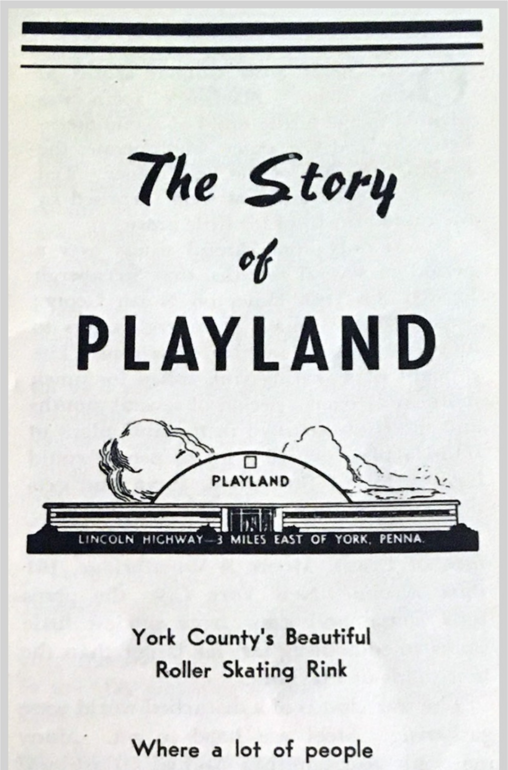
Only in York County

HOME ASK JOAN STORES AND RESTAURANTS OF THE PAST YORKISMS ABCS OF YORK COUNTY

MORE BLOGS



The Story of PLAYLAND

PLAYLAND
LINCOLN HIGHWAY—3 MILES EAST OF YORK, PENNA.

York County's Beautiful
Roller Skating Rink

Where a lot of people

Search …

Search

ABOUT ME

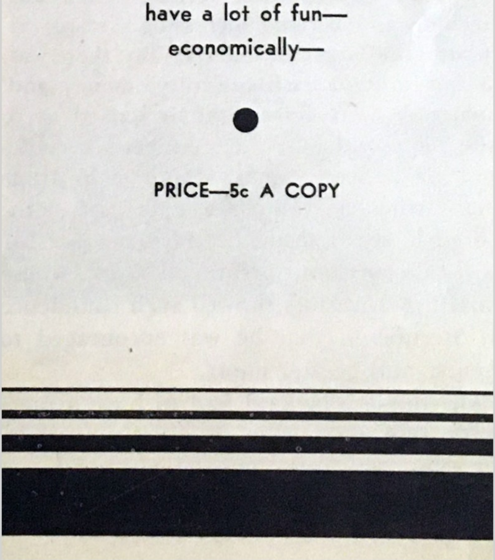
EAST
HOPEWELL
TOWNSHIP

My name is Joan Concilio and I'm a lifelong Yorker.

Through high school and college, I swore I was getting out of here as soon as possible. Now, (more than) a few years later, I can't think of anywhere I'd rather be. I love my town and the people in it.

So please, connect with me and let's share what makes life in York County great. I'm here to help you enjoy this place as much as I do!

Contact me at joan@joanconcilio.com.


have a lot of fun—
economically—

●

PRICE—5c A COPY

Reader Gretchen Frederick shared a copy of this brochure with me. She found it in her mother's ephemera.

POSTED BY JOAN CONCILIO | AUGUST 23, 2020 | LOCAL MEMORIES | NO COMMENTS

Brochure details the story of Playland roller rink

Gretchen Frederick of Sparks Glencoe, Md., sent me something cool a couple of years ago that I just never made the time to digitize until now.

“Enclosed is a document that I found among my late mother’s ephemera. She kept everything!” Gretchen wrote.

She continued, “I’ve noticed Playland mentioned in your column on several occasions. My best friend and I went roller skating at Playland every Thursday evening when we were about 14… 1957-1958. We had our own skates and wore twirly short skating skirts. I believe my mother made mine.”

About the brochure, she wrote, “This brochure is a comprehensive description of the designing and building of Playland. It opened in 1941 and everything about it was top notch. I do not find an author of this booklet but it was definitely someone who had all the information regarding the oriigns of Playland roller rink.”

