



John Zavinski of Hermitage is a deltiologist – a collector of postcards – and illustrates historic local images here with modern views of the same scene. He is director of graphics and technology for *The Herald* newspaper and design director for *Life & Times* magazine. Contact him at jzavinski@sharonherald.com or 724-981-6100 ext. 235.



This postcard published in 1936 shows the north side of the Casino. Swimming originally was in Lake Julia, which had sandy beaches. Pat O'Mahony, general manager of the park, says the large pool shown here was one of Mrs. Buhl's last projects before her death in 1936.

Park's Casino gleams like new again

By John Zavinski

THE CASINO BUILDING stands as an icon at Buhl Farm park in Hermitage, and this year it stands prouder than ever after a \$2.6 million restoration.

Built in 1915, the building has never had anything to do with gambling. Instead, "casino" reflected the original general-entertainment purpose as a place for dances and use by swimmers and ice-skaters on the adjacent 11-acre artificial lake, Lake Julia.

The Casino will have a grand reopening on Buhl Day Sept. 6 to show off the restoration after years of decay. Outside, its columns and porches have been updated and sky-

lights and a cupola brought back. The first floor has been gutted for new park offices, bathrooms and a kitchen, and the upstairs ballroom left for large group use with new, easier access.

Local donations and government grants paid for the project, part of ambitious improvements throughout the park.

The Casino, the lake, a free nine-hole golf course and everything else in the 300-plus-acre park were a gift to the community from Sharon industrialist Frank H. Buhl and his wife, Julia Forker Buhl.

Buhl's mills gave work to thousands and made him millions. The Buhls in turn spent millions to make the Shenango Valley a better place to live.

Their other benevolence included a library, a club for athletics and recreation, a country club, a home for the charitable Sunshine Society and a stone chapel in the cemetery. When he died in 1918, Buhl also left a couple million dol-

lars to aid the people of war-torn Europe.

For memorability, Buhl Farm tops all the gifts. And he insisted on calling it "farm" to connote a place of recreation, not to be confused with trolley and amusement parks of the era.

In the late summer of 1915, Buhl was putting the finishing touches on the park after three years of construction. Community leaders decided it was time to say thanks. A whole day of thanks: Buhl Day. With a parade, food, games, speeches, dancing, athletics and fireworks.

The parade with its 2,000 marchers wound past the windows of his mansion on East State Street, where he reviewed it from a window, confined to his home with injuries from an automobile accident two months earlier.

Tears welled in his eyes on many occasions, the newspapers reported.

"It was wonderful," he told reporters. "Words fail to express the pleasure which the demonstration brought me. I don't know why the people should do what they did, but it made an impression that will never be effaced from my memory."

Thanks to his philanthropy, Buhl isn't gone from valley memory nearly a century later, which will be demonstrated in a few weeks when once again the people of the community gather in the the park for a day of leisure and fun – another time of saying thanks to those who make it all possible. ♦

The postcard view-point today, with the Casino veranda restored where a pool house had been attached. A new storage building is on the lake shore at right. The current, smaller pool was put in during the early 1980s.

John Zavinski/Life & Times

