

Ellison Park

In a year of anniversaries, there's a park in northeast Brighton that's ninety years old.

On land long used by the Senecas, in 1797 John Tryon laid out a commercial village called Tryon town at the Irondequoit Landing. John Tryon's plan included a warehouse, store, distillery, ashery, and shipping dock on Irondequoit Creek and forty residential lots on the hill west of the Landing. For a time the small community thrived, buoyed by boatbuilding and trade but John Tryon's death in 1807 signaled the decline of Tryon. The War of 1812, with British ships on Lake Ontario, contributed to the ship building enterprise at the Landing but it discouraged civilian commerce on the Lake and put off prospective settlers. Perhaps the greatest reason for the end of Tryon was the knowledge that the long-planned Erie Canal would use a route well south of Tryon, effectively eliminating commercial trade at the Landing.

The inhabitants moved on to other communities. The Tryon heirs mortgaged and sold their property in the village to each other, blurring the original lot lines, and eventually selling it out of the family. Farms replaced the houses, the ashery, and the distillery. At some point, Mortimer Reynolds, founder of the Reynolds Library and son of Rochester pioneer settler, Abelard Reynolds, acquired the land. After Reynolds' death in 1892, Frank T. Ellison purchased the two hundred ten-acre tract.

In mid-December, 1926, the Monroe County Park Commission announced the gift of the \$100,000 farm in honor of Mr. Ellison's father, pioneer Nathaniel B. Ellison. It was to be Monroe County's first "wild park."

Beginning in March of 1927, workers removed old fences, fallen timber, and overgrowth. They drained marshes, cleared Irondequoit creek of sunken logs, and planted grass in the meadow areas. Although not officially open to the public until October 1, Ellison Park was visited almost daily throughout that year by Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, other organizations, and family groups. In April of 1927, the Park Commission publicized its intent to purchase the nine-acre Chambery farm in order to add the Irondequoit Landing to the park property.

In anticipation of the crowd expected to attend the October 1 dedication ceremony, newspapers published directions to the three entrances to the park. Coming from the trolley stop on Blossom Road near the old gas tank, one could walk east on Blossom Road until it ended at Landing Road then go left on Landing to the entrance there or take a right onto Landing Road then proceed to Rich's Dugway and take that road to the park entrance. From Penfield, visitors were advised to take Bidwell Road that led from Creek Street to Sperry's Mills (later known as the Daisy Flour Mill restaurant). A few years later, Blossom Road was extended from Landing Road to Sperry's Mills, connecting with Bidwell Road, at which time the entire road became Blossom Road.

In the years after the dedication, Ellison Park acquired several popular amenities. The first, in conjunction with Troop F at the Culver Road Armory, was the addition of bridle trails to the park. The Country Lane and Bridle Trail Association of Monroe County laid out nearly six miles of trails delineated with

orange metal discs with white arrows bearing the legend "Country Trails." The formal opening of the trail from the Armory to Ellison Park was on July 2, 1927. The opening of the trail from Genesee Valley Park to Ellison Park took place in May of 1928. Horseback riding in Ellison continues to this day.

Perhaps the most famous of Ellison Park's attractions was the 800-foot toboggan slide that operated on a hillside on the Park's south side. Park Superintendent Robert Cochrane estimated that the top speed on November 24, 1938, was 80 miles per hour, a rate achieved by packing four inches of snow onto the wooden chute then dowsing it with water to create a glazed surface. All participants had to sign waivers before climbing on their toboggans. Those between eight and ten years old had to be accompanied by adults. A successful run would send the toboggan down the chute and along the snow-covered ground almost to Blossom Road. The slide closed in the early 1960s due to maintenance issues. It has never reopened.

Ellison Park today contains 447 acres in the towns of Brighton and Penfield. Its tennis courts, baseball diamonds, and trails would be familiar to the visitors of 1927, but disc golf, geo caches, and the dog park might cause a raised eyebrow or two. Ellison Park is one of Monroe County's most accessible and most visited parks.

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