track at Englewood was a challenge to the drivers of the large stock cars, which weighed between 1,900 and 2,600 pounds and were meant for longer tracks. But, the drivers liked Englewood and decided to modify their cars to work better with the track. With the weight of each car cut down to 1,200 to 1,400 pounds, which was just slightly heftier than the heaviest midget, and the standard tires replaced with those used on the midgets, drivers found that the Englewood track became manageable. By the opening of the 1948 season, the stock cars were similar to the midgets in more than just size and tires, however. They were also, according to an article in *Speed Age* magazine, "approaching the track record times, attendance and payoff records" of the midgets racing at Englewood. On opening day of the 1948 race season, the stock car races outdrew the opening day baseball game of the Denver Bears, something the midget races had been doing for many years. The sport of stock car racing was heating up in Denver.⁶

As the number of spectators at the races grew each week, the drivers began to realize that they needed to put on a good show for their fans. For the 1948 season they added clowns, special stunts and guest appearances, cleaned up the appearance of both the cars and pit crews, and began making appearances at other Denver area tracks. They finally arrived at Lakeside Speedway on August 6, 1950. Drivers Morris Musick and Gib Lilly (who were also both involved with midget racing) won the first races. Seeing how enormously popular they were at their first outing at the park, Benjamin Krasner immediately added stock cars to the rest of the season's schedule. Their initial popularity assured that they would be asked to make return appearances the next year, and throughout the 1951 season the stock cars were a regular feature at the Speedway. They were well on their way to becoming Lakeside's new stars, but the

midgets still clung to their dominance for the rest of the year. By the end of that summer, however, the stock cars clearly had the upper hand at Lakeside, as was the case at tracks throughout Colorado.⁷

Midgets and stock cars continued to share the track at the Speedway for the rest of the years that it operated, and by the 1960s the two groups enjoyed an easy working relationship. It had not, however, been very easy for them to get to that point and many midget drivers remained bitter towards the stock car drivers for years. In 1952, for example, Lakeside Speedway pulled out as the last remaining track in the Rocky Mountain Midget Racing Association circuit. With Lakeside gone, the once-mighty RMMRA essentially ceased to exist that year and the midgets were without a sanctioning body. The Denver Midget Racing Club sanctioned the races from 1952 to 1954, but they sponsored only one race at Lakeside, in 1953. Making its return to Lakeside Speedway in 1953 and 1954 was AAA. The club sponsored three midget shows each of those years, but they were part of a touring midget racing program that the organization put on rather than regular races. Without the backing of a major sanctioning body, the midgets were struggling to survive in Denver. Well aware of the midgets' plight, the CARC decided to step in and sanction the midget races at Lakeside beginning in 1956.⁸

More than a few midget drivers, writes historian Bill Hill, were outraged at CARC's move into midget sanctioning. They blamed the stock car group for nearly driving the midgets out of business in the first place and felt resentful at its backing, believing that the group seemed to want to own them, which only added insult to injury. But, according to Hill, CARC had no desire to own the midgets. Many of the stock car supporters had been, and still were, fans of the midgets, and several of the stock car drivers had driven midgets in addition to the bigger cars. Far from wanting to control the midgets, the stockers simply wanted to see the smaller cars

survive. Over the next two seasons the CARC sanctioned both stock car and midget programs at Lakeside until the RMMRA revived in 1958. The midget group might have been back, but they never regained their dominance, and the stock cars and CARC remained in command at Lakeside Speedway until the end.⁹

The midget drivers were not the only ones disappointed by the new dominance of the stock cars. The increasing popularity of the stock cars at the Speedway was good for business, but a bit of a sad change for Benjamin Krasner. Krasner was a fan of racing in general, but the midgets, remembers driver Marv Slusser, were his favorite cars. Krasner, however, had repeatedly proven himself a very smart businessman, and had shown time and again that he was more than willing to adapt his amusement park to changing times in order to keep it viable. The same proved true at the Speedway. Stock cars, said Slusser, were simply a sign of changing times and Krasner knew that his Speedway had to change too in order to survive. Krasner did keep the midgets around, moving their races to Saturday nights while giving the stock cars the prime Wednesday and Sunday night spots.¹⁰

The vehicles themselves accounted for much of the popularity the stock cars enjoyed. By the late 1940s, midgets had become expensive machines that cost a great deal of money to buy and even more to maintain. Stock cars were just the opposite. In the first years that they raced, most of the cars at Lakeside (and other tracks) were 1932, 1933, or 1934 Fords with standard V6 engines. Many drivers recalled that they were inexpensive to both buy and maintain and as a result, said stock car driver Bob Land, there were so many of them around that “everybody knew somebody who had one.” Land referred to stock cars as the beer compared to the champagne of the midgets. Sonny Coleman, who raced both midgets and stock cars at Lakeside, described the stock car drivers as kids who wanted to race but could not get started in the midgets because of a

lack of money or other concerns. While they may have been kids, Coleman also remembered that those kids were exceptionally skilled at knowing what to do to make their cars handle well on Lakeside's difficult track, something at which the midget drivers had to constantly work very hard. By 1957, forty-eight stock cars were appearing each night there was racing at Lakeside, twenty-four in the A class and twenty-four in the B class. The B cars were not as fast as the A cars (which could reach speeds of up to sixty miles per hour), but having the B class allowed those drivers to both race and get recognition, something they greatly appreciated. There was also what was called a Hooligan race at Lakeside, which was made up of the cars that had not managed to qualify for the B class race. Driver Sheri Thurman Graham, one of the rare women drivers at Lakeside, described the twenty-five lap Hooligan race as essentially a demolition derby in a circle, and one of the regular competitors was a driver called Cowboy Jackson. According to Graham, Jackson always had cars that were impressive to look at but which simply did not run well. Jackson always seemed to lose in the Hooligan as well. When Jackson finally won a Hooligan one night, everyone in the grandstands was on their feet cheering for him. At the same time that at least forty-eight cars were running at Lakeside, about eighty cars raced at Englewood Speedway, further evidence of the overall popularity of the stock cars.¹¹

The sheer number of them certainly helped drive the stock car's popularity, but the stock cars also provided a lot more action for the fans to watch. Midget races, as far as most people were concerned, had grown dull by 1950 and Benjamin Krasner's efforts at livening them up had failed to spark a renewed interest in them. The stock cars, on the other hand, seemed to generate an excitement all on their own. Unlike the midget races, all of the stock car races were fully inverted, with the fastest car starting in the last position. The midgets had experimented with inverted races, but only in the time trials and never in the feature race. The stock car drivers also

did a lot more passing than the midgets had done, which was something fans liked to see a lot of in races. Times for the stock cars were also more exciting. Given the follow-the-leader type racing that most midgets were doing by the late 1940s, one car might finish a race only a few hundredths of a second ahead or behind the next car. When it came to the stock car races, there could be as much as a full second difference between cars. It was still a small amount of time, but it made a difference to those watching and greatly pleased fans. Action was vital, and the stock cars had a lot more of it to offer than the midgets.¹²

Passing and timing were not the only things that made the stock cars more exciting. Stock cars, midget driver Charlie Gottschalck remembered, were very easy to flip, and there were far more rollovers with the stock cars than there were with the midgets. Many jokingly referred to the upside down stock cars as taxi cabs, but even though they had a higher tendency to roll over, the stock cars were relatively safer than the midgets due to their larger size, enclosed passenger compartments, and safety equipment. As driver Marv Slusser recalled, stock car accidents might hurt the drivers a little bit, but they were not getting killed in the accidents. While they were safer, the increased rollovers resulted in what Sonny Coleman called “wrecks you wouldn’t believe.” Bob Land blamed the accidents on the open style of the wheels on the cars and the tightness of the track. Sheri Thurman Graham pointed out that, given the diminutive size of the track and relatively large size of the cars, if there was an accident, all of the cars usually managed to get tangled up in it. As she said, “when they had a pile-up, they really had a pile-up.” Fans loved the extra action taking place on the track, packing the grandstands night after night in order to see what might happen.¹³

When the stock cars first started racing at Lakeside, the accidents were such a novelty that photographs of them even appeared in the weekly programs. One program from 1950, while

still heavily promoting the midget races, featured a picture of a demolished Essex stock car that driver Blu Plemons had managed to lodge between the guardrail and grandstands. The car was absolutely demolished. Looking at the tangled mess, Plemons asserted that he had never put a scratch on any of the cars that he raced at Lakeside or anywhere else. Plemons's assertion led his fellow drivers to joke that while the car was indeed destroyed, it was true that there was not a single scratch on it.¹⁴

As exciting as the accidents might have been, more than just the cars were getting torn up during the stock car races. Stock car drivers were a far rowdier bunch than those who had driven the midgets and fist fights frequently broke out between drivers, especially after accidents or between races. Just as more accidents seemed to get the crowds' juices flowing, the fights heated things up even more. The midget drivers began fighting too, but not with the stock car drivers. The midget drivers were not at all happy at being replaced by the stock cars as the main feature at the Speedway, but there was little they could do about it. The frustration that many of them felt led to them fighting with each other. Rarely, however, did they take it out on the stock car drivers. Sonny Coleman did not remember any animosity between the midget and stock car drivers, although Bob Campbell vividly recalled one night when someone pulled the spark plug wires off of the stock cars in an effort to keep them from running that night.¹⁵

The stock car races also brought the first female drivers to Lakeside Speedway. The Powder Puff Girls usually were the wives or girlfriends of the regular drivers, and they usually sold programs and played music between the races. Sometime in the mid-1950s, the CARC got the idea of having the women race in a ten-lap trophy dash. Women drivers were considered somewhat of "a lark" at the time, and most spectators and drivers viewed the first Powder Puff race as simply one more part of the entertainment package that CARC had been perfecting ever

since their 1948 season. The Powder Puff drivers, however, took their races very seriously and many of them even proved to be very good at it. In fact, according to Powder Puff driver Sheri Thurman Graham, some of the men were even surprised at how well the women handled the cars. It was not long before the Powder Puff races became a regular feature at Lakeside. The women were not allowed in the pits, which had been a long-standing rule at the Speedway. In fact, photographer Jerry Miller referred to the pits as “sacred” space. The women had two races, fifteen minutes of hot laps and one ten-lap race after the B class cars ran. Prior to each race, the women drivers gathered outside the gates to the pits and when it was time for them to get to their cars they were escorted in by a pit hostess. They sometimes had little time to prepare themselves if the car they were going to drive in their race also happened to be one of the cars from the B class races, which finished just ahead of them. Even the trophy girls were excluded from the pits, recalled Marv Slusser, and after the men ran their races, the trophy girls were escorted into the pits to present the trophies and then taken back out to the stands. That rule finally changed shortly before the Speedway closed.¹⁶

While most of the early Powder Puff racers drove cars that belonged to their husbands or boyfriends, CARC rules did permit women to have their own cars as long as the car was registered with the club. But, few took advantage of the opportunity. Auto racing was still an expensive sport (Sheri Thurman Graham called it the most expensive of all the sports with which she was involved) and being able to drive someone else’s car made sense financially. Sonny Coleman remembered one woman in particular, Audrey Bolyard, who took racing especially serious. Bolyard was one of the few woman drivers who had her own car, which she had custom built, for Powder Puff races at Lakeside. Although she only drove for a short while, Bolyard, who came from Kansas, was “one hell of a race driver” according to those who knew her, and

she won several championships within the CARC Powder Puff division in her light purple car at Lakeside. Those women who shared cars with their husbands also generally shared all of the equipment that went with racing. Sheri and Don Thurman, for example, shared the helmet that the rules required all drivers to wear.¹⁷

For the racers, both male and female, the entire operation was very much a family affair. Pit crews were often made up of fathers, brothers, and male cousins, while mothers, aunts, and female cousins served as pit hostesses and children as trophy boys or girls. In addition to helping on race night, the entire family also helped get the cars ready during the week. The cars always needed maintenance, even if they had been fortunate enough to escape an accident during the previous week's races. As Sheri Thurman Graham said, drivers and their families essentially lived their entire lives based around the cars. For example, she remembers working on the family's race car with her father-in-law whenever her husband had to be out of town for work during the week. Each Sunday night of racing began with the drivers and their families arriving at Lakeside early to eat hamburgers at the park's restaurant (which Graham called the best hamburgers in town) before heading to the pits to prepare for the night ahead. The races were also family affairs for the fans, who often spent Sunday afternoons in the amusement park, eagerly waiting the moment when the Speedway's ticket booth would open so they could buy their tickets for that night's event.¹⁸

The Powder Puff Club had grown to thirty members by 1968, though only eleven of them actually raced. By 1973 there were twelve drivers. More women would like to have raced, according to those who were there, but they did not have cars of their own and did not know anyone who would let them drive one of their cars. A number of the owners, according to Graham, simply were not open to letting women drive their cars. The average age of the female

drivers, according to a story in *The Denver Post*, was twenty-six and a half, and they had twenty-eight children between them. In addition to racing, the women appeared in parades, had a booth at the annual Arvada Harvest Festival, and took part in fundraising programs. After Benjamin Krasner's death, the Powder Puff drivers met with his wife Miriam to plan each week's program during racing season.¹⁹

The Powder Puff drivers, according to Sheri Thurman Graham, had a smaller percentage of accidents in their races than did the men. She credited this to the lower number of cars in the Powder Puff races and the ten lap limit. Still, she said, there were certain women that the other drivers were very careful of when they did pass them. The shortened races also made it harder for the women to win depending on their pole position at the start of the race. If a woman started in the back, she had to pass all of the other drives in a very short amount of time, at least one per lap and sometimes two, to become the leader. The restrictions on their races were sometimes irritating as well. Graham said that the Powder Puff drivers could have been competitive if given more of a chance, but no one challenged the situation. One spectator, she said, even suggested that they could go to a lawyer to sue for the chance to race with the men rather than in a separate class. But, so many of the women shared cars with their husbands or boyfriends that it would have been difficult to decide who got to drive the one they had. Buying and maintain a second car was out of the question as it was beyond the financial ability of most families. At the same time, according to Graham, a number of male drivers and owners would have pulled their cars from the races before they let women drive them or compete alongside them. Throughout the years the Powder Puffs raced at Lakeside, the men kept a tight hold on the races and steadfastly refused to let the women have more time or more races. Graham noted that the same situation still exists in modern times as women try to break into NASCAR. Still, the fans at Lakeside

enjoyed watching the women race and the women thoroughly enjoyed their time on the track.²⁰

The Powder Puff drivers, said Sheri Thurman Graham, raced for the very same reasons as the men: they “wanted quick time and to win.” The Powder Puff drivers accumulated points throughout the season depending on where they finished in the races, ranging from four points for first place down to one point for fourth place, and at the end of the season the driver with the most points became the track Powder Puff champion. Mid-way through the 1968 season, Graham, who was Rookie of the Year in 1966, was the point leader; she went on to be that year’s Powder Puff champion. She detailed her experience driving for the *Post*, remembering that the first time she raced at Lakeside Speedway she was so excited that she ran over her husband’s toolbox while driving into her stall at the track. She quickly proved her capacity for racing, however, and even managed to beat her husband Don Thurman by .18 seconds in the time trials driving the 1933 Ford that they shared. It happened so frequently, she later said, that members of the pit crews even had bets on whether or not she would out time her husband. She told reporter Lois Barr that her family was very supportive of her racing career, which to her was the most exciting of all the sports she took part in (the list also included bowling, volleyball, and softball). She dismissed accidents as something that just occurred as part of racing and given the safety equipment that drivers were required to wear, she noted that drivers rarely got hurt. Graham told Barr that after one particular accident, the result of the throttle in her car sticking and causing her to hit the wall, she was more worried about the car than she was about herself. She even took part in demolition derbies at both Lakeside and Englewood Speedways, although at Lakeside she competed against men rather than fellow women drivers. She later said that she simply loved to race and drive because it “just felt natural” to her.²¹

It was obvious from the tone of the article in *The Denver Post* that, to most people,

women race car drivers at Lakeside were still a novelty 1968 even though they had been racing as part of the CARC for several years by then. Reporter Lois Barr wrote, for example, that Graham's most embarrassing moments racing were splitting her pants getting into her car one night and pinning a man against the fence in the pits when she entered too quickly. Of that incident, she said, "he probably thought I was a typical woman driver." But, it was also obvious that the women took racing very seriously. Graham told Barr that mechanical knowledge was essential to racing, and that she had worked on the car with her husband and was capable of changing spark plugs and tires and installing wiring on her own. She also thought that racing had made her a much better driver in general because of the faster reflexes and knowledge of what speed could do that racing instilled. She even urged other husbands to let their wives drive if they were so inclined. Graham later said that the Powder Puff drivers had a hard time being taken seriously, and that some of the male drivers would have happily gotten rid of them if they could have. But, despite the opposition, the women were both very competitive and very serious about the sport.²²

As the midgets lost popularity, it was no longer the case that fans had to be in line by 5 p.m. if they wanted tickets to the midget races; by the early 1950s they could simply walk up at any time and be assured of getting a seat. But, on stock car nights, it was another story. The bigger cars consistently packed the stands every night during race season, and on holidays, the grandstands were filled to capacity and then some with standing room only crowds. The crowds, however, were not the same group of people who had come for the midget races. The stock cars, said driver Marv Slusser, attracted a very different group of spectators to Lakeside Speedway. In fact, according to Sonny Coleman, they were "absolutely totally different." Those attending the midget races very often dressed up for the event, and if the men were not in suits they were at

least in slacks and dress shirts. The midget races may have been a very blue-collar pastime, but they were still a special occasion and people dressed accordingly. In contrast, the stock car fans arrived in their work clothes and expected a good show. Coleman began backing off from stock car racing when, one night while he was racing, several especially rowdy fans threatened to go after his wife and daughter, who were sitting in the stands watching. He said it was one thing for other drivers to fight with him, but when anyone went after his family they had crossed a line, and for him, that was enough. It was also something that never happened during the years when the midgets dominated the Speedway. Photographer Jerry Miller commented that the stock cars, which brought a very different spirit with them, essentially resulted in the Speedway becoming two very different tracks depending on which group was racing.²³

As difficult as the change from midgets to stock cars might have been for some, by 1953 even *Billboard* had recognized what an important role the stock cars played in drawing business to Lakeside. In early August the magazine reported that the stock cars were primary among the attractions that “keep the crowd coming back,” and that the park used both stock and midget racing to “good results.” As the stock cars continued to increase in popularity, in 1953 KLZ-TV, the CBS affiliate in Denver, began broadcasting a half hour of the races each Sunday night. The broadcasts introduced a new audience to the races, and in the process made Lakeside Speedway bigger and more popular than it had ever been. That same year, Universal Pictures released the movie “Johnny Dark,” starring Tony Curtis and Piper Laurie. In the movie, Dark, played by Curtis, is an automobile designer who comes up with a radical new design for a race car. His employer rejects the design, so Dark, with the help of his boss’s granddaughter, played by Laurie, steals it and enters the car in a Canada to Mexico race, which he wins, in order to prove how good it is. To help promote the movie, Universal urged the Sports Car Club of America and

other race car groups to sponsor Johnny Dark themed events at their tracks. Although no details of the event have survived, Lakeside was on board, hosting a Johnny Dark stock car race at the Speedway in June, a notable event as far as *Billboard* was concerned based on the coverage the magazine gave it.²⁴

The Johnny Dark race started a new tradition at the Speedway as afterwards Krasner continually hosted special appearances by various novelty acts. As was the case with the special events and picnics at the amusement park, the special events at the Speedway overflowed the already packed grandstands. Joie Chitwood's Thrill Show played a three-day engagement at the Speedway in July 1955. Chitwood was a very successful race car driver who drove in seven Indianapolis 500s before giving up driving in 1943 to focus on his stunt driving show, which was reportedly the inspiration for Evel Knievel's act. Over 110,000 people packed Chicago's Soldier Field to see one of his shows in the 1950s. Chitwood's drivers did jumps, rolled cars, raced at high speeds, and performed dozens of other stunts, usually in Chevrolets, which sponsored his show. Bill McGaw's Tournament of Thrills, which was similar to Chitwood's show, appeared at the Speedway in August 1955. Both shows, said *Billboard*, "pulled crowds greater than the usually jammed grandstand for the twice-weekly stock car shows." Two years later, Krasner scheduled a "Little 500" race at the Speedway. The 500-lap race went on for nearly five hours, one hour of which was broadcast live on television. The special race drew an additional 4,500 people "into his already jammed" park according to *Billboard*. The heavy promotion and special events worked amazingly well. One month into the 1958 season, the Speedway ticket booth had already taken in as much money as they had on all of the busiest nights of the previous year put together, which was impressive given that during the previous year the Speedway had consistently attracted 10,000 customers per night on race nights.²⁵

Beginning in 1955, Krasner even realized that he could use the races to get a head start on the summer amusement season. Because the racing season usually started at the end of April or beginning of May, several weeks before the amusement park opened, he could claim an earlier opening day than Elitch's. No other part of the park was open for business during the first weeks of racing, but it did allow Krasner to report to *Billboard* that his park was open several weeks earlier than rival Elitch's while also boosting the total seasonal earnings for the park. By that year, the stock cars were "one of the biggest crowd getters" for the park, reported *Billboard*, and even inclement weather failed to diminish the crowds that packed the grandstands on race nights. The rain may not have driven the spectators away, but it sometimes turned the track into an unsafe mess. Race officials would attempt to dry the track as best they could between storms, but if it was getting to be too late in the evening they would call off the rest of the night's program and the Speedway would issue rain checks for the next Sunday. That was not always ideal for the next week's gate receipts, but it was much appreciated by the fans and helped the Speedway earn a reputation that kept them coming back for more.²⁶

