

WATER CARNIVAL AT MEADE COUNTY STATE PARK

Meade County, Kansas

Written by Elmer Stegman

** Additional information added about a certain area & an event mentioned in this story*

Every year during the summer, and usually in July, a water carnival is held at the Meade County State Park. The idea of having a water carnival every year was first put into practice several years ago, and it is being planned to keep this practice up.

Those who wanted to learn more about the water carnivals knew to reach out to C. A. Marrs in Meade County, Kansas. He was in charge of the concessions at the lake and sponsored the water carnivals.

Every year the water carnival is attracting more and more people from both far and near and all report a fine time. Last year there were a large number of people from Ashland, Garden City, Liberal, and Dodge City, plus a number of folks from Oklahoma.

The races and different events are open to everyone but are divided into different age groups. There are the boys' group and the girls' group. For example, there are contests for boys under ten, contests for girls under ten, contests for boys under twelve, and contests for girls under twelve, etc. Several different races of various lengths and descriptions are always held and the boys and girls run separately. Each winner receives a prize of some kind. There is also a race across the lake which is about one-half of a mile across.

There are also row boat races which are open to both men and women. Of course, they race separately.

A competent swimmer is on hand to demonstrate the various strokes in swimming, such as back-stroke, breast-stroke, and over-hand stroke. He also explains each and explains the fundamentals of swimming and how to learn to swim. Diving exhibitions are also given and diving contests are also held.

Every year there is some feature attraction that serves as a drawing card. Last year they billed a diving exhibition in which the diver climbed to a one-hundred-foot tower, poured gasoline on himself, lit it, and then jumped into the water.

They have a loudspeaker on the premises for the occasion of the water carnival so that everyone can hear what events are to take place next and also be able to hear who the winners were in the various contests held.

All children under a certain age are eligible to register for the drawing in which, every 30 minutes or every hour, names are drawn from a box that entitles the winner to an

ice cream cone, candy bar, soda pop, or some similar confection. The management tries to make it a point to draw every child's name that registered so that each will get a free prize. When one of their names are drawn they are given a ticket which entitles them to the prize at the confectionery which is located on the grounds.

Bathing beauty contests are also held for the titles of Miss Larrabee Beach, and Miss Larrabee Beach Jr. – that is one for the older girls and one for the younger girls. The winners are decided by the people present who applaud for their favorite. The winners are decided by a process of elimination and the one getting the most applause is declared the winner by judges chosen from the crowd. Last year a girl from Plains was first and a girl from Dodge City was second in the junior group... but the contest was very close.

For their prizes the winners each received one dollar in addition to the title which was bestowed upon them.

There is a big tower on the beach and an incline built leading down into the lake with tracks on it on which roller coasters are used. People get on the roller coasters and roll down the incline into the lake. Last year this concession was turned over to the young folks. Children between certain ages rode the roller coaster all day free.

Meade County State Park is located in the southern part of Meade County. It is situated about 13 miles southwest of Meade. You go south out of Meade six miles on Kansas 23. Here you turn west on the State Park Road. This road was just recently oiled all of the way. It is well marked and easily followed so that you won't miss the Park.

From Plains you start from the southern extremity of the city and go east two and one-half miles, six miles south, and four miles east on the State Park Road.

To get to the Meade County State Park from Liberal, you take US 54 northeast for 13 miles. Here you turn east on the State Park Road. It takes you straight east 14 miles to the State Park. A point of great interest to tourists is that it is the same distance from Liberal to Meade by way of the State Park as it is following US 54.

The first thing of interest you will see is the large Larrabee Lake.* It was named in honor of Lee Larrabee of Liberal who, at the time the lake was completed was a member of the State Fish and Game Commission.

The lake covers a total of about 160 acres of space. It is very irregular in shape except for the east and south sides. The east side is a fairly regular curve and the south side is a straight concrete wall. The northwest portion of the shore is very irregular and borders many places with cottonwood trees.

To make the lake possible, the bank on the east side had to be raised and reinforced. Bags of sand and cement were piled along the bank to keep the water from washing

the bank away. On the south side, it was much lower so it was necessary to build a high bank. This was accomplished by means of a steam shovel, tractors, and horses. The bank on the south is 15 feet high and higher in a few other places. First, a bank of dirt was made and then a concrete slab was laid on a slope on the inside of the bank extending down into the water. This was to keep the water from washing out the bank. There is an outlet through the south bank so that the lake may be drained if it is desired. On the southwest corner, a spillway was built to let the water gradually run out as it comes in when the lake is full. It is a concrete wall about fifty yards long which is about 5 feet lower than the south bank. It is about 7 feet high and 8 feet thick at the bottom and it tapers to the top where it is a foot thick. The water which overflows from the lake at the spillway is carried off in a concrete channel and forms a small stream that flows off to the southeast.

The lake is fed by means of a spring which is located northwest of the lake. The water here flows into a hydraulic ram pump which lifts it so that it will flow into the lake. It is piped from the spring to the lake.

The lake is about forty feet at the deepest place, although on the whole, most of it isn't over fifteen feet deep, and in some places, it is a gradual slope where you can wade out into it for quite a distance. It is used for both fishing and recreation. It has been kept stocked by the State with numerous kinds of freshwater fish including the channel catfish, drum, bass, crappie, sunfish, perch, and other common species. Several fish have been caught that weighed ten pounds or over. Anyone may fish as long as he abides by the State Fish Laws.

One-half mile east of the lake is the warden's home. Also here, you will find some of the following animals and birds; coyotes, foxes, raccoons, porcupines, and pheasants.

As the park is also a bird sanctuary and a game refuge, you see many birds and animals, that are very tame. You are not allowed to have a gun or a dog with you if you enter the premises.

North of the warden's home, one-half of a mile, is the fish hatchery where fish are raised to be used in stocking this lake and other lakes in the State.

In a pen about two miles west of the lake adjacent to the road are deer and antelope. Coming back to the highway from the fish hatcheries, you go west across the bridge and turn to the right, toward the picnic grounds. Here you can get fresh spring water and eat in the shade on tables and benches, and cook your meals in the fireplaces provided. The spring which feeds the lake is located here.

There was formerly an early Civilian Conservation Corps Camp* on the hill north of the picnic grounds, but they were abandoned. The buildings are still there, however. On April 1st, 1936 there were 110 boys and 2 officers in the camp. This was below their usual number, as a number had left because their enlistment was over.

There are 21 buildings in the camp and they were used as follows: 8 barracks, 1 mess hall, 1 hospital, 1 officers' quarters, 1 foremen's quarters, 1 recreation hall, 1 headquarter building, 2 latrines, 1 pumphouse, 1 soil conservation service shop, 1 soil conservation shop garage, 1 army garage, and 1 washroom.

The boys did a great deal of excellent work in repairing the lake, building fish ponds, cultivating and planting trees, and destroying poison oak.

Additional Information

- * Lake Larrabee was named after Mr. Lee Larrabee from Liberal, Kansas. The name was later changed to Lake Meade.
- * The Civilian Conservation Corps was a work relief program that gave millions of young men (mostly unmarried) employment, doing conservation work in the nation's forests, parks, and fields, during the great depression. CCC planted more than three billion trees and constructed trails and shelters in more than 800 parks nationwide during its nine years of existence. It helped to shape the national and state park systems of today.