

## THE PARK EXPERIENCE OF THE UNION ELECTRIC COMPANY, OF DUBUQUE, IA.

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For many years there has been discussion among street railway managers concerning the degree of activity which operating companies should exercise in the amusement line. The "amusement line" term as here used is intended to cover entertainment and amusement of every character and description, and its object is to induce traffic for the lines of the railway company.

The master minds of the profession have wrestled with the question, some on one side and some on the other. There are still many conservative managers who insist that no street railway company should invest a dollar of its money in amusement ventures, though the opinion generally held is that investments of this character are entirely legitimate.

The necessity of a company embarking in this field is



MUSIC PAVILION.

less pronounced in the larger cities. Centers of population of 150,000 and over present an attractive field for the individual whose business is catering to the amusement loving public. It is in the smaller cities, say of 75,000 or less, where the company is as a rule left by the professional promoter to its own devices. This will undoubtedly be the case to a greater extent in the future on account of the unfortunate summer season of 1907. The element engaging in this line had a sad experience the country over last year. The "White City" craze which spread over the country like an epidemic during the past two or three years found root in many cities and towns which on account of restricted population were entirely unable properly to support the ventures.

The writer, from contact with railway and park managers from many sections, and some observation as well, is of the opinion that the days of the gaudy papier-maché front with its glare of electric lights and corps of leathern-lunged boosters, the merry-go-round with its never ceasing mechanical piano, the roller coaster railway, the Katzenjammer castle, the crazy house, the old mill and all that line of so-called amusement devices, have had their day. The

public is tired of the toys of yesterday and wants something new. Ingenious as are the creators and builders of these schemes they cannot keep up with the demand of the public for a complete line of new devices each season. Even though they could be produced the income from the game would not permit of the reconstruction each year.

Many managers incline to the reasoning that the public in tiring of the boisterous "slap-stick" entertainment of the variety found in the average amusement park craves a touch of nature. This accounts for many striking examples of the development of natural resorts which are being undertaken in some of the smaller cities.

In the amusement line the Union Electric Company, of Dubuque, has, in the expression of the "Great White Way," "been down the line" in an endeavor to create traffic for its railway. The company in years past has been liberal in its support of many ventures which gave promise of returns. It controlled for several years a franchise in the III League, the company's manager directing the handling of the club. After four years of professional baseball the company has retired, having as an evidence of the time and money spent one handsome silver loving cup, which was presented on the happy occasion when its gladiators came romping home with the goods. To balance the books on this deal would show a loss. It is estimated that the extra traffic to and from the baseball park was about sufficient to offset the subscriptions which the company was compelled to make from time to time to keep its lusty representatives in circuit with the feed trough.

The company has for several years been a leading spirit in the Tri-State Fair, which conducts for one week each fall a big county fair and trotting races at Nut-

wood Park, this being a finely equipped fair and racing plant owned by the company.

In the summer of 1904 the company conducted a miniature "White City" edition with vaudeville as the feature. A season of cold, rainy weather transformed this venture into a memory which is recalled occasionally by a glimpse at the profit and loss account.

Balloon ascensions, individuals who made a slide for life with their teeth encircling a wire rope, fire works shows, monster picnics, band concerts, sauerkraut fests, high dives—in fact anything and everything on the docket—were undertaken. Some of these promotions were highly successful and increased at the time the company's receipts \$500, \$600 or \$700 a day. This, it will be understood, for a system operating a schedule calling ordinarily for twenty cars is an increase of considerable magnitude in its business.

In 1905 the company undertook vigorously the matter of developing a natural situation—a tract of ground of 40 acres, which has since been increased through purchase of additional acreage. Cutting loose from the old time "ballyhoo" methods, announcement was made that the entire object of the company would be to create a pleasure ground



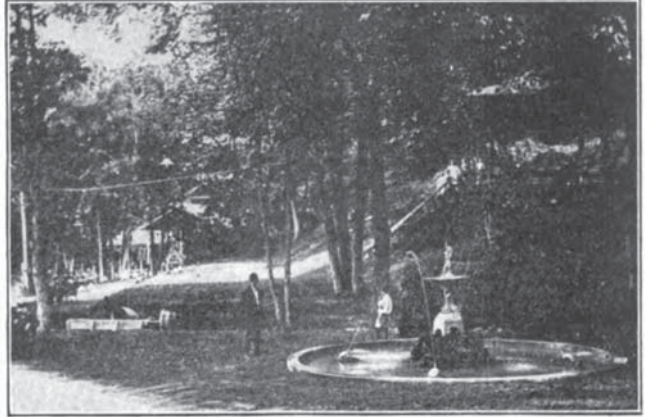
which would be the beauty spot of the city and the pride of its people. The first year material progress was made and in order to acquaint the public with the improvements concerts were announced by organizations of unquestioned merit. There was no charge or fee of any kind beyond the car fare, which is 15 cents for the round trip. From an obscure resort which for several years had been visited by a few thousand people each season, Union Park sprung immediately into popularity and each season has seen increase of patronage by the public at large.