The 1955 season also proved the wisdom of Krasner's decision to allow KLZ-TV to broadcast the races. Still running at thirty minutes long, the program usually aired two or three races plus part of the demolition derby depending on time. But, wrote *Billboard*, the show rarely, if ever, broadcast the end of the "ear-splitting final event," which left "the video audience wanting more." If seeing the races on television was not enough to convince people to attend in person the next week, failing to see the finish of the final event was, and *Billboard* reported that attendance was up each week after a television broadcast. The broadcasts were simply one more part of Krasner's tireless promotional efforts. Nearly every midget driver who raced at Lakeside remembered how actively Krasner promoted both the amusement park and the midget races,

using his connections with *The Denver Post* to make sure both received heavy coverage. He was no less active with the stock car races. By 1956, frequent news stories about, and pictures of, the stock cars appeared in newspapers, and when combined with the weekly television shows, pushed attendance at the Speedway ever higher. The broadcast also introduced the Speedway to people around the country. One fan who had moved to California was shocked when he turned on the broadcast of a race one night only to see the familiar sight of Lakeside Amusement Park in the background as he watched the races. The television broadcast moved to ABC affiliate KBTW in 1957, and Krasner reported to *Billboard* that he was going to keep the Speedway open into September as the grandstands were still packed on Sunday nights.²⁷

Interest in the standard stock cars began to drop a bit in the mid-1960s and into the 1970s, but unlike with the midgets, there was much that could be done to help renew their popularity. The Speedway experimented for a short time with Figure 8 racing in the mid-1960s, and the sound of the cars hitting each other as they crossed in the middle of the track area became common. The Speedway also introduced a compact class, which many thought was more suitable for Lakeside's small track. There were few compacts racing at the Speedway when those races first started, but the number of cars grew steadily until by 1970 they were a large group. The first compact car class at Lakeside was made up mostly of Plymouth Valiants, Ford Falcons, and even a Corvair. In the early 1970s the compact cars became the Late Model class, which were cars built specifically for racing. Lakeside made the change official for the 1975 season, when the track announced that late models would be based on newer compact bodies such as Pintos, Vegas, Gremlins, and Mustangs. There were no weight restrictions on the new cars, however, as the Speedway did not have a scale with which to weigh the cars. Some drivers argued that the new cars were too big for the Speedway's track and never should have been

allowed on it. The older cars with their V6 engines, they felt, were about as big a car as ever should have been at the Speedway. The Late Models, with their far more powerful V8 engines, were too much car for the track, and in the opinion of many, ultimately led to its downfall.²⁸

The demolition derby was another popular Speedway feature that was revived in the 1970s to heighten interest in the track. Unlike the Hooligan race, the new demolition derby also revived the figure-eight configuration that the track had tried for one season in 1964. During regular races it had resulted in unwanted accidents that damaged expensive cars, but during a demolition derby involving junkers, those accidents were valuable entertainment. The last car still running was the winner. As one park employee said, the demolition derby made sure that people stayed until the very end because it was fun to watch and see who would emerge victorious. The idea was similar to when Benjamin Krasner made sure that the end of the final race was never broadcast over television in the 1950s—it forced people to actually come to the Speedway and stick around until the entire program was over.²⁹

Driver Marv Slusser called the Speedway a “racer’s track.” As difficult as the short and narrow Lakeside Speedway track could be for the midgets, it could be even more so for the bigger and heavier stock cars, although this did not truly become a major factor until the advent of Late Models in the 1970s. Most stock car drivers remember the track in the same terms as midget drivers, with its uphill and downhill straightaways, banked north turn, and flat south turn creating a difficult situation for drivers. Like the midget drivers before them, stock car drivers had to set up their cars differently for Lakeside than they would for other tracks. Lakeside was the undoing of many stock car drivers, just as it was with the midgets before them. Most midget drivers believed that anyone who could master the Speedway’s track could drive anywhere; stock car drivers Marv Slusser and Blu Plemons believed the same for the stock cars. Sheri

Thurman Graham said that, while the track's size and layout made it difficult, "if you found a good groove you could really go." And, as difficult as the Speedway might have been to drive on, Slusser, Plemons, and Graham all remembered it as a fun track. But, the three also drove when the original, and smaller, stock cars were on the track. The car that Plemons crashed through the guardrail in 1957, for example, was an Essex with a Hudson engine. The bigger, heavier Late Models offered a very different experience.³⁰

The 1988 season marked the Fiftieth Anniversary of Lakeside Speedway. It was also to be the last season for the track. To celebrate the anniversary, organizers decided to hold two special midget races, one in May and one in July, in addition to the usual stock car races. John Eatwell, then president of the RMMRA, won the May 7 race. The midget drivers had the second program, which featured a fifty-lap race in honor of the milestone, scheduled for July 27. Don Daly, who had raced at Lakeside in 1938, was even scheduled to be there for the event. But, before the midgets could run the race, tragedy struck.³¹

On Sunday, July 24, 1988, about 4,000 people were in the stands watching the stock car races when, shortly after 10 p.m., about halfway through the main event, a late model Camaro driven by Gary Burton went out of control on the southwest corner of the track and hit the guardrail. The car flew several feet through the air before hitting one of the track's stop lights, which caused it to spin around and hit the chain link fence that protected spectators from flying debris. The impact shredded a wooden fence, the pieces of which went flying into the stands. Burton walked away from the accident with only minor injuries. The car itself never hit spectators, but the pieces of wooden fence hit thirteen of them who were sitting in the first three rows of the southwest grandstands. Kristy Carlson, a hairstylist at Westminster Mall, was killed. Carlson's death was the first spectator fatality in the Speedway's history.³²

The accident was not the first or most spectacular accident at the Speedway. Debris from cars and accidents, ranging from tires to engine parts, had been flying into the stands for years. Sheri Thurman Graham recalled one night when the engine blew on the car she shared with her husband, Don Thurman, showering fans sitting in the upper levels of the grandstands, with parts from it. Graham also remembered a night when one of the stock cars hit the guardrail and actually drove a short way on the chain link fence that protected fans. But, throughout fifty years of accidents, a fan had never been killed. For everyone involved with the track, it was a horribly shocking event.³³

Critics immediately charged that the Speedway was in poor condition and that that fact alone was responsible for the fatal accident. One driver, Bob Denney, told a reporter from the *Rocky Mountain News* that racers had repeatedly asked for improvements to the track and guardrail but that only minimal maintenance was done. Others said that the track was too small to handle the big Late Model cars, which were far different than the earlier, and smaller, cars that had raced on the track for years. Tim Miles, of the CARC, told the *News* that the chain link fence that protected spectators was one of the safest available, while Dick Pachello, president of the CARC, said that his club's drivers would not be on the track if they felt that it was unsafe. Stock car driver Bob Land speculated that the accident happened because the track had been overlaid so many times since 1939. That meant that the track surface was significantly higher than it originally had been, but, said Land, the guardrail was not raised to match the new height. Marv Slusser and others blamed the accident on the size of the newer cars. Still others blamed the wreck on what they termed poor workmanship by the professional maintenance team that, a couple of years earlier, had replaced the husband and wife who had maintained the track for nearly three decades.³⁴

Two days after the accident, insurance company investigators and police officials completed their inquiry at the Speedway and released the track in time for the midget races that were scheduled for July 27. The fifty-lap race, which driver Palmer Crowell from Oregon won, took place in front of a crowd of about 3,000 people and was preceded by a vintage midget exhibition run. The only major accident of the evening occurred when two cars leaving the track hit one of the vintage midgets, knocking it over on its side and causing a small fire in the car. A sprint driver who was watching quickly dealt with the fire, and the midget's driver was not seriously injured. For the first race after the fatal accident, it was a successfully uneventful evening. It was also one of the last races ever held at Lakeside Speedway. Some believed that critics used the fatal accident that summer as leverage to finally close the track. For years, many nearby residents had been unhappy with the Speedway because of the noise it generated; some drivers believed that neighbors saw the fatal accident as their chance to force Rhoda Krasner to either close the track or close the park.³⁵

In talking about Lakeside Speedway, Benjamin Krasner once said “as long as the boys want to run them, keep it open,” but on September 2, 1988, his daughter Rhoda made the difficult decision to close the Speedway. Both stock car and midget drivers were stunned by the news. The secretary of the CARC told the *Rocky Mountain News* that they were devastated by the loss of the track, while officials of the RMMRA revealed that they had spent two hours and used every argument they could think of trying to convince Krasner to keep the track open. Jerry Van Dyke, president of the Colorado Motor Sports Hall of Fame, remarked that the loss of Lakeside Speedway took away the only remaining paved track in the Denver metro area. In March 1990, nearly two years after the fatal accident, Kristy Carlson's father, Ronald, filed lawsuits against the amusement park, the Speedway, the town of Lakeside, and driver Gary

Burton. The defendants settled the lawsuits out of court the following December, but no details of the settlements were released.³⁶

Lakeside Speedway had enjoyed a wild ride between the time the first midget racers transformed it from an unused athletic field in 1935 to the day it closed in 1988. For many of its longtime fans, the closure was a tragic and quiet end to what had been one of the most prominent race tracks in Colorado. But, Lakeside Speedway had managed to outlast most of its one-time rivals. Its biggest competitor, Englewood Speedway, for example, had closed in 1979. Most racing activity in the Denver area eventually moved to Colorado National Speedway in Erie and the drag strip at Bandimere Speedway in Morrison. In its day, however, Lakeside Speedway had hosted some of the best drivers Colorado had to offer. The Colorado Motorsports Hall of Fame is filled with inductees who became stars at Lakeside, and even though they might have moved on to bigger and better things, they never forgot the track. Johnny Tolan, who started out as a midget racer at Lakeside, was not the only driver from the track who went to race in the Indianapolis 500. Jim Malloy was the 1959 and 1960 CARC champion at Lakeside; he went on to race in four 500s and was fatally injured in an accident while preparing to run his fifth. To nearly every driver who raced there, the Speedway track was not only special but fun as well and they loved every minute of their time there.³⁷

As much as the drivers loved the Speedway, the people who watched races there loved it even more. Fans vividly recall driving to the track, waiting for the ticket booth to open, the smell of hotdogs and hamburgers from the concession stands, and the roar of the engines. Each fan had their favorite driver, and the track was small enough that they could rush down to the pits to shout encouraging words at them while also booing whichever driver happened to be the “bad boy” of the track that season for having won more often than the others. Decades later, fans can

still recall what number car their favorite driver was in and who sponsored the car. And, over it all, they could hear the sounds of the amusement park competing with the cars' engines for attention, all of it working together to create a very memorable experience. For fans and drivers alike, the abandoned Speedway serves as a vivid reminder of the past. One spectator wrote that, anyone near the Speedway late at night could "hear the ghosts, the bark of the 'Flathead,' the zing of the 'Stove bolt 6,' the deep throated rumble of the 'Offy,' the snarl of the 'V8-60,' and faintly from the pit PA system...Reed Walker say, 'Ladies and gentlemen, here is the line up for the main...'" Those who were there have never forgotten Lakeside Speedway.³⁸

An indication of just how prominent the Speedway was, and the role that the Krasners played in its success, came when Benjamin and Rhoda Krasner were inducted into the Colorado Motorsports Hall of Fame in 2006. Four years later, Benjamin Krasner was inducted into the National Sprint Car Hall of Fame for his work as a promoter. In Krasner's biography for the Sprint Car Hall of Fame, Justin Zoch wrote that as an amusement park owner, Krasner knew how to entertain and worked hard as he "kept giving the people of Denver all the auto racing they wanted, and they came in droves" while behind the scenes he "worked hard to keep the cars coming to Lakeside." After fifty years, the roar of the engines, which had helped define Lakeside as a working class destination for most of those years, was gone. Lakeside Speedway was not the only race track to close in the country. Of the 8,200 tracks that once existed in the United States, 7,000 of them were gone by 2002. But, for fifty years, Lakeside Speedway had served as the most visible symbol of Lakeside Amusement Park's transformation from elite resort to working class playground.³⁹

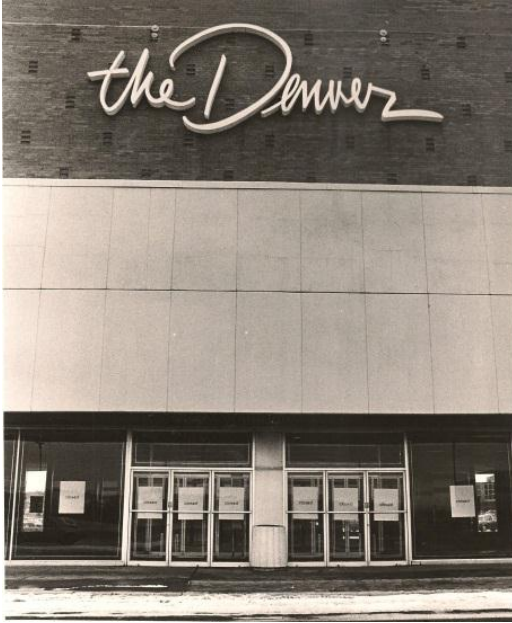


Fig. 34 The Denver Dry store at Lakeside Mall.



Fig. 36 Milo Lane's TV Repair Shop at Lakeside Mall.



Fig. 35 Matchbook from Lakeside National Bank.

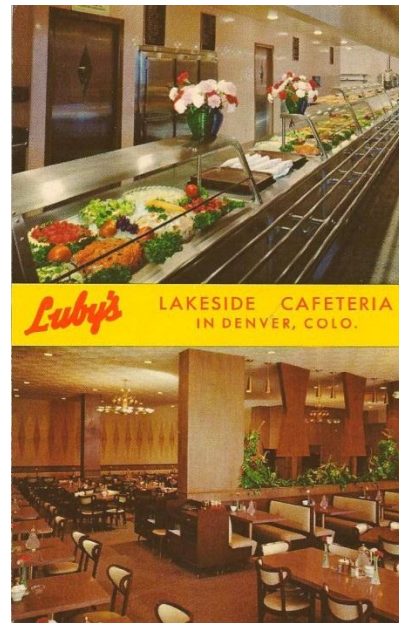


Fig. 37 Luby's Lakeside Cafeteria at Lakeside Mall.



Fig. 38 The west and south stands (above) and north and east stands (below) of Lakeside Speedway.



Fig. 39 The north and east stands of the Speedway from the south turn.



Fig. 40 The sign that used to be above the northeast corner of the Speedway.

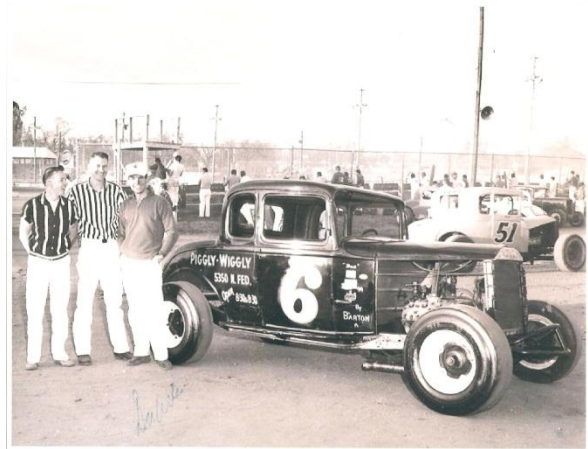


Fig. 42 Dick Wilson (on right), CARC champion several times at Lakeside, with his stock car at the Speedway.
(Wayne Arner Collection)

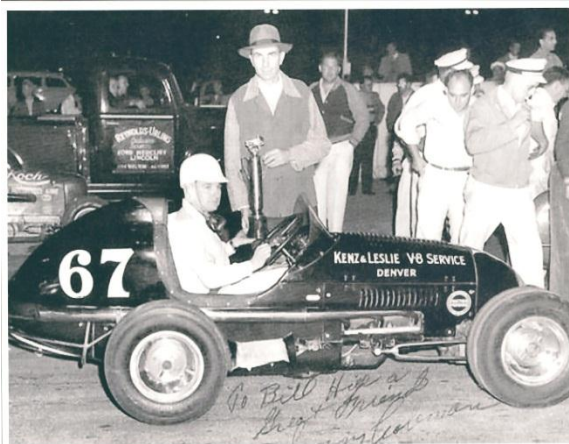


Fig. 41 Sonny Coleman, the 1950 Midget Champion, in his car at Lakeside.
(Wayne Arner Collection)



Fig. 43 The 1967 Powder Puff Club at Lakeside.
(Sheri Graham Collection)

CHAPTER TEN:
LAKESIDE AMUSEMENT PARK, PUBLIC NUISANCE?

The birth of the theme park forever changed the amusement park industry. As theme parks rapidly came to dominate the industry in the 1960s and 1970s, smaller, family owned parks like Lakeside Amusement Park started disappearing more rapidly than ever before. They had already been a rarity since the 1930s, when only about 300 of them still survived. With the advent of theme parks, there were a total of 997 amusement park businesses in the United States in 1963. Even with theme parks, however, the number fluctuated wildly. In 1982 there were only 466, but by 1987 that number had risen to 744. That year, 80.5% of the parks in the country were corporate owned, a dramatic change from the early years of the industry. The extremely high costs associated with staying competitive had eliminated most of the family- owned parks, which were unable to keep up financially with the constant change the business required, let alone compete with the industry giants. In Denver, Lakeside and rival Elitch's survived, protected by the fact that theme park developers had researched the Denver market and decided that it was too isolated for the destination parks that they were building, leaving the two small, family-owned parks to fulfill the city's amusement needs for the time being.¹

The enormous pressure that amusement parks faced from larger competitors may not have been an immediate threat to Lakeside, but there were other issues that had the potential to have a dramatic impact on the park's future. Denver was in need of room to grow, but a 1974 amendment to the state constitution prevented the city from annexing land in order to accomplish that. So, the city turned inward. Federally funded urban renewal projects created much needed

space for the city to grow up rather than out, but all across Denver some of the city's most architecturally significant old buildings fell to the wrecking ball. Among the most notable were the Tabor Grand Opera House and the First National Bank of Denver building. Denver's experiment with urban renewal sparked the city's first organized historic preservation movement, but not before many landmark buildings were lost. While urban renewal never made it to the town of Lakeside, some of the ideas and attitudes behind it seemed to, nearly to the detriment of Lakeside Amusement Park.²

By the mid-1960s, Lakeside Amusement Park owed its survival to Benjamin Krasner more than anything else. Unlike the owners of most other small parks, Krasner was able to keep up with bigger theme parks when it came to spending money to keep his park innovative. As the 1965 season neared an end, he had spent thirty years of his life keeping the park competitive through the constant addition of rides and attractions, from new ticket booths to construction of the Cyclone to automobile races at the Speedway. In a 1973 interview, his daughter Rhoda said that he had worked hard even as a child, resulting in his having “a restricted childhood.” It was that, she said, that resulted in “his long and delighted infatuation with Lakeside, a child's magic world.” Throughout the years he had owned it, Krasner was a fixture at the park, walking the grounds every day during the summer in his three-piece suit, making sure that the trains (which he was especially passionate about) ran on time, and studying all of the other rides. He rarely rode the Cyclone, recalled Rhoda Krasner, usually limiting his trips on it to once or twice near the end of the season. Before taking his ride, however, he had spent months leaning on the nearby fence watching the coaster and could feel every place that it needed work before the next season. Benjamin Krasner was passionate about his amusement park and making sure that customers had a fun and exciting place to play.³

Krasner's hard work and passion had earned him enormous respect across broad classes, from drivers at the Speedway to Denver's business community to the amusement park industry as a whole. But, outside of the amusement park, he preferred to remain in the background. Other than serving on the board of directors of Rose Memorial Hospital, he kept his charitable contributions quiet, letting his "good deeds speak for themselves." As the summer of 1965 wound down, Lakeside Amusement Park was heading towards the conclusion of another successful season, but Krasner did not get to see it. On August 8, 1965, Benjamin Krasner died at his Denver home at the age of seventy-four. Lakeside was suddenly without the leadership of the man who had kept it going for three decades.⁴

A year before his death, Krasner's daughter Rhoda had graduated from Mills College in California with a liberal arts degree and was planning to attend graduate school. Born several years after her father purchased the park, Rhoda Krasner had grown up with Lakeside. As one reporter put it in 1973, she grew up in a "world of carousels and chute [sic] the-chutes, midway barkers trying to out shout the belly ticking laugh of the big fat mechanical lady at the Fun House, a world colored by neon lights, buttered yellow popcorn, and pink cotton candy." One of her first jobs in the park, when she was seven years old, was bagging peanuts. Many years later she recalled scooping the peanuts into bags while watching elegantly dressed men and women making their way to the El Patio Ballroom. In subsequent years, she worked in a variety of positions at the park, wherever her father felt she was needed, usually in food service, at the popcorn machine, or the games. She became close with the year-round staff, and as "an only child, she found a big family among the park employees," wrote a reporter for the *Arvada Citizen Sentinel*. She rarely rode any of the rides while growing up. Under orders from her father, park employees often left one of the European gas-powered cars from the small race track out for her

to drive through the park before it opened each day. As a result, the park was ““still a novelty”” to her whenever she brought friends to it as a child. And now, with her father gone, “the land of enchantment with its fun and its heartaches” was her responsibility.⁵

