

Rorick's Glen Park
1900 to 1918
by: Scott W. Deming

The recent reopening and resurgence of Eldridge Park brings back memories of previous amusement park days in Elmira. In the early 1900's Rorick's Glen Park was the final destination on the Elmira Water Light and Railroad Company (E.W.L. & R.R. Co.) trolley line running into West Elmira. Remnants of the original park still exist today just east of Rorick's Glen Parkway on the south side of West Water Street. Between 1503 and 1467 West Water Street there still stands today two large stone pillars that once marked the Water Street entrance to the park. Today the old entrance is a well kept and maintained lot. The park itself was located on 125 acres on the south side of the Chemung River and was originally accessed from West Elmira by crossing a wooden foot bridge across the river. Prior to John Hendy (the first white settler) building a log cabin nearby, the land had been used by the Iroquois Indians as a meeting place and a vantage point to survey the vast Chemung Valley.

Rorick's Glen Park first opened on Memorial Day in 1900 as a summer theater for residents of the area and customers riding on the western most leg of the trolley line and was designed to promote and increase rider ship on the trolley line. Those riders that arrived by trolley received free tickets to the theater. The land the park was built on was originally owned by Sylvester Rorick's and was used for lumbering for over fifty years. It was sold in the late 1800's to the E.W.L. & R.R. Co. It was most popular from 1900 to 1917 until the growth and popularity of the automobile allowed Elmirans to become more independent and venture further for their entertainment. The park was unique in that it was liquor free and promoted good family based entertainment. Some of the park's popular attractions included a large 1200-seat theater, a restaurant, attractive picnic grounds, canoe rides, a circle swing ride, dance pavilion, roller coaster, children's playgrounds, fine gardens and fountains to name a few.

The open air theater was advertised as the largest, most elaborate open-air playhouse in the country and initially featured vaudeville and minstrel performers and later featured the famous Manhattan Opera Company. The theater burned to the ground in June of 1904 but was quickly re-built to accommodate the busy summer performance season. Rorick's Glen Park soon became the known across the country as one of the top summer performance theaters in the country featuring Broadway quality productions.

Once you departed the trolley car you had to walk across the Chemung River and up the hill to the park. The wooden foot bridge across the river was prone to being washed out by the flood waters of the Chemung and was replaced multiple times over the years. In 1907 a more substantial steel bridge structure was built to replace the wooden foot bridge. The steel bridge stood for 39 years before being washed out by the flood of

1946. At some point after the flood of 1946 a temporary bridge was built and that stood until the Hurricane Agnes flood of 1972 washed it out.

The theater officially closed in 1918 and continued in disrepair until a fire burnt it to the ground in 1932. The dance hall continued to operate with big band music into the