

The Arcadia, an immense building once located at 14th and Park Road in the Columbia Heights neighborhood, was a familiar landmark for city residents headed to everything from beauty pageants to wrestling matches that were held in the cavernous entertainment complex. The building itself was an early example of adaptive re-use, having been built as a car barn for the Georgetown Railroad Company about 1892. In 1909, however, a new car barn was constructed two miles further north to serve an expanding city, and the building was sold to the Arcadia Market & Amusement Company.

The Arcadia was located not far from a much earlier form of entertainment—a wildly popular horse racing track on land owned by William Holmead and occupied by his estate house, coined Holmead Manor, bounded by what is today 11th and 14th Streets, Park and Spring Roads. It became a famous mecca for horse racing and gambling in the early 19th century.

Constructed in 1802, a one-mile circular racetrack, centered on what is 14th Street today, was laid out just above what was then the Colombia College grounds by Colonel John Tayloe, a wealthy Virginian and avid horse racing enthusiast and thoroughbred owner, who moved into the now-famous Octagon House in 1800.

At its peak in 1822, as many as 5,000 spectators ventured out from the city to watch a \$5,000 match race which was won by a horse named Eclipse; the popularity and financial success of the track remained until social pressures and changing interests dictated its decline in the late 1830's. Up until the Civil War, this area remained rural in nature, with a few large estates built to take advantage of the spectacular view of the emerging city.

The building's immense size, a brick structure measuring 300 feet by 142 feet, was obviously a factor for the amusement company in obtaining the site, and it formally opened for business on February 14, 1910, with 10,000 residents attending the festivities. It maintained an official address of 3134-3138 14th Street, on the west side, just south of Park Road, and diagonally across from the Tivoli Theater. The re-use of the former car barn lent itself to a wide variety of uses by the amusement company, with its own band providing much of the musical interlude, often performing at an enclosed carnival-like midway.

The building also boasted a movie theater that seated 300 patrons, in addition to 14 bowling alleys, pool and billiard halls, skating rink, basketball courts, card rooms, lounges, a market, running track, tennis courts, and an enclosed dancing pavilion on the roof. An advertisement in 1910 indicated that the theater would only show "high class, clean pictures for intelligent people." Admission to the building itself cost 15 cents for adults and 10 cents for children between the hours of 3

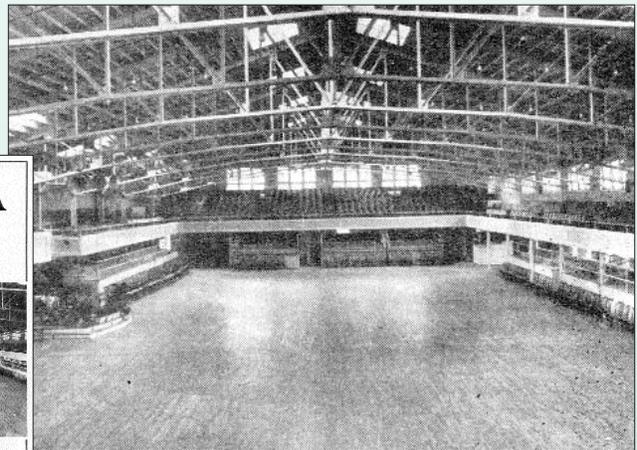


Scenes from the Past...

The massive Arcadia entertainment complex that once stood at 14th and Park Road actually evolved from a car barn.

photos—The Book of Washington; Washington Board of Trade, published 1925.

In this interior view, at right, one can clearly see how it was that diverse events such as boxing and wrestling, basketball, track, tennis, fashion shows, dances, lectures, and even large fairs could be accommodated.



THE ARCADIA

14th and Park Road N.W.
Washington's Madison Square Garden



This Beautiful Building The Auditorium in Which Houses— Can Be Held—

- Arcadia Sporting Club
- Beautiful Lounge
- Arcadia Market
- Auditorium
- Rest Rooms
- Bowling
- Billiards
- Dancing Classes
- Pocket Billiards
- Small Ball Room
- Card Party Room



- Boxing Exhibitions
- Fashion Shows
- Basketball
- Track Meets
- Tennis
- Fairs
- Dances
- Lectures
- Ceremonials
- Exhibitions
- Wrestling Matches

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ARCADIA
 MARKET & AMUSEMENT CO.
 INCORPORATED 1910
 1420 STREET AND PARK ROAD
 WASHINGTON, D.C. 20004, 20011, 20012, 20013

DIRECTORS
 HENRY W. A. BLOOMER
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photo—The Book of Washington; Washington Board of Trade, published 1927.

This advertisement for the Arcadia appeared in the Washington Board of Trade's 1927 edition of its *Book of Washington*, highlighting many of the activities held in the building, which was topped by the distinctive rotating light fixture seen here.

and 6 pm. Prices in the evening hours were raised to 25 and 15 cents, respectively.

The carnival midway portion of the building featured alluring attractions such as the "Mysterious Japanese and Crystal Maze," the "Down and Outside," the "Soup Bowl," the "Cave of the Winds" (or "Cyclone Tunnel,"), and the "Human Roulette Wheel," which could carry as many as 50 patrons as long as they could manage to stay on the twirling device. Ultimately, entire fairs and exhibitions were held within the enclosed facility. The Arcadia Market and Amusement Company advertised their building as "Washington's Madison Square Garden" in the 1925 *Book of Washington*, published by the Washington Board of Trade.

The Arcadia was reviewed in the magazine *Moving Picture* in 1910 by an anonymous reader that wrote, "It is jammed every night, all the evening, in spite of the fact that one must enter the building, walk up stairs and down a long hall . . . you will find one new and two old releases nightly, three full reels for a nickel." The building's large ball-

room opened on March 12, 1910, in which formal dance "hops" were held on Wednesday evenings for a charge of 50 cents per couple. It was also the venue for dance classes, fashion shows, formal dances, ceremonies, lectures, and private parties.

The building's picture garden was remodeled for the summer of 1913, but in January of 1919, the entire complex was remodeled, with a third floor space configured into another small dance hall; the space had been utilized prior as a practice facility for the World War I Army Signal Corps. Like many early amusement facilities in Washington, such as the building that now houses the 9:30 club at 815 V Street, the Great Depression ultimately led to their demise or demolition all together, and yet another of the city's neighborhood attractions would fade into the memory of all but a few.

—Paul Kelsey Williams
 Historic Preservation Specialist
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