The Rochester Park Band at Manitou Beach in 1906

by Lisa Kleman

Want to have some fun? Let’s go on a company picnic to Manitou Beach in the summer of 1906. We’ll join the nearly 1,000 employees of James Cunningham & Sons, a huge company with several factories, which, in 1906, was still making horse-drawn carriages, but by 1908, would transition to that new kind of horseless carriage called an automobile.

“We’ll meet at 7:30 am in front of the main factory on Canal Street. And then the celebration begins! We’ll march together, grouped into our different factories, each one with its large silk and gold banner, from Canal Street to the New York Central train station. And what is a parade without a band? And why not two? The Rochester Park Band with its handsome director, Theodore Dossenbach, and all its musicians in their glorious cream-colored suits, will lead us today, with Fred Zeiter and his 54th Regiment Band. And as we march along, people rush to the streets from their houses, or watch us pass from the windows of their workplaces, perhaps wishing they worked for James Cunningham & Sons.”

“We have a special train waiting for us at the station which brings us to Manitou Beach, and right away we join in the many sports and contests. Want to see how we had fun in 1906? Well, there was the baseball game between the married men and the single men. There was the married women’s race, the little girls’ race, the old men’s race, and who can forget the fat men’s race? And so many prizes — for the oldest man present, the youngest man, and the man having the reddest nose!”

The Rochester Park Band played often at Manitou Beach in the first few decades of the 20th century. On July 14th, 1920, the annual Orphans Day, sponsored by the Automobile Club, was held at Manitou Beach. It began with the car parade, starting at East Avenue and Brunswick Street, with Theodore Dossenbach and the Rochester Park Band and autos filled with excited orphans.

At Manitou Beach, the orphans rode the loop-the-loop and scenic railway and felt so much joy, which we hope lingered in their memories in their days to come. They were given lunches with two sandwiches, a banana, cake and candy, and there was orangeade and ice cream sandwiches free throughout the day. There were games and dances and contests, and at the end of the day was the grand march with 1200 children. William Bausch, such a goodly man, chaired this event; we are so thankful to him.

The amusement park at Manitou Beach existed roughly from the 1890s to the 1920s and boasted some of Lake Ontario’s grand hotels, including the Manitou Hotel and the Odenbach Hotel. Reachable by the Manitou Beach Trolley until 1924, with its trestle over Braddock Bay, the park and beach lingered long in the memories and stories of those who were fortunate to experience its special good times.

Sources:

*D&C, “Big Picnic at Manitou Beach”, 8/18/1906
*D&C, “Wonderful Time for Orphans on Outing of 1920,” 7/15/1920
Albert R. Stone photos used with permission

Corinthian, July-Aug 2020