The park is conducted along lines which could not but appeal to the best element of any community. The entertainment provided is of high class, and there is an entire elimination of the petty graft methods as involved through the

per cent more, but the company worked on the theory that there was more at stake through the guaranteed satisfaction of its patrons than an increase of \$1,000 or \$2,000 in the receipts from privileges.

The refreshment service, besides confections, cigars, soft drinks and ice cream, afforded a well-selected menu, including tea, coffee, chocolate, sandwiches, cold meats and salads.

Offers were made for concessions of the kind usually found in amusement parks which would have represented an income of several thousand dollars. Purchasers of these privileges would naturally have been compelled, in order to show a profit on the right side, to have grafted the company's patrons for an amount sufficient to pay for the priv-



VIEWS IN UNION PARK, DUBUQUE.

presence of individuals operating concessions of various kinds.

The concessions at Union Park consist of a dance hall, two refreshment stands and a bowling alley. The dance hall is a structure of unusual attractiveness; it is surrounded by a 12-ft. veranda, is brilliantly illuminated and is equipped with a large number of electric fans. The company sells the privilege for a fixed sum, reserving the right to cancel the lease at any time and demanding of the lessees that the dance feature be conducted in a manner agreeable to the company. The refreshment stands and bowling alleys are fully provided with modern equipment and are operated by responsible individuals on the profit-sharing basis. The company supervises the general conduct of these enterprises and guarantees the public city prices and the highest character of service.

The net amount received by the company for the 1907 season for the park privileges was \$1,500. These privileges could have been sold through competitive bidding for 100

ileges and a surplus. The manager of a street railway who realizes that he must win and hold the support of the public to which he caters will readily realize that these "separation" schemes will in a short time kill his park business. These games may prove successful for a short time in a community where there is a large transient population, but never in the cities of the class with which we are now dealing.

To insure its patrons of the minimum of annoyance from obstreperous characters, the company maintains during the season a park police force—special officers authorized by the judge of the county court. They are on duty during the afternoon and evening, assist in the handling of the crowds on and off the cars and incidentally look after the conduct of all who enter and leave the park.

The feature of the park is the "Plaza." This is a large square with a firmly rolled cinder and gravel bottom and provides, through the agency of modern equipment, seating capacity for 3000 people. The seats face a rustic band

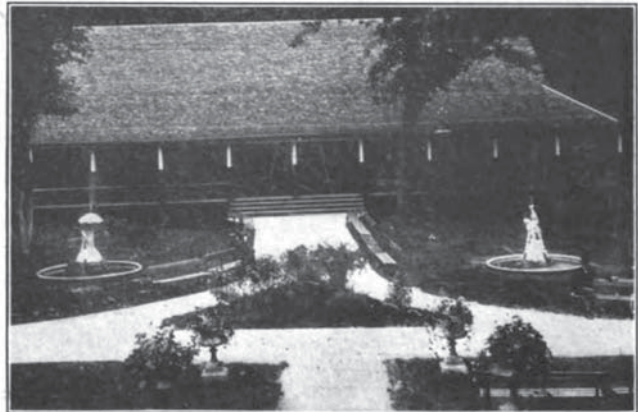


stand, the platform of which is 40 ft. x 40 ft. The roof of this stand was designed by a specialist on acoustics. Musicians and performers comment on the remarkable effects produced by vocal or instrumental effort from this stand.

Two performances are given daily, afternoon and evening. Each program lasts for two hours, with a fifteen-minute intermission. For two seasons the company put on brass bands, orchestra and soloists. A band of from twenty-five to thirty-five pieces would enter a two weeks' engagement, the elimination of railroad fares on the second week making it advantageous for the company to hold the organizations more than one week. On the last half of the engagement, as an added attraction, a singer of note would

Dubuque have questioned the wisdom of assuming this expense with no revenue other than the car fares. At Dubuque there is no question but that the returns have been in sufficient volume to more than justify the expenditure. Without the attractions the park travel would have been much less than that actually realized.

