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AUGUST 2015

ELECTRIC PARKS IN AMERICA



Night Scene, Electric Park, Kansas City, Mo.

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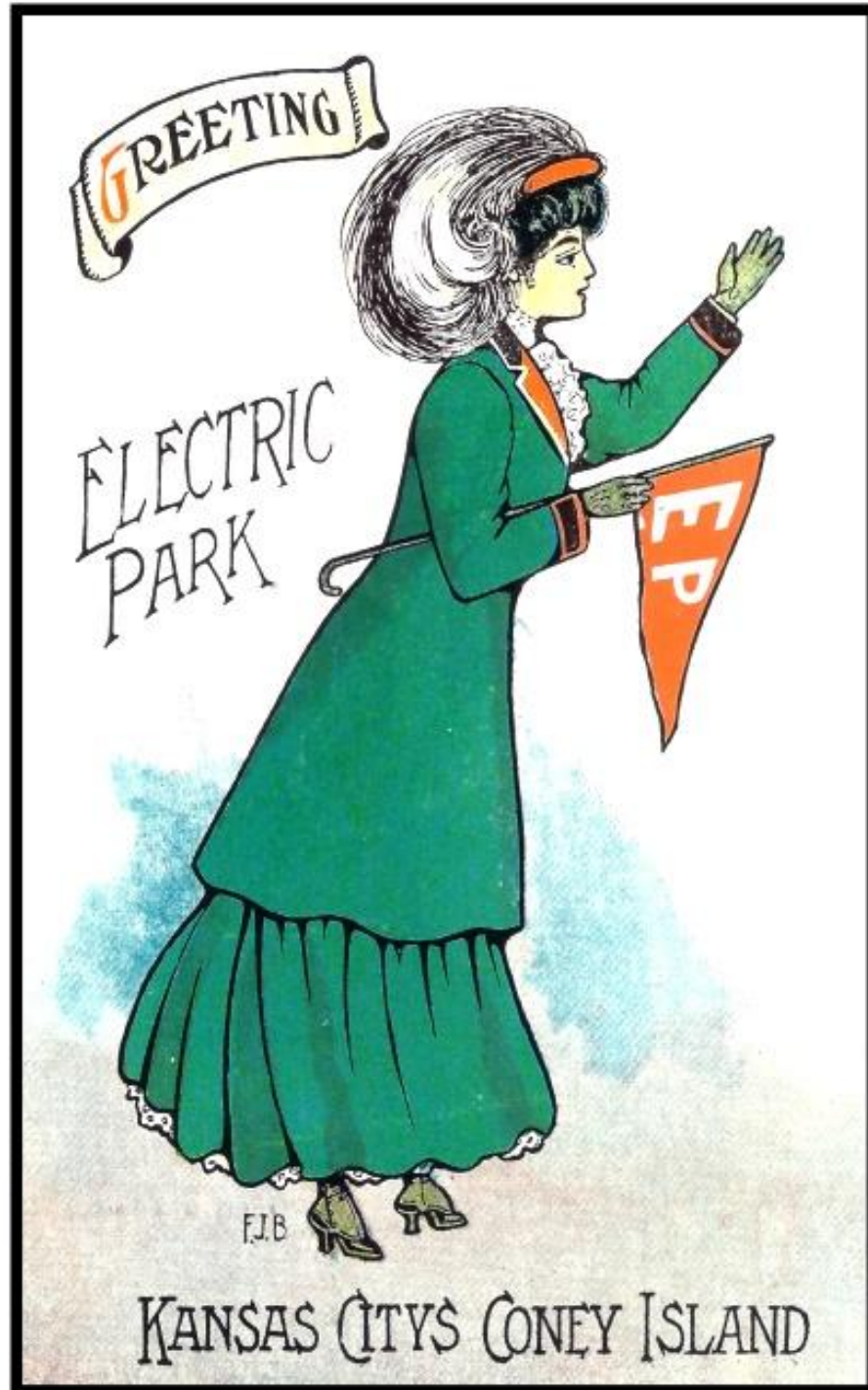
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◆ Electric Parks in America – See page 2.



