End of the Line at White Swan Park

W HITE Swan Park, family operated for 35 years, was bought this year by the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation to make way for a highway interchange. The park was tucked away in a ravine beside the Parkway West about two miles east of Greater Pittsburgh International Airport. The new Southern Expressway will roll across the property, linking a new airport terminal with the Parkway.

Roy Todd, his sister Margaret Kleeman, and their spouses bought the land in 1953 and opened with seven rides two years later. Kleeman was quoted in a recent newspaper article as saying that the park got its name because her husband liked white swans, “that’s all.” The number of rides eventually doubled, while games, picnic pavilions, and miniature golf were added later. The owners claimed they wished only to make people happy, and a rough estimate is that some 2.5 million visited the park before it closed in 1989. White Swan had been an especially popular spot for company-sponsored picnics, and after a few difficult seasons following the mill closings, attendance increased again in the late ’80s. Park workers stayed loyal, too, and parents often passed their jobs on to their children.

Everything was auctioned on September 12, 1990: the kiddie rides, the Sport Skooter bumper cars, the Ferris Wheel, the giant slide, and the largest ride, the Galaxi coaster. Smaller items also went, including the turnstiles, picnic tables, neon signs and games — the Balloon Water Race, the Cat Rack, and the Skee-Balls among them. Some were bought by nostalgic collectors and former patrons, others by investors and amusement park operators. The Mad Mouse mini-coaster and Merry-Go-Round will be going to Altoona’s Lakemont Park, while the Tilt-A-Whirl found a home at Knoebel’s, near Wilkes-Barre. — Photographs and text by Brian A. Butko
Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania
4338 Bigelow Boulevard • Pittsburgh, PA 15213 • (412) 681-5533