The company believes in using liberally the space of the daily papers. In each of the two dailies a double column space 6 in. deep is carried. On Sunday, the opening day of the week, the announcement of the week's program is given a space four columns wide and 6 ins. deep. In addition to this there is inserted in each paper 1000 lines per month of 3-in. and 4-in. "local readers." In recognition of the liberal support given the press by the management the



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be engaged to appear with the band or orchestra, the soloists rendering a number in each half of the two daily programs. The bands and soloists presented at this park play in all of the larger cities of the western country.

For the closing month of 1907 the company was prompted on account of inclement weather to economize on the cost of its entertainment, and put on moving pictures with three changes weekly with two singers who would change weekly and an accompanist. It was an agreeable surprise to note that this entertainment, at one-third the cost, drew equally as well as the more expensive attractions, indicating that the masses are not discriminating so long as the entertainment provided is clean and wholesome. The pictures could not be presented in the afternoon, and to lengthen the program the singers put on extra numbers.

During the season of 1907, which lasted only 60 days on account of unusually inclement climatic conditions, the cost of the advertising and attractions was \$7,720. Managers of street railways operating in cities of the class of

Dubuque publish as reading matter such articles relating to the programs at the park as would be of general interest. This means in the neighborhood of three-quarters of a column of reading matter in each Sunday issue and from a third to a half column in each daily issue. Traveling organizations provide lithographic matter which is placed at the company's expense through contract with the City Bill Posting Company. In addition to these methods bands and soloists provide half-tones which are used on 8-in. streamers—these streamers in bunches of fifty are hung in the cars to the amount of 10,000 or 20,000 per week.

Dubuque is a great community for picnic parties. The park is equipped with tables and benches which are scattered in shady nooks and corners, with a seating capacity of approximately 1000. It is the practice for the women and children to go out in the afternoon with the lunch baskets and be joined in the early evening by the male members of their families. After lunch they enjoy the first half of the program and return to the city—in this



manner contributing to break the rush which follows at the conclusion of the concerts.

The company operates a five-minute schedule to its park. Each motor car hauls a trailer, so that the carrying capacity is about 2000 people per hour.

One feature of Union Park which is not usually enjoyed by operating companies is the fact that every person visiting the park must go on the cars of the company. The

## . ROCKWOOD PARK, ST. JOHN

An excellent example is presented in Rockwood Park at St. John, N. B., of the results possible where full advantage is taken in park management of the natural resources of the land available for park purposes. The park is within limits of St. John, a city of some 50,000 inhabitants, and a 5-cent fare is charged from any point in the city to the



LAKE AT ROCKWOOD PARK

park is located at the head of a rocky gorge and there is no other entrance except via the street railway line.

Visitors are impressed with the substantial character of the park improvements—there are long stretches of broad cement walks, a complete water works system, beautiful fountains and the floral designs and exhibits are the most elaborate in the city.

Absolute good order in the park is so strictly enforced that women and children can visit the resort unattended at all times with every confidence that they will be free from contact with disagreeable influences of any char-

acter. The land set aside for amusement purposes comprises 1000 acres, included in which are three beautiful natural lakes. It is the water feature especially that has been taken advantage of to draw the crowds, and the methods used are in a way available to all park managers who are so fortunate as to include a lake within the boundary of their resorts. The resort is well patronized in summer as well as winter. As the seasons succeed each other, boating and fishing give way to skating and tobogganing and vice versa. The extent of the patronage is clearly indicated by the accompanying pictures showing both winter and summer scenes. An especially surprising feature of the winter patronage is the large number of spectators; in fact, the ice sports seem almost to draw as many people as the races in the summer.



CASINO AT ROCKWOOD PARK

acter. This the company regards as one of the chief assets of the institution. No park can enjoy a higher tribute than the entire confidence of the public at large in this particular.

Many improvements are being made for the 1908 season and the company anticipates a large increase over the business of the past three years.

The popularity of both boating and skating has been patent for years. The question has been how best to make the most of it. This the Rockwood Park management seems to have solved. The main chance is accommodation. This has been carefully looked after by providing a suitable club house, artistic but not costly, which serves as a rendezvous for the boats in the summer and as a retreat in the winter. Here a lunch room is maintained where at all seemly hours sandwiches, cakes, tea, coffee and milk may be obtained.

It is from this building that the boat livery is conducted in summer. On hire are row boats, canoes and barges. The row boats and canoes of course are exceedingly popular with the young men and women, who patronize them liberally, especially on Saturdays and in the evenings.