

DOES THE TAIL WAG THE DOG?

How the development of a
rail trail could repeat history in
Southern Rensselaer County

All About Nassau

People, Buildings and Memories

BY KURT VINCENT, NASSAU VILLAGE HISTORIAN

When first invented in the late 1800's, trolleys rapidly became part of America's cultural landscape, offering previously unimaginable transportation options that transformed the economy and culture of Southern Rensselaer County. At the turn of the 20th century, trolleys were both the medium and mechanism for the explosion of businesses, attractions and amusements for tourists and residents alike. Trolleys today are extinct as transportation, but their former rail beds and mystique have become a tourist attraction and economic engine in their own right.

Several miles south of Nassau at Kinderhook Lake, Electric Park was developed as a summer amusement park by the railroad company. This was a common practice across the U.S. as a means of attracting business on weekends and holidays. The target market was urban factory workers and city office employees - a growing population of people who ranked economically and socially a notch below the wealthy tourists who came "from away" and stayed in the grand hotels of the era.

The railway company said its Electric Park offered "All that is best in refined amusements" and was a "place where ladies and children can go unattended." At Kinderhook Lake, the trolley passengers would be greeted with the sound of the steam calliope and colored lights that ringed the park. A steam-driven Ferris wheel sat just outside the park, and those who did not want to or couldn't afford to pay the park admission fee could ride it for 5 cents.

Park admission was 10 cents but those who arrived by rail with roundtrip tickets, which cost 40 cents from Albany, were admitted free. In the lagoon at the bottom of the hill that runs down from where the train stopped, a carousel operated on an island that, in turn, was connected by a bridge with the midway, where soda, popcorn, ice cream and other treats were sold. Also in the lagoon was a roller coaster built on piles sunk into the water. A huge wooden slide into the water called a chute-the-chute ran floating carts in the summer and toboggans in the winter. The park was also open in the winter for skating, curling and dancing.

In the years before and just after World War 1 guest houses, hotels and farms taking summer guests were numerous in all directions. Nassau, Lyons and Burden Lakes all provided entertainment opportunities made possible by easy transportation on trolleys. Small farmers could now sell heavy cans of milk with only a short trip to the closest rail crossing. The railroad also moved freight and express in concert with the steam railroads, connecting with the New York Central at Rensselaer and Hudson and with the Boston and Albany at Niverville and Hudson. Milk processing plants were located at Nassau Lake, Nassau Village and North Chatham.

Students who wished to continue their education beyond 8th grade could now take a trolley to the closest High Schools either in Rensselaer or Valatie. Previously if a family wanted higher education for their children, a private or boarding school was necessary to provide room and board because a trip home would take to long on the crude highways of the day.

Now as we sit today with a promise of the old railway right-of-way once again being utilized, we can hope some of the old prosperity comes our way.

If you would like to share your Nassau stories and/or pictures contact us at info@nassau12123.com or telephone Mr. Vincent at 518-766-2291. We would love to include your material in a future edition.

VISIT ELECTRIC PARK

Beautiful Ride. Clean Amusements.

Good Boating, Fishing and Bathing

Try the New Restaurant

We Serve Only the Best.

DANCING

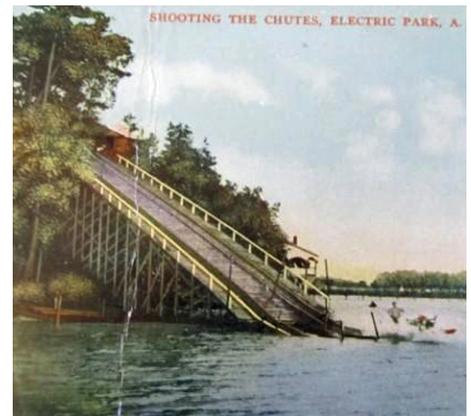
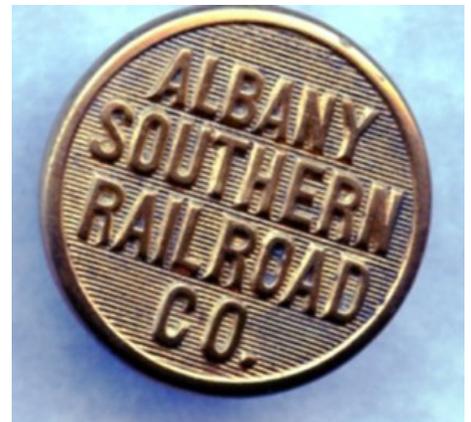
To-Night and To-Morrow

Prof. Jos. Stella's Orchestra

If You Do Not Dance You Will Enjoy the Music

Round Trip 50 Cents Any Day

Albany Southern Railway Company



From above top, 1902 advertisement for Electric Park at Kinderhook Lake. Middle - uniform button from a conductor's uniform. Bottom - period postcard of The Chute-the-Chute used both summer and winter to propel visitors to the lake below.