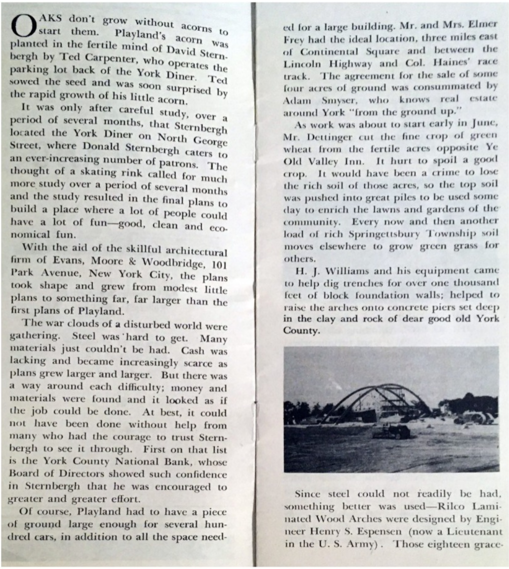
“I grew up in Dallastown in the ’40s and ’50s and moved to New Freedom as a teenager. I relate to many tiems in your columns. Always enjoy them,” Gretchen

POPULAR TOPICS

Around town Dover/West York County customs Schools Only in York County It used to be... Local memories Other Northern/West Shore Restaurants Southern ABCs of York County Things we eat Northeastern Dallastown/Red Lion Things we say Music Names of York Hanover/South Western Stores York City/Suburban Ask Joan Spring Grove Joan's randomness Central/Eastern

concluded.

While you can probably read some of the Playland brochure's info from the images I'm including with today's column, to best read the whole thing, download a PDF copy of the brochure here.



OAKS don't grow without acorns to start them. Playland's acorn was planted in the fertile mind of David Sternbergh by Ted Carpenter, who operates the parking lot back of the York Diner. Ted sowed the seed and was soon surprised by the rapid growth of his little acorn.

It was only after careful study, over a period of several months, that Sternbergh located the York Diner on North George Street, where Donald Sternbergh caters to an ever-increasing number of patrons. The thought of a skating rink called for much more study over a period of several months and the study resulted in the final plans to build a place where a lot of people could have a lot of fun—good, clean and economical fun.

With the aid of the skillful architectural firm of Evans, Moore & Woodbridge, 101 Park Avenue, New York City, the plans took shape and grew from modest little plans to something far, far larger than the first plans of Playland.

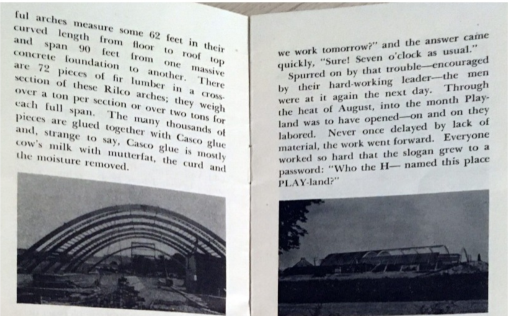
The war clouds of a disturbed world were gathering. Steel was hard to get. Many materials just couldn't be had. Cash was lacking and became increasingly scarce as plans grew larger and larger. But there was a way around each difficulty; money and materials were found and it looked as if the job could be done. At best, it could not have been done without help from many who had the courage to trust Sternbergh to see it through. First on that list is the York County National Bank, whose Board of Directors showed such confidence in Sternbergh that he was encouraged to greater and greater effort.

Of course, Playland had to have a piece of ground large enough for several hundred cars, in addition to all the space needed for a large building. Mr. and Mrs. Elmer Frey had the ideal location, three miles east of Continental Square and between the Lincoln Highway and Col. Haines' race track. The agreement for the sale of some four acres of ground was consummated by Adam Smyser, who knows real estate around York "from the ground up."

As work was about to start early in June, Mr. Dettinger cut the fine crop of green wheat from the fertile acres opposite Ye Old Valley Inn. It hurt to spoil a good crop. It would have been a crime to lose the rich soil of those acres, so the top soil was pushed into great piles to be used some day to enrich the lawns and gardens of the community. Every now and then another load of rich Springettsbury Township soil moves elsewhere to grow green grass for others.

H. J. Williams and his equipment came to help dig trenches for over one thousand feet of block foundation walls; helped to raise the arches onto concrete piers set deep in the clay and rock of dear good old York County.

