

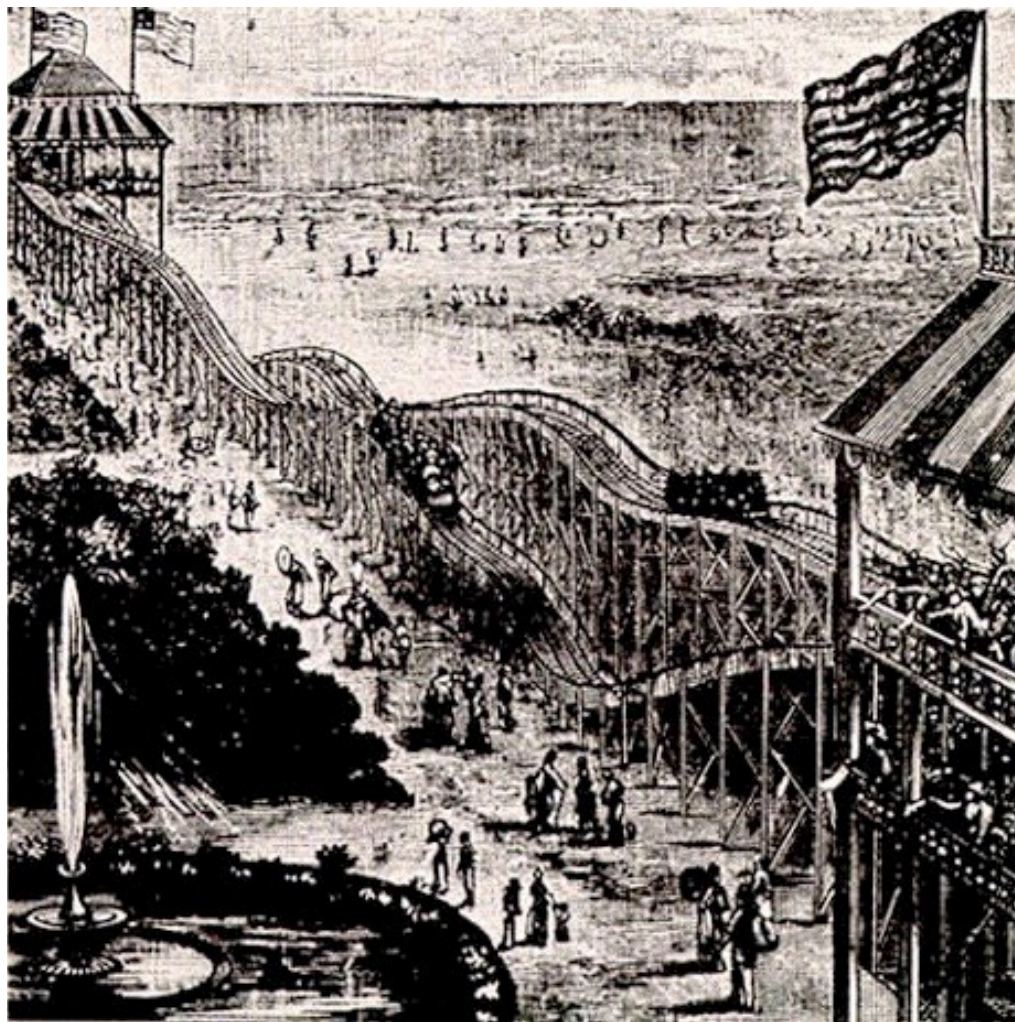
READING: WHY WE LOVE ROLLER COASTERS

The modern roller coaster descended from towering ice slides in Russia, which first appeared in the 17th century. Referred to as “Russian Mountains,” these slides provided entertainment throughout Russia, though they were most prevalent in the area that would later be known as St. Petersburg. Rising up between 70 and 80 feet in the air, the slides were made from lumber that was covered with several inches of ice and offered riders an exhilarating 50 degree drop. The slides were reinforced with wooden supports and had steps up the back for riders to climb before speeding down on sleds. Popular with the upper class, some slides were ornately decorated. An enthusiastic fan of the slides, Catherine the Great reportedly had several built on her property.

Historians debate who deserves credit for adding wheels and creating the roller coaster as we know it. Some contend that the Russians invented the first roller coaster, which was constructed in the Gardens of Oreinbaum in St. Petersburg in 1784. Other historians argue that the French are responsible for the first roller coaster.

Les Montagnes Russes à Belleville (The Russian Mountains of Belleville) was built in Paris and had many of the features we associate with the modern roller coaster, including guide rails, cars with wheels that lock to the track, and plenty of speed. It is also likely that Paris was home to the first permanent loop track, built in 1846 from an English design, and referred to as a “centrifugal railway.” It was constructed with a wheeled sled, which held one person and traveled through a 13-foot-high vertical loop.

In the 1820s, the United States made an impact on the development of the roller coaster. A mining company in Summit Hill, Pennsylvania, created an 8.7-mile downhill track in order to deliver coal to the town of Mauch Chunk. When the mine closed in the early 1870s, the track was dubbed “**Gravity Road**” and continued offering rides to thrill-seeking visitors for a price. A Sunday school teacher from Ohio, LaMarcus Adna Thompson, believed in the **potential** for wholesome fun that this type of entertainment could provide young people. He began to work on his own **gravity** switchback railway. In 1884, Thompson’s **Gravity** Pleasure Switchback Railway opened in Coney Island, and America’s first true roller coaster was born!



LaMarcus Thompson's Switchback Railway (1884)

Compare the Russian Slides from 17th Century to roller coasters as we know them now. What's the same? What's different?

What is the debate regarding the first roller coaster?

What was "Gravity Road" and what practical and recreational purposes did it serve?

How do you expect safety regulations (or laws) have changed as roller coaster technology has made different track shapes possible?