



The Mud Ring

**The Newsletter of the Cinder Sniffers Inc.
Winter 2011-12 Issue**

Welcome to the Winter issue of the Mud Ring. I have focused this issue around an article that Denis Larrick sent me. I think the article deserves to be run in its complete form, so here it is with very little chatter from me. Hope you all enjoy. Thank you Denis for sharing your research with us.

Vincent Bradley, Editor

The Coney Island and Lake Como Railroad

By Denis Larrick (December 2011)

Originally known as Parker's Grove, then Ohio Grove, today's Coney had at least three train rides in its history. Although C.J. Jacques' book "Cincinnati's Coney Island" shows a picture of a steam train on page 40, that picture was actually taken at Chicago's Riverview Park in 1916. Steam was known to have powered other rides such as a Ferris wheel in Coney's early days, and a sternwheeler steamboat was installed on Lake Como in 1902, but evidence does not show that Coney ever had an actual steam powered train. No photos have surfaced of the first train ride, but it is known to have been an electric train installed around 1926. Starting in 1922, electric trains were being built by the Dayton Fun House and Riding Device Company (later National Amusement Device in Dayton, OH), so that is a likely candidate. The NAD trains of the period had a third rail in the center of the track much like an oversized Lionel and were 24" gage. NAD trains also had very "non-railroad" style coaches which appeared to be wooden roller coaster cars running on railroad style wheels. An aerial photograph of Coney in 1929 shows parallel train and car rides between the Twister coaster and the Ohio River, about where the kids' Teddy Bear coaster was located on the map from 1971 (shown below).

In 1931, an electric train is said to have been installed in the children's area, but it was probably the same train. Children's crank style handcars were also installed in 1931. This area was formally converted to the "Land of Oz" in 1934. In 1935, the electric train and a new Toonerville Trolley were again mentioned. Billboard Magazine in July 1949 spoke of the Coney Zephyr train in the Land of Oz, and the Zephyr name could have been applied during the Land of Oz transformation, shortly after the new full size Budd diesel powered Pioneer Zephyr train was displayed at Cincinnati Union Terminal in May 1934 (a year after the opening of the state-of-the-art terminal).

In 1953, the Land of Oz was renovated and a gasoline powered modern diesel style locomotive was installed, also called the Coney Zephyr. It followed the colors of the Rio Grande Railroad with a school bus yellow and silver body, with possibly some dark blue on top. The photo in Charles Jacques' book reveals that it was neither a National Amusement Device "Century Flyer" nor an Ottaway B-14 style locomotive (Wichita, Kansas). It was a historically accurate General Motors F-style diesel body, but it did not exactly have the body style of the famous Miniature Train Company G-12 or G-16 engines used by most parks, either. In all likelihood, the new Coney Zephyr locomotive was a rare Arrow Streamliner made by Arrow Development in Mountain View, California. The cars are not typical of Arrow and may have been left over from the earlier train ride. Arrow Streamliners were available in a variety of gages, the most common being 18". An ad for the Arrow Streamliner appeared in the April 1953 issue of Billboard Magazine, the same year the new locomotive arrived at Coney. Only one Streamliner is known to exist today (in California), though it is always possible that the Coney engine will emerge from someone's barn someday. In 1960, the track was relocated to be more visible from the Mall, and a new Mansard roof curved depot was built near the entrance to the Land of Oz using crossing signals that appear to have come from the Miniature Train Company.

The most famous and remembered train ride at Coney, however, was the much larger 24" gage, 7/16 full size, \$200,000, Coney Island and Lake Como Railroad. Construction started in November 1963 and the railroad opened to the public on May 1, 1964, pulling 478,000 passengers in the first year.

John LaFayette Whetstone (1821-1902), son of a Cincinnati pioneer of the same name, was Cincinnati's most celebrated and talented steam locomotive designer, developing a truly balanced Stephenson valve gear in the 1850s for the Niles Locomotive Works near today's Sawyer Point Park. Why this story? Coney's Lake Como, over which the CI&LC was built in 1963, was excavated from 16.007 acres of land purchased by Coney in 1890 for \$5800.50 from John L. Whetstone. How's that for irony?

1963 was a banner year for train rides. Steam locomotives were retired from America's railroads in the late 1950s, and nostalgia was high for the wailing whistles. We were in the midst of the Centennial of the Civil War, and many tourist steam train attractions were built in America during this time, themed to honor the Centennial. Cedar Point president George Roose built the Cedar Point and Lake Erie Railroad 36" gage steam train ride in 1963 out of his own pocket when the Board of Directors wouldn't approve the money. Also in 1963, Crown Metal Products of Elizabeth, PA, built their first 25 ton, 36" gage steam locomotive for Legend City Amusement Park in Phoenix (since demolished). Eight years later, Crown would build Kings Island's 36" gage steam trains.