Since steel could not readily be had, something better was used—Rilco Laminated Wood Arches were designed by Engineer Henry S. Espensen (now a Lieutenant in the U. S. Army). Those eighteen graceful arches measure some 62 feet in their curved length from floor to roof top and span 90 feet from one massive concrete foundation to another. There are 72 pieces of fir lumber in a cross-section of these Rilco arches; they weigh over a ton per section or over two tons for each full span. The many thousands of pieces are glued together with Casco glue and, strange to say, Casco glue is mostly cow's milk with mutterfat, the curd and the moisture removed.



we work tomorrow?" and the answer came quickly, "Sure! Seven o'clock as usual."

Spurred on by that trouble—encouraged by their hard-working leader—the men were at it again the next day. Through the heat of August, into the month Playland was to have opened—on and on they labored. Never once delayed by lack of material, the work went forward. Everyone worked so hard that the slogan grew to a password: "Who the H— named this place PLAY-land?"

Rapidly the thing took shape—it was big, OH! SO BIG! Climbing high, reaching far, it resembled a giant turbine wheel two hundred feet long, 90 feet in diameter and half showing above ground.

It became a giant turbine for some seconds during a violent hurricane and thereafter for a time it was just a mess. The storm had come at just the wrong time—one more day and it would have been secure against *any* storm. The storm did great damage; it hurt two men severely; it almost broke Dave Sternbergh. And it almost crushed him, too, because he was under there with the rest of the workers when the storm struck.

That was at 4:20 P. M., July 28th. At 5:00 P. M. that same day, in the middle of utter desolation, Charlie Tome asked, "Do

From the beginning of construction good natured Eddie Hoffman was on the job as general all-around helper — carpenter, mason, cement worker, DeWalt power saw operator—anything that would help the progress of the job. When Playland opened he was so fond of the place that he just could not leave and thus became the only member of the construction crew to remain at Playland as a going concern.

Lumber arrived promptly from the Herman Noss yards, thanks largely to the attention of H. B. Eisenhower. Work was never delayed a moment for lack of plumbing—Franklin Kottcamp was on the job with Byrd Ruler and his crew. Norm Abel's electric wizard, Web Markle, and his son, Earl, as his helper, put in over three miles of BX cable and made everything connect-

When the floor was one great slab of concrete (equal to a mile of sidewalk) the General Roofing Company sent their boys along with their smudge pots and asphalt, heated the black stuff (tar, for short) and mopped it onto the concrete, quickly adding a sheet of roofing paper which became bonded into the tar. Then another coat of hot tar, another sheet of roofing paper, followed by a third coat of hot tar. These coats and sheets totaled over a quarter inch in thickness and made everything ready for the floor experts.

The John T. Swanson Company of New York is one of the largest and, we believe, the best floor specialist in the country. They have "done" most of the big skating rink floors in the eastern half of U. S. A. and it was thus quite natural that they "did" Playland's floor. When the Swanson crew arrived they inspected the job described above and declared it the best and flattest job they ever had to surface. Judging by their vast experience, Playland must have a good foundation for the Swanson floor. That consists of rough pine boards laid flat (not nailed) on top of the tarred surface and laid with great care, to fit the needs of the pattern or design of the maple floor. Now on top of the rough "sleepers" goes yet another layer of paper, followed by Northern Michigan First Grade Special Select Maple—all of which means THE VERY BEST. In one week they laid the floor, drove into place over 700 pounds of nails, never once got down on their knees to drive a nail and never once did any of them miss a nail.

As those fellows were finishing their job others arrived who specialize on FINISHING only and they brought along two floor sanding machines as heavy as tractors and equipped with ten horsepower motors. A double crew kept those machines going day and night until they had the floor in proper condition. They will be back again soon with their 10 HP machines to give the floor another sanding.

Ventilation of the big building is successfully accomplished by means of powerful fans which force air out of the building (patterned after the Holland Tunnel). Fresh air is thus drawn through the walls, entering close to the floor and rising rapidly to the high ceiling. A change of air is effected every three minutes, assuring more fresh air than any number of open windows would provide.

One of the most impressive things about Playland is the beautiful mural at the south end of the skating floor. The painting is the work of the Philadelphia artist, John Pierce, who has to his credit some excellent work done on the commission of Mr. Ezra Hershey and other work done for Mr. Du Pont of Wilmington, Delaware. Playland's mural is linked with a trip of Mrs. Sternbergh and daughter, Jean, made through the Great West in the summer of 1940. They took Kodocrome equipment with them and brought back several hundred excellent color pictures of this great country, including many of the Rockies and especially of that portion of the Rockies known as The Grand Teton Mountains. It was at Jackson Hole, Wyoming, that Jean took the picture now a part of Playland.