KANSAS CITY'S CONEY ISLAND

ELECTRIC PARKS IN AMERICA

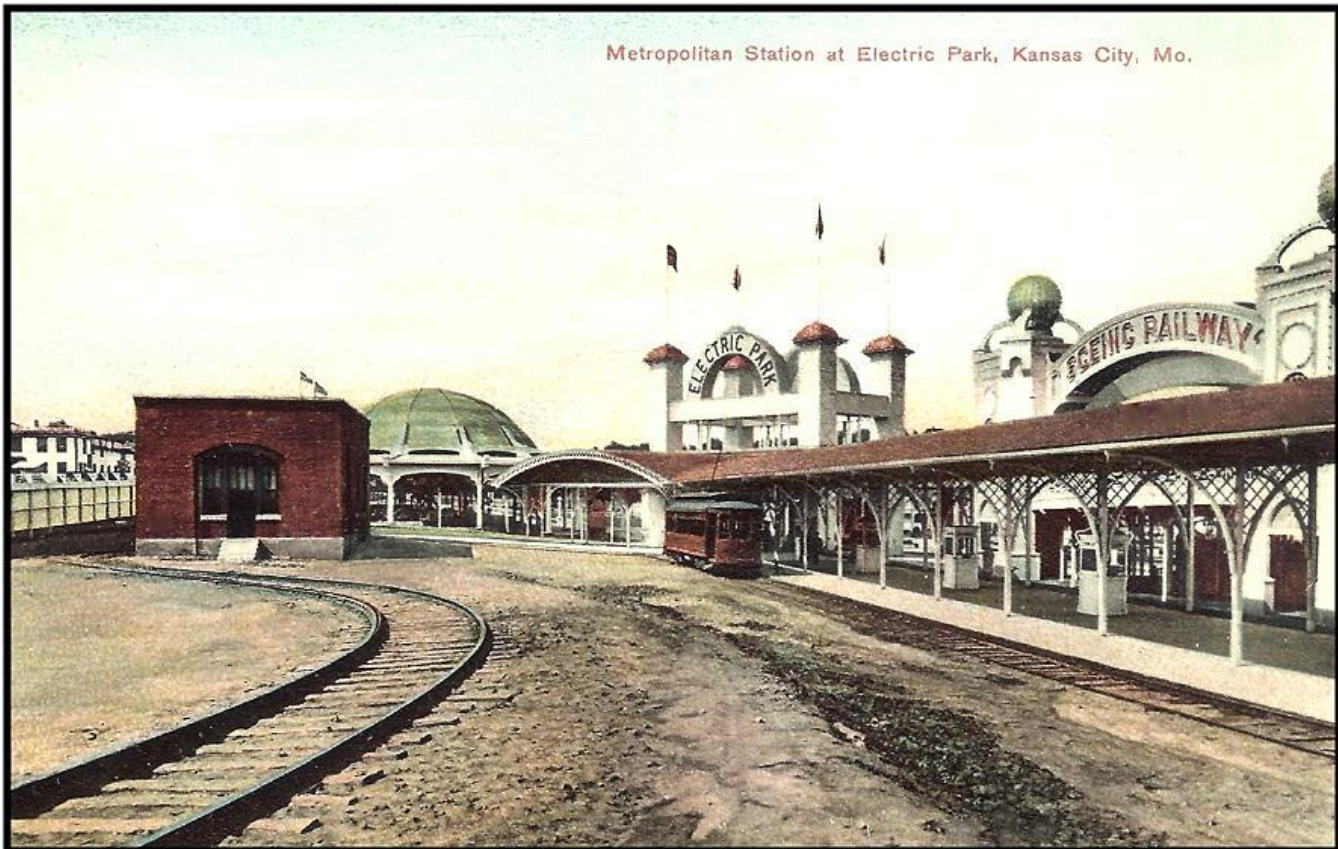
ELECTRIC PARK - "KANSAS CITY'S CONEY ISLAND."



"Electric Park" was a name shared by dozens of amusement parks in the United States that were constructed as trolley parks. The emergence of trolley parks in the last dozen years of the 19th century coincided with the rise to prominence of three entities: the electric companies, the railway companies, and the replacement of horse-drawn cars by electric trolley companies.