Rhoda Krasner told writer Stuart Leuthner in 1992 that she was naïve when it first came to running the park, saying ““you had a young daughter and her mother who were very conscientious about running the merry- go-round, but were pretty naïve. But we learned.”” For several years prior to his death, Benjamin Krasner’s brother-in-law, Martin Ruttner, had been helping him manage Lakeside. Ruttner and his wife Jennie continued to live in the apartment over the park’s College Inn restaurant that they had once shared with Krasner himself. After Krasner’s death, Ruttner took over as general manager of the park, running it in cooperation with his niece Rhoda for the next four years. After Ruttner died in 1969, Rhoda Krasner became general manager as well as owner of Lakeside, the same position her father had occupied. Taking over the park was a ““fantastic transition”” for her. In a 1974 interview, she said that she had to be alert continually to change and flexible enough to accommodate it. After eight years of running the park, she had learned much but still had more to learn. By the time she said those words, Lakeside had become a hard teacher.⁶

As Rhoda Krasner gained experience running Lakeside in the first years that she owned it, business continued pretty much as usual. A major highway project, completed the year after she inherited Lakeside, provided better access to it, helping to increase the number of visitors. Planning for Interstate 70 had begun with passage of the Federal Highway Act of 1944, which authorized construction of a highway between Denver and the Colorado border with Kansas. Supporters, however, wanted to extend the road past Denver and through the mountains into Utah. Permission for construction of the interstate west of Denver was not included in the

original plan, but passage of the 1956 Interstate Act took care of that. The State of Utah initially opposed building the highway west of Denver because it meant that it would pass through the mountainous eastern part of Utah, dramatically increasing the state's share of construction costs. Officials with the Colorado Department of Highways and one of Colorado's United States senators, Edwin Johnson, lobbied hard for the road west of Denver, however, and eventually won over Utah officials. With their united support, Congress approved the road in October 1956. Construction of the first piece of I-70 through Denver, which ran between Colorado Boulevard and I-25, started in 1961 and was finished three years later. Construction of the second section which connected I-25 to Sheridan Boulevard, began in 1964; the highway reached Federal Boulevard in December 1965 and Sheridan in July 1966. The total cost for the second stretch was \$4,501,000. Building the second section proved challenging because engineers had to thread the highway past Rocky Mountain Park, Rocky Mountain Lake, between Berkeley Lake and Denver's Willis Case Golf Course, and then past Lakeside Amusement Park. The highway cut off part of Rocky Mountain and Berkeley Lakes, so workers had to deepen both lakes in order to keep their water capacities the same. The highway also cut off a portion of the northern end of the Lakeside property, wiping out the long-abandoned greyhound track that still stood on the site. The end result, however, was what the Colorado Department of Transportation referred to as a "gently winding and beautifully landscaped section of I-70," and motorists who exited onto Sheridan found themselves practically at Lakeside's front gate.⁷

Lakeside Amusement Park found itself in the headlines once again that year due to a gruesome murder that took place on the grounds in October, well after the park was closed for the season. Three young men who lived near the park broke into the park on the night of October 16th and started roaming the grounds. Two of the men, Jimmy Herod and Gary

Goodwin, were 18-years-old and the third, Carl Martin, was just 17. They encountered guard Fred Carlson and proceeded to beat him badly. When found, Carlson was taken to Denver General Hospital, where he died from his injuries a week later. Carl Martin was scheduled to be the first of the three go on trial for murder at the beginning of January 1967, but in a surprise move all three men pled guilty to the charges and were sentenced to prison the following February. Martin's brother was on hand to witness the trial, where sheriff's deputies realized that he was a soldier who had been AWOL for three months, resulting in his arrest too. The unwelcome publicity brought by the tragedy seemed to do no lasting damage to the park's reputation.⁸

With business at Lakeside steady, Count Basie's band played the Moonlight Gardens Ballroom in 1968, one of the last big name bands to play there. The ballroom was closed by 1972. Rhoda Krasner said in a 1986 interview that her father had hoped to reinvigorate the ballroom when he redecorated it and changed its name to Moonlight Gardens in 1956, but it was impossible to "revitalize a trend with décor. We might have just prolonged the era a bit." Lakeside's ballroom was not alone; Elitch's tore down its famed Trocadero Ballroom in 1975. Ballroom dancing may have been fading, but still as popular as ever were Lakeside's fireworks displays, which the *Rocky Mountain News* in 1971 declared one of the largest shows in the region. The show included aerial and set displays. Most prominent among the sets were the American Flag and Niagara Falls, which was suspended from a 1,200 foot long cable. The aerial display that year used a new triple-burst shell made in England, with each burst producing twenty-four displays. Park customers were allowed to see the show for no additional charge, but many hundreds more gathered outside the park each year to view it as well without having to pay admission to the park. Overall, it seemed as if all was well for Lakeside, but trouble was about

to rear its head.⁹

Two seemingly benign incidents at the start of Lakeside Amusement Park's 1972 season triggered a series of events that dramatically threatened the park's survival. The first occurred shortly before Lakeside opened for the summer season when the Wheat Ridge Fire Protection District announced that it was not going to renew fire protection contracts with the park and the town of Lakeside. For many years, the District had been responsible for Lakeside's fire department needs. Rhoda Krasner later hinted that political issues over rebuilding Forty-Fourth Avenue may have played a role in non-renewal of the contract. The neighboring towns of Wheat Ridge and Mountain View, along with Jefferson County, wanted to direct drainage from the road into Lake Rhoda, which Krasner refused, saying that the drainage water would kill the lake's fish and make it harder to run the park's speedboats. With no fire protection contract in place for the year, Krasner purchased two fire trucks and asked the Colorado Division of Labor to train Lakeside employees and residents in firefighting techniques. State employees were in the process of doing so when the park opened in mid-May.¹⁰

The second incident, an accident on the Cyclone, happened on May 14, 1972. At about 4:30 p.m. that day, a five-car train on the roller coaster either slowed down or came to a complete stop at a low point on the track. It was then hit from behind by another train. Four passengers from both trains were taken to Lutheran Hospital. Only one, ten-year-old Juanita Proctor, was kept overnight; she had suffered a broken arm. The hospital characterized all of the injuries, including Proctor's, as minor, and Krasner told a *Rocky Mountain News* reporter that the ride would not reopen until investigators discovered the cause of the accident. Separately, the two events seemed minor, but the accident and losing the services of the Wheat Ridge Fire Protection district triggered a chain of events that posed the most serious threat ever to the

existence of Lakeside Amusement Park.¹¹

Three days after the roller coaster accident, *The Denver Post* reported that investigators from the Colorado Division of Labor and the Fireman's Fund American Insurance Companies were still investigating, but had been unable to determine a cause. Staff engineers for both groups were paying particular attention to the track in an effort to determine if the cause was unavoidable or if the park was in fact at fault. James Underwood, who worked for the Division of Labor, told a reporter from the *Post* that, while the Division of Labor inspected the park each year, its investigators focused on wiring and other issues. The state relied on the insurance company to actually inspect the structure of the roller coaster itself. Underwood did reveal to the *Post* that Lakeside had received more than one hundred citations for safety and fire code violations since June of the previous year, most of which were due to improper exits, improper or malfunctioning equipment, overloaded fuse boxes, and occupant loads that were too high. Underwood stressed that park management had done an "excellent job" of correcting the problems and complying with safety orders.¹²

As the month of May came to an end, both state Division of Labor employees and insurance company investigators had still been unable to determine the cause of the roller coaster accident after more than two weeks of investigating. In the meantime, however, two other committees had started investigations of their own at Lakeside. The Jefferson County Fire Safety Committee and two members of the Jefferson County Grand Jury's fire committee arrived at the park on May 19 to look into a number of safety concerns. Although the roller coaster accident played a part in prompting the investigation, the committee members were more disturbed by the failure of Wheat Ridge to renew the fire protection contract. The two investigative committees produced a confidential report that they gave to Jefferson County

District Attorney Al Herrmann, Jr., who in turn told *The Denver Post* that the report might form the basis for a grand jury investigation of the park.¹³

Herrmann actually felt more strongly about the case than he initially indicated to *The Denver Post*. The grand jury investigation began almost immediately after he received the report, and continued through the rest of 1972 and into 1973. While the grand jury investigated, another tragedy took place that put even more pressure on the park and town. Harry's Club Forty-Four was located at the corner of Forty-Fourth Avenue and Sheridan Boulevard, just inside the city limits of Lakeside. On the night of October 20, 1972, fire broke out in the bar. The five-month old Lakeside Fire Department arrived on the scene to fight the blaze. The blaze was a difficult one for even experienced firefighters, in part successive remodels of the building had resulted in new walls built over old walls, which trapped the flames between each layer.

Lakeside firemen George Thomas (who was also the mayor of Lakeside), Roy Dunn, and Robert Naylin were working inside the bar when an explosion (whether it was the furnace or a backdraft was debatable) rocked the building. Thomas and Dunn were treated for severe burns to their hands caused by the explosion, but the blast trapped Naylin, who was also an employee of the bar, in the basement, where he had gone to fight what the men believed was the source of the fire. Naylin died of smoke inhalation before anyone could reach him. It took rescue workers two days to find his body in the debris.¹⁴

Bar owner Harry Brown filed two lawsuits against both the Lakeside Park Company and town of Lakeside—one on November 29, 1972, and a second one, which replaced the first suit, on March 22, 1973. Brown asked for \$131,800 in damages, alleging that one of his employees had called the Lakeside Fire Department to report the fire when it started, but after receiving no answer, he had to go next door to wake up Mayor George Thomas (who happened to be living in

the house that once belonged to Marvin Adams, Lakeside's first mayor), who in turn alerted the fire department. Brown argued that it took forty-five minutes for the fire trucks to arrive, and that when they did they were unprepared and lacked proper equipment. Brown further stated that the firemen failed to follow proper procedures to save any of the furniture or other fixtures in the bar, and that the town bulldozed what was left of the building after the fire, destroying any remnants. Even before Brown filed his suit, the grand jury pounced on the fatal fire, adding an inquiry into it to their ongoing investigation.¹⁵

Lakeside opened for its sixty-fifth season in 1973, but as a reporter for the *Arvada Citizen Sentinel* wrote at the time, "there was no big you all come party to mark the stately anniversary." Rather, Rhoda Krasner and the park employees were anxiously awaiting the grand jury's report. It was finally submitted to the Jefferson County District Attorney in late June, and it was blistering. The report listed sixty-five violations of building, electrical and fire safety codes and suggested that the district attorney do everything possible to prevent the public from entering any of the buildings at the park. Investigators found code violations in the covered parking area along Sheridan Boulevard, the administrative offices, the ballroom (which had closed the year before), the Gayway and College Inns, the Fun House, and the swimming pool building. The pool had been closed for almost a decade by 1973, but the building was used as storage, a machine shop, and the park's maintenance shop. The grand jury argued that none of the buildings were paneled with fire-resistant material that was then required by law, and that the wiring in many of them was dangerously antiquated. Exits from many of the buildings failed to meet current building codes as well. The report also blasted the training, or lack thereof, of the town's fire department. The grand jury did give Lakeside's rides a "clean bill of health," but Assistant District Attorney Nolan Brown immediately started legal proceedings to close the park.

Lakeside Amusement Park, hailed at its opening in 1908 as “the greatest and finest amusement park ever attempted West of Chicago” and “the beauty spot of the West,” was suddenly pronounced a public nuisance.¹⁶

Aside from the condition of the Lakeside’s buildings, the grand jury was particularly critical of what they viewed as a lack of communication from park owner Rhoda Krasner. Jefferson County officials had sent her a copy of the draft report in March 1973, and she responded in a letter the following May that noted that the report did not question the safety of the rides at the park, which had been the chief focus of park employees for the last few years. She also argued that all of the listed violations were in areas of the park that were generally off-limits or only minimally accessed by the public. She went on to write in the letter that Lakeside would establish a program to correct all of the problems listed. In an interview with *The Denver Post* the day after news of the grand jury’s findings was made public, Krasner said she was “mystified” by the timing of the report, released just ahead of the park’s always busy Fourth of July weekend, questioning why Jefferson County did not move to close the park in March, well ahead of the summer season, instead of waiting so long. Krasner emphasized that all the rides were deemed safe by investigators, but worried that with the release of the report and the timing of it ““the damage is done to us, to our reputation.””¹⁷

As news of the investigation became public, it set rumors about Lakeside flying. One story held that the park was for sale for \$10 million. At a time when Denver’s Urban Renewal Authority was busily tearing down old buildings, another rumor held that Rhoda Krasner intended to tear down all of the park’s landmark buildings along Sheridan Boulevard and replace them with condominiums. Yet another rumor asserted that she was going to voluntarily close the park. In the same interview with *The Denver Post* where she stated that she was mystified by the

timing of the report, Krasner flatly denied that any of the stories were true, telling the newspaper's reporter that "we're staying open as a family amusement park and will run our operation safely and in a clean manner."¹⁸

On July 3, 1973, unmoved by Krasner's willingness to establish a corrective program, the district attorney filed for temporary and permanent injunctions to keep Lakeside Amusement Park from operating any of its buildings until the danger no longer existed. The move did allow the park to continue to operate its rides, which was a somewhat less strict position than the grand jury had urged. Krasner and other park officials responded swiftly, filing a three phase plan for improvements and repairs, the first phase of which listed about thirty projects already completed. Dan Fahrney, of the Jefferson County district attorney's office, told *The Denver Post* that through its plan the park had "complied substantially" with the grand jury's recommendations, and that the only remaining items to be worked out before Jefferson County accepted the plan were improvements to water supplies and electrical wiring. The main hold-up on the wiring plan centered on the electricians responsible for rewiring the park, who wanted the county to approve the plans rather than officials from the town of Lakeside. By the end of July, the plans for water and electrical repairs were in place and the Jefferson County district attorney filed for a consent decree from the courts that allowed Lakeside to operate as the work progressed. Under the agreement, which the court approved, the primary concern was training park and town personnel in safety and firefighting techniques, which was to remain an ongoing program. The plan also called for long-term repair programs for the park's buildings, along with demolition of those that could not be brought up to code. There was some room to negotiate if Krasner wanted to save any of the buildings for historic value, an insightful inclusion at a time when Denver was demolishing landmarks left and right. Judge Winston Wolvington, in officially signing off on

the plan, set the next inspection date at Lakeside for May 1, 1974, giving the park a little less than a year to correct the problems. With the date so close to the normal season opener, the park had to comply or it would not be allowed to open that year. After several tense months, it looked as if Lakeside had dodged what had been perhaps the severest threat to its survival.¹⁹

The grand jury investigation of Lakeside Amusement Park was very serious, but it was also a test case. Prior to undertaking proceedings against the park, Jefferson County had enacted a new criminal code that allowed the district attorney to close down any building, structure or land used by the general public and which presented a substantial danger to public health or safety. District Attorney Nolan Brown said that the law “puts teeth in the grand jury,” and that Lakeside was only the beginning. He planned for his office, in cooperation with the grand jury, to undertake many similar cases in the future because they finally had the legal power to do something about the problems.²⁰

Allowed to remain open, Lakeside finished the rest of its sixty-fifth season quietly. Only the *Arvada Citizen Sentinel* marked the landmark anniversary by conducting a long interview with Rhoda Krasner that went over much of the park’s history. A newspaper article typical of those from the park’s past even appeared in *The Denver Post* in mid-August, telling the story of *Miss Colorado*, a fifty-six foot long cruise boat that went into service on Lake Rhoda that summer. The boat, which was built in 1937, had operated on Denver’s City Park Lake for many years and counted Dwight Eisenhower among its many passengers. Denver’s Parks Department eventually put the boat into storage and it fell into disrepair before Don Swanson, who had ridden the boat as a child, bought it and spent a year restoring it before launching it at Lakeside. The boat, which could hold twenty-five passengers, was equipped with a dance floor, stereo system, and restroom facilities. Mindful of the ordeal Lakeside was still going through, the

article also carefully pointed out that *Miss Colorado* had “complete safety equipment” for the crew and passengers. Over 17,800 people paid thirty-five cents for a ride on *Miss Colorado* that summer, but Swanson grew discouraged by the results of the safety investigation and abandoned the boat at the end of the season. After a very intense season, Lakeside closed for the winter and workers prepared to undertake both routine maintenance and step up their efforts for the ongoing work necessary to satisfy the three phase program approved by the courts in preparation for the 1974 season. And then, disaster struck.²¹

Part of the three phase plan called for the demolition of Lakeside’s existing maintenance shop and the construction of a new one in a safer location, away from public areas at the park. The shop was located in the old swimming pool building, which stood next to the Casino building along Sheridan Boulevard. Demolishing the maintenance shop essentially meant that the entire swimming pool building had to be demolished in order to satisfy the plan’s requirements. The pool building had been used for storage and workshop space ever since it had closed in the mid-1960s. During the off season, workers brought cars from many of the rides there to keep them protected from harsh winter weather or for repairs. Because ride repairs were done in the building, many of the blueprints and manuals for park’s rides were kept there as well. The building may have been slated for demolition, but as the end of 1973 approached, it was still in use until a new maintenance shop was ready.²²

On December 11, 1973, fire broke out in the swimming pool building. Paul McWilliams, a maintenance worker at the park, first noticed smoke coming from the building shortly after 11 a.m. while he was working in Kiddieland. By the time he got to the pool, flames already were shooting out of the windows and spreading to the roof of the building. Jack Thompson, a carpenter working inside the building, noticed flames at about the same time as McWilliams

spotted the smoke. As the fire spread out from the southern end of the building, employees readied one of the town's two fire trucks, but by the time they got to the scene, the blaze was out of control. Fire departments from Denver, Arvada, Wheat Ridge, and Edgewater arrived to help the Lakeside team, but forty-five minutes after the first reports of the fire came in, it was still a raging inferno. At one point, flames from the blaze reached heights of fifty to seventy-five feet and smoke was visible from all over Denver as it billowed hundreds of feet into the air. Firefighters struggled to keep the blazing from spreading to nearby buildings, including the Casino and Tower, and Denver Fire Chief Myrle Wise later told a reporter from the *Rocky Mountain News* that had the conflagration reached the Casino, “we would have lost the whole park.” Between 150 and 200 firemen worked for over an hour to put out the fire, which completely destroyed the sixty-five year old building. Nearby residents, who at the height of the fire had resorted to spraying their roofs with hoses in order to prevent sparks from setting their houses on fire, condemned the Lakeside fire department and credited the Denver team with saving the park. It was not the first time they had done so. In 1911, when fire destroyed the park's Velvet Coaster, Denver had helped save it then as well, but that time it was in order to save a part of Denver's City Beautiful.²³

Firefighters may have ultimately saved Lakeside, but the damage to the park went far beyond just the destroyed building. The blueprints, a new drive system, and all but one car for the fifty-nine year old Staride were destroyed, rendering the ride inoperable. Cars, parts, and manuals for numerous other rides were lost as well. Also lost in the fire were most of the park's tools, leading one worker to speculate that the fire potentially posed a major setback to the ongoing work aimed at bringing the park up to code and satisfying the plan accepted just four months earlier by Jefferson County. Maintenance supervisor Charles McWilliams told the *Rocky*

Mountain News, ““this is really going to hurt us.””²⁴

As firemen and park employees speculated on the cause of the fire, newspaper reporters revisited the grand jury investigation and report, filling articles on the blaze that appeared in *The Denver Post* and *Rocky Mountain News* with details of the settled case. The first paragraph of the story in the *News* read, “Lakeside Amusement Park, branded a public safety hazard last summer by the Jefferson County Grand Jury, Tuesday was hit by a spectacular fire battled by five fire departments,” while the *Post* concluded their article writing, “there was disagreement Tuesday over who was responsible for fighting the blaze,” a reminder of the criticism Lakeside’s fire department had received from the grand jury. The *News* even sought out Assistant District Attorney Nolan Brown for comment, but he refused to do so without first knowing more facts about the cause of the fire. Park employees were understandably defensive in the aftermath of the fire about their work in the months prior. Park Superintendent Lyle Fulkerson told the *News* that employees were working daily to upgrade the park’s buildings in order to meet the grand jury’s recommendations, but he also said that it took time to do everything. Paul McWilliams stressed that no flammable liquids were stored in the area where the fire started, while his father George said that welding equipment in the area had not been used for several days. Bob Quinn, an Arvada fireman who had helped the grand jury investigate Lakeside the year before, even came to the park’s defense, saying that he had personally turned off the electricity to the swimming pool part of the building. Investigators eventually determined that the building’s aging electrical system was to blame for the fire.²⁵

In the aftermath of the fire, park employees pushed forward with the renovation program in order to complete it before the May 1974 re-inspection deadline. A new steel maintenance building on a cement foundation rose near the parking lot, satisfying one requirement of the three

phase plan. Jefferson County agreed to one modification of the agreement it had with the park, allowing Rhoda Krasner to preserve the park's administration building, which included the long-closed Casino Theater, "for its historical value." The original plan was to demolish the building, which for years had helped define the park's entrance, but under the new plan, county officials shut off electricity to the building until it could be brought up to code and park workers installed a one hour fire wall on the exterior of the building. As another condition to keeping the administration building, Krasner also agreed to install a new water main to increase water supply and pressure in the park, in part to be prepared for any future fires.²⁶

Lakeside's Fun House and ballroom were not as fortunate as the administration building. Rhoda Krasner planned to refurbish the Fun House, but chose not to do it in time for the 1974 season, meaning that it would remain closed until the necessary repairs there were completed. The ballroom, however, was beyond repair. District Attorney Nolan Brown told *The Denver Post* that the once stately building was "the single most important problem" at Lakeside. He said that its age and interior décor posed the most substantial fire risk in the park, with fire officials estimating that a fire would consume the interior of the building in less than a minute. Krasner made the difficult decision to tear down the ballroom in order to satisfy the requirements of the three phase plan. By the following May, only the skeleton of the building remained, which was itself gone by the time the park opened for the summer. When Krasner walked through the debris of the ballroom as workers demolished it, she found that much of the framing from the building was still stamped with the name of the lumber company that Frank Kirchoff, one of Lakeside's original builders and owners, had operated. The town's original jail, located in the basement of the ballroom, was still intact at the time the building was demolished, so workers removed it and placed it in storage in another part of the park.²⁷