The scene includes Cowboy Harry Parsons, sitting on the ground near his Palomino Pony, both figures being life-size. In real life they are at an altitude of over 6,000 feet above sea level; in the distance are snow-covered mountains of the Grand Tetons including The Grand Teton, over 14,000 feet high. It is all so real that one might expect Parsons to mount his pony

Tuthill Freezer) and at the same time reduces the number of steps required to "work" the counter, thanks largely to Donald Sternbergh and his York Diner experience.

His brother, Philip, who had worked at the Diner for over two years before coming to Playland, was resolved not only to have a good soda fountain but he was determined to have the best ice cream obtainable. That is why he makes it himself, with the very best ingredients and equipment obtainable. Likewise, all the soft drinks

and come riding across the floor; perhaps it is just as well that horse and rider are patient enough to stay right where they have been placed by the skill of Mr. Pierce.

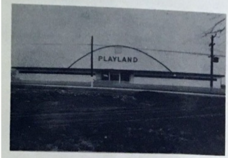
Skating is good exercise and that calls for a drink and drinks have to be served at a counter. When Playland was in the making the Fountain Room had not been fully planned; with a spare section of a Rilco arch on hand it was rather evident that the section should make a good fountain room bar top and that is how the unique shape of the bar was obtained. The result is a very pleasing shape resembling the letter V. The design permits more room for skaters to gather for soft drinks and ice cream (made right there in a

are made right on the spot and they certainly "hit the spot."

A good skating rink must have good sound equipment and must deliver good skating music to the skaters on every part of the skating area. That is why Playland has 18 speakers built into the ceiling of the building; a Hammond Electric Organ and Hammond Solovox, together with all the complicated gadgets needed to furnish music with excellent tone quality. The system includes a record player (until very recently the *only* music available in rinks with tardy management) but the record player is used only sparingly and even then you will often recognize the distinctive rhythmic beat of Don Berger, who has recorded a number of rink records. Playland's sound equipment also includes special speakers for public speaking; radio pick-up is available and can be broadcast onto the rink floor with a twist of the right dial. Complicated and costly, it totals up to good music for skaters and Playland applauds George Barbey & Co., Reading, Pa., for the sound system.

One group of things was omitted when equipment was being ordered and that was "pin-ball" machines. There are none. Parents and wage earners, please note.

The story of Playland might end right here were it not for the fact that it had to be opened to the public on the 14th of November, 1941. Now the opening of a skating rink with high ideals behind it, to the effect that it must be a decent place for a lot of people to have a lot of fun—the opening is not like grabbing the door knob and pulling.



Playland had to be opened right, which meant that Playland had to have a really good organist. After diligent search the right man was found, over in New Jersey, having left his home town of Lancaster to build experience around his many natural abilities. Don Berger liked the ideas which can briefly be described as the policy to be followed at Playland:—That it shall be a clean and decent place where a lot of people can have a lot of fun, economically.

Don KNOWS skating rink music and knows how to play the organ and the solovox to suit the skaters.

As the result of Don's clear-cut ideas and ideals, roller skating as a sport for York and this section of the State has been raised to a new high level.

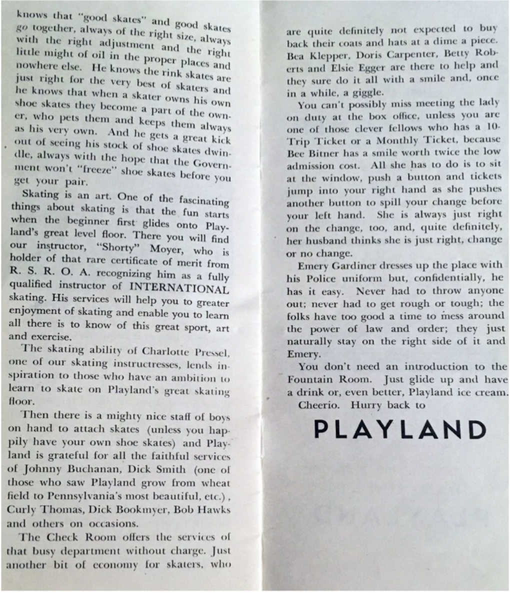
Playland MUST be a swell place to go for a good time. And it has to be a swell place to work, too. The writer knows that the employees consider it an honor and a privilege to work at Playland and to help maintain the high standards established at the time the doors opened in November.

