



## **A History of Kings Island**

Kings Island opened its gates on April 29, 1972, serving as a replacement for Coney Island, an immensely popular amusement park located on the Ohio River 10 miles east of downtown Cincinnati.

Old Coney Island began sedately in the 1870's when an enterprising apple farmer named James Parker began to invite groups of people to picnic on his property along the banks of the Ohio River. His 400-fruit bearing trees tempted river travelers to stop and relax, and soon he was renting the place.

Captain William F. McIntyre bought the grove from Parker in 1886 for \$17,500. He built a dance platform there, created the Cincinnati Steamboat Company, and called the venture Ohio Grove – Coney Island of the West.

In the early 1920's Coney Island came upon hard times, however, when its steamboats were destroyed by fire at the Cincinnati wharf. (The first excursion boat to Coney Island was The Guiding Star, 1887. Others that followed were The Queen, 1907; The Morning Star, 1915; The Princess, 1918; The Island Maid, 1922; The Island Bell, 1927; the first Island Queen, 1932, and then a few years later, the second Island Queen.)

Then a Cincinnati shoe merchant named George F. Scott, together with a group of local businessmen, including William Cooper Procter, bought out the financially troubled park. With considerable new capital and great imagination they built the modern Coney Island.

Edward L. Scott, George's son, was named president of the park in the 1940's and 50's. His brother-in-law, Ralph Wachs, was president in the 1960's. In 1969, the park was sold to the Taft Broadcasting Company of Cincinnati due to the threat of competition from the new emerging "theme" parks and the annual flooding which took place there.

The purchase of Coney Island led Taft into the theme park industry, and due to frequent flooding, the company decided to build a replacement for Coney Island – Kings Island – in Kings Mills, Ohio, 20 miles north of Cincinnati. Coney Island closed September 6, 1971. Almost all of the rides were relocated to Kings Island.

Taft Broadcasting created the name of its new park from the previous landlord, the defunct King Power Company, which founded the town of Kings Mills for its workers.

The star attraction when Kings Island opened was the twin-track Racer roller coaster. Designed by legendary designer John Allen, the Racer is credited with starting the second golden age of roller coasters. In 1982, the trains on one side of the Racer were turned around backwards

making it the world's first full-length backwards-traveling wooden roller coaster. The backwards side was turned back around forward after the 2007 season.

Other roller coasters that opened with the park in 1972 were the Bavarian Beetle, a steel coaster brought over from Coney Island (removed in 1979), and Scooby Doo, a wooden coaster which was renamed "The Beastie" in 1979 and renamed again as "Fairly Odd Coaster" in 2006.

Also opening with the park in 1972 were the Antique Cars, Der Spinning Keggers, Enchanted Voyage, Grand Carousel, Haley's Comet, Kings Island and Miami Valley Railroad, Log Flume, Monster, Turnpike Cars, Rotor, Scrambler, Sky Ride, and Witch's Cauldrons.

The centerpiece of Kings Island in 1972 and still today is the Eiffel Tower, a one-third replica of the original Eiffel Tower in Paris, France.

The park received some of its first national exposure from two ABC sitcoms that filmed episodes at the park: *The Partridge Family* in 1972, and *The Brady Bunch* the following year.

On October 25, 1975, daredevil Evel Knievel successfully jumped 14 Greyhound buses at Kings Island, setting a new audience viewing record for ABC's *Wide World of Sports*, garnering a remarkable 52 household share when his performance was broadcast live. Knievel landed on the 14<sup>th</sup> bus, but managed to hold on in one his last big jumps.

On July 4, 1976, Kings Island played host to the wedding of Paul Revere of the pop rock band *Paul Revere & the Raiders*.

Throughout its history, Kings Island has always been known for its roller coasters. In 1979, Kings Island unveiled the longest, fastest and tallest wooden roller coaster in the world at the time – The Beast! Nearly 30 years later, The Beast still holds the world record as the world's longest wooden roller coaster at 7,419 feet and is arguably the greatest wooden roller coaster ever built. In 1981, Kings Island unveiled the world's first suspended roller coaster, The Bat. In 1984, King Cobra opened as the first stand-up coaster in the world. In 1987, the park introduced Vortex, the world's first roller coaster with six inversions. Son of Beast, marketed as the sequel to The Beast, opened in 2000. The coaster, which is the tallest and fastest wooden roller coaster in the world, opened with a vertical loop making it the first-ever wooden coaster to incorporate a steel loop in an otherwise wooden structure. The loop, however, was removed after the 2006 season when the park switched to lighter, more comfortable trains.

In 1989, Kings Island opened WaterWorks, a family water park featuring several slides, a wave pool and several other water attractions. An expansion of WaterWorks occurred in 1997, followed by a major renovation and expansion in 2004, which included a name change to Boomerang Bay Waterpark Resort.

In 1982, Kings Island introduced a Christmas event called Winterfest, which ran from Thanksgiving through December 31. The International Street Fountains were turned into an ice-skating rink. The train and Carousel operated during Winterfest, which also featured Holiday-themed shops and restaurants. The event ended after 10 years in 1992, but returned for one additional season in 2005.

Today, Kings Island is owned by Cedar Fair Entertainment Company and features more than 80 rides, shows and attractions, including 14 thrill-inducing roller coasters, a 15-acre Australian-themed waterpark, and a seven-time, award-winning kids' area. In the fall, the park transforms into the biggest, baddest and just plain scariest Halloween event around with the Halloween Haunt.