A fourth contributor to the rise in amusement parks in the first decade of the 20th century was the success of Coney Island, which spurred the establishment of dozens of Electric Parks, Luna Parks, and White City amusement parks (the latter actually inspired by White City in the 1893 World's Columbian Exhibition in Chicago), with many metropolitan areas having two (or more) parks with these names. The existence of most of these parks was fairly brief: most of them closed by 1917, the year of the U.S. entry into World War I.

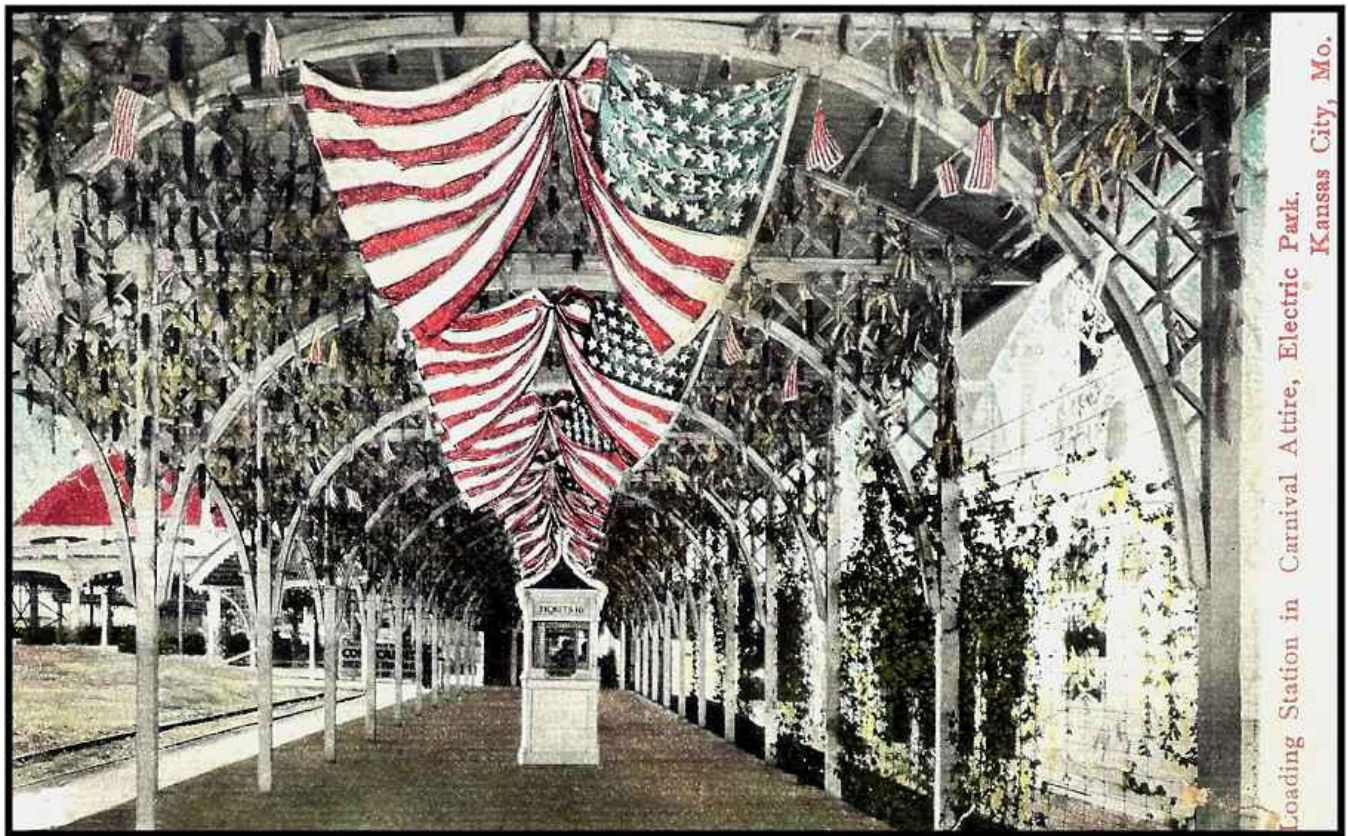
Most Electric Parks were owned by electric companies and trolley companies, which often had one or more lines that transported workers and shoppers between the downtown areas of the various cities and residential and industrial areas. After 1890, interurban electric rail lines began carrying commuters from one city to another.



