



[Aerial view, 1907](#) [Dancehall with patrons, 1909](#) [the Chutes](#) [the Bandstand](#) [the Administration building](#)

Vanity Fair Amusement Park

→ our history

Take 195 East over the Washington Bridge and exit onto Veteran Memorial Parkway. Travel south for a mile or so, paralleling the bike path and skirting the big fence that guards the property where the oil storage tanks hide behind the trees. Turn right onto a narrow road that leads down to the eastern shore of the Providence River. Pull over into a grove of trees and stop. North, across what is now a dirt track, used to be another world. On the other side of the fence rose enormous wooden buildings like castles, with spires sparkling in the sun and triangular flags snapping in the breeze. Welcome to Vanity Fair.

Never heard of Vanity Fair Amusement Park? I'm not surprised. It was only in operation for 5 years from 1907 until 1912, but it was one of the most grand amusement parks of its time. It is difficult to remember, but Providence at the turn of the century, home to manufacturing giants such as Gorham, Brown & Sharpe and Nicholson File Co., was considered the richest city in America.

Unlike many early RI and Mass. parks, which were developed as picnic areas at the end of trolley lines, Vanity Fair was developed on a centralized plan, much like the arrangement of the World's Columbian Exposition of 1893. Abandoning the traditional midway arrangement, Vanity Fair arranged its attractions around the "Shoot the Chutes" attraction which ended in a large 1,600,000 gallon pool. Other attractions included shops, a "one-cent vaudeville" theatre, a grand ballroom, The Human Laundry, Rocky Road to Dublin, Dippy Daffy House, and a scenic railway called "Over the Rockies." One of

Quickstats

Built 1905,
 demolished
 1912. Postcards
 from various
 dates. Originally
 located along the
 water in E.
 Providence.

Historic (long gone...) (19 entries)

- American Screw Company
- Before/After: PVD 1976
- Blue Ribbon Beef
- Cove Basin/Waterplace Park
- Crescent Amusement Park
- Downtown Chinese Restaurants
- Downtown Bonanza Bus Terminal
- Downtown Chinese Restaurants
- Gorham Silver
- Merchants Cold Storage
- Possner Castle, Cranston
- Postcards from the Past I
- Postcards from the Past II
- Providence Central Fire Station
- Providence Cycledrome
- Providence circa 1975
- RI Auditorium
- RI State Archives
- RIPTA Historical Photos
- Vanity Fair Amusement Park

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the most popular shows was called “Fighting the Flames” in which a mock fire was started at various times to be put out by the Vanity Fair “fire company.” Visitors get to jump from the upper floors of the constructed buildings into nets and get “saved”.

The park was the brainchild of George B. Boyden. Earlier, Boyden’s Crescent Park amusement arcade (also E. Providence, RI), with its carousel and roller coaster, flourished, attracting thousands. Flush with success, Boyden starts construction for a much more ambitious amusement park than Crescent Park, to be called Vanity Fair, in 1904. It fronts on a lagoon and terminates in a spectacular shoot-the-shoot. The design was inspired by the 1902 Pan-American Exposition in Buffalo, N. Y.

In 1910, attendance flounders and the park is haunted by bankruptcy. A fire in 1912 almost destroys everything. The park finally closes and was purchased by Standard Oil as a refinery in 1915. It remained a field of ugly, industrial tanks for many years without a sign of the grandure that it once was. Today Silver Spring Golf Course is located there.

Sources:

Lewis and Young, Rhode Island Amusement Parks, pp.41-46

Kathy’s [Amusement Park page](#)

Thanks to people on **eBay** selling postcards for the scans.

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Christine Tassone [APR 10 2018](#) The Library in North Providence has a 1908 program from the park. It shows pictures of the park at night, the baby incubators, and other attractions. It’s really neat.

John Damon [AUG 18 2016](#) Old canisters of celluloid film turn to dust, after 40 or fifty years. Hence the rush and reason to preserve as possible of the old films from Hollywood. The likelihood we’ll ever see anything the man from North Providence had.

Marge Phelps [MAR 13 2016](#) Vanity Fair was way before my time but as a history buff and someone who lived in EP from the 50s-70s and recently (2014) moved back to the area, I find the story fascinating. I’d love to see that old film if that person ever agrees to share it. I have a special fondness for Crescent Park and was their first female employee.

Richard Correia [APR 6 2014](#) I met a man in North Providence who has the film strip of Vanity fair. He found it in his basement and has never opened it. I would love to see what treasures are hidden within that film!

Richard Correia [JUN 15 2012](#) I learned about Vanity Fair by mistake. I was in a Burger King in Wakefield, and saw a picture on the wall of the old park. I decided to look it up and found some information, but not much. I was talking to a man in North Providence and he told me that he grew up in that area. I asked him if he had heard of Vanity Fair. He said he owned the land in the area, and he had heard of the park which is unusual. I was floored when he told me he had old film on the park. He said he never opened up the



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cannisters. It could be opening day or something else. These cannisters are rare!!

Barbara-Jean (Carroll) Vallante My parents bought 21 Sunnyside Ave. in 1957. It is formerly the bandstand of Vanity Fair. They raised 5 daughters there and sold the house only a few years ago. It was a fun place to grow up and we always enjoyed the memorabilia related to Vanity Fair. The house is currently on the East Providence Historical Society poster. I enjoy having the framed poster in my home to bring back the memories of a wonderful childhood.

Shirley Marland Hanley My grandmother had twin babies who were in incubators at Vanity Fair. She said there were nurses around the clock to take care of them and they were on exhibit.

→ add your anecdotes

The information about each building grows as visitors let us know about their experiences. Did you or a member of your family work here? Did you grow up near it as a child? Let us know. All entries will be moderated and may be posted in an edited form. We will use your name unless you tell us otherwise. We will not make your email public.

Your Email:

Your Name:

Tell us your anecdote

Show us your human side. Click the third button.

Color 1

Color 2

Color 3

ArtInRuins tracks demolition and redevelopment in the City of Providence, RI, and some surrounding areas. Historical research is found from various local sources and credited to the best of our abilities. Anecdotes are curated and manually updated, and anonymity, when requested, is granted to the best of our abilities.

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