

From Evolution to Extinction

AN EARLY ZOO IN COLUMBUS

Sam Roshon

The Columbus Zoological Company was incorporated on February 16, 1895, by several area businessmen, including Charles M. Williams and Milton R. Kerney. By September 6, 1902, the zoo had received donations of some bears and birds and a lion and had been offered a deer, wolves, and a rattlesnake. Theodore Roosevelt wrote and offered some animals when he returned after his next hunting expedition. The zoo announced a plan to build a house for the winter care of the animals.

Two hundred fourteen acres of the lands originally purchased by John Rathbone in Township one, range eighteen of the U.S. Military District and later owned by Albert and Charles H. Wetmore and Herman and William H. Albery were purchased for the zoo through attorney Prosper M. Wetmore on December 3, 1902, and mortgages were obtained December 24 and 30, 1902. Land titles were filed January 1 and 19, 1903, and recorded January 5 and 23, 1903. A brief announcement of the \$40,000 sale appeared in a local paper on January 21, 1903.

Zoo president Beecher W. Junk and zoo secretary William Ebright were undoubtedly distressed to find out, on January 24, 1903, that Olentangy Park was planning to have its own zoological gardens. The first through trip of the Columbus Delaware and Marion interurban railroad came by the Columbus Zoo site on January 24, 1903, raising hopes that it would feed crowds of patrons to the proposed zoo. The Zoological Gardens at

Olentangy Park opened with much publicity on May 17, 1903, as the first permanent zoo in Columbus. On August 21, 1903, Frederick Ingersoll of Pittsburg announced several proposed new buildings, including a Laughing Gallery, an 85-foot high tower called the "Down and Out," a most appropriately named "House of Trouble," and a theater.

The Ohio Fuel Supply Co. received an easement for one of their pipelines through the zoo on October 13, 1903. Working capital was in short supply so some of the land was platted on January 18, 1905, for sale as the Zooland Addition. The first announcement of the opening of the Columbus Zoo appeared in the *Columbus Citizen* on May 6, 1905, but the Zoo's opening on May 28, 1905, had little advance advertising and even less of a newspaper review. A drama called "Creation, or the Great Hereafter" was featured along with band concerts, dancing, bathing, a 3000-foot toboggan, and a baseball game won by the zoo team against the Crescent team. Trouble came in the form of the opening of Indianola Park's extensive new attractions, including a swimming pool, on June 8, 1905. The Columbus Zoo featured a balloon ascension with a parachuting monkey aeronaut and Professor Rice's dog, pony, and monkey circus on July 2, 1905.

The last announcement of entertainment at the Columbus Zoo appeared in local papers on July 9, 1905, and the final scheduled event was the outing of the Hunter Club of Prospect, Ohio, on July 18, 1905.

On July 17, 1905, Judge Thomas M. Bigger named Thomas J. Abernathy as assignee under \$20,000 bond. The valuation of the personal property was \$10,000 and the real estate valuation was \$50,000. The deed of assignment was signed by B.W. Junk and William Ebright on all notes filed since May 5, 1904. On the same day, Lena Junk filed a Common Pleas Court suit for \$12,756 on nine notes issued since March 26, 1904. Additionally, David T. Prushing, William Ebright, and John D. Brown asked for a judgment of \$6781. It was felt that the amount due on house lot sale contracts and unpaid subscriptions would offset the total debt.



Frank M. Raymund of Columbus began bankruptcy proceedings in Cincinnati on August 4, 1905, claiming that an assignment was made on July 17, 1905, despite \$18,000 in *cogno it* judgments made against the zoo. The zoo attorney was Isaac N. Abernathy of Circleville. It was ruled that zoo assignee Thomas J. Abernathy would retain the land. On August 8, 1905, Henry Gumble requested the selling of 200 lots of the recently platted addition out of the current total of 700 lots. Fully 300 other lots were said to have been *contra* for sale. The bankruptcy action was refused by the court.

The Franklin County Common Pleas Court declared the Columbus Zoo defunct on October 7, 1905. Thomas J. Abernathy petitioned the court to sell part of the real estate on August 11, 1905, and the land was sold on August 16, 1905. There was a tax sale on part of the land on January 16, 1906, and some of the land was assigned to a creditor, the Philadelphia Toboggan Co., on February 26, 1906. A Columbus Zoo Co. land lease was cancelled on May 16, 1906. On May 27, 1908, Joseph W. and William

Bott, founders of the Clock Restaurant site, obtained some of the land and sold it to the Sun Realty Co. on September 30, 1908. Other land portions were obtained by Everett Wetmore on September 15, 1908.

The Columbus Zoological Co. was dissolved by the Secretary of State on August 27, 1914, and the Crayton-Johnson Realty Co. purchased land for the Zooland Addition on January 25, 1915. Evidence of how slow new housing was being constructed that far north off High Street is seen by the existence of only one house, that of David L. Perry in 1907 in the Crestview Addition two miles south of the Zoolands. Only one house stood in the Zooland Addition in 1920! Annexation of the Zooland from Clinton Township to Columbus was approved by the Franklin County Commissioners on July 2, 1927, and approved and accepted by Columbus City Council on September 6, 1927, and October 6, 1927. By 1936, only 7 percent of the 596 house lots had houses on them; 42 houses had been built since 1920.

CYCLE OF LIFE cont.

bus, and Sylvia, a breeding loan female from Baltimore, Maryland. Pongi is owned by the Birmingham Zoo in Alabama, but this offspring belongs to the Columbus Zoo.

Named Colbi (or Colbridge for Columbus and Bridgette), the infant remains with the family as this newsletter goes to press. Pongi's maternal care has been excellent, and there is every reason to be optimistic about the Columbus Zoo being well on its way to its second mother-reared gorilla infant.

Pre-birth watches were maintained from 4:00 p.m. -8:00 a.m. daily for about two months prior to the event using a TV camera on loan from WSYX-TV, Channel 6.

Two more blessed events are due in the spring, with Lulu and Toni both pregnant by Sunshine.

The zoo is extremely grateful to all the Gorilla Group volunteers for the many hours of pre-birth watches and for the observations that continue on Bongo and Fossey and Pongi and her baby. Also to Channel 6 for the loan of the very important monitoring camera.

As a part of the Columbus Zoo's sixtieth anniversary year, we have included stories of historical significance in ZooViews. This is a story not about the Columbus Zoo but about one of its early predecessors. We thank Sam Roshon of the Columbus Public Library for his research, for writing the article, and for sharing it with us. [Ed.]