Metropolitan Street Railway Station at Electric Park in Kansas City.

Originally, the trolleys and interurban lines would either operate at a reduced level on weekends or be completely idle. To generate weekend traffic, the companies eventually created new destinations, generally at the end of their lines, for the public to attend on the weekends, whether it be a picnic park or (later) an amusement park. Regardless of the type of park, the destinations owned by the local electric company or accessed by the electric trolley were commonly called *electric parks*. After 1903, Luna Park in Coney Island's success (with the park's entrance decked with electric lights) inspired the creation of Electric Parks, which spread throughout North America (at the same time, the similarly-inspired Frederick Ingersoll started to construct his Luna Park empire).

Like their Luna Park and White City cousins, a typical Electric Park featured a shoot-the-chutes and lagoon, a roller coaster (usually a figure eight or a mountain railway), a midway, a Ferris wheel, games, and a pavilion. Most also had miniature railroads. Many cities had two (or all three) of the Electric Park/Luna Park/White City triumvirate in their vicinity... with each trying to outdo the others with new attractions, with many incorporating an exhibit simulating the Johnstown Flood of 1889. The competition was fierce, often driving the electric parks out of business with increasing costs of equipment upgrades, upkeep, and insurance. More than a few succumbed to fire. As a result, most were out of business by 1917, the year the United States entered World War I. By the time troops returned to the U.S. in 1919, almost all the Electric Parks were gone.



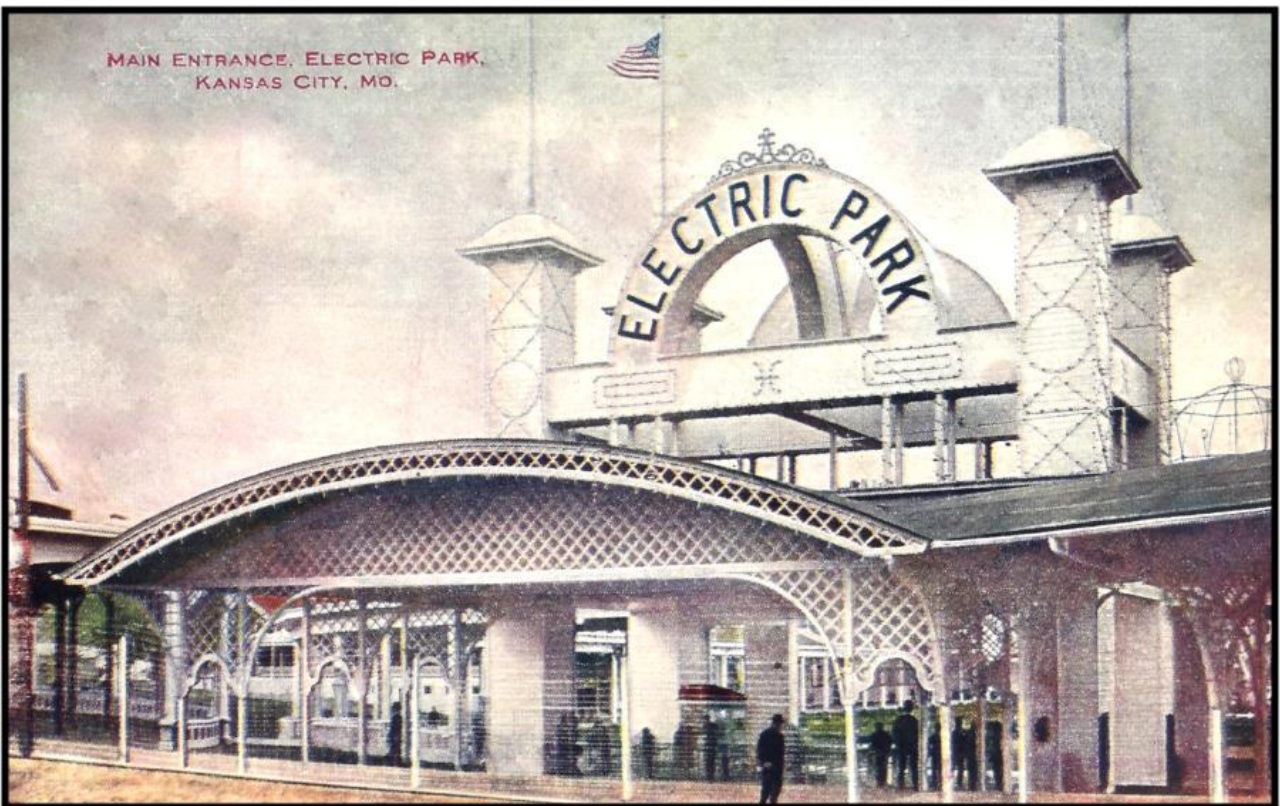
Metropolitan Street Railway Station in Carnival Attire at Electric Park in 1909.

