

Adventure Land

For a handful of glorious summers in the late 1950s and early 1960s, West Newbury was home to the wild, wild west and other wonders. Adventure Land, located across I-95 in the corner of West Newbury that now is home to the State Police barracks, offered many adventures—some intended, many not.

On December 13, 1956, the Town of West Newbury granted a [permit](#) “for the operation of a family type entertainment ... consisting of displays representing Mother Goose nursery rhymes, children’s stories, plus a western village and a shopping area; also to erect suitable signs on both sides of the ... highway for the advertising of this business.” NY developer [George Spalt](#), who had opened [Storyland](#) in Hyannis, purchased the Scotland Road property, along with adjacent land in Newbury. Spalt quickly completed [Adventure Land](#)—comprising Storyland, Animal Land, Dodge City, and Fort Apache—in time for grand opening on June 15, 1957.

With modern progress the prevailing mood, Adventure Land was part of a 1957 building boom: it would anchor the eastern end of Town, while at the west end just beyond Groveland a new shopping center was planned. “And,” said the [Newburyport Daily News](#), “in between these two eagerly awaited developments, of course, will be the beautiful and modern new regional junior and senior high school.” In 1958 the [Daily News](#) predicted enormous success for Spalt’s theme parks: “within the next five years his vast operations will probably extend along the entire Eastern seaboard.” After a [scouting mission to Disneyland](#), in 1959 Spalt added a [Comstock railroad](#) and a 70’ high x 66’ long three-masted [pirate ship](#) on a rocky crag (which outcrop still looms over the interstate highway), advertising Adventure Land.

Animal Land, under the auspices of “Great White Hunter” [Harold Fox from upstate New York](#), featured such creatures as a lion, wildcats, a kangaroo, and “[b]eautifully plumaged ducks.” Menagerie escapees provided many an unexpected adventure. A couple of monkeys got loose and were, [it was reported](#), last “seen in the A&P parking lot area at about 8:30 Saturday morning.” Throughout the summer of 1957, a couple of [West African Barbary sheep](#) were on the lam, happily grazing

about the Newburys. When cornered in September, one of them refused to be taken alive, and instead “[hanged himself on a piece of rope](#) which was around his neck at the time of capture.”

According to reminiscences of former Adventure Land cowboy [Bob Burns](#), he and his fellow cowpokes were expected to conduct animal roundups when not otherwise occupied robbing the saloon, performing daredevil horseback riding, holding up the stagecoach and/or train, fending off Indian attacks, or engaging in periodic scheduled gunfights. Burns reported that a jailbreaking bear once headed for the high ground, climbing three stories up in the pirate ship. Burns and his compadre brought the bear in—but not without damages inflicted by the indignant escapee. The “annual pig catch,” performed with more advance planning, was “perhaps the most fun,” Burns averred.

Adventure Land’s golden future quickly tarnished in the 1960s. [In 1960](#), it was fined for labor law violations. Before the 1961 season opened, George Spalt advertised “[FOR SALE OR LEASE](#)” an amusement park on a superhighway 30 miles from Boston: “can handle 8000 people in one day, has netted \$70,000 in season, own ¼ million invested by out of state owner, price \$175,000, liberal terms.” Later that year, upon opposition from neighbors and the West Newbury police, a liquor license was denied to “[Park Picnics, formerly Adventure Land](#).”

In 1962 the park experienced the theft of [15 hand guns](#), and was offered for sale at [\\$100,000](#). Adventure Land reopened in 1963—its final year of operation. [Waltham’s Cusano brothers](#) (plastering contractors) infused new money and management, to no avail. In 1965 Adventure Land went into foreclosure and, with [no property taxes paid in 1964 and 1965](#), came close to becoming a tax taking adventure for West Newbury. The [pirate ship burned in 1966](#); over time use of land for the police barracks and I-95 expansion largely erased the place.

Adventure Land lives in the [memories](#) and reminiscences of children who visited and young adults who worked there. And, thanks to Pentucket High School filmmakers, anyone can visit Adventure Land today, free of charge, just by clicking [here](#).

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Source for all photos: <http://nbptma.com/2014/01/amusement-parks/>

