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Men in suits drop in

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Hard to imagine men riding a roller coaster in suits and ties, but there was a time that wasn't so unusual. This photo was snapped by a photographer with the Toledo News-Bee on Aug. 25, 1934, at Willow Beach Park, near Summit and 101st-105th streets in Point Place.

The Willow Beach amusement park opened in 1929, with the help of a group of Toledo businessmen, including casino and gambling house operator Jimmy Hayes. In addition to the popular roller coaster, the park had a twirling seaplane ride, a centipede ride, bumper cars, a fun house, and a dance pavilion that was also used as a roller-skating rink. The park also had a large sandy beach that offered swimming, sunbathing, and boat rides.

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Willow Beach was swept by fire in 1932, then partially rebuilt. In 1934, during the Great Depression, the park operators let their lease expire, and it reverted back to the original landowner, Frank Lux, who did his best to keep the park going. Gambling continued in the area until 1937, when the land was annexed into Toledo. Then in 1947, a 17-year old girl who had recently graduated from Waite High School fell from the front seat of the roller coaster and died.

The park never quite recovered from the tragedy. It was abandoned by 1949.

The City of Toledo bought up to 15 acres of the former amusement park property in 1954 for \$50,000. It became a boating and fishing area, and a seaplane ramp was converted into a boat launch. The park and marina were named Cullen Park after Edward D. Cullen, a Toledo city councilman from 1917-1922.

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