

AVOCA PARK

By Carol C. Cole

The official opening of the bike trail through Terrace Park to the Little Miami Golf Center occurred on Saturday the 10th of June, 2006. A ceremony was held at Avoca Park putting to an end the controversy started some 18 or more years ago over whether the trail should be allowed to go through Terrace Park. In fact Terrace Park never owned the land the trail is on since it runs on the roadbed of the old Little Miami Railroad.

But where and what is Avoca Park and what is the derivation of the name? Avoca Park is located on the south side of Wooster Pike, US 50, east of the bridge to Newtown. Avoca is not an acronym for anything as many people have thought but a place in Ireland. A Dictionary of Celtic Mythology defines Avoca as follows: "Variation of the place-name oboxa, as found in Ptolemy's geography (2nd cent. AD), which is identical with the modern Avonmore, Co. Wicklow, 3 miles S of Rathdrum. Avoca was popularized in Thomas Moore's (1779-1852) song 'The Meeting of the Waters'. The waters are the Avonmore and Avonberg rivers"

"Sweet vale of Avoca! How calm could I rest
In thy bosom of shade, with the friends I love best
Where the storms that we feel in this cold world should cease
And our hearts, like thy waters, be mingled in peace."

There are many places now named Avoca after the place in Ireland.

In the 1800s the Armstrong family built one of their mills where Avoca Park is today. The land was later sold to the Hartmann family who established a picnic grove on the banks of the Little Miami River. That was the forerunner of Avoca Park, which was for many years operated by the Disabled American Veterans of World War. Early in 1920 the Ohio Mechanics Institute in Cincinnati formed a group and got Judge Robert S. Marx involved. It was he who wrote the constitution for starting the National Disabled American Veterans. It's "the only national organization consisting entirely of wounded, injured and disabled soldiers, sailors and marines of the World War". The DAV must have leased Avoca Park as soon as they were established.

According to a 1922 article in the DAV's monthly magazine Avoca Park contained "over sixty-five acres of varied lands and is ideally located, being directly adjacent to railroad, traction line, and highway." Many improvements were made including construction of a Club House and "thoroughly modern" camp cottages, the whole managed by "an efficient, hard-working Camp Committee and Camp Supervisor". There was a ball ground where games were held every Sunday between the DAV team and a visiting team. A tennis court and croquet grounds were under construction. All kinds of refreshments were available at the Club House. Saturday night dances on the new dance floor in the Club House were very popular. Jimmie Size's Orchestra was hired for the season. The price was thirty-five cents for men and only twenty-five cents for ladies. "Japanese lanterns strung through rows of beautiful trees adds to the beauty of the scene and lends a gala effect which is irresistible. You will find the bathing beach simply immense, with a sand bar stretching throughout the entire distance, which is the envy of other summer campers along the river. Spring boards, rafts, canoes, water baseball, etc., make this spot the center of activities during the afternoon and early part of the evening." Fifty-cents was the price of the excellent all-you-can- eat evening meal

served on the Club House porch. “Students taking two meals a day and three on Saturday and Sunday are charged only five dollars per week: and week enders, thirty-five cents for breakfast and fifty cents for dinner or supper.”

Certainly by the 1960s Avoca Park was in bad shape and needed a great deal of work to bring it back to it’s former glory days. A group of five men were trying to purchase the place from the DAV. There were still 20 summer camps there on the fifty-seven acres but three were condemned. A new dance hall was proposed.

Stan Brown remembers working there in 1993 when the DAV had a” Homeless Veterans Stand Down”. The men were brought there for medical checkups and referrals, haircuts, rest, food, clothing and general cleanup including showers.

In 2001 there were new plans again for Avoca Park. The nearby villages and the Mariemont School District were talking with the Hamilton County Park District about putting in several ball fields as well as playground equipment. However, the Park District, who by then owned the land, was very protective of the property. They said they “acquired the property for the purpose of protecting the area and keeping it scenic”. Obviously the Park District won out because no ball fields have been built and the area is now being preserved without development except for parking and restrooms for the Avoca Trailhead.

Note – This is a slightly expanded version of the piece first published in the June 2006 issue of Village Views.



2010 - Bike Trail at Avoca Trailhead



2010 - Bike Trail and Picnic Area at Avoca Trailhead



The Club House and shade trees at Avoca Park in 1922