County officials inspected Lakeside Amusement Park as scheduled at the beginning of May 1974 and found that all improvements Rhoda Krasner agreed to make were near completion. Judge Winston Wolvington stated that he found no reason to believe that the remaining projects would not be completed by opening day and accordingly signed an order allowing the park to open for the summer. While the order stated that the park “no longer presents a substantial danger,” it did allow the district attorney to take action without notifying Lakeside’s owner if he determined that anything in the final stage of the renovations created a dangerous situation for customers. Nolan Brown told *The Denver Post* that he gave Rhoda Krasner ““an awful lot of credit...she did things I didn’t believe were possible,”” and also made sure to point out that the condition and safety of Lakeside’s rides had never been questioned. To his knowledge, he told the *Post*, ““their reputation...has always been top.”” Brown did, however, ask current and future grand juries to keep track of the park and monitor any future improvements.²⁸

Lakeside opened on schedule in 1974 and made it through the season without incident. The tone of press coverage of the park even returned to that found in the days before the grand jury investigation and the fire, with the *Rocky Mountain News* singling out the Cyclone for special attention that year. Pointing out that the *New York Times* had put the coaster on its Top Ten list that year because of its design and view of the Rocky Mountains, the local newspaper did nothing but sing its praises. The recent past was not forgotten, however, and the *News* pointed out that accidents on the Cyclone were rare, with most incidents involving blown off wigs and dropped eyeglasses, conveniently ignoring the accident just two years earlier that had triggered the series of investigations that almost brought down the park. Rhoda Krasner rode the Cyclone with reporter Irene Clurman, and as “teenagers...squealed in fear” she “calmly”

discussed the maintenance the ride required. Saying that it needed constant checking and painting, Krasner told Clurman that workers walked the track once and rode it at least five times each day before opening it the public, checking for loose bolts and obstructions. Given what the park had just gone through, the emphasis that summer in press coverage was on safety and the measures park employees took to guarantee it. But the thrill, Clurman wrote, was still there. At a time when so many amusement park attractions that had once thrilled people now seemed tame, the Cyclone “still had them white-knuckling the guardrails, faces frozen in silent shrieks,” and based on the number of people waiting in line for their turn each night, she wrote, “the thrill will never be gone.”²⁹

Behind the scenes, workers spent much of 1974 and the first part of 1975 on the last project that remained to be completed, bringing the Fun House up to code. It was a difficult job, made so in part by the size of the building. Originally constructed as a one-story building in the 1920s to replace the Third Degree, the park’s original Fun House, it had been enlarged to two floors in the 1930s. The Fun House also used an enormous amount of electricity, and its ancient electrical system had been one of the major faults cited in the 1973 grand jury report. Rewiring it was a painstaking process. Barry Morrison, a reporter with *The Denver Post*, wrote that, given the huge challenge the Fun House presented, it would have been easy for Rhoda Krasner to follow in the footsteps of dozens of other amusement parks and simply tear the attraction down. Instead, the Fun House underwent a complete remodel that allowed it to reopen with Jefferson County’s blessing while also reviving interest in it, leading Morrison to write that “its marvelous to have the Fun House back...” When the new Fun House debuted in 1975, much of what had made the attraction popular in the past was still there: games, a series of rotating barrels that people had to walk through, a shifting floor, slides from the second to the first floor, the spinning

saucer, and Laffing Sal, for which workers built a new steel enclosure. In fact, the forty air jets located throughout the Fun House that were used to blow up women's skirts were the only feature that disappeared. By the 1970s, when most women wore pants or shorts instead of skirts and those who did wear skirts did not want them blown up, the air jets were simply outdated. But, the appearance of the interior was entirely different. Artist Jerry Childers created what he described as a "total environment," meaning that the design removed people from the outside world as much as possible. For example, Childers repainted the walls of the entryway, where people had to cross the shifting floor, in fluorescent colors and lit them with alternating red and green spotlights. The scheme seemed to make the walls shift as much as the floor. Childers painted the spinning saucer black and white and installed strobe lights over it, which seemed to make it spin in the opposite direction from which it was actually turning. In the slide area, Childers painted psychedelic designs on the walls and installed black lights, which Morrison wrote gave the "gut-gripping drops...twice the impact." Only one other new attraction arrived at the park that year. On the Heart Flip, passengers rode in heart-shaped cars suspended from overhead arms that they could spin as wildly as they wanted to by turning a wheel inside the passenger compartment. Krasner spent \$10,000 alone on the custom lighting for the ride, rides manager Jim Moffett said, "to make it glow as romantically as it should," while also matching the still-famous lighting on Lakeside's other rides.³⁰

By the time Lakeside Amusement Park opened for the 1976, the park had once again proven that it was a survivor even in the face of very difficult challenges. Given the difficult times Lakeside had gone through, Rhoda Krasner would have had good reason to celebrate the park's landmark Seventieth Anniversary in 1978, a milestone that very few amusement parks of the same age every reached, but it passed without any fanfare. Throughout the rest of the 1970s

and into the 1980s, safety, history, and the Cyclone became the dominant themes of Lakeside. In a 1979 article, *The Denver Post* hit on all three. In a story titled “They’re always busy at Lakeside,” the newspaper covered the never-ending work that went on during the off-season in order to get the park ready for summer. Rykken Johnson, the reporter writing the story, detailed how a crew of twelve spent the entire winter tearing down rides and either repairing or rebuilding them. Three of the men were responsible for just the roller coaster, inching their way along the track giving it a “microscopic check” as they searched for loose nuts and bolts. An article in the *Rocky Mountain News* two years earlier similarly detailed the inspection, adding that workers could tell if a bolt was loose just by the sound it made when hit with a hammer. John Christian, maintenance director at the park, said the crew spent more time on the coaster than on any other ride, and that he himself walked the track at least once a day before the park opened, and sometimes twice if he noticed a particular problem. The coaster was special, Christian said, because “it wouldn’t be an amusement park without a roller coaster.” The Cyclone’s trains were removed from the track each year as well and taken to the maintenance shop for inspection. The cars may very well have been the original 1940 trains, although the *Post* did point out that, given the years of repair on them, it was likely that “any particular part on any of the cars probably wasn’t all that ancient...” But, for appearance and safety reasons, Rhoda Krasner decided to have two new trains, a red one and a blue one, built for the Cyclone in 1979. Unhappy with the boxy design of new commercially made cars, the park hired Denver furniture maker Hans Vichiola to replicate the sleigh-like shape and oak construction of the old cars. Vichiola made only two changes on the new trains. Under orders from the park, he replaced the steel shield on the front of the cars with a fiberglass copy, which made it easier to change them in the event that vibrations from the ride cracked them. And, in a nod to safety, the new cars also

had a stronger chassis than the originals. The red train debuted in 1979, followed by the blue train in 1980.³¹

The same article in *The Denver Post* also made sure to highlight the extensive training that all ride operators at Lakeside received before being allowed to run the rides. The training began about two weeks before the park opened for the summer, and in order to have a job, the trainees had to pass a final exam. In addition to actually learning how to operate the rides, ride operators also had to take classes in park rules and regulations, safety procedures, and ride operation. The final exam consisted of the trainees having to turn around and train the trainers on how to operate all of the park's rides. If they did so successfully, they were allowed to run them for the public. The press coverage was reminiscent of that from an earlier era at Lakeside when it seemed as if all of the newspapers and magazines covering the park wanted it to succeed while also letting the world know what a beautiful park it was. By the late 1970s, it seemed as if Denver's newspapers wanted the park to once again succeed by assuring readers that the problems of 1973 were gone and the park was safe.³²

As the 1980s dawned, it seemed as if Lakeside had put the worst well behind it and was comfortably embracing its position as a historic park. Lakeside was justifiably proud of its history, but that history had always included the necessity to change in order to keep people interest in the park. That was no less the case in the 1980s. In 1981, for example, most of the rides in the park were given new color schemes: the Round-Up was painted what rides manager Jim Moffett called Pepto Bismol pink, the Whip "grape sherbet," and the cars on the Satellite and Hurricane "a mixed basket of Easter-egg colors." It was much different and far more colorful than 1908, when everything in the park was painted white. The Cyclone remained the top attraction, however, and in 1985, the *Rocky Mountain News* assembled a panel of three teenagers

to rate Denver's coasters. Lakeside's Cyclone and Wild Chipmunk were rated "semi-awesome," about equal with Elitch's coasters. Lakeside may not have drawn as many people as Elitch's (a 1987 estimate put Elitch's annual visitors at 850,000 and Lakeside's at about half that, although Rhoda Krasner believed it was more), but in rides it was proving itself equal to its rival.³³

Occasionally, however, unwelcome reminders of 1973 returned. In concluding the case against Lakeside, Jefferson County District Attorney Nolan Brown had urged the grand jury to keep track of the park in the future, but his successors did not follow suit. Insurance inspectors, however, did. In 1982, inspectors wanted to check the center shaft on the rocket ship ride. Although the cars had been changed three times, the base was still Lakeside's original Circle Swing ride from 1908. The shaft was encased in cement, and the park had to use dynamite in order to get at it. The process essentially destroyed the ride only for investigators to find that the shaft was in excellent condition. The gleaming stainless steel rocket ship cars, described by the *Rocky Mountain News* as "vintage Flash Gordon," were removed and the ride never ran again. In 1985, inspectors wanted to look at the center shaft on the still popular Tumble Bug ride, which had been at the park since the 1920s. It was déjà vu. The shaft on the Tumble Bug was buried in cement, and the park had to again resort to dynamite in order to expose it. As with the rocket ship ride, the inspection destroyed the ride only to find the center shaft in perfect order. Rhoda Krasner, in a 2000 interview, mentioned the Tumble Bug as one of her favorite rides and losing it as one of the bigger disappointments at the park. Within three years Lakeside had lost two of its oldest rides, but as Krasner told Stuart Leuthner for his 1992 *American Heritage* article on Lakeside, "once you take a ride down, it never goes up again."³⁴

The Fun House was also a victim in 1985. Between necessary repairs and higher insurance costs (Elitch's, for example, had seen their insurance premiums balloon to over a

million dollars a year by 1986), the attraction simply became unsustainable. In a 1987 interview with the *Rocky Mountain News*, Rhoda Krasner said that “it was a real dilemma to let it go,” but in the end it was the only choice that made sense. Laffing Sal went into storage, and the Fun House was torn down. The park built a steel roller coaster called The Dragon, so named because the train that traveled the new ride resembled a dragon, complete with head and tail, on the site of the Fun House in time for the 1986 season. Krasner characterized the ride, which cost just under \$1 million, as an intermediate coaster, giving the park something for those who were too big for the kiddy coaster but not ready or brave enough for the Cyclone. She also hoped that the new coaster would help Lakeside better compete with Elych’s, letting people see it as something more than “Denver’s ‘other amusement park.’” Like her father, Krasner knew that, as hard as might be to let some of the old favorites go, it was necessary to do so if Lakeside wanted to stay in business. In a nod to the past, however, the park occasionally brought a portable trailer-mounted Fun House to the park. Its first appearance was in 1993.³⁵

The eight years between Benjamin Krasner’s death and the fire that destroyed the swimming pool building had been among the most tumultuous years that Lakeside Amusement Park had ever endured. The once highly praised park saw its reputation in near ruins by 1973, in many ways a victim of its own longevity. In 1907, Lakeside’s owners had decided to ignore the common amusement park practice of building structures that would soon decay and disappear and instead built permanent buildings at their park, buildings that would last long beyond the owners themselves. Zang and his associates had succeeded. Sixty-five years after Lakeside opened for the first time, most of its original buildings still stood. Had the buildings fallen apart, later owners might have replaced them with more modern structures that met then-current building codes. That never happened, however, and Lakeside’s permanence turned against it in

1973. At a time when landmark buildings were disappearing throughout Denver, it seemed as if more than a few people would not have minded seeing a landmark amusement park meet the same fate. But, Lakeside had always proven itself resilient, and while the challenge posed might have been greater than ever before, it survived. The ballroom, swimming pool, and Fun House were lost in the end, but most of the park's historic structures were remodeled and still stood by the time the turmoil had settled. In the years after 1973, a few of the favorite rides and attractions disappeared from the park, but Rhoda Krasner took that in stride, repeatedly commenting that the park had to balance the old with the new. By 1979, wrote a reporter for *The Denver Post*, county officials "openly" admired improvements made at the park and all inspections produced excellent results. Lakeside, however, still had one more threat to its survival with which to contend.³⁶

CHAPTER ELEVEN:
AN AMUSEMENT PARK WITHOUT A TOWN?

Like Lakeside Amusement Park's owners, Walt Disney watched nervously as less than desirable businesses crept in around Disneyland after it opened in 1955. Frustrated, Disney decided that at his next park he would make sure that he controlled enough surrounding land to ensure that he could keep unwelcome neighbors away. In 1964 and 1965, agents for Disney purchased more than 27,000 acres of land, nearly forty-three square miles, outside of Orlando, Florida for construction of an East Coast version of Disneyland. In an unusual move, the state of Florida granted Disney complete control over the land. It would have its own laws, police force, hospital, maintenance department, and tax rates. To many, the kind of control that Disney had over the Florida property was unprecedented. But, at Lakeside Amusement Park, thanks to the town of Lakeside, it was old news. Other than size, the only major difference between what Lakeside had enjoyed since 1908 and what Disney obtained in 1965 was that at the Florida property no outside authority could enter without permission from the owners. At Lakeside, there was always the possibility that Jefferson County could involve itself in park affairs.¹

There had been times over the years that Lakeside officials would have liked to have had the provision that prevented outside authorities from entering the town. As the Jefferson County District Attorney waged war on Lakeside Amusement Park's liquor sales in 1909, the *Colorado Transcript* reminded its readers that the park was one of the largest employers and biggest tax payers in the county. Even though the park was in the small town of Lakeside, it was still part of Jefferson County and it was something of which the entire county should be proud said the

newspaper. Events sixty-five years after the *Transcript* printed those words might have left many Jefferson County residents wondering if Lakeside was something of which they should still be proud while leaving Lakeside's residents wishing the county would go away. The Jefferson County District Attorney again waged war on Lakeside in 1973 and 1974, but despite great odds, the park had come through those trying times and was slowly but surely rebuilding its reputation with the public as the 1970s came to a close. Even after surviving so much and for so long, Lakeside still had critics, however, and they were far from done with their attacks. But, with the amusement park seemingly safe for the time being, opponents turned their attention to the mall and the town itself. The difficult times for Lakeside were far from over.²

In 1907, Marvin Adams, the town of Lakeside's first mayor, had predicted that his grandson, the first baby born in the then-new town, would one day be the mayor of the great city of Lakeside. Adams's prediction never came true. Not only did he and his family leave Lakeside shortly after an opposition candidate defeated him for reelection in 1909, but Lakeside had remained a small town dominated by the amusement park, not a major city. Not until the 1950s did a challenger to the amusement park's dominance arise in the form of the shopping mall. The town's few residents continued to live in the small houses that the first residents had built along Sheridan Boulevard, and unless the amusement park was open for the summer, only a handful of people ever called Lakeside home. For most of the year the town was a relatively quiet place to live, but it did have the amusement park and, after 1956, the shopping mall, which enabled it to do quite well financially. The mall's impressive financial impact (earnings ranged from \$25 million in 1960 to \$60 million in 1988) was a fact that Lakeside's neighbors began to take special notice of in the 1970s and 1980s.³

Until the 1970s the town of Lakeside had existed fairly peacefully alongside its much

bigger neighbors. Denver had, of course, been one of the park's biggest champions during its formative years, when the park and the town were essentially one and the same. Neighboring Wheat Ridge, Arvada, and Mountain View had started out nearly as small as Lakeside, but, with the exception of Mountain View, had grown into much larger cities that soon dwarfed the two small towns (Lakeside and Mountain View) that they bordered. That growth created one of the biggest threats to the future survival of the town of Lakeside, and its amusement park, as larger cities began annexing smaller towns around them.

Lakeside's biggest neighbor was Denver, whose boundary with Lakeside was Sheridan Boulevard. For years, the city of Denver had gobbled up its small neighbors as it rapidly grew in size and economic power. The town of Highlands, in north Denver, was one such place. Founded by temperance advocate Horatio B. Pearce in 1871, the town did not permit smelters or factories within its borders and discouraged bars from serving liquor by requiring a yearly \$3,000 license fee for such establishments. By 1890, Highlands had seven streetcar lines, 5,000 residents, and was Colorado's sixth largest city. Just three years later, however, Highlands was in such bad shape financially due to the economic depression then plaguing the country that its residents accepted annexation to Denver in order to survive. Highlands was not the only town willing to surrender its independence to Denver in order to survive the tough times as the towns of Barnum, Harman, and South Denver also accepted annexation to Denver in 1890. Nine years later, when the City and County of Denver was carved out of Arapahoe County, the towns of Elyria, Globeville, Montclair, Valverde, and Berkeley (neighbor of the future town of Lakeside) became part of Denver through annexation. The additional land created a city of 59.25 square miles with a population of over 130,000 people.⁴

At one time, Denver was ringed by a dozen incorporated towns and several

unincorporated settlements. By 1902, nine of those incorporated towns had become part of Denver. Other cities soon filled the gap, including Aurora, Lakewood, Wheat Ridge, Mountain View, and Lakeside. The new cities managed to remain independent of Denver, although for some it was a close call. Voters in Lakewood, for example, rejected official incorporation of their town in 1947, 1956 (when backers proposed merging the town with Wheat Ridge), and 1961, when backers organized the election in the face of rumors that Denver was eager to annex the town. Voters finally approved incorporating Lakewood in 1969, driven in part by continued threats of annexation from Denver and in part out of concern that the town needed better law enforcement after a string of brutal rapes terrorized the community.⁵

During the post-World War II housing boom, builders constructed houses in several older, unoccupied areas of Denver, but new suburbs quickly grew up on the southwestern edge of the city, including Brentwood and Harvey Park. Denver moved quickly to annex those areas. The city continued to annex new land into the 1960s, including the wealthier Bear Valley and Pinehurst neighborhoods. As land hungry as Denver appeared to be, when it came to its annexation activities, the city was actually no different from most other major cities in the United States. As political scientists Jered B. Carr and Richard C. Feiock note in their article on the subject, “municipal annexation is the most widely used method of jurisdictional expansion, and its use has been central to the economic and political development of cities.” Annexation, they write, often was promoted as giving residents of outlying areas needed services, such as water supply and police protection (the case Denver made it when threatened to annex Lakewood for example). However, annexation also provided financial benefits to the annexing city through a greatly enlarged tax base. Between 1950 and 1970, write sociologists Vivian Klaff and Glen Fuguitt, annexation was one of the principal means by which metropolitan areas expanded their

populations and tax bases.⁶

While they may not have been as big or as politically or economically powerful as Denver, the big city's smaller neighbors annexed their share of surrounding land as well. Lakeside neighbor Arvada annexed portions of the Rocky Flats Nuclear Weapons Plant for development in the 1990s, while both Arvada and Lakewood annexed parts of unincorporated Jefferson County. Smaller towns like Lakeside and neighboring Mountain View watched annexation activity nervously, leading some observers to say that they "jealously" guarded their independence against sometimes very intense opposition. The town of Lakeside became an especially attractive prospect for annexation after Lakeside Shopping Center opened in 1956. With the exception of Arvada, nearly every city around Lakeside at one time or another had their eyes on the mall, and many questioned what would happen to the remainder of the town and the amusement park if anyone did annex the mall property.⁷

Denver's land grabbing days came to an abrupt halt in 1974 with passage of the Poundstone amendment to the Colorado State Constitution. The amendment, championed by political activist and future Greenwood Village Mayor Freda Poundstone, changed the way voters approved any annexation requests. Prior to the amendment's passage, only the voters living in the area subject to annexation had to approve it. Under the new law, voters in the proposed annexed area still had to approve the change, but so did voters from the county which would lose the land. While the new law applied to the entire state, it was specifically aimed at Denver. On the surface, requiring the permission of the entire county that would lose land seemed like a common sense move, but the primary reason behind the amendment was seldom talked of publicly. Throughout the late 1960s and early 1970s Denver had experienced serious racial problems, especially when it came to segregation in its public schools. Residential

segregation, more than any official policy, accounted for segregation in the schools, although there were instances when the Denver school board seemed to deliberately position new schools in order to reinforce racial divides. The school board failed to address the issue satisfactorily and angry parents went to court. After a long court battle, which made it all the way to the United States Supreme Court, Federal District Judge William Doyle issued a ruling in April 1974 designed to integrate Denver's public schools. Doyle's order rearranged school boundaries, created paired schools that would trade students during the day, and called for busing over 11,000 students in order to achieve racial integration. Earlier attempts at busing had already caused many white families to flee Denver for the suburbs, but after Doyle's April 1974 order, families left the city in droves. The new suburbanites anxiously joined older residents of the suburbs in overwhelmingly supporting the Poundstone amendment, which passed with 58.4% of the vote, because it severely limited the potential that Denver might annex a neighboring town and its schools, which would then be brought under the busing order that many of them had left Denver to escape in the first place.⁸

