

Midway Gardens/Ballroom ca. 1920-1987

Almost 40 years have passed since a well-known landmark that brought memories of good times at Cedar Lake came to an unfortunate end. Yet, for those who remember Midway Gardens/Ballroom from their experiences continue to relive them in their memories. They still hear the songs and the dance steps that they took in their minds.

In 1920, George Hetzler inherited property at northeast Cedar Lake after his father Adam passed away in May of that year. It was about that time that George leased lakefront property to two Chicago doctors who built a pier on the lake that consisted of a dance pavilion. It is not exactly known what early performers were here, but Jazz and Swing music were popular. But by the time that the Great Depression hit, the two doctors abandoned their business and went back to Chicago. However, George continued this very lucrative enterprise.

By the 1930s and 1940s, Jazz and Swing music was joined with Big Band. Performers like Jimmy and Tommy Dorsey, Ken Nowlan, Mickey Isely, Tony Pastor, Les Elgart, and Les Brown played here. For a brief period in the 1930s, Midway Gardens even had public weddings and held bathing beauty contests. During the 1940s, Guy Colby from W.L.S. came out on Friday nights for the barn dances.

Then, by about 1946 George's nephew James Kubal purchased the dance pavilion and about 1950, the name changed from Midway Gardens to Midway Ballroom. Right after World War II, returning servicemen could buy a dance here for 25 cents. At this time Indiana state law required that a hotel with a minimum of 25 rooms was needed to serve alcohol, so James moved the Top Flight Hotel owned by his mother Mary across the street and joined it with the pavilion. The hotel had a restaurant, so they started serving food. In addition, some of the musicians occasionally slept in the hotel rooms. During this time performers included Chuck Foster, Jim

Lounsbury, The Diamonds, Stan Kenton, Woody Herman, the Glenn Miller Band and Frankie Yankovic. However, the with the next decade, the style of music changed at Midway.

By the 1960s, Rock and Roll was the popular music. Believe it or not performers included Bobby Rydell, the Everly Brothers and the Beach Boys. Other acts included the Buckingham, the Kingsmen and Little Peggy March. There were even local groups. At this time one of them was the Dick Sterling Quartet. During this time, it cost a dollar to get into the ballroom. Those on Those caught trying to get in were kicked out and they had a strict dress code and did not allow blue jeans. Those with boats would set anchor and listen to music for free. Yet, again, the music changed.

In the 1970s, the music went to Country-Western. According to Brian Kubal, his dad sold Midway to a group of Chicago investors and it became Midway Inn that included a restaurant called the Longhorn Restaurant and the building was painted yellow, orange, and other colors. Advertisements show that the Midway Inn lasted from about 1971 to 1972, then the investors defaulted and Jim painted the building solid brown as it previously was and changed the name back to Midway Ballroom. Despite this, the music stayed Country-Western. Well-known artists included Waylon Jennings, Conway Twitty, Barbara Mandrell and Johnny Paycheck.

Once Brian took over the family business in the 1980s, the music went back to Rock and Roll and is when it drew some of its biggest crowds. Some of the best names in Rock performed here like Survivor, Foghat, Steppenwolf, Iron Butterly, Grand Funk Railroad, and the local northwest Indiana band Pawnz. But then they say that good things do not last.

Unfortunately, at about 2:47 A.M., on 20 April, 1987, Midway Ballroom was completely engulfed in flames. According to Police Chief Jim Hunley, one officer on patrol went by northbound and did not see a thing but another one who was passing Eller-Brady Funeral Home

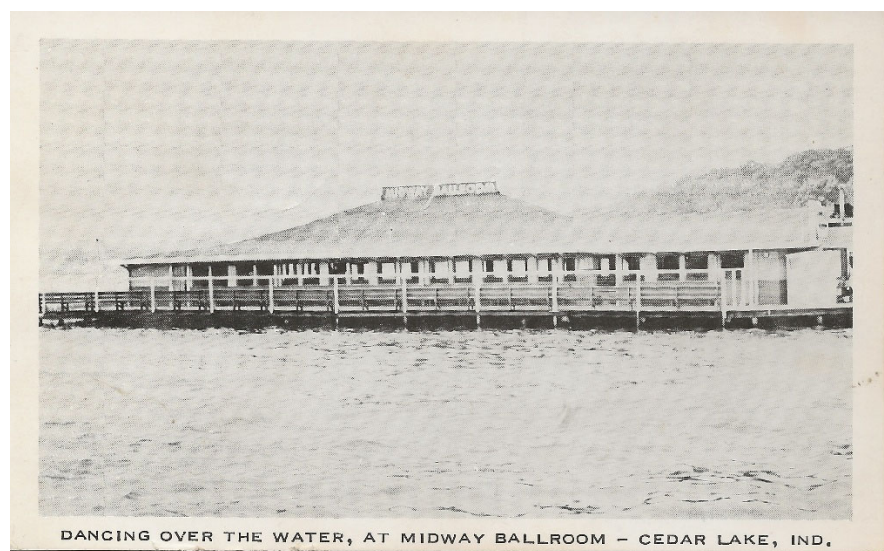
at the north end of the lake, saw flames from the back end of the building over the lake. By the time that officers arrived at the ballroom there was not much they could do. Cedar Lake, Lowell, and Lake Dalecarlia Fire Departments were called out to fight the blaze. Firefighters remained there until 9:00 A.M. to make sure the fire was completely extinguished. All that remained was a pile of charred and smoldering rubble floating on the lake and part of the front façade.

Brad Sandbert of Jasper County, a representative of the State Fire Marshall's Office was soon on the scene that morning to investigate the cause of the fire that apparently started in the northeast corner of the building. According to Police Chief Hunley, a gas meter was located at that part of the building and the gas was feeding the fire. NIPSCO had to come out and dig into the parking lot in front of the building to shut off the gas. The building was valued at \$175,000 by Brian Kubal and was seen as a total loss and there was no insurance.

After 67 years, the locally famous Midway Gardens/Ballroom ended. It was not just a complete devastation to the Kubal family but also to all of those who have had musical connections to this landmark that is long gone. Yet, their fond memories remain.



Midway Gardens, 1930s.



Midway Ballroom, 1950s.



Midway Ballroom fire, April 1987.



Midway Ballroom fire, April 1987.



Midway Ballroom fire, April 1987.

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