

"CARNIVALS"

By Frank W. Santucci

In the early 1950's Verona's Volunteer Fire Department continued its long-standing "street fair" tradition held during the end of July and early August. The Verona Volunteer Fire Department building was located at the bottom of Spruce Street. In those years, Spruce Street was two way and fairly steep. The fire truck, Verona only had one, was a 1935-36 La France American model. The engine was loud and even if the fire was up on the hill top of Verona, the truck would head down to First Street then go up Center Avenue. The building was a one-stall wooden structure with a second floor. The fireman's band would practice on the second floor on Thursday and Friday evenings.

Carnival Week in Verona was big time, Monday through Saturday with a Saturday matinee. A parade was held on the last day originating on Third Street, winding through Verona, Center Avenue, Second Street, down North Avenue across First Street, down Center Avenue to the carnival grounds. Rides and tents were located just below Allegheny River Boulevard near the railroad tracks. The lot had been an industrial area where wood chips were scattered everywhere to keep the dust down. Many neighboring fire trucks, including a stand-out yellow squad van from Universal, PA were in the parade, some even had their own firemen's band. As the parade came to the finish line, the firemen would continue around the bottom of Center Avenue to East Railroad Avenue. This road was notoriously known for many bars and taverns located there. At least seven were available and the firemen enjoyed them as much as they enjoyed the firemen's parade. Festa's Bar on one corner, Terry's Grill on the other corner, the bands would play in the bars for free drinks. The Moose and the Eagles were also located on this lower road. Across the street from the fair was the Verona Café, called Blondies now. Verona Café's owner, Mr. Dardenell could always be seen wearing a large white apron! Futules Bar was on Allegheny River Boulevard near South Avenue. Bands from North Braddock, North Bessemer, Arnold, and Springdale spent many hours tasting the Verona beer.

The carnival had something for all ages. The amusement company offered various rides, merry-go-round, ferris wheel, little kiddie car rides, loop-d-loop and a tilt a whirl. On some occasions a large steel circular object that was covered with a wire mesh shaped like a globe. This object was an attraction, not for patrons to participate. At certain hours of the evening two motorcyclists would perform a remarkable feat inside of this 30 or 40 foot high globe, crisscrossing and barely missing each other.

Fireman Herman Dentino was always in charge of the large bingo tent. Another game that was popular was something called fish. A room of sheets was set up with no top and patrons would pay to throw a line over the 7- foot high sheets. Someone would hook a bag of some candy or trinket on the end and it was pulled out.

Another tent set up was one that had shelves with packs of cigarettes sitting upright on them. Cork shooting rifles were used to knock the packs of cigarettes down with the shooter getting to

keep the most popular Lucky Strikes, Camels, Chesterfields, and Philip Morris. This particular stand always intrigued me as my schoolmate, George Stuart, was the person who had to load the guns. His father was the Fire Chief and I thought he really had an in. Three corks for 25 cents, not a bad deal when one pack of cigarettes cost 21 cents, but it was difficult to knock the Packs off of the 6-inch shelves. No filter tips during this era.

Teenage girls would dress up with fashionable skirts and blouses. In the 1950's most teens dressed up when an event was for all ages, not like now in 2015.

Patrons walked to the crowded fair. Sounds and odors permeating the air, wood chips on the ground, roasting hot popcorn, cotton candy, and hot dogs let you know you were at the fair. Popcorn served in a paper cone-shaped container, usually pink in color. Occasionally a freight train would pass by and all would pause to watch it go by.

If carnival food wasn't appealing, you could walk up to the Verona Cafe for hot sausage, and if that did not satisfy you, take a walk down East Railroad Avenue to Scat's Bowling Lanes for more hot sausage. Also close by was Ferraco's Pizza, one of the first pizzerias in the whole area.

Around midnight Saturday night the fair would close down. By noon Sunday, the equipment of mirth and merriment was all packed on trucks and ready to move to the next small town anxiously awaiting their Monday opening day.

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