The trains of the Coney Island and Lake Como RR were not real steamers, however. The 5445 lb. locomotive bodies contained 58 HP tractor engines operating on

gasoline. There was a provision to inject oil into the hot exhaust manifold to add smoke to the smokestack which had a device to make it appear to “puff”. They were built by the Chance Manufacturing Company of Wichita, Kansas, (who had purchased Ottaway Amusement in 1954) and were modeled after the *C.P. Huntington*, the first locomotive of the Central Pacific Railroad that was involved in the great Transcontinental Railroad. Collis P. Huntington is also known for building the Chesapeake and Ohio Railroad that ran through Cincinnati.

Coney had two trains, each with five cars seating a total of 70 passengers per train (14 per car). Locomotive #34, the “Mad Anthony Wayne”, sported a light blue boiler with red stack and red cab. #35, the “George Rogers Clark” was mostly dark blue with red wheels and cowcatcher. The Chance Manufacturing Huntington models have proven to be one of the most popular products of train ride equipment in history, over 350 of them having been built between 1960 and 2007, and they are still in production under the Chance Morgan name. Today, the locomotive alone retails for around \$160,000. They were numbered in the order they were built, so #34 and #35 were some of the earliest constructed, very shortly after #32 was built for Youngstown’s Idora Park. #240 is operating today at the Cincinnati Zoo (replacing the original NAD Century Flyer), and #90 operates at Stricker’s Grove near Cincinnati (installed 1981). Interestingly enough, the real *C.P. Huntington* was built in 1863 by Danforth, Cooke, and Company of New Jersey, exactly 100 years before its little sisters were installed at Coney. The original full sized locomotive, by the way, still exists in the California State Railroad Museum in Sacramento.

Real steam locomotives are powered by the large “drive wheels” connected to the cylinders. The smaller wheels are just along for the ride to support extra weight and to guide the engine through curves. On the Chance Manufacturing engines, however, it is the drive wheel that is along for the ride, swinging back and forth under the engine. Some parks removed it entirely, including Stricker’s Grove. The Chance Huntington’s are powered by the smaller wheels under the front and back of the engine by a drive shaft from the transmission. While the Huntington’s are some of the most historically accurate scale models among the many manufactures of park trains, Chance did cheat on the power “trucks” (wheels). The trucks under the front and back of their “faux steamers” are actually scale models of “Blomberg Trucks” that were developed by the Electromotive Company for modern streamlined diesel locomotives. These scale model trucks were castings identical to the G-16 Miniature Train Company “diesel” trucks. Apparently, ride manufacturers freely stole ideas from each other (Chance merged with Allan Herschell in 1969 who had bought Miniature Train Company in 1958). Such lack of authenticity drives historians and railroad fans crazy, but it gave the Chance engines a character of their own and a very reliable suspension and drive train.

The 4678 foot long CI&LC track contained two tunnels under the north entrance road (still in existence) which could be used to shelter the trains at night and during

shutdown days, but a spur track was provided at the station to hold the spare train on operating days until needed. This track also contained a facility for fueling the locomotives. Whereas Kings Island's storage spur was designed with a "trailing" switch so that trains have to back in, at Coney the switch was "facing". The story goes that someone did not reset this switch after placing the second train in the spur. Along came the active train which promptly turned into the spur and rear ended the parked train. That probably never happened a second time. During periods of flooding, the trains were hauled up out of the flood zone and stored in a long wooden building (still in existence) behind Frisch's on Beechmont Avenue. The pilings of the 462' long railroad trestle stood in Lake Como for many years after Coney closed in 1971.

Although I never had the opportunity to visit Coney during the eight years the CI&LC ran, I was, however, the fireman on the very first public trip around the track of the Kings Island and Miami Valley Railroad on April 29, 1972. Sometime in the early 1970s, I drove to Coney and met with Kings Island General Manager Gary Wachs to discuss the future of the Coney trains, which were for sale since they had been replaced by larger trains at Kings Island. The old CI&LC station (designed by UC alumnus architect Darrel Daniels) was offered to the Cinder Sniffers miniature railroad hobby club, but it was turned down as being too difficult for club members to transport. All I can remember is how Gary told me that they wished they had never closed Coney in 1971. He felt that even with the opening of Kings Island, Coney was still a viable competitor for LeSourdsville. However, the demise of Coney certainly did make it possible to build Kings Island for a fraction of the cost of other parks of the time. The animated mannequins from the CI&LC ended up on the KI&MV, including one which caught fire from its propane rifle shooting at the train and came up from behind the mountain in the middle of the night in an eerie self-cremation ritual.

