

GLEN ECHO

PARK



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

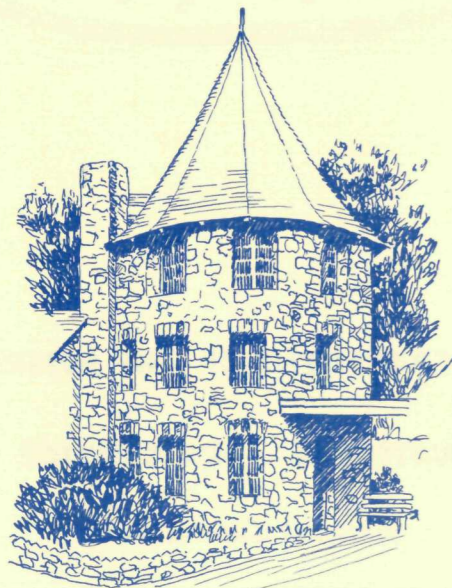
National Capital Parks

GLEN ECHO WAS in the 1890's:

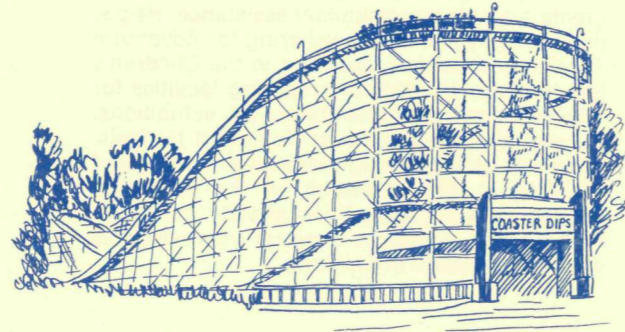
THE CHAUTAUQUA ERA: Glen Echo-on-the-Potomac

Glen Echo Park has quite a history. It has changed hands and form many times. Back in 1891, during Glen Echo's Chautauqua era, remarkable Victorian-style stone structures housed a noble vision conceived by Edwin and Edward Baltzley, realtors from Philadelphia. The vision saw the re-creation, near the Nation's Capital, of a touch of Germany's Rhineland with castle-like dwellings along the heights overlooking the Potomac River, coupled with the creation of a citadel of learning and cultural piety among the masses. This dual religious and educational venture was at the heart of the Chautauqua Movement—a great wave of democratized education—which was sweeping the country during the late nineteenth century. The Glen Echo Chautauqua was envisioned as the Nation's greatest center of general culture. Renowned scholars in the sciences, arts, languages, and literature were called upon to design the curriculum. A spectacular amphitheatre, constructed in 1891 over Minnehaha Creek, served as the focal point for cultural gatherings of some 6,000 spectators with leading educators, religious speakers, and musical artists of the century. Just prior to the 1892 season, an outbreak of malarial fever developed into epidemic proportions, and doomed the ambitious project to failure.

The main surviving structure of that era on the Park tract is the Chautauqua Tower, where large bells in the belfry tolled the beginning and ending of class sessions.



After 1910:



THE AMUSEMENT DAYS: Fun and frolic

By 1911, the Washington Railway and Electric Company, which operated a great street car line to Glen Echo, had purchased the Chautauqua grounds and converted the area into an amusement park. In 1922, a marvelous carrousel was acquired. This classic work of art was made by wood carvers of the Dentzel Company of Philadelphia, creators of the finest carrouseis in America, according to folk art experts. The Park's largest attraction, a roller coaster, was built in 1923. Eight years later marked the opening of another milestone—the quarter million dollar Crystal Pool. The Spanish Ballroom, erected in 1933, was host to most of the Big Name bands of the World War II era. Every year, during the next four or five decades, thousands of pleasure seekers flocked to the Glen Echo grounds and memories of these halcyon days still linger among old and young. The historic, cultural, and architectural values associated with the Chautauqua period faded into the past.

Beginning with the early 1950's and into the 1960's, public interest in the Park waned, business declined, and Park facilities deteriorated. The Amusement Park closed permanently after the summer of 1968, marking the termination of another phase of the Park's history. Gone were the garish lights of marquee and Midway, the rapid-fire clatter of a plummeting roller coaster, the Dodgem, Kiddieland, skeeball alleys, the Penny Arcade, sticky-apple and cotton candy booths, and take-a-chance stalls with their prize Kewpie dolls and teddy bears.

GLEN ECHO IS NOW

A COMMUNITY PARK: Center for Broad Cultural and educational exchange

Glen Echo Park, administered by the National Park Service, is located off MacArthur Boulevard, a short distance beyond the District of Columbia line on the Potomac Palisades in Montgomery County. The transition from Amusement Park to public park has required the concerted effort of interested citizens and government officials.

In 1969, after the Amusement Park closed, a plan by the Park owners to develop high-rise apartments encountered strong local opposition. Concern for the future of the 16 acre tract lead first to action by the Montgomery County Council to prevent high-rise development and a subsequent exchange of Federal surplus land to permit preservation of the site as parkland.

Another major endeavor was to save the beautiful hand-carved carrousel. When the Amusement Park closed, its private owners had sold the carrousel to a collector, who in turn was planning to dismantle it and ship it to California. To preserve this historic landmark, a committee of interested citizens organized a "Save the Carrousel Fund Drive." It was a rare display of responsiveness on the part of public officials at every level and of the Town of Glen Echo in enacting a public-interest crusade to raise the needed \$80,000 to buy back the carrousel. Today, the 50 year old carrousel turns happily again, resplendent with its lights and prized band organ, providing a unique focal point for public enjoyment of the Park.

