

## Senning's Park

Carl Fredrick Senning found his way to Louisville from Kesse, Germany in 1868. On March 8, 1877, Carl Fredrick Senning and Minnie Goeper were married in the home of her uncle, Charles Goeper. This union of life endured 62 years, producing a lucrative business and six children.

Fred and Minnie purchased their first restaurant at 407 West Market Street. The venture lasted five years. Next the Sennings opened a restaurant and hotel on East 8<sup>th</sup> Street. It was at this location that the Sennings began introducing new experiences to their customers. They introduced Louisville to finger bowls in the dining room and the first bowling alley.

The Sennings continued to take advantage of new opportunities. As the streetcar reached out to South Louisville and the Grand Boulevard stretched to Iroquois Park, the Sennings too found themselves heading south, finally settling at Kenwood Drive and New Cut Road. Here they built Senning's Park and the Senning's family continued to introduce Louisville to new attractions for the next four decades.

In 1920, William Senning took over operation of the park from his parents when they left for an extended visit with relatives in Germany. William carried on the family tradition of originality in Louisville when he opened the first zoo.

William Senning built one of the finest private collections of animals in the country. It included lions, tigers, bears, monkeys and a variety of exotic birds, just to name a few. William Senning acquired his animals through years of correspondence with other zoos and collectors. In a letter from the general manager of the Cincinnati Zoological Park Association, dated February 20, 1924, per Mr. Senning's inquiry, he was offered the following:

***I have some black Fallow Deer, two year old, that I could price you at \$120.00 per pair. Also one male Water Buffalo, a year old, very fine specimen, at \$165.00. This is a very fine animal and would be quite an attraction in some show. Have one Lioness that I could price you at \$450.00- seven years old, and very fine specimen. These are all the animals that I could spare just at the present time.***

The following text from a circa 1927 news article announced the arrival of the ostriches at Senning's Park:

***When manager Will Senning of Senning's Park Zoo purchased two young ostriches from the Florida Ostrich Farm, at South Jacksonville, Florida, he little reckoned that his young hopeful, William A. Jr., and probably thousands of other children in and around the city, would soon be in a fair way of becoming proficient in the art of ostrich driving. This form of sport has long been a favorite with the folks of Australia, the native habitat of these birds.***

William August Senning Jr. was born in Louisville, Kentucky on June 7, 1925 to William August Senning Sr. and Ethel Gray Senning. In 2006, Bill Senning Jr. lent insight to the fact that the top floor of the main building was living quarters in which the Senning's family lived. William Senning Jr., recalled it would get cold during the winter and the family would have to store the alligators in the basement of the main building to keep them warm.

Over the years, quite a collection of stories detailing animal antics at Senning's Park became legendary. One such story was recounted by William Senning Sr. regarding a time that Jimmy the Bear was fed so many ice-cream cones that he fell and could not get up. The Senning's Park staff had to throw a bucket of water on poor Jimmy in order to bring him back around. Mr. Senning also shared details of a strange animal that park officials were never able to identify. The animal was purchased from the stockyards for \$150 and was described by Mr. Senning as beastly, big as a bull with a hump like a camel and feet like a deer. The animal managed to escape his cage took off down New Cut Road. It was later found on the bank of Floyds Fork. Even though Mr. Senning offered a \$50 reward to anyone who could identify the animal, he got no takers.

In its heyday, the popularity of Senning's Park prompted the Louisville Street Railway Company to add cars to their service to Third and New Cut. For the observance of Decoration Day alone, the park reportedly prepared for a crowd between eight to ten thousand people.