Electric Park was the name shared by two amusement parks in Kansas City, Missouri, that were constructed by Joseph Heim (then president of the Heim Brothers Brewery) and his brothers Michael and Ferdinand Jr. and run by them. The first was built next to the Heim Beer brewery in 1899; the second, a larger one, was built and opened for the public in 1907 and remained in operation until the end of the 1925 season.

The Heim brothers built the first Electric Park in land adjacent to the Heim Brothers Brewery (at the time the largest brewery in the world) in East Bottoms. The amusement park was bounded by Montgall, Chestnut, Nicholson, and Rochester Avenues.

Open from 1899 to 1906, the first Electric Park proved to be an immediate success as one of the world's first full-time amusement parks. Featuring a Shoot-the-Chutes ride (called the Mystic Chute), the park also had a beer garden with beer piped directly from the brewery next door. Eventually, the carefully groomed grounds were too small to sustain the park's popularity; at the end of the 1906 season, some of the rides were dismantled and moved to a new location to the south.

Much of the grounds lay neglected or abandoned for the next 19 years. In 1925, part of the plot (near the corner of Montgall and Rochester) was deeded to city of Kansas City for use as a neighborhood playground. Opened in an August 1, 1925 ceremony, the park offered "Pet Night," in which children won prizes for displaying the largest, smallest, and the most deformed dog. Another day saw swimsuits awarded to boys who created wood carvings from dead trees.



Main entrance to Electric Park in Kansas City.

The second Kansas City Electric Park, this time at 46th Street and the Paseo, opened May 19, 1907. Like the first one, it was a trolley park (this time served by the Troost Avenue, Woodland Avenue, and Rockhill lines of the Metropolitan Street Railway Company), but the successor was one of the largest (if not *the* largest) ever to be called Electric Park.

It had "band concerts, vaudeville, an Electric Fountain, ballroom, natatorium, German village, alligator farm, chutes, Dips Coaster, Norton slide, penny parlors, novelty stand, Japanese rolling ball, scenic railway, pool room, a Hale's Tour of the World, Electric Studio, boat tours, old mill, a Temple of Mirth, Flying Lady, Double Whirl, Circle Swing, soda fountain and ice cream shops, knife rack, doll rack, shooting gallery, air gun gallery, giant teeter, boating, outdoor swimming, carousel, clubhouse café, Casino 5-cent theater, fortune telling and palmistry, covered promenade and horseless buggy garage." Souvenirs from the park touted it as "Kansas City's Coney Island," which it matched by having 100,000 light bulbs adorn its buildings. In 1911, the second Kansas City park attracted one million people, averaging 8000 paying customers per day that season.

Much of the second Electric Park in Kansas City burned to the ground in 1925. The fire was witnessed by a young Walter Cronkite, who later wrote "Our hill overlooked, a half dozen blocks away, Electric Park...One night after closing it burned in a spectacular fire. The Ferris wheel seemed to turn as the flames climbed up its sides. The grease caught fire on the two parallel tracks of the Greyhound Racer roller coaster, and twin blazes raced up and down with the speed of the cars that once toured the Disorderly conduct tumultuous circuit..."



