

McKinley Park

McKinley Then and Now

McKinley Park has a rich history dating back to 1875. Since its beginnings, it has served as a resource for the surrounding community, showing how places truly reflect the culture, context, and identity of those who spend time there. McKinley Park has taken many forms: from humble beginnings as a country tanyard, to a destination hub for parades and jazz concerts, stretching all the way to when its tennis court was transformed into a winter ice skating rink! Located in the Beltzhoover neighborhood, McKinley Park is just 1.7 miles south of bustling Downtown Pittsburgh.

Country Beginnings

The land was first owned by William Penn's son and grandson, who then sold it to John Ormsby in 1791.



By 1875, a large portion of the farm was sold to the contracting firm of McLain & Maple, where they laid out plots and streets and began building new houses, primarily purchased by German workmen. Thomas S. Maple, son-in-law of Benjamin McLain, named a street for each of his children: Florence, Eugenia, Howard and Harriet (now Delmont and Michigan).



In 1794 Ormsby sold 248.5 acres to Melchior Beltzhoover, a tavern keeper from Hagerstown, Maryland, who immigrated from Metterzimmern, Germany in 1752.



Melchior and his wife Elizabeth farmed the land and raised a large family there. When Jacob died in 1835, the Beltzhoover farm passed to his daughter, Harriet. Reminiscent of rural Germany, the land retained its country landscape for the first three quarters of the 19th century.

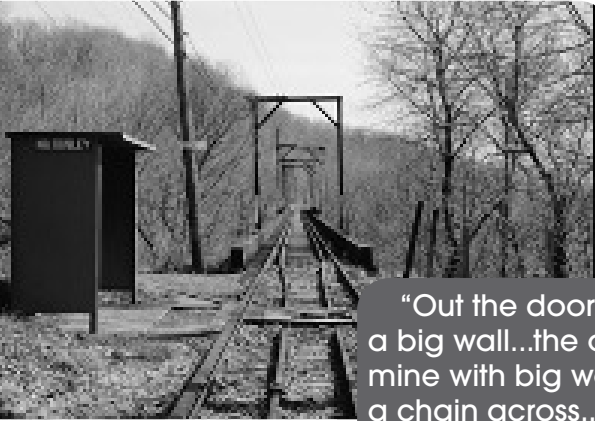


Another area of parkland below Butcher's Grove became known as "Slack Hollow" for the slag spoils from Jacob Beltzhoover's second coal mine. Slack Hollow was a typical rendezvous for mischievous boys who could usually be found in the swimming hole in Saw Mill Run. Beltzhoover was annexed to the City of Pittsburgh on March 1, 1898; and the City purchased Maple Park from McLain & Maple shortly thereafter. The name was changed to McKinley Park, after President William McKinley's assassination.



The McLain & Maple Plan reserved a large acreage from development. It became a favorite picnic site. It was given the name "Butcher's Grove" after a large oxen roast held by butchers and slaughterhouse employees on July 4, 1875. Swings fastened to the limbs of the poplars and chestnuts with stout bull ropes were a favorite amusement of the children. Ninepin alleys were constructed for special picnics, and there was a pavilion where young and old could dance to familiar tunes played by a German band.

Remembering McKinley



"Out the door, over the hill, a big wall...the opening of the mine with big wooden slats and a chain across...everyone tried to open it but it was too heavy. Years later, plastered it up. Always wondered why there was coal trucks taking metal down the park road ("the horse path") to Buffington."
- Dorothy DeV Vaughn McCoy



"When we find someone with certain talents we let them do their talent, and let them do what they wanna do."
- Gus Johnson



"During the summer - boys slept out... Shelter house if it rained, it was always open-slept maybe three hours... we'd be up all night laughing and talking... nobody got in trouble because we were all in the park."
- Jim White



"Park was very safe...community of people, the older people took care of the younger people."
- Marian DeV Vaughn

