

FOREWORD

There have been numerous oral interviews with Roberta and Harold "Chief" Terrill, and much has been written about Silver Beach, usually in the form of newspaper stories. There is an excellent article by Alan Schultz entitled "Silver Beach: A Scrapbook-of Summers Past" which appeared in the July/August, 1979, issue of Michigan History Magazine and was reprinted by Leco Corporation in a booklet entitled "From Times Past." In 1991, Helen Sinn wrote an interesting piece entitled "The History of Silver Beach." These are the sources which provide much of the material which appears in this booklet.

A. G. Preston, Jr.

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DRAKE AND WALLACE, OR THE STORY OF SILVER BEACH

(A PRIMER)

Any discussion of Silver Beach and its many amusements involves the Drake and Wallace families, which produced a number of St. Joseph's prominent citizens.

The Drake family in St. Joseph begins with J.J. Drake, who was a good friend of Montgomery Ward, and they grew up together in St. Joseph. Drake helped Ward start his catalog business in Chicago in the late 1800's. Drake and some of his family did much of the bookkeeping for the rapidly growing business. Ward even offered Drake stock at \$.12 1/2 per share, but Drake was a restless person and elected not to get involved.

J.J. Drake was born in New Jersey in 1840. He was a bookkeeper and later became a school teacher in St. Joseph. During the Civil War, he served as captain of the 7th Regiment, Missouri Volunteer Infantry, having organized a company in St. Joseph, which he took to Missouri with him. He was staff officer under General John Loan. He married Frances Brewer, who had been one of his pupils in school. Her father, J.W. Brewer, was a Justice of the Peace in St. Joseph for 35 years and also operated a river boat between Niles and St. Joseph. Mr. Brewer helped straighten the course of the mouth of the St. Joseph River, using a team of oxen.

J.J. Drake had five children, including two sons, Fred and Logan. Logan was born April 22, 1863, and in 1879, when he was 16 years old, he moved to Chicago, where he and Fred operated a confectionary store. In 1880, he purchased approximately 20 acres in St. Joseph between Broad Street and the river from the Pere Marquette Railroad Company and also from local "Indians" and began to develop the property. Over the years, he acquired at least 50 yards of additional beach when the lake began to recede, which added additional value to his investment.

In the beginning, Logan started with a boat livery and boat building. He then built a boardwalk, water slide, cabanas, a hot dog stand and some souvenir stands. He soon provided transportation up and down the St. Joseph River in a side-wheeler called the Tourist and several small steamers, the Wolverine, Buckeye and Milton D. (named after his son).

In 1885, Logan became associated with Louis D. Wallace. The Wallace family had moved to St. Joseph when John Wallace established the Wallace Lumber Company here in 1866. John Wallace had 13 children, including Louis D., who was born November 25, 1864. Logan Drake and Louis D. Wallace built 10 cottages along the beach which they rented to vacationers. The tourist business prospered, and in 1891, Wallace became a partner in the firm of Drake and Wallace, which lasted until the 1930's, when Logan Drake bought out Louis D. Wallace, reportedly for \$100,000.

In 1901, Logan Drake, then 38 years old, married Maude Schlenker from Berrien County. She is given credit for naming "Silver Beach" because of the way the moon "shimmered like silver" on the water. Louis Wallace married Maude's sister, Laura, making the two men brothers-in-law, as well as friends and partners. Logan and Maude had two children, Milton, who became a Detroit banker, and Roberta, who married Harold "Chief" Terrill. All of the persons mentioned here were active in Silver Beach at one time or another.

With the turn of the century, tourists came to Benton Harbor and St. Joseph by the thousands, largely from Indiana, Chicago and Milwaukee. Although many came by rail and the interurban, most came by steamboats such as the City of Benton Harbor, City of St. Joseph, City of Grand Rapids, the Bainbridge and the Theodore Roosevelt. The trip took about five hours, and the standard fare from Chicago to St. Joseph was 50¢. It was possible for people to come over here and go back the same day. They could stay overnight at St. Joseph's many hotels, including the Hoyt House, the Krieger House, the Perkins House, the Lakeview, the St. Charles and the Whitcomb, or the numerous hotels and resorts in Benton Harbor. For entertainment they would go to Silver Beach, where they could enjoy the entertainment provided by Drake and Wallace.

