

Rock Falls Park a.k.a. Stoughton's Beach

Slippery Rock, Butler Co., PA.

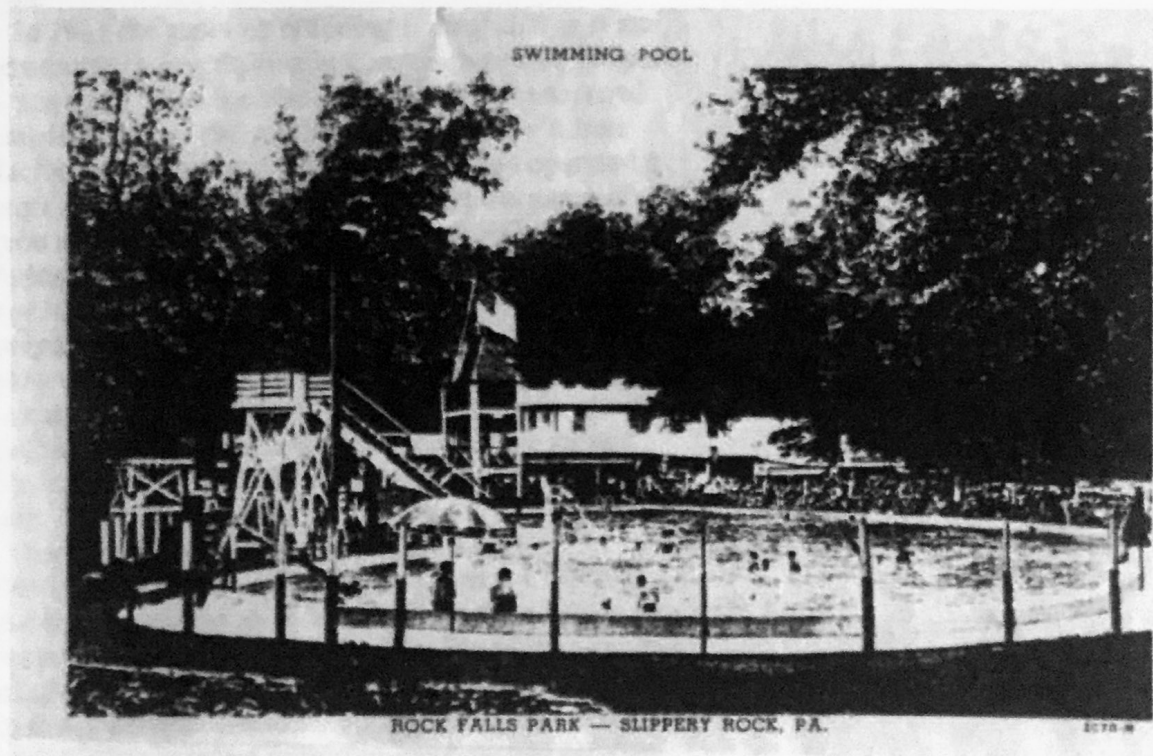
Date Opened: 1932

Date Closed : 1975

Location: 2 miles south of Slippery Rock, PA, beside the Slippery Rock Creek.

Remains: The swimming pool, at one time PA's biggest, now has trees growing out of the deep end.

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History

The park was first named Stoughton's Beach after Saul Stoughton who had it built on part of his farm. (Mr. Stoughton had a one foot right-of-way surveyed around the entire perimeter of his farm so that no one would have access to the park other than via his road.) The park opened in 1932 and was truly a Stoughton family

business. Saul's son Howard and his family did most of the work at the park. Howard ran the merry-go-round, his wife Esther operated the custard stand, and five of the seven kids pulled clean-up duty. Two of the sisters taught roller skating. In addition to the operating of the park, which was of course seasonal, Saul owned a sawmill and Howard had mules which he used in the logging business. In addition to all of these activities the Stoughtons operated two farms.

When the park opened it boasted the largest swimming pool in Pennsylvania. The pool featured two diving boards—a ten foot high board which was open to all, and a twenty foot high board which was used mostly for diving exhibitions. Stoughton's featured a diving show every Sunday. For one of the attractions gasoline was poured on the water and set afire. Divers would plunge into the water through the fire to the amazement of all.

In 1941 the gasoline rationing of World War II and the accompanying decline in customers caused the park to close, but when the war ended in 1945 it reopened. Just after the war the park was purchased by Albert MacDonald who along with his family had operated a resort in Virginia. MacDonald changed the name of the resort from Stoughton's Beach to Rock Falls Park. During the years which MacDonald owned the park he kept tab and reports that 128 different businesses, companies, and groups had picnics at Rock Falls Park; many of which were annual affairs. In 1952 he sold the park only to repurchase it when the new owner declared bankruptcy in 1961. MacDonald spent some money renovating the park but sold it again in 1967 for the final time.

Before he divested himself of the park Mr. MacDonald sold the park's merry-go-round. He didn't realize the value of the ride and sold it for \$400 only to discover later that it was re-sold for \$2,000 to a shrewd antique dealer who sold it to the Smithsonian Institution for \$18,700. The ride had been imported from Germany around 1900. It was a very rare, hand-carved carousel with real horsehair tails. As the original horsehair was pulled out by riders the tails were replaced by twine.

The last operator of Rock Falls Park was Ed Frank, a retired photographer who had worked for the Pittsburgh Press. Frank purchased the park from Sam Emigh in 1972. Its final year of operation was 1975.

The Slippery Rock Creek has long been an attraction to those seeking fun in the sun. Summer cottages still line the creek. As far back as the 1820's a dam, mill

race, and grist mill were located near the bridge on what is now Route 173. For most of its history the grist mill was referred to as Daugherty's although they were not the original owners. The Impounded water behind the dam created a nice swimming hole which was enjoyed by several generations. When Stoughton's Beach was in its heyday, the Straub family owned the area and It was a popular swimming spot. The Straubs never charged admission and we could find no records of any drownings or lawsuits. It was a different era. Straubs had a picnic grove near their beach, and it was for all to enjoy.

Improved highways and high speed automobiles gave people access to a larger selection of leisure time activities. Small amusement parks such as Rock Falls, Cascade, West View, Alameda and others were not able to compete with the likes of Conneaut Lake, Kennywood, Cedar Point and Presque Isle.

-from Butler County, the Second Hundred Years, by Ralph Goldinger and Audrey Felters.

Additional Information

We are looking for pictures and stories about Rock Falls Park, a.k.a. Stoughton's Beach. Please email us at rockfallspark@gmail.com .

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