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## **REMEMBER LAKE LORRAINE?**

THE Tuscaloosa and Castle Hill Real Estate and Manufacturing Company began work on its amusement park soon after the incorporation of the company. The first step in the development of the park was the making of an artificial lake by damming a small stream that flowed through the company's property. A newspaper account says that the dam was to be 30 feet high and 300 feet long. The approximate area of the lake was to be two acres. (Mr. Frank Fitts says it was nearer seven acres.)

In March 1887 work on the lake was begun. Sixty Negro workers were hired and, with picks, shovels, and wheelbarrows, the dam was built. But there were difficulties. Workers were paid a dollar a day and did not have to load their own wheelbarrows. The company management, thinking manpower was being wasted, ordered workers to load their own wheelbarrows. Because they resented the company's action and because they wanted higher wages the workers struck. The company's policy prevailed and work was resumed. After the water had risen 20 feet and the lake stocked with fish the dam broke. Repairs were made and the dam completed.

The lake was located 13,486 feet, or about 2½ miles east of the Washington Hotel (SW corner Broad St. and 22nd Ave.) In the beginning it was called Lake Lismore. The editor of the Times said that the name meant "Lake of the Great Castle." He added, "Though there is no castle that we know of, the name is pretty and euphonious." (Mr. Frank Fitts says that James H. Fitts intended building a large house near the lake but never did so.) A short time

later the editor said, "Lake Lismore is no more. Its name has been changed to Lake Lorraine.

The central features of the Lake Lorraine Park were the lake and a pavilion. The pavilion was provided with a floor for dancing, a piano, a phonograph, a skating rink, a bowling alley, a shooting gallery, and a stand where one could buy lemonade, coffee, or ice cold buttermilk. Outside were a fountain "of handsome design" with several miniature falls, croquet grounds, and a zoological department where were kept deer, monkeys, parrots, owls, swans, Peking ducks, white rabbits, ground hogs, a peccary and other animals. v

On the water were rowboats and canoes, and on the land near the lake was a toboggan slide 140 feet long and 40 feet high. The toboggan carried two or three people, and descending the slope, passed over 800 small wheels. The momentum of the vehicle often carried passengers as far as 90 feet out into the water.

Swimming was the chief attraction of the lake. A *Tuscaloosa Times* reporter, in 1890, said, "Already some natty bathing costumes are to be seen, but as the Times did not have its camera with it Saturday it is unable to give plans and specifications in this issue." The public was assured that everything was quite proper. The reporter said, "Grouped on the shore at the foot of the slide were a number of sedate matrons who were the chaperones of the party. . ." Also, we are told, the superintendent, "like a guardian spirit, hovered about the neighborhood of the slide, keeping male loungers at a respectable distance."

For a decade or more Lake Lorraine served as a place for recreation and entertainment. Dances and parties were regularly held in the pavilion. Railroad companies gave low rates and, on special occasions, brought hundreds of people to Tuscaloosa in order that the facilities of the park might be used. The Tuscaloosa Gun Club held its annual shooting match there.

There are Tuscaloosas who have fond memories of Lake Lorraine. Mr. George Johnston (former Tuscaloosa county Tax assessor) says

that he went to many a dance in the pavilion and Mrs. Johnston says that she learned to swim in the lake.

When the dummy line was extended to Riverview the importance of Lake Lorraine declined. Finally the dam broke. Mr. Frank Fitts, whose grandfather was president of the company that established the lake, says that fish were scattered over the ground all the way to the river. In its day Lake Lorraine made the nineties gay for many, and the people of Tuscaloosa were poorer for its passing.