In 1902, Drake and Wallace built three large buildings, all of which survived for over 70 years, the first being a bath house and swimming pool, the second a roller skating rink, and the third a dance pavilion (called the Pavilion and also the Casino).

The bath house was enlarged when they built a large "heated" indoor pool. The pool was 210 feet long and 70 feet wide, and from 3 feet to 5 feet deep, which used lake water heated by a steam furnace. Skylights let in the sun for additional heating. One could rent towels, bathing suits, shoes, stockings, bloomers and blouse, together with matching hat and umbrella. Lock boxes were issued with pin-on keys for securing valuables, and lockers were rented for changing clothes. Water wings were available for non-swimmers. Towels cost 5¢, cotton bathing suits were 35¢ and wool bathing suits were 60¢, a hat cost 10¢, and the shoes were 15¢.

The roller rink was one of the first in the area. Roller skates, like ice skates, as they exist today, were unheard of, and rented skates were attached to the shoes with leather straps. In 1906, Drake and Wallace added Southwestern Michigan's first pipe organ to the rink and it became a great success.

The third building was the dance pavilion, located at the south end of the property. It had an organ on the order of a merry-go-round organ, and dances cost 5¢ each. Live music came later, and the firm built two stages for the bands, one at the rear and one on the side. Two bands played every Saturday and Sunday, and there were also matinees. In the beginning, the orchestras came from Chicago or out of town. Among the bands appearing in the dance hall were those of Jules Stein and Billy Goodhart, a couple of medical students from the University of Illinois who played summers to support their education. Eventually, they organized

a booking agency, which they called "Music Corporation of America," or "M.C.A." The dance hall was filled to capacity nearly every weekend for years, and when there was a band or two at the pavilion, it seemed like the entire Twin Cities attended.

About 1910, an airplane ride was built, consisting of six pre-World War I designed planes, suspended from cables, attached to a motorized revolving top. The ride was in honor of two local airplane flights. The first was a powered flight of 8 to 10 seconds by Augustus Herring of St. Joseph, predating the 1903 flight of the Wright Brothers at Kitty Hawk by 5 years. The other was in 1913, when Logan "Jack" Vilas flew his open cockpit bi-plane from Silver Beach to Chicago, a distance of 62 miles, in one hour and 40 minutes, which was the first successful crossing of Lake Michigan by air.

It is not possible to name all of the various rides and concessions, but mention should be made of the merry-go-round, the bowling alley, the roller coaster, the fun house, and Shadowland.

The merry-go-round, which was popular in Europe, first arrived in St. Joseph in 1915 and proved to be an instant success. Imported from Italy, it featured 42 hand-carved horses with jeweled saddles and real horse-hair tails. It had an 8' x 8' hand-carved organ, once estimated to have a value of \$50,000. The horses were worth \$1,000 to \$2,000 each. Also featured was an elusive brass ring which, with other rings, dangled from a post outside the circumference of the ride, and any person successful or lucky enough to snatch it received a free ride.

In 1917, a new building was built, housing a new attraction. Louis Wallace had just opened a bowling alley in South Bend, Indiana, that was rapidly becoming successful. The thought of starting the business at the beach seemed profitable, too. The park was currently operating a ten pinnet alley, which was similar to bowling but with smaller balls, pins and lanes. Drake decided to remove the small version of the game and replace it with the real thing. Eight bowling lanes were set up into position, as were fourteen billiard tables and a soda fountain. The Twin Cities had their first bowling alley with Frank Lewis, a renowned bowler from Detroit, as its manager.

Bowling was different in the 1920's than it is today. There were no mass-produced scoresheets, so the score was kept on blackboards behind the bowlers. In the early days at Silver Beach, women were not allowed to bowl or shoot pool, and the only woman likely to be seen in the "man's den" was the owner or manager's wife. There were no automatic pinsetters either, but the problem was alleviated by hiring young ambitious schoolboys to set pins. Bowling found a spot in the hearts of the people of Southwestern Michigan, a couple of leagues sprang up at the park, and even major league bowlers were often at the lanes. Balls were made of wood, and according to the late Billy Wilcox, a South Bend team once beat the locals using off-center weights.