Cities found that they were not able to annex land as easily as they once had after the amendment's passage in 1974, but that did not stop them from dreaming about it. And, occasionally, those dreams included Lakeside and its very successful shopping mall. The annexation bug first hit the town of Lakeside in 1958, two years after the shopping center opened for business. In March of that year, Lakeside Shopping Center owner Gerri Von Frellich wrote a letter to the Jefferson County Commissioners complaining that property taxes on the mall, which came to about \$440,000 a year, were ““grossly unfair and inconsistent”” with comparable properties in the county. Arguing that taxes would be \$40,000 less if the mall was in Denver, Von Frellich instructed his attorneys to both appeal the tax assessment and begin exploring the

possibility of annexing the mall property to Denver. Von Frellich stressed in his letter that he did not want to leave the town of Lakeside if he did not have to, but he clearly left the threat of doing so there for the county commissioners in case they failed to agree with his argument about the property taxes. Intrigued by the possibility of Denver getting the mall, *The Denver Post* sent a reporter to Denver city attorney John Banks in order to hear his opinion on the matter. After investigating, Banks determined that Denver could not annex the shopping center because the city's rules required that one-sixth of the total boundary line of a proposed annexation area be contiguous to Denver's boundaries. Unfortunately for Von Frellich, Lakeside Shopping Center had Lakeside Amusement Park sitting between it and Denver.⁹

Banks's may not have believed that Denver could annex the mall, but that was not the end of the issue as far as Von Frellich was concerned. Over the next two years, the shopping center continued to expand to the north, which eventually brought it to the edge of Forty-Eighth Avenue, the northern boundary of the town of Lakeside. With that, the shopping center was suddenly in compliance with the rule that a part of its boundary be contiguous with Denver because not only was Forty-Eighth Avenue the northern boundary of Lakeside, it was also the boundary between it and Denver. Mall spokesman Joseph Schuller announced in May 1960 that Lakeside Shopping Center was once again studying the financial benefits of leaving Lakeside (and Jefferson County) and attaching itself to Denver. Although Schuller put forth the same argument as Von Frellich had two years earlier about high property taxes being the reason for wanting to leave, *Rocky Mountain News* reporter Bill Miller revealed an even more tempting reason why another city might want the mall. Estimates suggested that the mall did between \$25 and \$30 million of business each year. With Denver's one percent sales tax, annexing the mall property would bring the city an additional \$300,000 in tax revenue per year. It was a very

tempting possibility.¹⁰

Remaining silent throughout the 1958 and 1960 deannexation talks were officials from the town of Lakeside and Lakeside Amusement Park. Although the park was originally the only reason for the town's existence, the shopping center had become an important part of the community for the revenue that it brought. Town officials surely could not have been happy at the thought of losing one of their city's two main attractions and sources of revenue. Benjamin Krasner knew what the mall had done for his amusement park as far as attendance figures, and he might have guessed that whether the mall was in Lakeside or Denver would not have made much difference to the park. The only issue would be whether or not the town of Lakeside would continue to exist if it suddenly lost half its land to another city. In the end, nothing came of the 1960 effort to have Denver annex the mall, and Von Frellich sold the shopping center for \$8 million in 1962. Other cities remained intrigued by the revenue potential that Lakeside Shopping Center presented, however, but always ran up against the difficulty of getting the mall property away from the town of Lakeside. The best chance for that to happen would come in 1988, when Jefferson County attempted to abolish the town of Lakeside altogether.¹¹

Had the town of Lakeside become the exclusive playground for the rich that its earliest promoters hoped for, the annexation discussion might have never gone anywhere. There certainly would not have been a Lakeside Shopping Center, which was built on the land where Adolph Zang and his partners hoped mansions would one day rise. If the houses had been built, there might not have even been a Lakeside Amusement Park by the 1950s if Robert Speer's experience with Arlington Park in the 1890s and early 1900s was any indication. But those things had never happened, and while the town did not become the thriving metropolis that Mayor Marvin Adams had predicted in 1907, it had survived. The mayor's wife may not have

hosted meetings of the Moonstone Thimble Club or piano recitals anymore, and the *Colorado Transcript* did not report on its social or political events in its pages, but residents went about their business in the small town without much concern for such things. The town was indeed small, so small, in fact, that people who should have known better sometimes forgot about it. After conducting its official count in 1970, the United States Census Bureau issued a list of a dozen towns that had lost all of their population in the 1960s. Two in Colorado made the list, one of which was Lakeside. Lakeside's surprised residents objected to the ghost town designation. *The Denver Post* ran an article on the mix-up headlined "Lakeside Does So Have a Population!" and the Census Bureau had to admit that they had indeed made a mistake. Based on the 1970 Census, the town of Lakeside had a population of seventeen. To most, the Census Bureau's mistake was just a humorous incident, but it did serve to arouse people's curiosity about the Denver area's smallest town.¹²

In 1979, *The Denver Post* began profiling several of the small communities in and around Denver, including Lakeside. The town's population had grown to twenty people by then, although only seventeen of them were registered voters. All city officials (the mayor, city council, and treasurer) worked for Lakeside Amusement Park. Taking no chances after the trouble of 1973, the town had a twelve-man fire department (all residents) and two fire engines, with two more available to them if needed. The amusement park itself also had mutual protection agreements with the Denver, Wheat Ridge, Lakewood, and Arvada fire departments, as did the shopping center. If fire ever broke out in the town of Lakeside or its amusement park again, both were well protected. The shopping center and adjoining office building relied on the Jefferson County Sheriff's Department for police protection, while a combination of security officers and town police were responsible for the residents and park. Outside of issuing liquor

licenses, the town's main responsibility was maintaining half of Forty-Fourth Avenue and half of Harlan Street, on the western edge of the town, which also happened to be the only two streets in the town of Lakeside. Almost a decade after the *Post* profiled the town in 1979, the population had dropped to just eight. Those eight, however, lived in what the *Rocky Mountain News* described as what "could well be the most entertaining city in America." Mathematically, the numbers were indeed impressive. According to the article in the *News*, when the number of rides in the amusement park was divided by the number of residents, it came to five rides per person. Mall space was even more impressive—each resident had nearly 90,000 square feet of it, far greater than that available to residents of Aurora, where the Aurora Mall had recently opened. Lakeside may have been small, but its residents loved living in their "own little world," which did have its benefits.¹³

Because the amusement park owned all of the houses in town and rented them to their occupants, residents paid no property taxes. Rent was also fairly reasonable. Carl Chadwick, who had been mayor in the 1960s and was again mayor in 1979, paid just \$45 a month for his house. Unemployment in Lakeside was non-existent as the amusement park was always hiring residents to fill needs. The size of the town gave everyone who lived there a chance to be part of the government as well as residents essentially rotated the government positions amongst themselves every two years. In 1982, for example, Carl Chadwick, who had worked for the park since the 1950s, returned to a seat on the city council after finishing another round of two terms as mayor, while former mayor George Thomas (who had been mayor during the events of 1973) returned to the top job. The amusement park office served as the town's polling place; it opened at 7 a.m. and closed whenever the last resident had voted or 7 p.m., whichever came first.¹⁴

The light-hearted newspaper articles on the number of amusement rides per resident or

the ease of Lakeside's electoral process painted an amusing picture of the quirky town of Lakeside, but behind the scenes things were not as light as many residents wanted to believe. One scandal made headlines in March 1980 when Lakeside Chief of Police Roy Ray Duncan was arrested and charged with bribery and soliciting unlawful compensation. Duncan's crime was selling a Lakeside police commission to Morton Karman, a pimp who owned two escort agencies in Denver. Karman had originally applied for a job with the Lakeside Police Department because he needed extra money and because it would allow him to carry a concealed weapon. During his interview, Duncan told Karman that the commission would cost him \$200. Disturbed by what he took to be the chief of police soliciting a bribe, Karman went to Jefferson County authorities with the story and agreed to help them bust Duncan. He wore a wire to his next meeting with the police chief, and after they agreed on a price of \$150, county sheriffs swooped in and arrested Duncan. Authorities quickly began investigating how many other police commission cards Duncan may have sold in his four years as Lakeside's chief of police, but eight months after his arrest, he pled guilty to official misconduct and received a much lighter punishment than he would have if convicted of the more serious charges.¹⁵

Lakeside Mayor Carl Chadwick expressed dismay at the incident, telling a reporter from the *Rocky Mountain News* that ““nothing like this has ever happened before in Lakeside.”” It was obvious that times were quite a bit different from the day in February 1908 when Marvin Adams had presented Chas Snyder, Lakeside's first deputy marshal, with his badge and urged him to use it but not abuse it. Still mindful of what had happened at the amusement park in 1973, the town moved quickly to try to contain the damage. In mid-June 1981, the town council called a meeting at which they ordered Acting Police Chief Ray Russo to revoke all concealed weapons permits, prevent officers from having sirens or flashing red lights on their personal

vehicles, and to make sure to confine the police department's activities to the city limits of Lakeside. Russo objected to the new rules and resigned in response, and he, along with four part-time city police officers, walked out of the meeting. The protest was short lived, however, as by that afternoon all of the officers had relented and returned to work and city officials replaced Russo with a former command officer. Lakeside officials dealt with the problem effectively, but it was an indication that not all was well in the tiny town. Trouble was still brewing over a long-standing issue that, while not as serious as Duncan's crimes, threatened to bring about the end of the town's days.¹⁶

Rhoda Krasner had pointed to political issues over maintenance of Forty-fourth Avenue as a possible motivation for the Wheat Ridge Fire Protection District not renewing its contracts with Lakeside and the amusement park in 1972. The street remained a problem even after all of Jefferson County's issues with the amusement park were settled. As late as 1979, Lakeside officials told *The Denver Post* that they typically let Jefferson County keep any of the highway use-tax funds that were designated for the town so that the county could maintain Forty-fourth. But, Jefferson County was no longer interested in being responsible for Lakeside's half of the street or in administering the maintenance fund that existed for it. As a result, the road continued to deteriorate while the amount of money in the fund to maintain it continued to grow, reaching a balance of over \$167,000 by 1988. Town lawyer Harold Eisenhuth also pointed out that Lakeside had little interest in its share of Jefferson County's open space fund, which was just over \$34,000, because there was no place in town to build a park. Lakeside officials continued to urge the county to take the road money in the fund and have its road crew fix the street. County officials fired back, saying that they could not touch the money without approval from the town council and by March 1988 were in the process of writing an agreement to that effect.

Lakeside and Jefferson County appeared to be going in circles, with the town telling the county to take the money and use it while the county said they could not touch the money without approval from the town.¹⁷

The issue that held up reaching an agreement that allowed Jefferson County to rebuild the road was ongoing maintenance of it. Jefferson County did not have a problem with repairing the road one time, officials said, but they did not want to be responsible for continually maintaining it. Both neighboring Mountain View and Wheat Ridge offered to take over Lakeside's maintenance responsibilities on Forty-fourth Avenue, but only if Lakeside gave them ownership of the entire road. Wheat Ridge's offer was further contingent on Lakeside repaving the road prior to the transfer of ownership. The town of Lakeside, through lawyer Harold Eisenhuth, refused both offers, saying that it made little sense for the town to give up one of its two streets. Jefferson County officials were unmoved by any of Lakeside's arguments, saying that county road crews had no enthusiasm for taking care of eight blocks of roadway for the town. Lakeside officials responded by offering to give the county seventy-five percent of its road and bridge money if it would take over construction and maintenance of both Forty-fourth Avenue and Harlan Street.¹⁸

Lakeside's offer to let the county keep seventy-five percent of the money instead of all of it incensed Jefferson County officials, who lashed out at the town. Jefferson County Commissioner John Stone argued that it was simply not the county's responsibility to fix a city's roads. The county, he said, was "at the end of our rope" when it came to dealing with Lakeside officials. Critics were so angry that they quickly invented their own history of the town of Lakeside. Wheat Ridge City Manager Mike Smith characterized the town of Lakeside as it existed in 1907 as "a tent city of transients at the end of a trolley line from Denver, "while Stone

added that “it was a façade even back then.” The historical research that Smith and Stone claimed to have based their depiction of Lakeside on certainly presented a very different picture than what was in fact the truth. Lakeside had been a sparsely settled section of farmland in the Berkeley district of Jefferson County in 1907 with no trolley lines near it. Far from being a transient tent city at the end of a streetcar line, the Denver Tramway Company had rushed to build its line to the gleaming new Lakeside Amusement Park in 1908 after securing a right-of-way from the new town of Lakeside that year. Smith’s and Stone’s historical research may not have been in accord with the facts, but it certainly worked well with the case they were trying to make against Lakeside. Stone had even gotten his fellow Jefferson County commissioners in on it. One referred to Lakeside as “the uncity,” while another (who may have been Stone but was left unidentified by the *Rocky Mountain News*) labeled it “a joke.” By the time Smith and Stone told their fictitious story of Lakeside’s past, Stone had even convinced his fellow Jefferson County Commissioners to ask the Colorado legislature for permission to abolish the town of Lakeside once and for all.¹⁹

An article in the *Rocky Mountain News* pointed out that, if Jefferson County succeeded in disbanding the town, both the amusement park and the shopping mall “could find themselves eyed hungrily by Wheat Ridge and Mountain View.” While the *News* included it as one of the prizes, the amusement park was nearly forgotten as cities salivated at the thought of getting the mall. Wheat Ridge Mayor Dan Wilde said his town had “more than a passing interest” in the property. With an estimated \$60 million a year in sales, having the mall as part of Wheat Ridge would mean an extra \$1.2 million a year in revenue for his city. Mayor Garfield “Bob” Johnson of Mountain View, which had a population of around 550, said his town might be interested as well. Denver also had its eye on the mall property, which had been the case for nearly thirty

years, but city planning director Bill Lamont told the *Rocky Mountain News* that, with the Poundstone amendment in effect, it would be virtually impossible for the city to annex the land. If the town of Lakeside no longer existed and Mountain View or Wheat Ridge took the mall, it would at least stay in Jefferson County. If Denver tried to take it, they would need to secure approval from Jefferson County to take away one of the biggest taxpayers in the county. A favorable vote to that effect was highly unlikely.²⁰

While some cities kept their eye on what would happen to the shopping mall if the town of Lakeside were eliminated, others saw one more chance to get rid of the amusement park. Critics alleged that the existence of the town of Lakeside allowed the amusement park to avoid tougher safety inspections, seemingly forgetting the events of 1973 when Jefferson County attempted to close the park. Since the park controlled the town, detractors said, it dictated to the town council what safety standards it should set for the park. Mayor Robert Gordanier refuted the charges, which were still being tossed around in 1994, rightfully pointing out that the park's insurance company had a major financial stake in the park operating safely and that insurance company inspectors would not insure the park if unsafe conditions existed. The fact that it was insurance inspectors, not county officials, who had brought down the rocket ship ride and Tumble Bug in the early 1980s, added weight to Gordanier's arguments. Still, critics argued that the town only existed to protect the amusement park and that the situation needed to come to an end. It was far different from 1908, when supporters pointed to the existence of the town of Lakeside as one of the elements that guaranteed Lakeside Amusement Park would enjoy a fine reputation and be unlike any other amusement park in the country.²¹

Lakeside's residents were understandably defensive of their town in the face of the county commissioner's threat to eradicate it. They even found support for their position from

Guy Kelly, a reporter with the *Rocky Mountain News*. Kelly began his January 15, 1989, editorial writing, “let’s lighten up on Lakeside.” In supporting the small, struggling town, Kelly pointed out that it had no unemployment issues, did not need a computer to handle election returns, had not had any scandals other than the debacle involving the chief of police in 1980, and got by on a budget of less than \$100,000 a year. Despite having so much that seemed to be in its favor, Kelly described Lakeside as “a Rodney Dangerfield kind of town” that got no respect from its neighbors. The reporter even reminded his readers about the Census mistake concerning the population in 1970. Granted, Kelly wrote, Lakeside had its issues, but contrary to what most believed, the town was at least surviving if not thriving. All it seemed to want, Kelly said, was to be left alone, and he ended his piece with “is that too much to ask?”²²

Jefferson County’s attempt to have Lakeside wiped off the map floundered in the 1988 legislative session, but Commissioner John Stone was far from done with it. He continued his crusade against Lakeside, trying once again to have the town abolished during the 1993 legislative session. Stone argued that Lakeside park and town officials refused to even speak to the county, even if just to have informal talks about intergovernmental agreements or the possibility that the town might qualify for community grants. State Representative Maryanne “Moe” Keller, whose house district included Lakeside, agreed with Stone’s assertion that the town was a farce but told *The Denver Post* that he had not approached her about sponsoring any legislation that would strip the town of its status. The editorial board of *The Denver Post* even joined Stone’s fight, writing that “taxpayers ought to be annoyed that Lakeside enjoys the benefits of an incorporated town when in fact the ‘town’ of Lakeside really is little more than the amusement park of the same name.” The editorial went on to argue that Rhoda Krasner could remove the mayor or any of the town council members by simply evicting them from their

houses, that the town could unfairly apply for federal Community Block Grants in order to improve the for-profit amusement park, and that the mall owners had no say in how the town was run because they did not live in the town of Lakeside. The *Post* concluded its editorial with the assertion that “clearly, Lakeside should be dis-incorporated” and either annexed by Wheat Ridge or made part of unincorporated Jefferson County. It was quite a change for the newspaper that Benjamin Krasner had once counted on for heavy publicity and support.²³

Stone’s second attempt to disband Lakeside failed as well. In the aftermath of the failed second try, Representative Keller told the *Rocky Mountain News* that she had no plans to introduce legislation to decertify Lakeside during the 1994 session even though she agreed that there were severe problems with the town. Stone was unmoved, referring to the town as a joke that existed only to serve the needs of the amusement park. Two defeats had deflated the move to abolish the town, however, and despite Stone’s very public campaign against it, the town, like the amusement park from which it took its name, managed to survive. Stone still took the opportunity to criticize the town whenever possible, however. In 1997, Lakeside asked its voters to approve the first ever city sales tax, property tax, and occupational tax. If approved, the taxes had the potential to raise as much as \$3.2 million annually for the town, which city officials planned to use primarily for increased police services as Jefferson County sheriffs were no longer going to be responsible for policing the mall. Stone criticized the city’s police department, calling it a sham, and questioned the legality of its officers making arrests. Mayor and Police Chief Robert Gordanier and city attorney Richard Daly defended the proposed increases, saying that the city needed the increased money to meet its obligations, especially with its police force patrolling the mall. Despite the heated criticism, Lakeside’s residents did not need to worry about further attempts to get rid of the town.²⁴

While Stone's first attempt to abolish the town of Lakeside may have failed in 1988, the Lakeside Mall (as it was then named) was not yet done trying to get out of town. The mall had been through a lot since Gerri Von Frellich had tried to deannex it from Lakeside in 1960. By 1988 it had been sold, damaged by a fire in 1975 (which investigators blamed on an electrical short), remodeled twice, and the subject of an asbestos scare in 1987, and still the owners fought to get out of Lakeside. At the beginning of October 1988, Lakeside Mall's owners signed a tentative agreement with the city of Wheat Ridge to annex the mall property. Mall management took the Jefferson County commissioner's plan to decertify the town seriously, and having no way of knowing that it would end in failure they decided they needed to protect themselves by attaching the mall to another town. Mall officials also argued that Lakeside did not provide police protection and did not plow the center's parking lot after snowstorms. As the annexation battle loomed, an issue, reported the *Rocky Mountain News*, was what Lakeside Amusement Park and town owner Rhoda Krasner would do about the mall's plan to leave. John Stone, who did not seem to miss a chance to attack Lakeside, argued that if the town approved the deannexation of the mall, the only thing left would be the amusement park, leaving little reason for the town to continue to operate. Stone further predicted that, if Lakeside fought the mall's plan to leave it, the battle could very well land in court.²⁵

In their study of municipal annexation, Klaff and Fuguitt write that in the years before World War II, two factors had caused a decrease in the number of annexations in large cities. As separately incorporated cities began to surround large cities, it became increasingly difficult for the larger cities to take the smaller ones. At the same time, rurally-dominated state legislatures passed laws that made it harder to annex land in the face of political opposition to such a move. The Colorado legislature had passed laws to that effect, and the town of Lakeside decided to take

advantage of them. At times, it looked dicey for Lakeside. Rhoda Krasner, for example, admitted in her deposition in the case that she prepared the town's budget and that, when the town needed money to operate, the amusement park simply paid another license fee, as it had been doing since 1908. Unmoved by the mall owners' arguments, in February 1989, Jefferson County District Judge Gaspar Perricone ruled that state law did not allow non-agricultural areas to disconnect from a town and that a town board could refuse to let a piece of land deannex "if the move would be prejudicial to the town." The city council reviewed the mall's proposal and determined that, if the mall left Lakeside, the town would lose fifty-nine percent of the money it received for road maintenance and the sizable amount of cigarette tax revenue that the mall generated. Additionally, six Lakeside Mall merchants, including Montgomery Ward, which was the largest store in the mall after Denver Dry Goods closed its doors in March 1987, had written letters to the Lakeside city council opposing the plan. They argued that Wheat Ridge's higher tax rate would result in lost business. The potential in lost revenue, combined with the merchants' objections, led the Lakeside city council to reject the mall's bid to leave, saying "the financial impact would be too devastating." Lakeside Mall manager Tony Lemberger, surprised by the court ruling that had initially allowed the town to reject the deannexation request, told the *Rocky Mountain News* that he did not know what further steps the mall's owners might take to get out of Lakeside and into Wheat Ridge. Commissioner John Stone expressed his surprise that the court battle had not gone on longer. Less than a year later, the mall's owners defaulted on their loans and the mall went into receivership. No further deannexation efforts took place, and the Lakeside Mall remained a part of the town of Lakeside until it closed in 2008.²⁶

