

FRIEDHEIM'S POND

By Paul Gettys

Rock Hill is today known as the home of an award-winning Department of Parks, Recreation and Tourism (PRT) which provides a multitude of parks and programs for the citizens and visitors. However, early in its history, the city was not involved in providing recreational activities. The first public park was Confederate Park, opened in 1924, a twelve-acre park on North Confederate Avenue on land provided by the White family.¹ This article seeks to outline what is known about a private park operated by the Friedheim family which became a popular recreation site for the citizens of Rock Hill in the late Nineteenth Century. It is sometimes referred to as “Friedheim’s Pond” and at other times “Friedheim’s Park.” The information is taken largely from various issues of *The Rock Hill Herald* and *The Yorkville Enquirer*. Anyone who has additional information is invited to submit it to Roots and Recall.

Several brothers of the Friedheim family began settling in Rock Hill shortly after the Civil War. A German Jewish family, the Friedheims operated one of the city’s most important mercantile businesses on Main Street for almost a century, and members of the family became leaders in other areas of civic and business life. The first reference I have found to the property which eventually developed into Friedheim’s Pond was from 1884, when it was reported that “The Friedheim Brothers let the water out of their pond last week and found in it 188 fine German carp. They will place a fence around the pond and restock it.”² There is no indication in this notice that the pond was open to the public, but later that year it was reported that “Friedheim’s Pond is a popular spot with the young people. Many a match will be made under the shade of the old oaks and the magnificent springs.”³ This seems to indicate that the property was already accessible to the public and a well-known spot.

The next summer, it was reported that Friedheim Park continued to grow in popularity and that crowds of strollers could be seen there every afternoon. The pure waters of the springs were enjoyed by all and it was described as the most attractive place in Rock Hill.⁴ A new boat, built by Overcash and Flowers, was launched in the pond in July 1885, presumably available to the

¹ Lynn Willoughby, *The “Good Town” Does Well: Rock Hill, SC 1852-2002*, published by the Sesquicentennial Committee, 2002. Page 157.

² *Rock Hill Herald*, April 24, 1884.

³ *Rock Hill Herald*, August 18, 1884.

⁴ *Rock Hill Herald*, July 2, 1885.

public.⁵ It is not known if these two men were paid for building the boat. It is likely that they were J. H. Overcash, a downtown merchant who lived at 409 West Main Street, and T. O. Flowers. He lived at 331 East Main Street and worked at Rock Hill Supply Company. Flowers later was a policeman and the Building Inspector for Rock Hill for many years.

The next winter, the pond provided a different kind of recreation. In January 1886, it was reported “The ice was three to four inches thick last week on Friedheim’s Pond, and the young people had a pleasant time skating. The pond was full of users each day with skaters even late into the evening.”⁶ By that summer, the Friedheim Brothers were adding other attractions, including a small zoo. They added a large cage, divided into three sections. In one were a number of rabbits, in the second squirrels and guinea pigs, and the third was reserved for birds, which had not yet arrived. “This provides children with a new amusement. The community owes a great debt to the brothers Friedheim for their support of the park.⁷ The next year, the park was described by the *Rock Hill Herald* as “A pretty resort for parties in the summer,” and attractions included were fishing, a fountain, boating, and walks around the pond.⁸

Public recreation was not the only use for the pond. In the summer of 1887, the Rock Hill Fire Department acquired a new Silsby steam fire engine to replace the old horse-drawn fire wagons. The city was building cisterns downtown to store water for the steam engine, but the cisterns had not yet filled sufficiently. Anxious to try the new contraption, the firemen took it to Friedheim’s Pond. “The cisterns not yet being completed, the engine was taken to the pond of the Friedheim Brothers, where a large number of our citizens, including several ladies, had assembled to see the engine tested.”⁹ Not everyone appreciated the wildlife at the pond. “Mr. William Stoll killed a blue crane on the Friedheim Brothers fish pond yesterday morning that measured six feet four inches from tip to tip of the wings, and five feet from the bill to the end of the feet.”¹⁰ This was likely a Great Blue Heron. Hunters in that day killed any large bird, on the theory that they might be predators on pets and livestock.

Perhaps the best and most complete description of Friedheim’s Pond was provided by an interview in the *Rock Hill Herald* in April 1969 with J. Y. Scruggs, the retired City Engineer. Scruggs grew up near the pond. He reported “My father took me there many times when I was a boy. It was such a nice place and it was called Friedheim’s Pond.” Scruggs reported that Julius Friedheim owned hundreds of acres in the western part of the city, including the present area of Wilson Street. The park “was all wooded, with huge oak trees. The grass was kept mowed and there was a small picket fence around a sort of small park where he kept several deer.” He

⁵ *Rock Hill Herald*, July 6, 1885.

⁶ *Yorkville Enquirer*, January 21, 1886.

⁷ *Rock Hill Herald*, June 3, 1886.

⁸ *Rock Hill Herald*, January 6, 1887.

⁹ *Yorkville Enquirer*, August 3, 1887.

¹⁰ *Yorkville Enquirer*, August 17, 1887

explained that the pond originated from a clear-flowing spring. There was a spring house where women in the neighborhood brought earthen crocks of butter and milk to be kept cool. “Mr. Friedheim built a dam about one hundred feet beyond where Wilson Street is now and the flow of that spring formed what everyone called Friedheim’s Pond.”¹¹

It is not known at this time how long the people of Rock Hill enjoyed the pleasures of Friedheim’s Pond. The area developed in the late Nineteenth Century. The Globe Mill, later called the Victoria Mill, was built to the west in 1889-1890, and then the Arcade Mill was developed in 1896. Each mill had a mill village with a number of houses and new streets. Perhaps this development impacted the park. In the early 1890s, the Oakland development began, and it included Oakland Park, a large landscaped area with a lake, curving roads, and a pavilion. “Going Out To Oakland” became a pastime for Rock Hill residents. Oakland Park later became the nucleus of the Winthrop University campus.

At any rate, Friedheim’s Pond ceased to be used, and Mr. Scruggs reported in 1969 that the dam for the pond was washed out about thirty years before (around 1930). At the time of the interview, the spring still flowed between Wilson Street and the Southern Railway, although largely obstructed by brush and undergrowth. At the time, housing projects were being developed in the area. Nearby is Pond Street.

Friedheim’s Pond was a remarkable gift to the people of Rock Hill from the family in the time before there was a concept of public recreation.

¹¹ *Rock Hill Herald*, April 7, 1969.