

Columbus Amusement Parks

Columbus, Ohio was home to the amusement parks - Indianola Park, Minerva Park, and the crown jewel of local amusement playgrounds, Olentangy Park.

Indianola Park was located on North Fourth Street near 19th Avenue just north of Ohio State University. This park opened June 8, 1905 on twelve-acres with a dancing pavilion, restaurant, and a swimming pool, 250 feet long by 150 feet wide. As the park's popularity grew other attractions were added including a "scenic river," tennis courts, picnic grounds, carousel, chute-the-chutes, and the "fastest" roller coaster of its time, the Blue Streak. Entertainers such as "King & Queen, the High Diving Horses," Keith Vaudeville acts, and Carl Randall, who later became a Ziegfeld star, were featured performers. By 1937 the park closed and the remaining buildings were used to house a supermarket and small shopping center.

Minerva Amusement Park debuted May 15, 1895. Situated on 150 acres of wooded land, the park offered picnics by the lake, bowling alleys, baseball diamonds, target range, tennis courts, amusement rides, an Ornithology Museum, and monkey, bear, and deer exhibits. The main attraction at Minerva Park was the Casino. Built in four weeks for \$50,000, the Casino housed an auditorium larger than any theatre in Columbus, Ohio. Vaudeville and musical greats were featured in the 2,500-seat facility where box seats could be purchased for twenty-five cents. After seven exciting years Minerva Park closed in 1902. The playground's remoteness and inadequate transportation facilities could not compete with the newer, nearer, and more easily accessible Olentangy Park.

Olentangy Park, on the site of today's Olentangy Village Apartments in Clintonville, began operations in 1895 as a tavern spot run by a streetcar company. The Dusenbury brothers acquired the park in 1899 then added a theater, boating facilities and other attractions. The early decades of the twentieth century were a period of rapid expansion for the amusement grounds. In 1905 the Dusenbury's added "Fair Japan," an entire Japanese village previously exhibited at the St. Louis Exposition. By 1909 daring individuals could ride the Red Devil roller coaster, the Whirlwind, the Old Mill, Loop-the-Loop, Crazy House, and the "towering Shoot-the-Chutes." The park's crowds grew, sometimes attracting 40,000 visitors in a single day. With 100 acres featuring picnic areas, outdoor amphitheater, zoo, playgrounds, ballroom, and a swimming pool (part of the pool still serves Olentangy Village residents), the amusement company could easily accommodate the teeming multitudes. Olentangy Park remained a popular attraction well into the 20th century, but the Great Depression of the 1930s brought an end to the merriment. In 1937 Leslie L. LeVeque purchased the site and cleared it for construction. LeVeque opened Olentangy Village March 26, 1939 and rented the spacious apartments for \$30 to \$50 a month.

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