While the town of Lakeside struggled to survive, a few blocks to the southeast long-time amusement park rival Ely's was dealing with its own serious problems. One of the biggest, as

far as its owners were concerned, was that the park had simply run out of room to expand its operation by the 1980s. As the park's renowned flower gardens continually gave way to more space for new rides and attractions, owner Budd Gurtler complained that asphalt should not replace the famous flowers because the park's name was, after all, Elitch Gardens. With space in which to put new rides at a premium, new rides were literally built on top of older ones. Elitch's placed their new Spider, for example, on top of the bumper car building. It was a problem Lakeside did not have. Even after selling the land on which the shopping mall stood in 1954, the park still had plenty of room to expand if its owners so desired.²⁷

Elitch's location, at Thirty-eighth Avenue and Tennyson Street, was also starting to work against it. The Gurtlers found that tourists, who were becoming an important core group of customers for Denver's amusement parks, were unwilling to take the time to search for the park. Elitch's was essentially surrounded by houses in its northwest Denver location, sometimes making it difficult to find if people did not know where to look for it. Again, it was a problem that Lakeside did not have. Located at the intersection of Sheridan Boulevard and Interstate 70, and next to a popular shopping center, Lakeside could not have asked for a better, more prominent location. Lakeside's attendance figures may not have matched those of Elitch's, but business remained steady at the park, which was sometimes all it needed. As hard as Lakeside's owners tried, however, their reputation as a working class park kept them from overtaking Elitch's as the dominant park in Denver.²⁸

Finally, Elitch's owners found that its family appeal was lost on crowds of thrill-seeking teenagers who wanted bigger and more exciting rides. Lakeside did not necessarily have any more thrilling rides than Elitch's, but it did have a very different customer base. The Krasners had spent years building and perfecting the park's image as an inexpensive entertainment option

for Denver's working class. They had also spent a great deal of time and money trying to keep the park fresh for its customers. Such an approach may not have given Lakeside the bigger number of annual visitors that Elitch's enjoyed, but it did create a fiercely loyal group of customers which in turn helped protect it against the kind of problems its rival was facing.²⁹

As far as the Gurtlers were concerned, there was only one solution to all of the problems that plagued Elitch's. In order to create the beautiful state-of-the-art amusement park of which they dreamed, they had to move Elitch's. After investigating several options, Budd Gurtler announced on May 1, 1986, that, after ninety-six years in north Denver, Elitch's would move to the booming suburb of Highlands Ranch in Douglas County. Just two months after he made the announcement, Gurtler and Rhoda Krasner agreed to a joint interview by newspaper columnist Bill Gallo for *Denver Magazine*. Krasner told Gallo that the announcement of Elitch's move took her completely by surprise, saying "I had no idea, I really didn't." When Gallo suggested that the move, which would end the close rivalry that had existed between the two parks for nearly eighty years, would be beneficial to Lakeside, Gurtler expressed his pleasure that Gallo had said it and not him. Krasner responded that she and her staff had simply been too busy with the 1986 season to even think about what the move would mean for Lakeside, but some park employees speculated that they would definitely see more business when they no longer had to compete with nearby Elitch's.³⁰

Elitch's move to Highlands Ranch fell apart when residents of the area objected to the amusement park moving there, but Budd Gurtler's son Sandy, who had taken over as president of the park, did not give up on moving. As soon as he found a suitable location, the move would happen. Gurtler finally found the spot in 1989—a sixty-eight acre former railroad yard in Denver's Central Platte Valley that the Environmental Protection Agency had deemed a

Superfund site because of the high amount of hazardous waste present. Denver voters had approved \$14 million in bonds to pay for improvements to the area, where the city planned to eventually build a baseball stadium, hockey and basketball arena, and an aquarium. Having a new Elitch's in the area seemed like a perfect fit, and the city pledged \$21 million in public funds to help the Gurtlers with cleanup and construction costs. Denver's support was reminiscent of what Lakeside had received from the city in 1908. Then, Lakeside was a large jewel in Denver's City Beautiful crown; in 1989, a new Elitch's was a key part of Denver's vision for the Platte Valley and it supported the park accordingly. Sandy Gurtler eventually had to form several partnerships to come up with the \$95 million it would cost to build the new park, but once he did so construction proceeded rapidly. The 1994 season was the last for Elitch's at Thirty-eighth and Tennyson; the new park opened in May 1995. After eighty-seven years, Lakeside had north Denver all to itself. It also very nearly had all of Denver to itself because the new Elitch's was a disaster. During the first season the new park was open, it rained nearly half the total days it was in operation and the area was constantly threatened with flooding. Visitors put off passing judgment until the second season, but the higher admission prices and lack of old trees and flowers was too much. The park did not look or feel like the old Elitch's, and Denverites were not impressed or interested. As Bill Gallo had written in his *Denver Magazine* article in 1986, Lakeside and Elitch's were "such a deep-rooted Denver tradition that they draw and draw through the generations," but with its move in 1995 Elitch's had broken that tradition. Sandy Gurtler's partners began to pressure him about repaying their money, and he was forced to sell Elitch's to Premier Parks, Inc., in 1996. Two years later, Premier purchased all of the Six Flags theme parks and renamed its Denver park Six Flags Elitch Gardens. The theme park had finally arrived in Denver.³¹

Under Benjamin Krasner's leadership, Lakeside had been able to hold its own against the bigger theme parks, especially as they had never taken hold in Denver. But, with the arrival of Six Flags, family-owned Lakeside had its chance to see how it would hold up against direct competition with one of the giants. Given the success that its focus on working class family entertainment had brought over the years, Lakeside saw little reason to change it. Elitch's much higher admission price at the new park kept many visitors away, while others complained because they could no longer bring picnics to the theme park, whose corporate owners wanted to force visitors to buy food at the park. Picnics had been one of the great traditions at the old Elitch's. Picnickers were still very welcome at Lakeside, however. Lakeside's steadfastness worked in its favor, and when the financially struggling Six Flags decided to sell Elitch's in 2006, Lakeside Amusement Park was still going strong. With Elitch's on the market once again, many thought that Lakeside might remain the only amusement park in Denver as people speculated that Six Flags would sell the Elitch's property to a developer. Elitch's survived when a subsidiary of Parc Management LLC bought it and six other Six Flags parks and in turn sold them to CNL Income Properties, Inc, maintaining Denver's claim to two parks.³²

Despite its financial struggles, Elitch's cemented its position as the preeminent Denver amusement park after its move and became the standard by which some judged rival Lakeside. As Jefferson County officials still fumed about ridding themselves of the town of Lakeside, history seemed to repeat itself at the amusement park. On September 6, 1994, one fully loaded train on the Cyclone crashed into another fully loaded train that was about ready to leave the loading platform. Two dozen people, about half the total number of passengers on the two trains at the time of the accident, were injured. They were treated for minor injuries at area hospitals and quickly released. The accident had occurred on the last day of the season, leading Lakeside

spokeswoman Connie Schafer, to later comment, ““what a way to end it.”” Park officials were grateful that no one was seriously injured, but Colorado Department of Labor and Employment investigators arrived on the scene to look into the accident. The situation was eerily reminiscent of the nearly identical roller coaster accident in 1972 that nearly led to the demise of Lakeside Amusement Park.³³

In its coverage of the accident, the *Rocky Mountain News* parroted criticisms of the park that Jefferson County Commissioner John Stone had been making for years, particularly that the amusement park controlled the town and therefore the safety codes. The newspaper pointed out that forty-seven personal injury lawsuits had been filed against Lakeside between 1975 and January 1994 while only twenty-seven were filed against Elitch’s during that same period. The newspaper did not report how many of the lawsuits against either park were ultimately successful or dismissed. The *News* also attempted to revive the issue of the spectator death at Lakeside Speedway that had led to the race track's closure in 1988. Nearly ignored in the coverage of the coaster accident was the fact that a similar accident had occurred on Elitch’s Twister coaster two weeks earlier and that the same day as the accident at Lakeside, a mechanical malfunction on an unlicensed roller coaster at the Taste of Colorado celebration in downtown Denver forced firefighters to rescue twenty-four very frightened people from the ride. The article on the Cyclone accident mentioned neither of the other two coaster mishaps until thirteen paragraphs into the story.³⁴

Investigators quickly determined that human error was to blame for the accident on the Cyclone and stressed that there were no mechanical problems with the fifty-four year old ride. Unlike 1973, there would be no grand jury investigation or threats to close the park in 1994. For all the noise that Jefferson County Commissioner John Stone and others made, there were no

further threats to disband the tiny town of Lakeside after the 1993 attempt to do so had failed.³⁵

It had been an interesting ride for Lakeside Amusement Park and the tiny town to which it gave its name. The repeated attempts to get rid of both had been very public, and had even turned some long-time friends such as *The Denver Post* against them. At times it seemed as if everyone wanted to get away from Lakeside and its neighborhood. The owners of Lakeside Mall begged nearly every city around it to annex the property, and the owners of Elitch Gardens decided that it was necessary to leave North Denver after nearly a century being there. Lakeside Amusement Park seemed to be the only major institution in the area interested in staying put. Even the people were fleeing, although that did work in Lakeside's favor. Denverites who flocked to the suburbs in order to shield their children from forced busing did not head to the school-less town of Lakeside, but their passage of the Poundstone amendment to make sure that their escape was not in vain did protect the town from being taken over by Denver. At the same time, the small town was able to stand up to its bigger neighbors in order to preserve its independence. For decades, Lakeside Amusement Park had battled its way through the loss of Denver's backing during the City Beautiful era, two world wars, bankruptcies, the deaths of owners, the rise of theme parks, and attempts by Jefferson County officials to close the park. After each battle, the park had successfully reinvented itself and moved on. Just as it had every time in the past when the odds seemed to be against it, Lakeside Amusement Park had once again proven that it was indeed a survivor.



Fig. 44 Opening Day of the Dragon coaster in 1987.

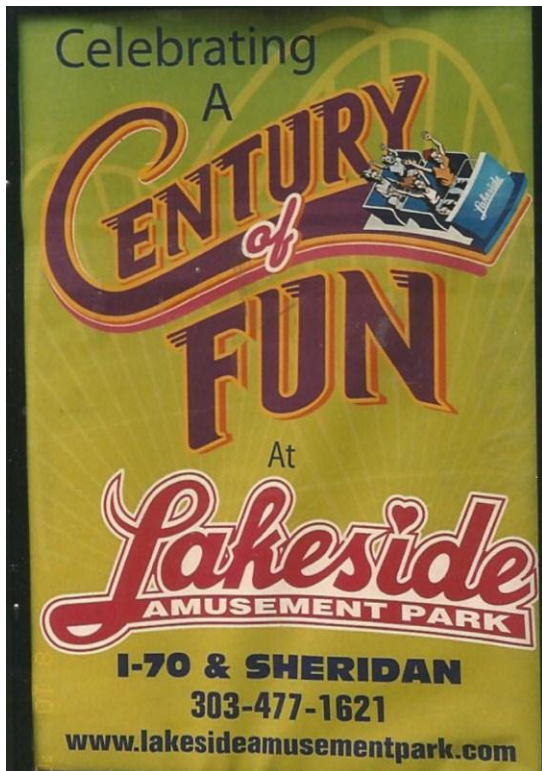


Fig. 45 A poster advertising Lakeside's centennial season in 2008.



Fig. 46 Lakeside owner Rhoda Krasner with her daughter, Dr. Brenda Fishman, in 2011.
(Karl Gehring, The Denver Post)

CONCLUSION:

A CENTURY OF FUN AT LAKESIDE AMUSEMENT PARK

Denver was a very busy place. Municipal boosters said the city needed the park space provided by Civic Center Park. Having such an oasis in the heart of downtown Denver was vital to the health and well-being of residents, they argued. In addition, it offered an ideal place to hold important civic gatherings while also giving the city a “front yard.” As part of the debate over Civic Center Park, many people argued that the City of Denver also needed to decide whether or not Robert Speer’s City Beautiful program had a role in its future as a pleasant and livable place. While the debate raged over Civic Center Park, Denver also had to get ready for the Democrats, who were coming to town as the city was hosting the party’s national convention. The convention, boosters argued, meant not only increased business revenue but also the chance to showcase the major city that Denver had become. And, for residents and visitors seeking an escape from it all, there was a grand amusement park offering fun and games to all just outside of Denver in the small town of Lakeside. Yet, it was not 1908 when all of this was taking place. It was, in fact, a century later, but it very much felt as if it was 1908 all over again.¹

On a warm July day in 2008, Denver City Auditor Dennis Gallagher arrived at Lakeside Amusement Park to play the role of Mayor Robert Speer, who had done so much to promote the park as part of his City Beautiful program. Gallagher, as Speer, was there to kick-off the official celebration of the park’s one-hundredth season. A few days later, on July 18, park owner Rhoda Krasner hosted a dinner, special tour of the park, and ice cream social for members of the National Amusement Park Historical Association and other invited guests who had come to

celebrate the landmark occasion. Coverage of the centennial made the front page of the *Rocky Mountain News*, the first time a story on the park had occupied that spot in many years, and billboards, posters, t-shirts, water bottles, and stickers reminded everyone in Denver that it had been a “Century of Fun” at Lakeside Amusement Park. The park had become one of only twenty-eight family-owned amusement parks in the United States to reach the milestone. That same summer, Denver hosted the 2008 Democratic National Convention, one hundred years after it had first hosted the event. Convention planners did not include a visit to Lakeside on any official schedules, as they had done in 1908 when Speer hosted a dinner for delegates at the newly opened Casino restaurant. That did not stop Gallagher, speaking at the centennial dinner at the park, from publicly expressing hope that some delegates might choose to visit. Lakeside’s role in the 1908 convention did not pass unnoticed however. A reporter for *The Colorado Independent* commemorated the park’s role in the first convention in a short article that also mentioned several of the other spectacles that had greeted delegates a century earlier, including snow for snowball fights and Indian dances. Snubbing history, Denver chose rival park Elitch Gardens to host a media party for convention delegates, busing in over 9,000 people “for a night of glandhanding and libations.” In the end, delegates to the 2008 convention did not visit Lakeside, but the park did not let the slight ruin its celebration of its amazing achievement.²

Had Adolph Zang walked into Lakeside on July 18, 2008, he may not have recognized everything that was there but he definitely would have known where he was because, even though it had reached the age of one hundred, Lakeside Amusement Park still looked remarkably as it had in 1908. The Tower of Jewels still marked the main entrance to the park, although the nearby automobile entrance handled far more customers than did the Tower. The covered parking spaces that had always been on the north side of the Tower entrance since 1908 still

stood, although they were now reserved for Lakeside employees rather than the park's automobile owning customers. Close observers still could make out the words "Casino Theater" above the Sheridan Boulevard side of that building which, although the upper floors had long ago been boarded up, still stood next to the Tower. Once inside the gates, visitors still could stand in the area known as Central Park, though it had been years since it had divided the social and entertainment areas of the park. Ever since the Derby coaster had invaded the social area in 1912, amusement devices had slowly but surely taken over that part of the grounds. The wood and metal benches, with Lakeside Park and Denver, Colo., stamped on the legs, still ringed the Art Deco fountain in the middle of Central Park. The space once occupied by the College Inn, on the north side of the main entrance, no longer offered dinner and dancing; games and pizza were the modern replacements. But, the Art Deco sign that *Billboard* praised so highly in 1937 still hung above the entrance. The Gayway Inn, on the south side of the entrance, had seen its name changed to the Eatway Inn, but the impressive marble back bar that Benjamin Krasner had rescued from Denver's Union Station, the multi-colored light that ran down the center of the restaurant's ceiling, and the Art Deco-style wooden booths and terrazzo floor were still in place.³

The lone reminder of the park's former social area's past was the foundation of the ballroom and entrance to the long-closed Riviera nightclub, which still stood across from the Wild Chipmunk roller coaster. In that same area of the park, other rides that had moved into the social area were still there. The Satellite, the first American installation of which Ben Krasner had purchased and installed in 1958, had earned the park a great deal of attention from both *Billboard* and the Denver newspapers. By the time Lakeside turned one hundred, Disneyland's Satellite ride (which had been the second one in the country) had long since been dismantled. But, at Lakeside, riders could still "Be a Pilot" on one of the few remaining Satellites still in

operation in the country. On the opposite side of the one-time social area of the park, the Scrambler, which Krasner had purchased along with the Satellite in 1958, still delighted customers as it spun them around. Nearby, the Spider, which had replaced the park's original Octopus ride, still left customers dizzy. The silent structure of the Staride also still stood, waiting for the day when someone might be able to restore it and once again let it run so that "the lights on the Star, meet the stars in the sky."⁴

In the area of the park formerly dedicated solely to amusements, Avenues A and B still ran alongside the former Shoot-the-Chutes lagoon, where the captains of Skoota boats happily bumped into each other. No one called the avenues by their original names and they were no longer decorated with Greek statues, but, just as they had in 1908, they still ended at a picnic area, now located on the edge of Kiddieland. The Whip, installed in 1914, still delighted customers, as did the Hurricane, Dragon coaster, bumper cars, Heart Flip, Matterhorn, and other rides, all of which had been at the park for decades. Scattered throughout the amusement area were many of the park's original light poles, most with the original globes on them.⁵

Although history was everywhere at Lakeside, the park had not lost its desire for the new. Innovation remained a constant at Lakeside in the years prior to its one hundredth anniversary although the pace of it slowed considerably in the 1980s and 1990s. Among the permanent rides added to the park's line-up were a Flying Dutchman, new go-karts on the miniature race track next to the Satellite (which were again replaced in 2012), and a Frog Hopper in Kiddieland. Temporary attractions included a Gravitron, Wisdom Boomerang, Flying Carpet, Pirate Ship, and a Tea Cup ride. Lakeside Amusement Park may have been old, but it could still entertain its visitors. In 2007, the year before the centennial, Rhoda Krasner had a 140-foot drop tower called Zoom, manufactured by Texas-based ARM/Larson, installed near the park's Ferris wheel.

Zoom's installation came at a time when rival Elitch's tower, eighty feet taller and named the Tower of Doom, was closed due to a freak accident on the similarly designed Tower of Power at Six Flags Kentucky Kingdom that resulted in a thirteen-year-old girl's feet being severed at the ankles. The Towers of Doom and Power were designed by Intamig AG, a Swiss company, and a spokeswoman for Lakeside assured *The Denver Post* that not only was Zoom built by a different company, but the tower's design was different from the other two towers and that it was completely safe. Memories of the events of 1973 had not disappeared entirely.⁶

On the southwestern edge of the park, the long abandoned Lakeside Speedway stood as an eerily silent reminder of the very noisy races that had once taken place there. The men and women who raced at the track, along with fans, occasionally spoke of restoring the Speedway as a memorial to those who had died there, but most settled for telling stories in online forums or at weekly breakfast meetings during which they reminisced about the past. Even though twenty years had passed since the last race took place at the Speedway, for those who had raced there the memories were very much alive. Some people also talked of listing Lakeside on the National Register of Historic Places, but park owner Rhoda Krasner seemed reluctant to give up the control that might involve. She preferred to make sure the park remained a family-friendly destination, which it had been for decades. Just west of the Speedway was the empty field where Lakeside Shopping Center, a one-time financial powerhouse, had once stood; the site had been cleared earlier that summer to await future redevelopment.⁷

As rich as the history at Lakeside was as it celebrated its centennial, the park was proudest of two attractions that had been there since opening day. One was the original 1908 Parker Merry-Go-Round, whose horses were still galloping inside the building that Benjamin Krasner had Richard Crowther design for it in 1942. The ride's original band organ had quit

working in the 1970s, but recorded music still gave riders a hint of what it had sounded like for sixty years prior to that. The other ride was the Lakeshore Railway. By 2008, the park only used the steam engines on weekends while the diesel engine circled the lake the rest of the week, but the train remained one of the most popular rides at the park, especially late at night when tired visitors wanted to relax. Always unique, Lakeside Amusement Park had managed to reinvent itself once again. By the time of its hundredth anniversary, the park was a family friendly, lower cost alternative to the big corporate owned theme parks that dominated the industry while at the same time successfully mixing the historical and the new within its gates. A reporter covering the park's anniversary for *Intermountain Jewish News* wrote that Lakeside was a “confluence of architectural moods spanning the 20th century,” and that “this conscious stylistic eclecticism—from Beaux Arts to art deco to contemporary—has made Lakeside unique among amusement parks.” Photographers from historical and architectural magazines visited the park regularly, as did tourists from around the world. As park owner Rhoda Krasner said, “we’re not vintage, we’re different vintages.” Lakeside’s devoted fans loved it, as did the thousands of visitors who still screamed on the Cyclone and shouted as the train entered the tunnel near the end of its journey around Lake Rhoda.⁸

As with any institution that exists for as long as Lakeside, a number of urban legends about the park grew, although none were true. Most of the stories focus on the park’s roller coasters and supposed deaths on them. Passengers waiting in line for the Cyclone frequently told of the time that one of the coaster’s fully loaded trains flew off the track and into the lake, sometimes drowning everyone on board and sometimes not, usually dependent on how many young children were nearby listening to the story. Others told of the time one of the cars on the Wild Chimpunk fell off the edge of the track, killing its passengers. Some people even insisted

that Lakeside was the inspiration for the identically named haunted amusement park in the Silent Hill video game series, which included a tower that marked the park's location. The legends were simply part of Lakeside's having been in business for a century.