The interaction of community and governmental involvement has continued in the evolution of Glen Echo Park from the decaying shell of the old amusement facility to a growing center of creative activity. The process has included a number of public forums for the exchange of ideas and continuing participation by individuals and organizations who have seen the Park as an opportunity for the expression of community needs. This community interest and concern has led directly to the home for Adventure Theatre and to the extensive Creative Education Program. It has helped also in shaping the philosophy of the Park which stresses a continuing dialogue with the community, a commitment to creative development of the individual, and active efforts toward environmental responsibility.

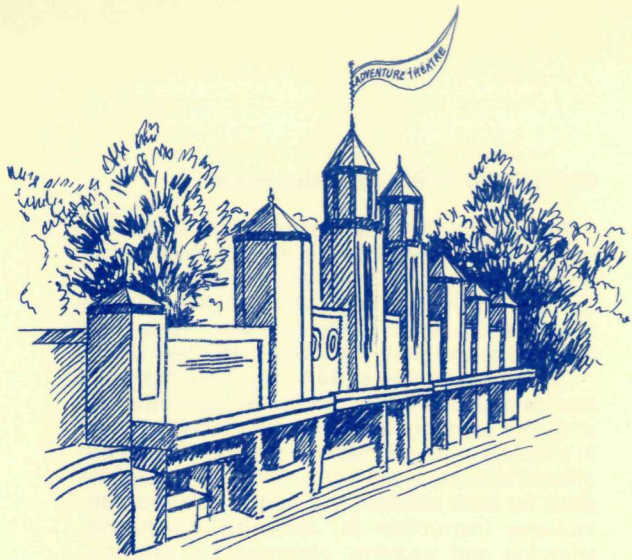
GLEN ECHO PARK: An active vision

Today, Glen Echo Park has become a community park where emphasis is placed on participation by the visitor in cultural, creative, and educational activities. Those who visit the area are provided the opportunity to come away with knowledge and skills that may enrich their lives.

Since the summer of 1972, the Park has been host to over 140 artists, craftsmen, and other instructors working, teaching, and demonstrating in a variety of media. Workshops and classes are offered to explore both beginning and advanced skills for both children and adults. The program includes instruction in: ceramics, enameling, spinning and weaving, photography, drawing, painting, mixed media, fabric decoration, leathercraft, picture framing, sculpture, silkscreen, drama, dance, music, yoga, natural foods, ecology, and many more. A separate brochure is available at the Park in advance of each session. Anyone interested should request that their name be put on a mailing list.

During the Park's busy summer season, artists and craftsmen conduct open demonstrations during the weekends, and the Glen Echo Gallery is in full swing. The demonstrations give the visitor an opportunity to see and meet many of the instructors teaching within the Park. Other activities include a wide range of offerings for the entire family: carrousel rides, puppet shows, folk and square dances, Adventure Theatre productions, magic shows, folk and country music, picnicking under the oaks, the Children's Experimental Workshop, visiting guest performances, and more.





A THEATRE-IN-RESIDENCE: Adventure Theatre

The old Penny arcade of the Amusement Park has been transformed into a home for Adventure Theatre, a non-profit organization of professional and amateur members skilled in directing, acting, and producing theatre for young audiences. The theatre group has presented a wide variety of shows drawn from traditional fairy tales, folk legends, and ballads.

The organization has three performing divisions and a workshop program. The Adventure Theatre's Carrousel Players performed in their intimate, on-site theatre at Glen Echo Park from June through August. The touring Adventure Theatre In-School Players carry innovative productions to local schools throughout the greater Washington area from September through June. Semi-annually, Adventure Theatre mounts large-scale presentations in formal theatre settings in the area.

For ticket information, call: 530-5203.

**AN INNOVATIVE VENTURE FOR THE YOUNG:
The Children's Experimental Workshop**

The Children's Experimental Workshop, held each summer, involves both inner city and suburban area children. The series of workshops offered are collaboratively designed by professional staff in the visual and performing arts. Through dance, dramatization, form and design, themes relating to the vital interdependency of man and nature are stimulated to create "environmental assemblages". Children are selected for the program by application based on serious interest in the arts. Limited enrollment enables individual attention and group concentration. Application information for this program is announced each season in the Creative Education brochure.



VOLUNTEERS IN THE PARK: We need you!

Glen Echo Park's operation is large and active. In the attempt to enlarge our focus and programs, we welcome volunteer assistance. Help is needed every summer in ushering for Adventure Theatre productions, assisting in the Children's Experimental Workshop, preparing facilities for arts and craft demonstrations, art exhibitions, Sunday afternoon concerts, fairs and festivals, as well as disseminating public information, and assisting in the operation of the carrousel. Groups of volunteers have already contributed time and energy to projects improving the physical condition of the Park.

park summer hours:

Craft demonstrations, gallery sales, carrousel rides, picnicking, entertainment, and recreational programs are continued during the summer park hours:

FRIDAY: 6:00 - 9:00 P.M.

SATURDAY: 10:00 a.m. - 8 p.m.

SUNDAY: 12:30 - 8 p.m.

For information on programs, call the Park at 229-3031 or check the park entrance bulletin board.

ALL PARKING IN LOWER LOT OFF OXFORD STREET VIA MACARTHUR BOULEVARD.

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