

Lakewood – Indians to Artifacts” Below is a brief history and a couple of pics of Lakewood Fairgrounds.

I am not sure where one would start to give an adequate but brief history of the old Lakewood Fairgrounds, but I will start with the Indians. Before 1821 the Chattahoochee River divided two tribes: the Cherokees north of the river and the Creeks to the south. It took 100 years to "remove" all the Indians from Georgia, starting in Savannah in 1733 and ending in North Georgia in 1835.

The government sold the land in 200 acre lots. The land, known today as the old Lakewood Fairgrounds, was purchased by Stephen Terry, a surveyor for the town of Marthasville (Atlanta). Terry was Atlanta's first real estate agent.

Shortly after the Civil War Atlantans realized they had an inadequate supply of water for drinking and fire protection. In 1875 Terry's property with its mill on Poole's Creek became Atlanta's first waterworks. Thus, 30 years after becoming Atlanta, there came water. When the hydrants in downtown were tested, it was reported on September 12, 1875, "Thousands of spectators, including many hundreds of folks from the nearby rural areas, marveled at this 'manmade water' . . . spouting simultaneously." A few years later, Atlanta had outgrown this solution. Another water plant was built and put into use at its present location on Marietta Road in northwest Atlanta. That was in 1893. It is still in service today.

Mr. Terry's former Creek Indian land seemed to have run its course until 1895 when the Atlanta Constitution announced, "Atlanta is to have a summer resort next season that will meet the wants of the pleasure loving people of the city. The old waterworks property and lake south of the city has been leased for that purpose. The plans include an immense bathhouse, music stand, open air theater, and elegant pavilion. Several dozen rowboats will be on the lake." Some years later, incubated by the coming of World War I, Georgia farmers were called upon to raise more food. A stimulus was needed for the movement, and an agricultural fair was suggested. Lakewood Park, comprising some 375 acres, was picked as the site. In 1916 the Southeastern Fair surpassed all expectations. Permanent buildings, cattle and agricultural exhibits, parades, fashion shows, fireworks, and other diversions were created. A stellar attraction was the horse racing on the mile track around the lake.

During the 1930's the Park and Fairgrounds fell on hard times. But men of a younger age were taking an interest. Mike Benton and John Armour came aboard to help out, and the fair began to regain interest with automobile, boat and motorcycle races.

By the 1980's people had moved to the suburbs, and the fair and racetrack had to compete with Six Flags Over Georgia Amusement Park and Atlanta Motor Speedway. Lakewood has lost its gleam. The agricultural shows are a thing of the past. and the buildings are now used for local flea markets and antique shows. An amphitheater brings in a crowd for special musical events. Its outdoor concert and parking area cover the old speedway's third and fourth turns and most of the straightaways. The track's ghostly old concrete grandstand remains, but the lake is now a dirty pond. The identity and heart of Lakewood is all but gone.

After the fairgrounds were built and the 1916 Southeastern Fair was over, Atlanta decided to try something different. On July 4, 1917 Lakewood saw a horse races and motorcycle races. The horse races lasted five hours, and the crowd was tiring when the motorcycles cranked up. E.G. Walker from Macon won the first race on a Harley. J. Parmalee of Atlanta won the amateur race. The events were a huge success with an announced attendance of 23,384.

The next week Ralph DePalma and the legendary Barney Oldfield ran a set of match races of 10, 15, and 25 miles. Admission for the three races was 50 cents for adults and 25 cents for children. An extra 25 cents gained a seat in the grandstands.

Oldfield was in his Golden Submarine; DePalma was in his Packard. Lakewood added an aviator to do loops over the speedway for extra thrills, and the fans got their money's worth. Larry Brown, the aviator, crashed in front of the crowd and walked away from a destroyed airplane.

A crowd of 15-20,000 saw Oldfield win the first race and DePalma win the second. In the third race the Golden Submarine threw a wheel and damaged the axle so badly it could not be repaired. Although DePalma said he would wait for repairs, Oldfield withdrew, and DePalma was the World's Dirt Champion by default.

During the 20's and 30's the duels on the track were almost as intense as the duels off the track for the sanctioning of the finest mile track in the South. The American Automobile Association (AAA) and the International Motor Contest Association (IMCA) battled each other for the right to hold events at Lakewood.

AAA claimed that a lot of the IMCA results were predetermined. Because race cars were so hard to come by and the schedule ran from late February to early November, IMCA could not afford to have their stars, much less their cars, torn up in racing events. IMCA also felt that racing was unsafe and wanted to protect the racers.



Speedway at the Southeastern Fair, 1943



Special Collections Department, Julian Library, Georgia State University

### Ferris Wheels: Southeastern Fair, 1945

From atop these four Ferris Wheels, riders could get a bird's eye view of the Lakewood Fairgrounds in South Atlanta. Sites they overlooked included the four Spanish colonial livestock exhibition halls, a circus big top (with live elephants!) and a huge carousel that remained until 1967. By 1945, a dirt track around the lake served as Lakewood Speedway for stock cars as well as one of the major stops on the grand circuit of harness racing.

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