The next year, as Lakeside entered its 101st season, a reporter for *The Denver Post* wondered if long-time rival Elitch's might finally have lost its hold as Denver's preeminent amusement park. Arguing that Elitch's failed to "match the quality and vibrance" of the cultural attractions around it, John Wenzel wrote that some saw the big park as simply an "interim" use of the land it occupied. Comparing it to Lakeside, he said that the older park was a "smaller, more affordable place" full of "whiplash-inducing rides" such as the Wild Chipmunk and Tilt-a-Whirl. With its aging neon signs, and the smell of hotdogs and popcorn seemingly embedded in the carousel horses, Wenzel wrote that Lakeside "oozes personality, while the modern Elitch's...sometimes feels like a second-rate corporate theme park." Wenzel argued that Denver surely could come up with a venue that mixed the thrill rides of Elitch's with the "relaxed family vibe" of Lakeside, but ultimately called on Elitch's to reinvent itself or get off the stage. Reinventing itself had not worked well for Elitch's, but for Lakeside, reinvention was an art at which it was a master.⁹

As the park celebrated its one hundredth birthday, Rhoda Krasner told *Rocky Mountain News* reporter Janet Forgive that, "Lakeside evolves, just as our lives do and our society as a whole...one thing leaves and another takes its place." Long gone, Krasner said, were the Saturday night dances at El Patio with men in suits and women in elegant gowns, replaced by a more casual clientele in a more casual time. The ability to evolve had worked very well for the park. As Jim Hillman, events coordinator for the National Amusement Park Historical Association, told the *News*, the small, family-owned amusement parks that still survived did so

“because they appeal to families, offering an affordable day of fun and a balance of thrilling new rides and timeless attractions.” Krasner echoed those sentiments three years later as the park entered its 103rd season, telling *The Denver Post*, ““my father’s philosophy, and our philosophy, is that we want Lakeside to be affordable to everyone.”” That philosophy had guided Lakeside since the days when Adolph Zang’s family first started to transform it into a typical working class amusement park, proving the park’s ability to evolve under circumstances that most other parks would have found fatal.¹⁰

Lakeside owed a part of its survival to the Denver amusement parks that came before it. Zang and his partners were able to see what had and had not worked at Elitch’s, Arlington Park, Manhattan Beach, and Tuileries, and avoided mistakes those parks had made. But, with the exception of Elitch’s, Denver’s other amusement parks were barely memories by the time Lakeside celebrated its one hundredth birthday. Although the land on which they once stood were still public parks, only plaques marked the former locations of Manhattan Beach and Arlington Park. No known photographs of Arlington Park even exist. Tuileries was less fortunate as nothing marks its former location, now the site of commercial development, although a local historian did write a short book about the park. The site of the old Elitch’s, at Thirty-eighth and Tennyson, was redeveloped into a mix of housing and retail with only the theater and carousel buildings left to commemorate the area’s past. Of all of Denver’s early amusement parks, only Lakeside remained in business at its original location.¹¹

As Lakeside Amusement Park prepared to celebrate its landmark one hundredth anniversary, interest in Denver’s City Beautiful program suddenly, and perhaps fittingly, revived. The new conversation centered on Civic Center Park, which Mayor Robert Speer had viewed as the centerpiece of his City Beautiful plan. The park, one of the prime remaining

examples of City Beautiful design in the country, had even been listed on the National Register of Historic Places and was one of only seven percent of such listings to be rated as a site of national significance. Two episodes sparked the new debate about the historic park. The first was a new design for Civic Center Park offered by architect Daniel Libeskind, who in 2006 had designed an addition to the Denver Art Museum. The Civic Center Conservancy, a private group that partnered with the City of Denver to raise money for restoring and reviving the park, asked the architect to create a new design for it as part of their revitalization efforts. Libeskind's plan for the nearly ninety-year-old park included replacing most of the flowerbeds and a large portion of the lawn with a six-inch-deep water feature, building a pedestrian bridge to connect the park to a nearby bus station, glass enclosures for restaurants and shops, and a glass cover over the Greek Amphitheater.¹²

Reaction to Libeskind's plan was swift and highly critical, with most people arguing that the new design, if actually built, would destroy the park. Joanne Ditmer, a columnist for *The Denver Post*, wrote that the design was a great plan for a park anywhere other than Civic Center. When it came to Civic Center, however, she referred to the plan as "a frivolity superimposed on one of downtown's last green spaces..." Michael Paglia, writing for *Westword*, referred to the members of the Conservancy as "dim-witted, self-serving vandals" for approving the new design which, he argued, would destroy the symmetry of the park's original design. Backers quickly shelved the almost universally hated design, but even its critics admitted that it had, at the very least, started people talking about Civic Center Park and the need to revive it. Much of the debate focused on what kind of park the Civic Center space should be, whether still quiet and dignified, as it always had been, or more active. One columnist for *The Denver Post* even argued that the city should stop using Civic Center as the focal point of all summer activities and move

many of them to a new location, suggesting the “Elitch Gardens site if it ceases to be an amusement park” as one possible place.¹³

Opponents may have stopped the Libeskind plan for Civic Center Park, but the battle over the park’s future was far from over. The following year, the Colorado Historical Society was forced to begin searching for a location on which to construct a new building after the state announced that it was going to build a new judicial complex that would require tearing down the Historical Society’s building at Thirteenth Avenue and Broadway. Several people suggested Civic Center Park as an ideal location for a new history museum, and the Society eventually proposed constructing a new, four-story building on the south side of the park. The plan met with intense opposition. The most vocal opponents argued that giving a piece of the park to the state would rob the people of Denver of much-prized and needed green and open space. In words that echoed Speer and other City Beautiful advocates from a century before, Carolyn and Don Etter, former co-directors of Denver’s Parks Department, wrote in a column for the *Post* that the park gave Denverites “space for play and inspiration, room for civic gatherings.”¹⁴

Supporters argued that the new Historical Society building was in fact compatible with Speer’s City Beautiful ideas. Susan Barnes-Gelt, a former member of Denver’s City Council, had opposed the Libeskind plan for the park but approved of the Colorado Historical Society’s relocation plan. In another column for the *Post*, she wrote that the plan gave the city a unique opportunity to partner with the state to transform the long-neglected park through restoration of the old Carnegie library building and a \$100 million investment on the part of the state that would have in turn inspired private businesses to invest as well, all of which would have “generated regular, daily activity in a grossly underused public square.” She even used a quote from Speer, in which he said that a civic center without a city building was in fact a civic

deformity and a sure sign that a city had lost its purpose. She also argued that a new building on the south side of the park would complete Speer's master plan for Civic Center, which had called for such a building to balance the Carnegie library structure. The Historical Society's supporters were no match for opponents, however, and the very vigorous opposition eventually forced the Historical Society to give up their plans for the new building. Denver offered to give the Society the Carnegie library and the option to build a smaller building on the south side of the park as a consolation prize but they rejected that as well and decided to construct a new building at Twelfth Avenue and Broadway, a block south of their previous location. Critics were delighted that they had once again saved the park from what they saw as certain doom, but they also called for vigilance against any future threats. The controversy did make certain that people continued the discussion about Civic Center Park that the Libeskind plan had started the year before, although no quick answers were forthcoming.¹⁵

Never mentioned in the ongoing debate over Civic Center Park and its future was the fact that Lakeside Amusement Park had once been an integral part of Denver's City Beautiful movement. Both sides in the debate claimed to be the champions of Robert Speer's vision, but neither side had it quite right. All seemed to forget that the politically strong and enormously realistic mayor had once found room for an amusement park in his vision for Denver. Observers past and present argued that no amusement park could ever fit within the ideals behind the City Beautiful, but Speer, the former amusement park owner, thought otherwise and acted accordingly. Whether or not Speer would have approved of the Libeskind plan or welcomed the Colorado Historical Society to his beloved park is, of course, impossible to know, but his acceptance of an amusement park a century earlier showed that he was much more flexible than were his self-professed heirs on what defined the City Beautiful.¹⁶

In 1901, Jerome Smiley had written extensively in his *History of Denver* that the city needed park space for the well-being of its residents. More than a century later, the debate over Civic Center Park also showed that Denverites were as much in need of recreation space in 2008 as they had been at the beginning of the twentieth century. In fact, Denver had never stopped adding park space in the years since Speer's administration. Mayor Wellington Webb, like Speer, doubled the city's park acreage during his administration. At Red Rocks, which was part of Speer's Denver Mountain Parks system, the city purchased 193 acres of additional land to help prevent ongoing development in the area from getting any closer to the park. Lakeside's once celebrated role in fulfilling Denver's need for recreational space may have been long forgotten by the time it turned one hundred years old, but the park was just as willing and able to provide entertainment for Denver's residents as it had been on the day it opened in 1908. The history of Lakeside's involvement with the City Beautiful era in Denver's history also helped to show just how unique the park was.¹⁷

Prior to Disneyland's opening in 1955, and especially Walt Disney World in 1970, it is difficult to find an American amusement park as unique as Lakeside. For decades, the park stood virtually alone in the unusual combination of factors that made it so different. The closest comparable amusement resort to it, Blackpool, is more than 4,500 miles away in the northwest of Great Britain. Like Lakeside, the seaside resort of Blackpool went through a series of changes as tastes in entertainment and types of visitors evolved. By the 1750s, Blackpool had become a popular destination for "the provincial gentry and the middle ranks" who enjoyed swimming there. But, like American amusement parks, Blackpool had become a place of escape for British workers after the train arrived in 1846. The resort was known especially for its beaches, but it also had an amusement park, Pleasure Beach, which opened in 1897. Until the 1920s, Blackpool

was very similar to most amusement park areas. Its departure came when most amusement parks began to decline during the 1920s. Instead of declining, Blackpool thrived. Coney Island, the best known of all amusement park locations, slipped into an irreversible decline in the 1920s and 1930s, brought on by newer attractions in different and more pleasing locations, political opposition, and social tension. With all of these factors working against them, the island's legendary parks were doomed. It took years for the end to finally arrive, but it finally did when Steeplechase Park closed in 1964. Lakeside Amusement Park and Blackpool, however, were still going strong.¹⁸

The seaside resort included one amusement park, Pleasure Beach, along with several beaches and other amusement areas. Some of the similarities between Lakeside and Blackpool were easy to see. Like Lakeside Amusement Park, the parks on Coney Island, and every other American amusement park, Blackpool used lighting and technology to, as historians Gary Cross and John Walton write, give “adults permission to act like children.” But, whereas the amusement parks on Coney Island entered into a seemingly irreversible period of decline in the 1910s, Blackpool, like Lakeside, managed to head off disaster by successfully reinventing itself and catering to changing crowds of customers.¹⁹

Like Lakeside, Blackpool began to reinvent itself in the 1920s. Blackpool's government was “master of its own municipal destiny,” write Cross and Walton, and town officials worked closely with local businesses to ensure the town's survival. Together they planned for new growth while leaving the existing amusement section intact. The leaders of Blackpool had very similar dreams to those that Marvin Adams and other early officials in Lakeside had in that they wanted their town to grow and prosper. But, while Lakeside remained a small town occasionally forgotten by the people of Denver, Blackpool's dreams came true as it grew into a thriving town

that happened to be a major recreational area. While their growth was by no means identical, the similarity between Lakeside and Blackpool was unmistakable. The two towns, built around amusement areas, set their own rules and worked hard for their own survival.²⁰

Blackpool, like Lakeside, found that, if it wanted to survive with the arrival of a new customer base, it had to change. But, Blackpool's new customer base was from different from Lakeside's. While Lakeside went after the working class customers that surrounded the park, Blackpool went after middle and upper class customers, a return to the earliest time of the resort. Just as Adolph Zang and his associates expected Lakeside's design to attract only conservative amusement seekers, Blackpool's leaders sought to create "a spacious and civilized setting for crowds whose behavior was expected to improve in step with the environment..." Blackpool's leaders extended the upscale areas of the resort in the 1920s and 1930s and even planned for City Beautiful-inspired improvements, including large flowerbeds and boulevards. The plan also called for eliminating the area of Blackpool known as the Golden Mile, which housed most of the freak shows, games of chance, and other typical amusement devices found in most parks. As passionate as Blackpool's leaders were about the new look for the amusement area, World War II and the economic turmoil that followed delayed implementation of the plan for more than thirty years. But, once again, the similarities between Lakeside and Blackpool were undeniable. Both warmly embraced new customer bases in the 1920s and actively remade themselves in order to appeal to those new customers.²¹

The new customer bases that both Lakeside and Blackpool embraced in the 1920s remained relatively stable thereafter. Lakeside, with its vast picnic grounds and lower admission price, remained a favorite of its working class customers. Described as "blue collar," "family friendly," and "affordable," Lakeside was a popular destination for birthday parties and school

and church group outings, while Elitch's, especially after Six Flags took over in 1998, banned picnics and raised prices significantly. Blackpool had managed to remain one of the few British seaside resorts left relatively untouched by World War II, and people flocked to it in the twenty years after the war ended. The advent of paid vacations and continued rationing left British pleasure seekers with plenty of money to spend but limited ways in which to do so, leading Cross and Walton to write that the crowds at Blackpool became "more affluent than ever." Not until the 1960s did a new youth culture began to appear in Blackpool, but even then the crowds still demonstrated a "persisting respectability." The rise of automobile ownership in England in the late 1950s and early 1960s (decades later than in the United States) allowed more working class customers to visit Blackpool, but middle and upper class customers maintained a strong presence. Since 2000, Blackpool, according to Cross and Walton, has struggled with a once-again changing customer base, but prior to that it, like Lakeside, enjoyed an unusually stable customer base that allowed both parks to survive in changing and trying times.²²

Under Benjamin Krasner, Lakeside Amusement Park became an Art Deco wonderland. In recognition of its new reputation as a working class park, Lakeside had to leave behind the Exposition-style architecture that had defined it as an upscale park and become a place where working class customers felt comfortable. Blackpool's Pleasure Beach, under the leadership of Leonard Thompson, underwent a very similar transformation. Prior to Thompson's changes, Pleasure Beach had appeared very industrial, with few decorative touches added to mask the mechanics of rides and attractions. In the 1930s, Thompson hired architect Joseph Emberton to give the park a very streamlined Art Deco look. Just as Zang had done at Lakeside, Thompson constructed the new buildings at Pleasure Beach to last, some of them standing for decades afterwards. The new design not only revived interest in the park but also set "the clean healthy

fun” of Pleasure Beach apart from the other, less desirable, amusements found on the Golden Mile. Like Krasner at Lakeside, Thompson adopted a program of constant innovation through new rides and other attractions at his park. Many of the rides that Thompson installed were the same as those found at Lakeside, including a Hurricane and Wild Mouse (the original name of the Wild Chipmunk at Lakeside). When they first opened, the owners of the parks on Coney Island, as well as most other early amusement parks, had similar attitudes towards constant change, but when economic hardship hit, it was hard to keep up with it. Krasner and Thompson, exhibiting a strong determination, kept with the program no matter what. In the case of Blackpool, it was not just Pleasure Beach that modernized. The area as a whole underwent great change in the 1930s, and the leaders of Blackpool even turned to a retail store to protect and promote the town’s image. While Krasner looked to an entire shopping center fifteen years later, Blackpool turned to the “world’s greatest Woolworth’s,” which opened across from the train station in 1938.²³

As many and impressive as the similarities were between Lakeside and Blackpool were, they were not endless. One thing in particular set Lakeside apart from Blackpool and most other early amusement locations. In a very unusual move, Lakeside’s builders foresaw and embraced the rise of the automobile. Even though the Denver Tramway Company rushed to build a streetcar line to Lakeside, the park’s owners thought far enough ahead to include automobile parking at the park at a time when automobile ownership in Denver was not very high. It was an amazingly far-sighted move on the part of Zang and his fellow owners. The rise of the car culture was often a sign of impending doom for most amusement parks. Not only did the majority of parks lack parking lots as part of their original designs, but few could find space for them when the time came. Elitch’s, for example, had to tear down attractions in order to make

room for a parking lot. Granted, it was the long-empty zoo enclosures at Elitch's that fell to the wrecking ball, but the fact remained that the park had to tear something down in order to make room for cars. The owners of San Francisco's Playland at the Beach encouraged customers to take the streetcar to the park rather than drive as late as the 1920s. By that time, however, people wanted to drive themselves to their amusement destinations rather than rely on public transportation. Park owners were either stuck or out of touch when it came to the love affair with the automobile.²⁴

Lack of parking space was not the only major challenge that the car culture posed for amusement parks. The freedom that the automobile provided was another. When people no longer had to rely on streetcars or trains to get to their destination, they could go virtually anywhere they wanted. Owners built new resorts that catered almost exclusively to those who could afford the cars that were necessary to get to them (foreshadowing the rise of the theme park in the 1950s), leaving the once great amusement parks to those who still relied on mass transit. In New York, for example, the overpasses above the highways leading to the new resort areas were purposely built too low for buses to go underneath and requests for train connections were always dismissed. The move effectively prevented anyone who did not have a car from getting to the new resorts. This essentially meant that the poorer members of society congregated at the old parks, which often led to increased social and racial tensions, which was in turn what led to the demise of so many of them.²⁵

Lakeside, however, embraced the car. In 1938, thirty years after the park opened, the baseball field gave way to a parking lot that could hold 7,000 cars, in addition to those that could park under the covered parking area along Sheridan Boulevard. The Tower of Jewels gave way to the automobile gate as the primary entrance to the park. The automobile gate was never as

grand as the Tower entrance; for many years it was a simple arched, stuccoed gate with lighted letters that said “Lakeside Park.” But, the fact that a large paved lot and separate entrance gate existed at the amusement park at all by 1938 was remarkable. The Speedway and the enormous crowds it attracted was further evidence of the important role the automobile played at Lakeside Amusement Park. The park’s acceptance of the car set it apart from nearly every other amusement park of its era.²⁶

The car culture was slower to take hold in Great Britain than in the United States, which somewhat delayed the automobile from becoming a problem in Blackpool. But, by the 1960s, the resort area had to deal with the same issues that had posed major challenges for almost every other amusement park. Blackpool’s layout, centered around railroad depots, quickly became obsolete. The number of people traveling to the area by train dropped from 3.2 million in 1937 to 630,000 in 1966. Due to the number of people coming by car, traffic congestion became a major problem. One of the earliest proposals for handling car traffic at Blackpool was to build an elevated relief road in the center of the amusement district, but that proved to be far too costly. Blackpool’s leaders eventually did what nearly every other amusement park had done: they tore down something to make way for a parking lot. In their case, they built a new road that followed the old train route into the center of town and tore down the train station in order to build parking lots.²⁷

The experience of amusement parks from across the United States and even Great Britain demonstrates the wisdom and uniqueness of Lakeside’s leaders in accepting, embracing, and planning for automobiles from day one while also demonstrating how unique the park was. Lakeside Amusement Park a park like no other, and its distinctiveness was what enabled it to survive for more than a century, sometimes against very great odds. As Lakeside celebrated its

centennial, many people wondered whether Adolph Zang and his associates would have been surprised to see the park still in business one hundred years after they first conceived the idea of it. Most people were certain that they would, indeed, be surprised, arguing that they were sure the builders had never expected it to last so long. That might not necessarily have been accurate. Zang, had, after all, built the park to last, a fact that press coverage of its construction and opening noted repeatedly. While other amusement park builders used the inexpensive mixture known as staff to construct elaborately designed buildings that soon crumbled and fell apart, Zang and his partners used brick and wood to construct buildings that would stand for decades. Granted, that permanence had worked against the park during the upsetting grand jury investigation in 1972 and 1973 as many of the park's old structures were cited with building code violations. Somewhat lost in the blistering results of the grand jury investigation, however, was the astonishing fact that Lakeside's buildings still stood, sixty-five years after they were built. In contrast, the elaborate tower at Coney Island's Dreamland, which was built of staff, lasted just seven years before it and the park burned to the ground in 1911. At Lakeside in 2008, visitors could still walk through the park entrance at the Tower of Jewels and down a staircase flanked by lion statues that had been there since opening day in 1908. When it came to visiting an old amusement park, being able to experience so much that was original was a rarity. In fact, visitors had to look no farther than the old Elitch's, which had gone through a succession of entrance gates in the years that it occupied its original site at Thirty-eighth Avenue and Tennyson Street in North Denver, or the new Elitch's in downtown Denver, where very little was old, to see how truly impressive it was to be able to walk through a century-old entrance at Lakeside. From the beginning, Lakeside's builders planned for and expected their park to endure and they built it accordingly, which set it apart from every other amusement park of the era.²⁸

The permanence of Lakeside's buildings and the park's longevity even began to work in its favor once it got past the sticky issues of the early 1970s. Theme park builders and owners often planned their parks around the concepts of fantasy, history, and nostalgia. Disneyland's Main Street U.S.A. is the prime example of this, but the Six Flags parks, Busch Gardens, and California's Great America, among many others, followed the same design ideas. Closer to Lakeside, visitors who arrived at the new Elitch Gardens for the first time in 1995 entered through an old-fashioned looking streetscape that was designed to bring back memories of the old park. At Lakeside, however, not only was the history authentic, it was also everywhere. The Tower of Jewels in 2008 was the actual tower, not an attempted replica. The same was true of the Cyclone—the nearly seventy-year-old coaster was the real deal, not a re-creation. The American Coaster Enthusiasts (ACE) even named the Cyclone an ACE Roller Coaster Landmark for its historical significance and the fact that it was one of only a handful pre-World War II coasters still in operation in the United States. The Cyclone was even out of commission for much of the 2009 season as workers performed extensive maintenance on it ahead of its seventieth anniversary in 2010. The Merry-Go-Round, the Hurricane, the Satellite, the trains, all were original, historic rides still operating at the park. More and more, people began to appreciate the history of Lakeside that was always on display. Jim Futrell, historian for the National Amusement Park Historical Association, in 2011 told reporter Claire Martin of *The Denver Post* that Lakeside was indeed a classic, and ““what makes Lakeside special...is that it has so many original features. *Intermountain Jewish News* writer Andrea Jacobs observed that “at Lakeside, the past and future continually merge—inherently, and intentionally.” In an industry that thrived on constant change and innovation, often at the expense of history, Lakeside had managed to both evolve and respect its past. It was a very rare accomplishment for an

amusement park.²⁹

The park's owners demonstrated exceptional timing in their ability to adapt. Adolph Zang and his family had done their best to create an upper class amusement park that would provide Denver residents with a clean, fun environment where they could escape from their troubles for a short while. The design Zang and his associates chose for their park happened to fit with the plan that Robert Speer had for turning Denver into the City Beautiful, which was getting underway at the same time. Denver's version of City Beautiful was a bit different from that found in most cities, largely due to Speer and his take on the idea. In other cities, an amusement park was not an acceptable element of any City Beautiful plan, but that was not the case in Denver. In addition to good timing, Lakeside also exhibited some of the most important traits that marked Speer's version of the City Beautiful. Impressive architecture, beautiful gardens, lots of lights, and an environment in which romance was encouraged, all combined to make Lakeside Amusement Park a perfect fit for Speer's City Beautiful program. Problems, however, made the marriage short-lived. In Denver, Speer's political influence floundered as residents reacted against the corruption of his administration, forcing him to decide against seeking reelection in 1912. At the same time, working class neighborhoods, not the upper class neighborhoods Lakeside's owners had hoped to see, grew up around the park. It was then that the park and its owners first demonstrated their ability to adapt.