Throughout the years, Sennings Park attracted crowds seeking everything from five cent beer to dancing to highfalutin picnicking. In the February 1, 1940 edition of the Courier-Journal, the description of the average picnicker at Senning's Park was described as follows:

***Picnic crowds at the park thirty or more years ago were out, supposedly, to enjoy a day's car ride and frolic. They were dressed in the most voluminous and cumbersome finery. The men wore high, stiff collars and shirts with long sleeves and stiff cuffs. Their ladies wore yards and yards of white dress goods and broad hats balanced on top of the most elaborate coiffures. Probably their feet were in high buttoned shoes many sizes too small. Poor people! How could they enjoy a picnic rigged out like that?***

Senning's Park was host to a number of political meetings. It has been said that four Kentucky Governors were nominated during political gatherings at Senning's Park. Esther Lillian Preston Perkins, former Iroquois resident and former Auburndale school teacher reflected on trips to Senning's Park with her family as a child. She looked forward to getting a bag of popcorn and looking at the animals in the zoo.

During the Depression Senning's Park fell on hard times. The animals were expensive to care for and feed as a result, Carl and Minnie resumed operation of the Park. Minnie and Carl worked Senning's Park until after midnight, seven days a week. Minnie supervised the cooking while Fred bossed the bar. This continued until Carl Senning's death on December 6, 1939.

Senning's Park was sold, lock, stock and barrel to B. A. Watson for fifteen thousand dollars. B. A. Watson remodeled the property and named it The Colonial Bar and Grill. Louisville was fortunate that William Senning Sr. kept good notes on all of his animals, such as how to care for them, what to feed them, cost and source of purchase and various mistakes and successes he had with the animals. Around 1970 the James Graham Brown Foundation consulted with Mr. Senning as they prepared to start the current Louisville Zoo.

### **Colonial Gardens/Teen Bar**

In 1940 BA Watson purchased Senning's Park for fifteen thousand dollars. He closed the zoo, remodeled the structure and renamed it Colonial Gardens Restaurant and Grill.

During the 1940s, Colonial Gardens hosted big band entertainment and dancing. It took on the persona of an evening club that included a full service restaurant. Over the course of BA Watson's ownership of the property, a couple of events took place at the club that kept local headlines interesting.

*Aerial photograph of Colonial Gardens is used with the permission of the University of Louisville Archives.*

In 1944, Colonial Gardens temporarily lost the right to sell rationed foods during a time of war due to application falsification. On January 13, 1948, police raided Colonial Gardens and seized an illegal Beat-the-Dealer gambling den. *Photograph of Senning's Park poster is courtesy of Beverly Wheatley.* On August 16, 1950, some time after the last customer, BA Watson noticed smoke coming from the eaves of Colonial Gardens. The building was on fire. Firemen were able to extinguish the flames. The fire damaged two dining rooms and there was smoke damage to Watson's apartment on the second floor. Although the damages were estimated at ten thousand dollars, Watson vowed that the fire would not disrupt business. The cause of the fire was unknown.

During the early 1950s, Colonial Gardens was purchased by Herm Schmid. Eventually it became known as Teen Bar. During this time, the club was strictly non-alcoholic. It was the favorite outing for many teens, especially those living in the South End.

The teens that patronized Teen Bar were thrilled to have such a wonderful hang out. They developed a newsletter simply titled Teen Bar News, in an effort to keep all of the "members" abreast of social highlights and events. The Teen Bar News staff consisted of the following:

<b>EDITOR</b>	Dottie Carmen
<b>SPORTS EDITOR</b>	Jim Fisher
<b>TYPIST</b>	Lucy Rice
<b>REPORTERS</b>	Caroline Drexler, Rita Wagner, Bobby Barlow, Al Curelle and Johnny Noon

In the editorial section of the newsletter, the paper staff expressed their appreciation to the management team of Teen Bar:

***I think Al and Helen have done a wonderful job by starting the Teen Bar. They have gotten us a nice, decent, respectable, place where we can meet new friends and dance until our heart desires. We also want to show our appreciation to Herm. Herm, Al and Helen have really been working hard to get us everything we need and like. They want to satisfy all the teenagers. I know there isn't a finer Teen Age Club as "TEEN BAR". Believe me, they haven't stopped yet. Teen Bar in the future will be bigger and better. Any suggestions will be welcome. Our managers are three wonderful people. Let's do our best to show our wholehearted appreciation.***

Teen Bar became widely known as the place to watch or participate in all of the popular dances such as Jitterbug, Rat Race, Sailor Hop, Elephant Walk, Camel Walk, Bunny Hop, Dirty Boogie, Slow Dance and Hokey Pokey. Wednesday night was ever popular Jitterbug contest, hosted by Ed Kalley.