The track pattern of the CI&LC was closely copied on the newer KI&MV, and like the original plot plan of Kings Island when it opened in 1972, the railroad at Coney covered about a third of the total area of the amusement park. A large loop circled and crossed Lake Como (part of the north shore roadbed was obliterated in a 1985 lake reshaping). Two ends of the loop passed through the tunnels and paralleled in double track before separating into a smaller return loop through the woods between the north entrance (now Gate #1) and Penn Avenue (near the I-275 / Kellogg Avenue exit). Except for the station spur, there were no switches. In the far loop, Indians shot at the train and at the settlers. Deer, wolves, beaver, buzzards, and bears also were along the track. The animation was created by 30-year MGM special effects designer Winfield Hubbard and the Special Effects Co. of Morrison, Colorado. Coney upgraded the animation with \$10,000 of additional displays in 1966, including Ft. Washington. Propane flames fired "cannonballs" from the fort, "landing" in the pond along the track with compressed air splashes. Sadly, during the flood of 1966, the controls were damaged. All of this was

moved to Kings Island and installed in the new Ft. McHale, named after Park Manager Ed McHale.

The first chapter of the Coney trains “post-Coney” is still clear in my mind. #34 was sold to World of Golf in Florence, KY. It opened in 1975 or 1976, and I was there that day. The curves were so tight that the ends of the coaches were bumping together, risking pinched passenger fingers or hands. We spent some time extending the coupler bars so the coaches could be spaced farther apart. We also had to remove the sand pipe in front of the swinging drive wheel since it wouldn't clear. Chance Manufacturing said their trains could take a fifty foot radius curve (80' preferred), but I think that was an exaggeration. The brand new totally enclosed main station next to I-75 near the parking lot had two tracks under roof which allowed the train to be broken in two for storage. The track continued down a steep grade parallel to I-75, ending in a high curved trestle over the neck of the lake. Although the train had full coach brakes, that first run down the hill was taken gingerly to be safe, and even at that the trestle seemed mighty high. The last remnants of the trestle were only recently removed. The track then dodged trees along the lake through the woods next to a nursing home with enough humps and curves to make a roller coaster proud. After the Cinder Sniffers turned it down, the CI&LC station was cut into sections and transported to Florence. It was located on the dam of the lake at the back of the property, visible from I-75 until the 1980s when vandals burned most of it and the remains were torn down a few years later. After passing over the dam and through the station, the track passed through a corrugated galvanized steel culvert tunnel (with tight clearances) in the hillside on the balloon loop before passing through a spring switch which led back to the dam.

The World of Golf owner had high hopes for his railroad. Among his ideas were transportation to a go-kart track behind the dam, shooting buffalo from the train with laser technology, and gutting and converting one coach to a bar car for golfers. Alas, the railroad's run was short. The Florence Sewage Treatment Plant overflowed into the lake later that summer and shut the operation down. To my knowledge, it never ran again for the public. Today, Houston Road runs behind the dam where the go-kart track would have been built, the lake is drained, and both of the stations, the trestle, and the tunnel are gone. New buildings cover the site of the front station along I-75. The #34 train remained stored in that deteriorating station until the early 1990s when it was sold to the Oil Ranch in Hockley, Texas. Today, it has been repainted and has lost its number, but it still entertains people on a regular basis.

The other train is still somewhat close to home. #35 was rumored to have gone to an individual in southern Indiana who was going to install it on his farm somewhere in the vicinity of Millhousen. At some point in time, #35 was sold to the Guntown Mountain Railroad near Mammoth Cave (Cave City), Kentucky, and for several years circled the mountain. In the late 1980s or early 1990s, I was given the opportunity to take the throttle for one of those laps. It wasn't much of a challenge, but it was a thrill.

She had been given a new all red factory paint job, indicating that it had made a trip back to Wichita for a thorough going over. Due to rising insurance costs, in October 2005 all of the rides at Guntown Mountain were sold by Norton Auctions. As of this writing, the train and 2.5 miles of track is in storage at Beech Bend Park in Bowling Green, KY. The owner of the park tells me it is for sale. Anyone interested?



**CI&LC #34 crossing Lake Como. Note the red gas pump in front of the station.
(Photo from coneyislandcentral.com)**

I am sure that we have members who visited Coney Island during the time that Denis is talking about. How about sharing those memories with our younger, newer members? If you have pictures so much the better. Please let me know and I will do the rest. In the meantime enjoy the pictures.

