



Riverhurst Park

By Marlis Coss Aaron

The 1950's ballad "Cruising Down the River" might have been written by someone who had experienced life in the Western New York village of Westons Mills, (Town of Portville) NY in the late 1800's. Riverhurst Park was opened by Mr. Wilson R. Page of Olean and operated until approximately 1920. The park was located in a pine grove along the Allegheny River and was accessible from all directions by the trolley cars owned by Mr. Page's Olean Street Railway Company. The trolleys ran from the Rock City area as far as Bolivar, NY and then to Shinglehouse in PA. The trip from Olean to Westons Mills cost 5 cents. The park could also be reached via the Shawmut Railroad which ran excursions from as far away as St. Marys, PA. Old timers recalled riding the "Hoodle Bug" to Riverhurst from Bolivar.

Mr. Page developed Riverhurst Park into a popular picnic and entertainment resort which was known far and wide. Hundreds of people descended on the Park in the summer for lodge meetings, church outings and family picnics. On September 11th, 1899 over 4000 people gathered to hear the performance of Hi Henry's Band. The Olean Herald reported "While the street railway company handled the crowd remarkable well and

without an incident, many had to wait until later in the afternoon before they were able to reach the park."

Boating on the Allegheny River was one of the more popular Sunday afternoon entertainments at the Park. Stairs led up the riverbank to the boat-house where rowboats were stored. At the foot of the stairway, a dock jutted out into the river where people could get into the rental boats. A floating timber boom attached to the dock and extending down to the river provided a place to anchor the boats. The women in their long dresses, big hats and umbrellas to shelter them from the sun, were rowed along the scenic river by gallant young men in bowler hats, bow ties and spats.

The large elegant pavilion housed a skating rink and dance hall area. The park also boasted a restaurant, ice cream parlor and large dining area for use in inclement weather. Behind the pavilion stood a large merry-go-round. There was also a Razzle Dazzle and a Penney Arcade.

The pavilion was torn down by Donald Sloane and his son Charles and used to build his house in Westons Mills. This house is presently owned by the Biehler family, relatives of the Sloanes.

The park's present owner, Philip Kush, has put the park to use as a summer park for recreational vehicles. Perhaps someday, someone's vision will restore the park to its glorious days of old.