Some time around 1956, Carl Coons took over the Colonial Gardens property. He changed the name to Carl's Bar and operated it for about three years. It is a well known fact that Elvis Presley's grandparents lived at 4008 Beaver Street, just a few blocks North of Colonial Gardens. Although it is not a confirmed fact, local oral history dictates that in 1956, while in town for a performance at The Armory, Elvis spent the evening on Beaver Street with his grandparents. Some time that night, he made his way to Colonial Gardens and took the stage for an impromptu performance.

In 1959, Wilburn "Curly" Bryant began leasing the property and changed the name back to the original, Colonial Gardens. Curly operated Colonial Gardens until his death in 1983. At that time, his son, John Bryant, took over the operation.

In a 2005 interview, John Bryant reminisced about the way the building looked when his father acquired it. When you walked in the front door there was a beautiful, spiral staircase and banister leading to the second floor. Just past the staircase, you walked into a small piano bar and after the piano bar was the main bar. The bar is the original bar; the original dance floor was in the center. The staircase was removed along with the walls of the small piano bar in order to open up the floor plan. Eventually, John put in a new staircase to obtain better access to the second floor.

Throughout the years, Colonial Gardens underwent physical changes as well as changes to the genre it catered to. During the Bryant years, Colonial Gardens became known for its live entertainment. During the 1950s and 1960s, they hosted high school type bands such as the Sultans and the Monarchs. Things moved to a rock and roll theme in the 1970s and by 1978, a country/Urban Cowboy theme was heavily influencing the club. Over the years, some of the famous visitors to the Colonial Gardens stage included Billy "Crash" Craddock of "Rub It In" notoriety- who fell off of the stage during his

performance and Angie Humphrey, of local weather fame. John Bryant recalled hearing a story about Jerry Lee Lewis performing on the premises. In the story, Jerry Lee played a hot pink, baby grand piano. John never could confirm the details of the story. Years later, when the new staircase was installed to the second floor a hot pink, baby grand turned up on its side, was discovered in a closet on the second floor- a mystery as to how and when it was put there.

Colonial Gardens offered a little bit of entertainment for everyone. Activities upstairs in the loft included pool, darts, karaoke as well as a small bar; downstairs housed the dance floor, bands and main bar. A variety of dance lessons were offered; they tended to change from year to year as fads changed. Some of the most popular were two step, waltz, line dancing and swing. It is interesting to note that the routine bar patrons were not the people who took the dance lessons.

John Bryant pointed out the Colonial Gardens that his family operated was more of a night club/social gathering vs. a bar. John and some of his long term staff, Donna Eades, Jan and Julie always looked forward to the biggest night of every year- New Year's Eve. John recalled, "It was a whole new beginning, you would celebrate the same way, a new start. We had people who came there for generations to celebrate. They were not the normal bar crowd, they were people you would see once a year, get caught up on everyone and then not see them again until the next year. We always went all out, it was a special night".

As times changed, DUI emphasis started to take a toll on all of the bars in the South End. Colonial Gardens went from being open seven days a week to four days a week. Eventually, there was insufficient business to keep it open. Colonial Gardens closed its doors to the night club business in June of 2003. A capacity plus crowd of over 600 people packed in to say good-bye.

The legacy of both Senning's Park and Colonial Gardens is an abandoned building at the corner of Kenwood Drive and New Cut Road; vacant and unused with a very uncertain future. Perhaps it may once again become a much needed social gathering place, an asset to the community or another landmark, pushed aside to make room for a new pharmacy or gas station. Only time will tell.