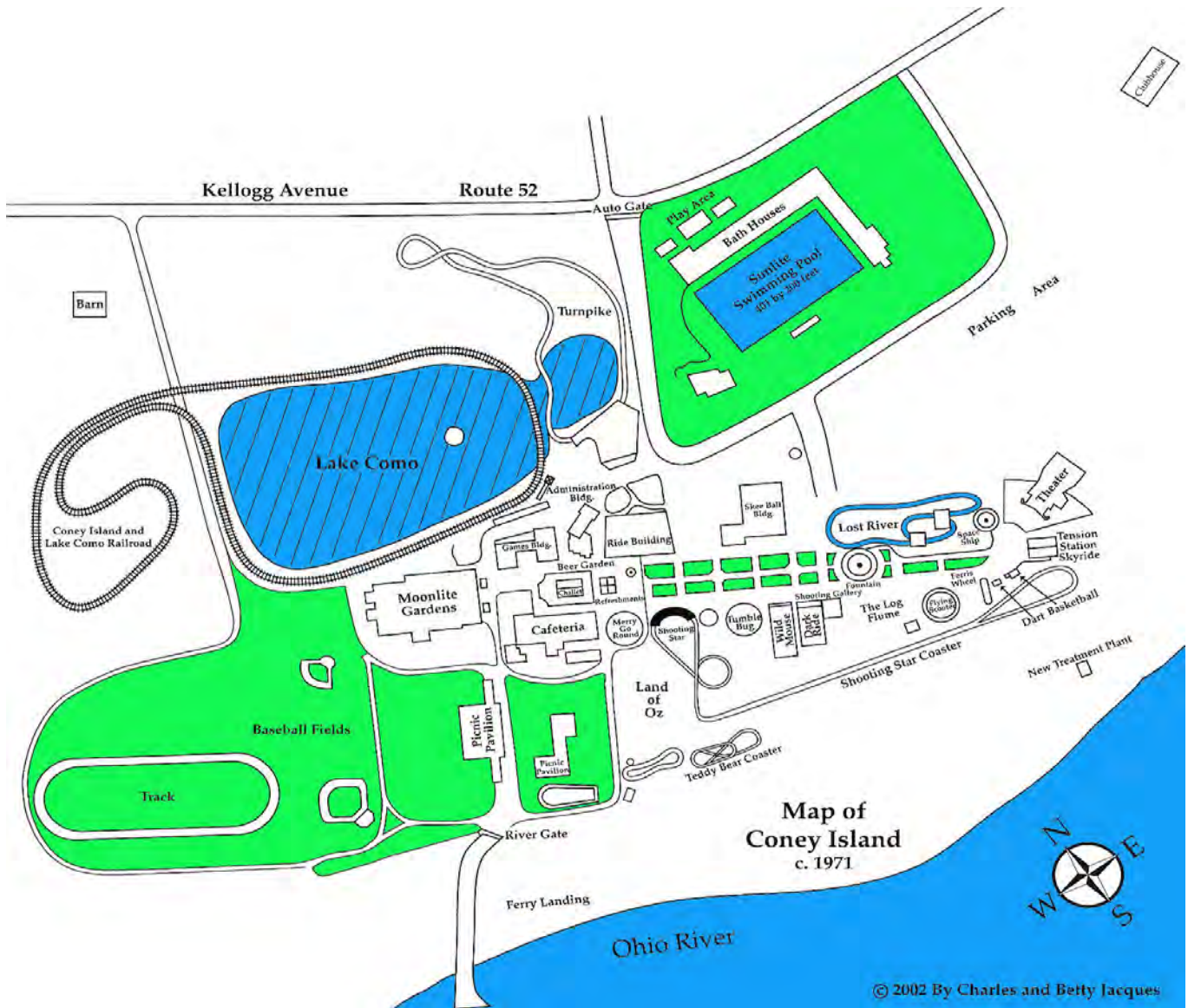
The Editor



**A spit and polish #35 operating near Mammoth Cave. She's for sale.
(Photo from themeparkreview.com)**



#34 as she looks repainted today near Houston, Texas (Photo by Oil Ranch)



**The original Coney Island in its last year of operation ending September 6, 1971
 (map from Charles J. Jacques, Jr. book “Cincinnati’s Coney Island”)**

Safety is never an accident; it is always the result of intelligent effort.

I have paraphrased John Ruskin’s comment on Quality which he wrote in the first half of the century about a friend’s lock making business. His friend’s business was the first mass produced, large scale, quality centered, interchangeable parts business which set the basics for all modern businesses to follow.