Entrance at night at Electric Park in Kansas City.

Despite the devastating blaze, the park maintained its operating hours as its theater and its aquarium remained open for the remainder of its last year. In the final days of 1925, Electric Park inaugurated its Coin Carnival to replace its destroyed midway. The two weeks before its final closing, Electric Park celebrated its own Mardi Gras after the Heim family decided to sell the land. On September 1, 1925 a fireworks exhibition punctuated the park's last closing ceremony.

After Elias Charles Disney moved his family to Kansas City in 1911, a nine-year-old Walt and his younger sister Ruth became regular visitors to the second Electric Park, which was a mere 15 blocks from their new home at 3028 Bellefontaine Street. While the Kansas City park was inspired by the original White City in the 1893 Columbian Exposition (for which Elias was a construction worker), Walt later took many features of the Kansas City Electric Park (including a train whose track ringed the park grounds and the daily fireworks at closing time) and incorporated them into Disneyland when he started developing the plans for the layout of the park that he opened in 1955.

Unlike many of its contemporaries, the Electric Park's grounds were meticulously maintained with landscaping designed to accentuate the park's rides and other attractions, a trait that Disney insisted to be maintained in Disneyland. Electric Park's "Living Statuary" electric procession featured young women emerging from a fountain onto a platform while bathed in various colored lights. Disney's entrances featured structures similar in design and structure to that of Electric Park's Monkey Cage Gazebo. In fact, most of the attractions that graced Disney's childhood park had similar counterparts in the California park that he opened three decades later.