Dick Bitner, with us for the first four months, had to leave us because his duties in war production deserved a priority over skating duties. Ted Carpenter, the fellow

who planted the acorn (remember?), is so proud of Playland that nothing is too much trouble so long as it helps everyone to have a good time in his rink. Edgar Kohr, the personality kid, is at his best when handling lady skaters who are a little vague about what their wheels are about to do next. When a new skater, or one of the seasoned ones for that matter, acquires a close and abrupt association with the maple floor Ed. Kelly and Bill Strickler share the honors of restoring balance and dignity in a flash.

Vivian Brown, whom most skaters know as "Spider," is the official helper of the timid but determined souls who don ball-bearings for the first time. Beginners are loud in their praise of Vivian because she is a good teacher as well as a good skater.

Bob Herman looks after skates, be they rink property or your own shoe skates. He



knows that "good skates" and good skates go together, always of the right size, always with the right adjustment and the right little might of oil in the proper places and nowhere else. He knows the rink skates are just right for the very best of skaters and he knows that when a skater owns his own shoe skates they become a part of the owner, who pets them and keeps them always as his very own. And he gets a great kick out of seeing his stock of shoe skates dwindle, always with the hope that the Government won't "freeze" shoe skates before you get your pair.

Skating is an art. One of the fascinating things about skating is that the fun starts when the beginner first glides onto Playland's great level floor. There you will find our instructor, "Shorty" Moyer, who is holder of that rare certificate of merit from R. S. R. O. A. recognizing him as a fully qualified instructor of INTERNATIONAL skating. His services will help you to greater enjoyment of skating and enable you to learn all there is to know of this great sport, art and exercise.

The skating ability of Charlotte Pressel, one of our skating instructresses, lends inspiration to those who have an ambition to learn to skate on Playland's great skating floor.

Then there is a mighty nice staff of boys on hand to attach skates (unless you happily have your own shoe skates) and Playland is grateful for all the faithful services of Johnny Buchanan, Dick Smith (one of those who saw Playland grow from wheat field to Pennsylvania's most beautiful, etc.), Curly Thomas, Dick Bookmyer, Bob Hawks and others on occasions.

The Check Room offers the services of that busy department without charge. Just another bit of economy for skaters, who are quite definitely not expected to buy back their coats and hats at a dime a piece. Bea Klepper, Doris Carpenter, Betty Roberts and Elsie Egger are there to help and they sure do it all with a smile and, once in a while, a giggle.

You can't possibly miss meeting the lady on duty at the box office, unless you are one of those clever fellows who has a 10-Trip Ticket or a Monthly Ticket, because Bee Bitner has a smile worth twice the low admission cost. All she has to do is to sit at the window, push a button and tickets jump into your right hand as she pushes another button to spill your change before your left hand. She is always just right on the change, too, and, quite definitely, her husband thinks she is just right, change or no change.

Emery Gardiner dresses up the place with his Police uniform but, confidentially, he has it easy. Never had to throw anyone out; never had to get rough or tough; the folks have too good a time to mess around the power of law and order; they just naturally stay on the right side of it and Emery.

You don't need an introduction to the Fountain Room. Just glide up and have a drink or, even better, Playland ice cream.

Cheerio. Hurry back to

PLAYLAND

I have a few more roller rink memories to share today, too.

Jeff Gohn commented on a previous column about Playland online, noting, "I was a professional roller skater being taught by Jim Wells at Playland in the late 1950s and 1960s. John Conway ran the place for Mr. Sternberg."

And **Jane Jacobs** noted, "I really enjoyed your articles about Playland. I spent a lot of time swimming and roller skating there."

Finally, I have a note from commenter **Lisa**, who remembers other area rinks, open more recently. She said, "I went to Roll-R-Way East til it burnt down then I went to Roll-R-Way West. I started skating when I was 4; when I was 17, I became a mom and lost interest in skating. I have so many memories from both rinks but mostly West. I even remember some names of people I met there! My first kiss even happened there! I stopped going in 1995. Was anyone else there in the late 1980s til 1995?"

That's an era I remember, though I was probably just a little too young to hang out with you, Lisa! I would have gone to Roll-R-Way West in Delco in the late '80s and early '90s for elementary and middle-school parties. We all loved to watch the "big kids" skate and dreamed of being cool enough to come without our parents someday!

