

Electric Park

The time: 1906. The place: Galveston, Texas.

Throngs of tourists have arrived here by train and taken streetcars from Union Depot to the Seawall. They've come to relax at the beach and bathe in the Gulf. As dusk approaches, night becomes day at Electric Park on the Boulevard. Beneath the moon, hundreds of vacationers and local citizens alike flock to the amusement park, which is ablaze with thousands of incandescent bulbs. Tonight, Galveston is a mystical time and place; Electric Park has been transformed into a magical wonderland of sights and sounds. Although they will be gone well before dawn, those sights and sounds will remain with visitors as mental keepsakes — enchanted memories of Galveston.

Galveston in 1906 touted itself as “The Coney Island of the South.” Electric Park was the culmination of the Galveston Business League’s efforts to bring a smaller version of the famed attraction to the Seawall. Electric Park, owned by the Electric Park & Amusement Company, opened in May 1906 in the 2300 block of Seawall Boulevard. Its attractions included an aerial swing, a carousel, and a roller coaster called the Figure Eight, as well as Hale’s Tours of the World (an early movie theater) and a theater. All of these were lit. An illuminated Electric Park sign greeted visitors at the park’s entrance.

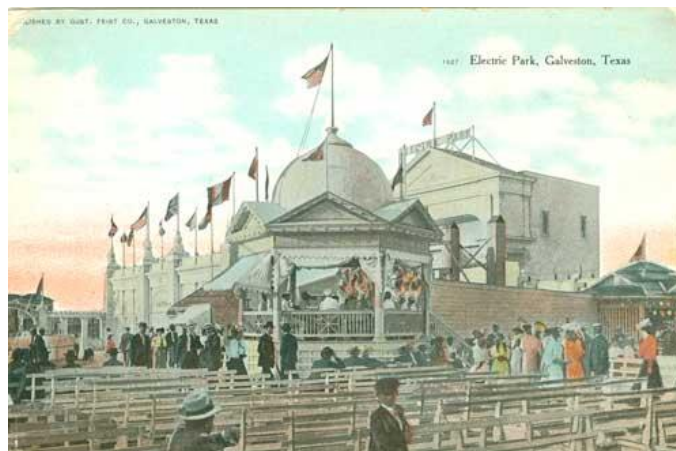


Written accounts and photographs preserved in the Rosenberg Library’s Galveston and Texas History Center attest to the thrilling experience of Electric Park at night. The *Galveston Daily News*, September 2, 1907, reported:

"To step into Electric Park from the softened shadows of the beach front and into the radiance of its myriad of electric lights is likened unto a vision of a fairyland. The ears are greeted by sweet strains of the band and the senses are called on to respond to the mingled shouts of the barkers, telling of their exhibitions' merits, the conglomeration of sounds, discordant, singularly but strangely fascinating when blended as a whole."

The Aerial Swing was Electric Park's centerpiece. The ride was illuminated with hundreds of bulbs that created an exciting stroboscopic effect. The September 2, 1907, edition of the *News* continued:

"The Aerial Swing, with its far-reaching circles of electric lighted cables, reaching farther and farther out to over the crowds beneath and going higher and higher in their until persons below take on the appearance of midgets, is the delight of hundreds on Sunday nights."



Sadly, like a fairyland that vanished before the first rays of sunlight, Electric Park's presence in Galveston was all too brief. Following the 1910 tourist season, the aerial swing was disassembled, and most of the wooden buildings were torn down in preparation for the grade raising behind the Seawall. One of the few structures that remained was the carousel. It stood until the 1915 Storm. Wind and waves smashed bathhouses and carried their timbers over the Seawall. The carousel's roof lay in the Boulevard, torn from the rest of the structure that housed the riding horses. Electric Park's magic was finally at an end.

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