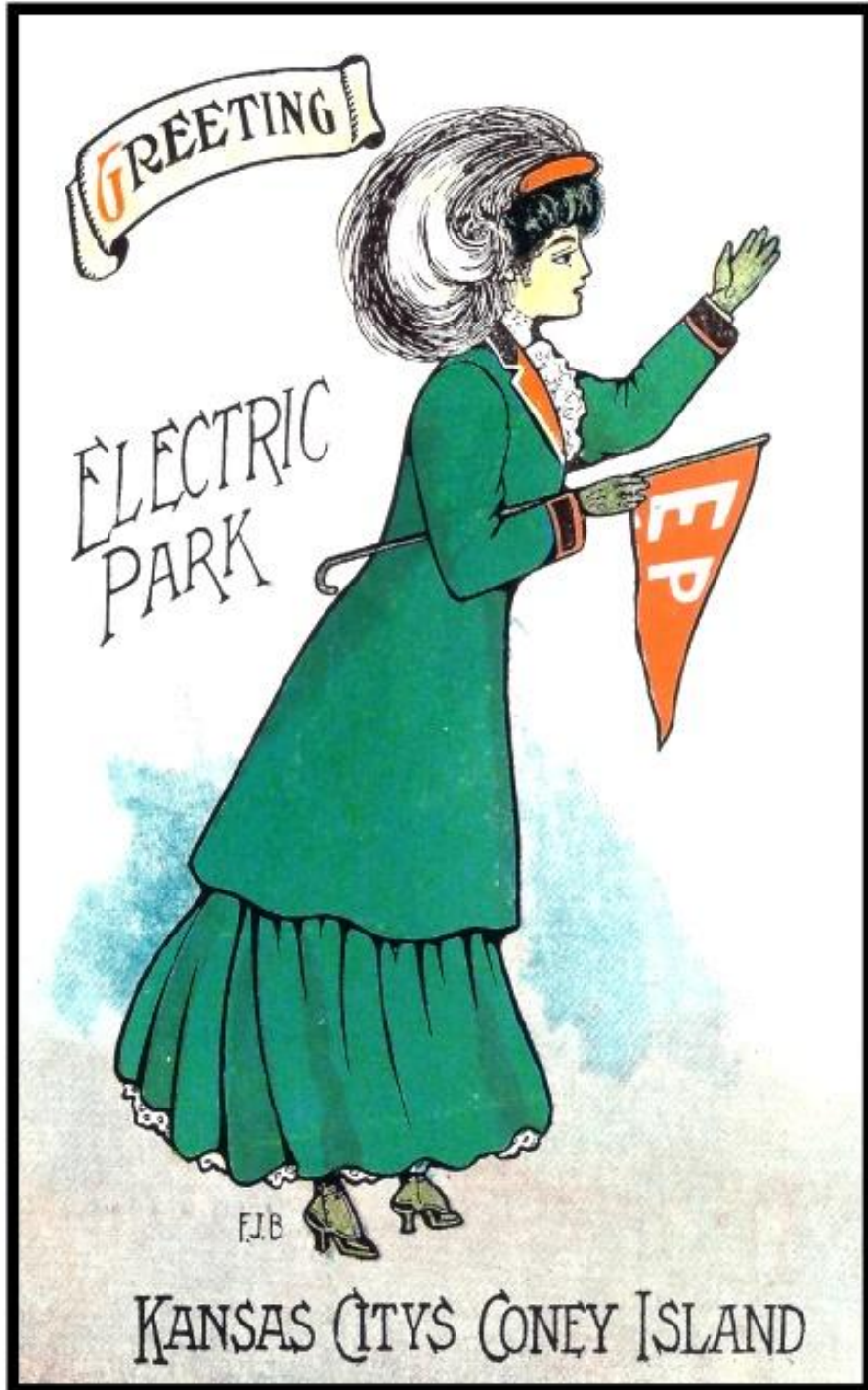
LIST OF ELECTRIC PARKS

While the date and location of the first Electric Park is currently unknown, several existed before 1900. Since then, dozens of amusement parks had acquired the name, but none remain:

- Electric Park – Aberdeen, WA
- Electric Park – Albany, NY – 1901 – also known as White City
- Electric Park – Atlanta, GA
- Electric Park – Baltimore, MD – June 1896 to 1916
- Electric Park – Bellingham, WA
- Electric Park – Binghamton, NY
- Electric Park – Blackwood, OK – Pavilion still stands
- Electric Park – Cleveland, OH
- Electric Park – Dayton, OH
- Electric Park – Detroit, MI – May 26, 1906 to 1928 – also known as Luna Park
- Electric Park – Eau Claire, WI – 1895 to 1926
- Electric Park – Fort Smith, AR – 1905 to 1920
- Electric Park – Galveston, TX – opened 1905
- Electric Park – Hancock, MI – opened June 7, 1906
- Electric Park – Holland MI – also known as “Jenison Electric Park”
- Electric Park – Houston, TX
- Electric Park – Iola, KS – 1901 to 1918 – also known as “Iola Electric Park”
- Electric Park – Joplin, MO – June 10, 1909 to 1912 – now part of Schifferdecker Park
- Electric Park – Kansas City, MO – 1899 to 1906
- Electric Park – Kansas City, MO – 1907 to 1925
- Electric Park – Louisville, KY
- Electric Park – Montgomery, AB
- Electric Park – New Haven, CT
- Electric Park – Newark, NJ – 1903 to 1912 – now the site of Vailsburg Park
- Electric Park – Niagara Falls, NY
- Electric Park – Oshkosh, WI – 1898 to 1950 – also known as White City and EWECO Park
- Electric Park – Pensacola, FL – opened 1905
- Electric Park – Pittsburgh, PA
- Electric Park – Plainfield, IL – 1904 to 1934 – Skating Rink/Dance Hall destroyed by a tornado in 1990
- Electric Park – Pottsville, PA – also known as “Electric Park Philadelphia”
- Electric Park – St. Louis, MO
- Electric Park – San Antonio, TX – currently a minor league baseball park of the same name
- Electric Park – Sheboygan, WI
- Electric Park – Springfield, MO – may have been known as “Joplin Electric Park”
- Electric Park – Syracuse, NY
- Electric Park – Tulsa, OK – 1921 to 1926 – merged into Crystal City Amusement Park - 1925
- Electric Park – Waterloo, IA – featured a water-turned Ferris wheel – Pavilion still standing
- Electric Park – Worcester, MA

GREETING

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F.J.B.

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