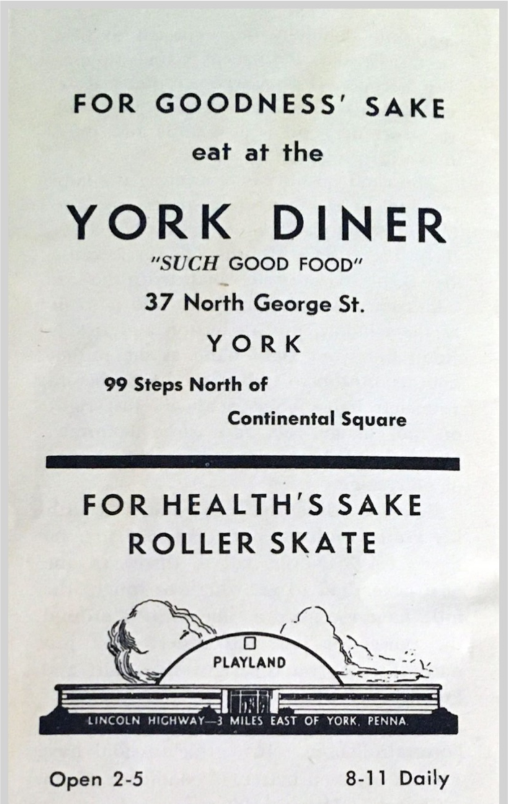
A few other rinks either I remember, or I'm interested in memories of:

- I don't remember its name, but wasn't there a skating place in Weigelstown somewhere?
- I'd also love to hear about Hagy's Fountainblu in Fairview Township, northern

York County. I went there several times with a friend from the Manchester area and absolutely loved the wooden floor, though it did not love my juvenile knees.

- Longtime reader friend **Audrey Lerew** noted in the past that Haar's in the Dillsburg area – home of the popular drive-in – had a rink in the past. Does anyone know about that?
- This is not a York County thing, but it's a Pennsylvania one: Does anyone remember Beers Roller Rink in the Towanda area (Wysox, to be exact)? I know we have a lot of people from that area, so maybe you went as a kid before moving here! It was run by the in-laws of my boss, **Stacy Beers**. Stacy and her husband, Rob, live in Lebanon County, and regularly go looking for Geocaches. They still have some wooden tokens from Beers Roller Rink that they leave around central Pennsylvania, so if you find one of those, I'd love to know!

Have questions or memories to share? Email me at joan@joanconcilio.com or write to Ask Joan, York Daily Record/Sunday News, 1891 Loucks Road, York PA 17408. We cannot accept any phone calls with questions or information.



FOR GOODNESS' SAKE

eat at the

YORK DINER

"*SUCH* GOOD FOOD"

37 North George St.

YORK

99 Steps North of

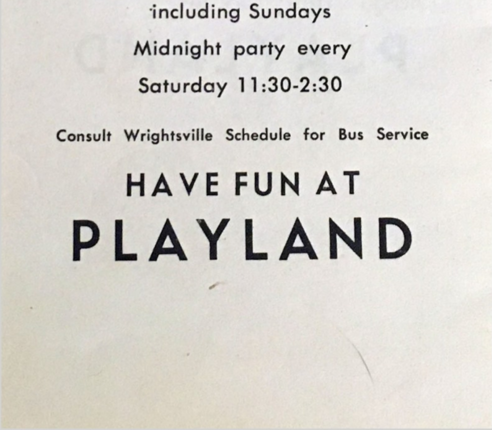
Continental Square

FOR HEALTH'S SAKE

ROLLER SKATE

LINCOLN HIGHWAY—3 MILES EAST OF YORK, PENNA.

Open 2-5 8-11 Daily



including Sundays
Midnight party every
Saturday 11:30-2:30

Consult Wrightsville Schedule for Bus Service

HAVE FUN AT
PLAYLAND

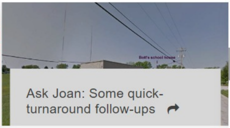
The back cover of the brochure for Playland includes an ad for the former York Diner.

⟵ Reader shares her wedding memories

Ask Joan: Why are places called what they are? ⟶

Related Posts

Street rod memories and more from Wayne Spyker



Ask Joan: Some quick-turnaround follow-ups

LEAVE A REPLY

Your email address will not be published. Required fields are marked *

Comment *

Name *

Email *

Website

Post Comment

This site uses Akismet to reduce spam. Learn how your comment data is processed.

© 2022 York Daily Record/Sunday News