With Robert Speer out of office as mayor and Denver no longer supporting Lakeside as part of the City Beautiful blueprint, the park had to find a new identity. The rapid rise of working class neighborhoods around the park made the choice obvious—in order to survive, Lakeside would have to become a working class playground. To attract and keep working class customers, new thrill rides, more lighthearted plays, and less elegant restaurants soon appeared at

Lakeside. But, as hard as they tried, Adolph Zang's family was too close to the park and its once glamorous history to make the very substantial changes that were necessary if the park was to survive. Fortunately for Lakeside, Concessions Manager Benjamin Krasner bought the park and made those changes. Through a mixture of the old and the new, Krasner turned Lakeside into a clean, safe working class park that was just as architecturally pleasing as the Zang version of it had been. Under Krasner's leadership the changes were more than just cosmetic. Modern thrill rides, some of them the first of their kind in the country, the Speedway, and the shopping mall, spoke of a deeper change at the park. All were designed to appeal to a new, broader customer base while also embracing new trends in the way people lived and played. Instead of the park dictating the type of people who visited it, as had been the case when the Zang family owned it, the people would dictate the type of park Lakeside would become. It was a foolish amusement park owner who did not pay attention to new ideas, as articles in *Billboard* frequently pointed out. Benjamin Krasner was no fool, and he wanted his park to thrive. Lakeside Amusement Park's ability to adapt was a great rarity among amusement parks.³⁰

The decision by Lakeside's first owners to use materials that would last when building the park was one very important factor in why the park survived. Another decision made by those first owners played an equally important role. In order to escape Denver's liquor laws, Adolph Zang and his associates not only built the park in neighboring Jefferson County, but they also organized the town of Lakeside to serve as the home of the park. It was an almost unheard of move in the amusement park industry, one that would not be matched until Walt Disney began to build his Florida theme park. In the short run, the existence of the town allowed Zang to serve beer at the park. In the long run, the town protected Lakeside from the kind of interference with which other amusement parks had to deal. The pages of *Billboard* are filled with stories of

towns passing laws against amusement parks or the activities that went on inside of them in an effort to drive them out of business. In New York, parks and highway planner Robert Moses used his position to wage a personal crusade against the parks on Coney Island. Moses used a variety of tactics. He provided public transportation only to the beaches at Coney, rather than the new beaches he had opened on Long Island in 1924, in order to prevent people without cars from reaching the new beaches. He launched a personal attack against the “raunchy frivolities” of Coney in the 1930s, and later supported supporting redevelopment of the area that destroyed most remnants of the once thriving amusement business. Events at Coney also worked in favor of Moses’s crusade against the island. Tension increased between poor whites and blacks at Coney in the years after World War II, and, when combined with gang violence and growing public interest in redevelopment, ultimately led to the resort area’s downfall in the 1960s. At Lakeside, prior to the 1973 grand jury investigation, the only thing critics had been able to do to the park was prosecute the owners and employees on trumped up charges of violating laws against serving liquor on Sundays. The most serious threat to the park’s survival was, of course, the lawsuit against it that came as a result of the grand jury’s findings in 1973, but even then the park was given a chance to reinvent itself, which it did successfully. Later critics had to resort to attempts to abolish the town of Lakeside or annex parts of it in order to threaten the amusement park, all of which failed miserably as the town and park survived.³¹

In addition to protecting it, Lakeside Amusement Park’s location also helped insulate it from many of the problems that eventually brought down other amusement parks. As closely as it may have been linked to Denver throughout its first years in operation, Lakeside was located in a very suburban setting at a time when most amusement parks were in or near urban areas. Suburban residents eventually came to perceive urban amusement parks as crime-ridden havens

for thugs or battlegrounds in the ongoing racial conflicts that most cities faced in the second half of the twentieth century. That way of thinking did not die out as time passed. More than a decade after Elitch's opened its new location in downtown Denver in 1995, *Denver Post* reporter John Wenzel found many of the same problems there, detailing once incident in which two rival groups of men shouted and flashed tattoos at each other. A security guard removed the man who appeared to be the ringleader from the park before a fight broke out, but the incident was disturbing to Wenzel. He did say, however, that Elitch's was just as safe, if not safer, than any other place in downtown Denver. Lakeside's suburban location, combined with the obvious presence of the town's police force and park security during the summer season, spared the park from the same type of problems that so many people identified in other amusement parks during the 1960s and 1970s, which is when many of those that had survived economic downturns, war, and competition from theme parks finally succumbed.³²

Just as important as the roles of design, location, and timing were in the long-term survival of Lakeside Amusement Park was the determination of the park's owners, the Zang and Krasner families, who simply refused to let the park die. After Adolph Zang built the park, the members of his family, especially his stepbrother William Buck and nephew Phillip Friederich, worked tirelessly to maintain the park and keep it going. Even after two bankruptcies, Buck and Friederich had a difficult time letting go of the park. They were too close to the park and its past, however, to make the full transition from elite to working class park, but with Benjamin Krasner that was not the case. As hard as the Zang family worked for the park, Krasner worked even harder. He made choices that were sometimes tough but necessary, such as paving over the baseball field in order to create a parking lot in recognition of the fact that more customers were arriving at Lakeside in their own cars rather than on the aging streetcars. Krasner also started a

program of constant innovation and renovation at the park that enable it to survive. His daughter Rhoda successfully fought off several attacks in the 1970s, 1980s, and early 1990s that threatened the park with closure. Without a succession of owners committed to its survival, Lakeside Amusement Park most likely would have closed its gates, just as thousands of other parks had by the time Lakeside reached its centennial.

As tenacious as the park's owners were, they also possessed very good business sense. Adolph Zang had a proven record of success when it came to his father's brewery and other businesses. Zang single-handedly transformed the family's grubstaking business into a successful bank, and his long-term plan to open outlets for Zang beer also worked very well. Building an amusement park was his biggest venture of all in that area, but it was one that was relatively certain to succeed based on the number of other brewers who did the same thing. William Buck and Phillip Friederich enjoyed great success in real estate investing outside of their joint association at Lakeside. Benjamin Krasner had a rare awareness of what the public wanted in an amusement park and had also made connections, especially with *The Denver Post*, that allowed him to promote the park effectively in the press. The Krasner's business skill and sense enabled them to do what was needed to allow the park to survive, from embracing the new car culture to constant innovation in rides and attractions to building the Speedway.

Just as notable as Lakeside's ability to survive was its ability to reflect life in Denver. Benjamin Krasner's new slogan for the park in 1935, "Denver Has Gone Lakeside," was indeed accurate. In its first years, the park had reflected Denver's struggle to find its place on the national stage while also leaving behind the rough and unattractive appearance of its early days in favor of a more settled and attractive image more in keeping with the city's growing prominence. The park just as obviously reflected the rise of the automobile culture in Denver,

with covered parking available to customers in 1908 and construction of the Lakeside Speedway in 1938. The park's transition to working class playground reflected Denver's suburban growth in the 1910s and 1920s, while the town's struggle to survive in the 1970s reflected suburbanites' fears of Denver's power and racial problems. The construction of Lakeside Shopping Center reflected both Denver's continued growth and changing trends in the way people lived.

Interstate highway construction, urban renewal, and political battles, among many other things, were also reflected in the story of Lakeside. And, perhaps most importantly, Lakeside reflected Denver's need for recreation. Through its unique ability to adapt to changing circumstances, Lakeside Amusement Park managed to remain in business long after most family owned amusement parks of its era had closed their gates for the last time.

Pioneer, survivor, and entertaining amusement park—all were labels that Lakeside Amusement Park wore proudly. In 2009, as Lakeside embarked on its 101st season, the park adopted a new slogan: "Life's a Roller Coaster, Enjoy the Ride." Lakeside's ride over the course of a century definitely had been a very wild roller coaster. From its earliest days as an unofficial part of Denver's City Beautiful movement to reaching its centennial season, Lakeside had done what most observers thought no amusement park could do. A dizzying array of rides, plays, bands, and restaurants had entertained multiple generations of Denverites within the park's gates and kept them coming back year after year. Unlike every other amusement park, Lakeside had occupied its own town and set its own rules long before Walt Disney thought of the concept. There had been times when it seemed as if the very unique amusement park might not survive, especially after the bankruptcy in 1933 that eventually allowed Benjamin Krasner to buy it and the 1973 grand jury investigation report that largely condemned it. But through good timing, adaptation, and determination, the park lived on. As Lakeside celebrated its one hundredth

birthday in 2008, owner Rhoda Krasner commented that, while the long-term future of the park was “hypothetical at this point,” she did say, “...I think Lakeside will be here in another 100 years. This particular piece of geography was meant to entertain people. It’s unique to our metro area.” A Century of Fun at Lakeside Amusement Park had proven that it was, undeniably, a very unique place.³³

NOTES

INTRODUCTION: THROUGH THE TURNSTILE

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CHAPTER ONE:
BEFORE THERE WAS LAKESIDE...

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CHAPTER TWO: LAKESIDE, A NEW AMUSEMENT ENTERPRISE

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12. Kasson, *Amusing the Million*, pp. 63-65; Hull, *Denver's Elitch Gardens*, pp. 13, 53, 66, 96, 105; Nasaw, *Going Out*, p. 86.

13. "Another Immense Amusement Resort Planned for Suburb That Overlooks a Fine View of Farm Scenery," *Denver Republican* (September 1, 1907): 2; *Lakeside Realty and Amusement Company, Lakeside Park, The White City, Denver Colorado, Official Guide and Views* (Denver: Smith Books, 1908), pp. 1-2.

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“Memories of Lakeside: amusement mecca for millions,” *Arvada (Colorado) Citizen Sentinel* (August 16, 1973): 5; 100th Anniversary Tour of Lakeside Amusement Park, July 18, 2008; Spare tire cover in possession of the author.

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CHAPTER THREE: OPEN FOR BUSINESS AT JOLLY LAKESIDE

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16. Untitled Article, (*Golden Colorado Transcript* (July 30, 1908): 4.
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36. Mayor's Budget 1909, p. 5, File Folder 22, Robert W. Speer Papers, Western History and Genealogy Department, Denver Public Library; Leonard and Noel, *Denver*, p. 135.

CHAPTER FOUR:
LAKESIDE, THE WHITE CITY BEAUTIFUL

1. All four Denver amusement parks were written about in the July 30, 1910, July 6, 1912, and July 11, 1914, issues of *Denver Municipal Facts*. Lakeside, Elitch's, and Manhattan Beach were written about together in the June 18, 1910 and February 28, 1914, issues. Lakeside and Elitch's were written about together in the May 13, 1911, issue while Lakeside and Manhattan Beach were written about in the June 17, 1911 issue. Elitch's and Manhattan Beach were written about together in the July 1, 1911, and August 5, 1911, issues. Lakeside received coverage alone in the August 29, 1908, January 8, 1910, August 20, 1910, August 27, 1910, October 29, 1910, July 11, 1911, July 22, 1911, August 11, 1911, May 17, 1912, June 14, 1912, August 24, 1912, June 28, 1913, July 12, 1913, May 23, 1914, and July 25, 1914, issues. Elitch's received coverage alone in the June 24, 1911, August 19, 1911, August 3, 1912, August 23, 1913, May 23, 1914, and March 28, 1914 issues. Manhattan Beach/Luna Park received coverage alone in the July 23, 1910 and November 26, 1910 issue. Tuileries received coverage alone in the August 13, 1910 issue. The quote about the lights of Denver and Lakeside creating a brilliant spectacle is from "Three Beautiful Lakes in Sight," *Denver Municipal Facts* 2 (October 29, 1910): 4.
2. "Denver and Colorado to Provide Royal Entertainment for Visitors to National Real Estate Convention," *Denver Municipal Facts* 3 (July 17, 1911): 3-6.
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9. David Francis and Diane Francis, *Cleveland Amusement Park Memories: A Nostalgic Look Back at Euclid Beach Park, Puritas Springs Park, Geauga Lake Park, and Other Classic Parks* (Cleveland: Gray and Company, 2004), pp. 9-10 77-80, 35, 40, 42-43, 56-57.

10. "Many Changes at Lakeside Next Year," (*Golden*) *Colorado Transcript* (October 7, 1909): 1; "Lakeside News," (*Golden*) *Colorado Transcript* (December 3, 1908): 5; "Denver, Col.," *The Billboard* 24 (March 26, 1910): 9; "Parks List," *The Billboard* 23 (March 26, 1910): 54; "Lakeside Park, Denver, Col.," *The Billboard* 24 (June 11, 1910): 14; "Summer Park News, Denver Parks," *The Billboard* 23 (May 7, 1910): 16.

11. Untitled Article, *Denver Express* (March 26, 1910), Lakeside Amusement Park Clipping File 4, Western History and Genealogy Department, Denver Public Library.

12. "Many New Features at Lakeside," (*Golden*) *Colorado Transcript* (May 5, 1910): 1; "Denver's Coney Island to Open With New Theater," (*Golden*) *Colorado Transcript* (May 26, 1910): 1; *Denver, The Convention City of America*, p. 20.

13. "Many Changes at Lakeside Next Year," (*Golden*) *Colorado Transcript* (October 7, 1909): 1; Adams, *The American Amusement Park Industry*, p. 52; Gee and Lopez, *Laugh Your Troubles Away*, p. 34.

14. Steven A. Reiss, *City Games: The Evolution of American Urban Society and the Rise of Sports* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989), pp. 66-67, 149, 70-71.

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17. "Gov. Shafroth Opens Season at Lakeside," (*Denver*) *Rocky Mountain News* (May 29, 1911): Sec. 1, p. 5; "Chamber of Commerce Carnival at Lakeside Next Week," *Denver Municipal Facts* 3 (June 17, 1911): 10.

18. Julian Helber, "Resume of the Week's Important Amusement Events in Big American Cities" for Denver, CO, *The Billboard* 23 (June 10, 1911): 18; "Resume of the Week's Important Amusement Events in Big American Cities" for Denver, CO, *The Billboard* 23 (June 17, 1911): 19.

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22. Noel and Norgen, *Denver*, pp. 22-26; Goodstein, *Robert Speer's Denver*, pp. 491, 496-497.
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25. Leonard and Noel, *Denver*, pp. 310-11, 307-308, 321.
26. Robertson et. al., *Denver's Street Railways, Volume 1*, p. 71; Smiley, *History of Denver*, p. 870.
27. U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Twelfth Census of the United States, 1900, Jefferson County, Colorado*; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Thirteenth Census of the United States, 1910, Lakeside, Colorado*; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Fourteenth Census of the United States, 1920, Lakeside, Colorado*; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Fifteenth Census of the United States, 1930, Lakeside, Colorado*; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Sixteenth Census of the United States, 1940, Lakeside Town, Colorado*.
28. "Lakeside Park Celebrates 100 Years," *NAPHA News* 30 (2008): 5; Untitled Article, *The Billboard* (March 24, 1928): 4, Clipping in Lakeside Amusement Park Clipping File 1, Western History and Genealogy Department, Denver Public Library.
29. "Western League Baseball Schedule," (Denver: Lakeside Realty and Amusement Company, 1912), Western History and Genealogy Department, Denver Public Library.
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32. "'Dry' at Lakeside; Bartenders Strike," (*Denver*) *Rocky Mountain News* (May 31, 1912): 4.
33. Certificate of Incorporation of Colorado Realty and Amusement Company, Document 14724, Wyoming State Archives; "Big-Time Bands Business Boon to Denver's Lakeside El Patio," *The Billboard* 43 (November 14, 1931): 34; Arnold interview.
34. "City Entertains Thousands During Bundes Turnfest," *Denver Municipal Facts* 1 (June 28, 1913): 3; "Lakeside Park," *The Denver Post* (August 5, 1913): 5.
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CHAPTER ELEVEN:
AN AMUSEMENT PARK WITHOUT A TOWN?

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28. *Ibid.*, p. 117.

29. *Ibid.*, p. 117.

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CONCLUSION: A CENTURY OF FUN AT LAKESIDE AMUSEMENT PARK

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12, 2009): Section E, page 8. Elitch's is also on the list of century-old amusement parks, although in the opinion of many people the true Elitch's ceased to exist when it moved to the Platte Valley and the new theme park is simply a park that has its name.

3. "30% Upturn For Lakeside," *The Billboard* 49(September 11, 1937): 46, 49.
4. Dave Smith, The Walt Disney Company Archivist, Letter to David Forsyth, April 7, 2012; "Lakeside Park Celebrates 100 Years," *NAPHA News*, p. 8.
5. 100th Anniversary Tour of Lakeside Amusement Park, July 18, 2008. The original globes on lights were pointed out repeatedly during this tour.
6. "Lakeside Park Celebrates 100 Years," *NAPHA News*, pp. 13-14; Simona Gallegos, "Ky. Accident won't delay Lakeside's new drop ride Zoom, which is made by a different company," *The Denver Post* (June 24, 2007): Section C, page 1.
7. Irv Moss, "The lure and lore of Lakeside track," *The Denver Post* (June 27, 2011): 6B; Development Agreement for Lakeside Center, December 16, 2009, available from <http://www.zachurban.org/1/post/2010/10/lakeside-development-agreement.html>, last accessed April 27, 2012. In early 2012, Walmart began construction of a new store on the Lakeside Shopping Center site. Prior to that, it was rumored that King Soopers would close its existing store at Thirty-eighth Avenue and Sheridan and building a new store in Lakeside. The bank and office building still stand (as of April 2012) on the former mall site, along with a newer building that houses the Town of Lakeside municipal offices.
8. The last time the band organ on the carousel is mentioned as working is in "Lakeside features old merry-go-round," (*Denver*) *Rocky Mountain News* (August 16, 1970): 5; Andrea Jacobs, "Lakeside marks 100th anniversary," *Intermountain Jewish News* (July 3, 2008): available from <http://www.ijn.com/features/210-lakeside-marks-anniversary>, last accessed April 26, 2012.
9. Wenzel, "Has Elitch's run its race as Denver's main event?," *The Denver Post* (July 12, 2009): Section E, page 8.
10. Forgrieve, "A century of thrills," (*Denver*) *Rocky Mountain News* (July 16, 2008): Business section 1-2; Claire Martin, "Nostalgia rides on at Lakeside," *The Denver Post* (July 2, 2011): Section D, pages 1, 8.
11. The plaque for Manhattan Beach is at Sloan's Lake Park, while the plaque for Arlington Park is at Alamo-Placita Park, both part of Denver's park system; The book on Tuileries is Nancy A. Bunker, *Tuileries Amusement Park: A Short History* (Englewood: Englewood Public Library, 1991).
12. "The Civic Center Conservancy," available from <http://www.civiccenterconservancy.org/about-us.html>, last accessed April 26, 2012; Michael Paglia, "Park and Wreck," (*Denver*) *Westword* (September 14, 2006): available from <http://www.westword.com/2006-09-14/culture/park-and-wreck/full>, last accessed April 26, 2012;

Joanne Ditmer, "Too much of a good thing," *The Denver Post* (September 3, 2006): available from http://www.denverpost.com/search/ci_4274787, last accessed April 26, 2012.

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19. Gary Cross, "Crowds and Leisure: Thinking Comparatively Across the 20th Century," *Journal of Social History* (Spring 2006): 633.

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23. Cross and Walton, *The Playful Crowd*, pp. 143-145, 153; Cross, "Crowds and Leisure," p. 639.

24. Hull, *Denver's Elitch Gardens*, p.65; Smith, *San Francisco's Playland at the Beach*, p. 13.

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26. Picture of Lakeside Park Automobile Entrance Gate, File Folder 9 , Photo Box 6, Richard L. Crowther Papers, Western History and Genealogy Department, Denver Public Library.
27. Cross and Walton, *The Playful Crowd*, pp. 160-161.
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