The original roller coaster was called the "Chase Through the Clouds" or the "Figure 8", and utilized several separate one or

two capacity cars. Later, around 1925, it was torn down and replaced with a new, improved roller coaster which was built of wood and featured larger cars that went much faster. It was tested and inspected frequently, and usually Mr. Drake took the first ride each year.

About 1927, the old dance pavilion was renovated into the "Fun House." One stage was removed and a 35' maplewood slide was pieced together and installed. Other additions included a revolving 8' barrel, spinning saucer, sugarbowl, distorted image mirrors, and a haunted house. The spinning saucer and the sugarbowl were electrically operated every 45 minutes. When either of these rides were about to begin, a mad rush would take place for a chosen spot. The Fun House was a conglomeration of assorted amusements, but the favorite was the huge two-lane wooden slide, which was the tallest of its kind in the state. Children would sit on pieces of carpeting and race to the bottom, and they would continually make the endless climb up the stairs to the top for another turn.

The last improvement made in the 1920's was the construction of Shadowland Ballroom. The older pavilion was doing well, but ballroom dancing had become very popular and in 1927 Drake and Wallace elected to build a rotund, wooden ballroom near the river. It took about a year to build, cost \$50,000, and when completed was one of the finest dance facilities in the entire area.

The emergence of Shadowland only slightly preceded the Big Band Era. Some of the bands appearing in the ballroom in the early 30's were the Joseph Chromis Band, the Whit Thomas Band of Kalamazoo, the Duane Yates Orchestra, and the Knizley and Talbot Orchestra. Dances were held in the ballroom each weekend, and it was not uncommon to have over a thousand dancers on any one evening. There was no admission charge, but tickets for dancing sold for 10¢, 3 for a quarter or 16 for a dollar. Other bands included Ted Weems, Wayne King, Lawrence Welk, Kay Keyser, Jan Garber, Woody Herman and Ben Bernie.

The end of the "Roaring 20's" and the Great Depression which followed marked the end of old-fashioned amusement parks, including Silver Beach. The steamers which brought so many tourists to our area disappeared and were supplanted by the automobile, bus and truck. The Big Band Era, as such, came to an end, and other forms of amusement became popular, such as professional athletics. The repeal of Prohibition led to more and better beer gardens, restaurants and dance halls, such as Chicago's Aragon and Trianon and Detroit's Greystone. World War II was the final blow.

With the passing of Logan Drake September 27, 1947, at age 83, Chief Terrill became the general manager. Despite his best efforts, crowds not only continued to decline but became unruly. Teen gangs shuffled along the midway looking for trouble and spending little money. Extensive repairs were needed for the old wooden buildings. Left with no other choice, in 1972 Terrill closed the park and put it up for sale.

The Fun House equipment was sold to a company in Fremont, Indiana; the ferris wheel was also purchased by an Indiana firm; and Laugh in the Dark went to an amusement park in San Antonio, Texas. The merry-go-round attracted the most buyers, including many of the people who sought to purchase the huge organ years earlier. Finally, the historic ride was sold for a reported \$50,000 to an amusement park in Roswell, New Mexico. The remainder of the park was left abandoned for three years in hopes that a kind person with money would rescue it. Nobody did.

In a 1976 interview, Mrs. Terrill, daughter of the park's founder, recalled, "We knew it was going to die, but we just didn't want to believe it. In the early sixties this place was a dreamer's delight, but nothing lasts forever." Chief Terrill added, "You could sense it in the people working here. Age was finally catching up with us."

The roller coaster was dismantled in 1974. The buildings were eventually dismantled or burned under the supervision of the local fire department, the last being Shadowland, which was dismantled in 1981. The land was eventually sold at private sale to Leco Corporation November 12, 1977, for \$750,000. The property is currently a public park operated by Berrien County and one or more state agencies, with little local input. Any resemblance to the old Silver Beach is purely coincidental.

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