

HEADLINE: Documentarian seeks information about Beech Mountain's *Land of Oz*

Sophie Hughes

HIGH COUNTRY— A Los Angeles-based documentarian is seeking information about the long missing Dorothy dress from the Land of Oz amusement park on Beech Mountain.

A 1975 fire at the park coincided with the dress' disappearance, and these events have long been shrouded in mystery, creating speculation. The fire damaged the main building which housed offices and costumes, the park's amphitheater stage and gift shop. The park's museum was ransacked, and the Dorothy dress along with a bronze bust of Dorothy were discovered missing. Though the park remained open for the following few years, it closed in 1980 due to a decline in attendance.

Pete Ferrerio, the documentary's director, said that through his documentary he'd like to understand; "Why did someone do this to this place that we love so much"

The Land of Oz park was created after Charlotte-based designer Jack Pentes was sent to Beech Mountain by the developers of Carolina Caribbean Cooperation to develop an idea for the land. He believed the landscape was reminiscent of the MGM movie "Wizard of Oz", and began developing the idea for a theme park inspired by the fantastical Emerald city and Land of Oz as envisioned by author L. Frank Baum. During the design process, Pentes could be seen walking around the park on his hands and knees, to imagine the park from a child's perspective.

After its opening, the park was widely successful, attracting more than 400,000 visitors in its first season. After a gasoline crisis affected ticket sales, Carolina Caribbean Corp. filed for bankruptcy

before the fire would occur later that year. The park now operates on a seasonal basis after experiencing two other closures. For the creators of the “Land of Oz” documentary, Dorothy’s dress, as worn by Judy Garland in *The Wizard of Oz*, is of particular importance.

Land of Oz employees and park goers have expressed feelings of betrayal over the missing dress, which is widely believed to have been stolen.

While the upcoming documentary delves into community response, the documentarians have made it clear that their efforts are not to be conflated with a criminal investigation.

“To be clear, this isn’t a witch hunt. We would just like to know what happened to Dorothy’s dress,” said Ferriero.

While the purpose isn’t to bring someone to justice, Sean Barrett, a collaborator on the film and former Land of Oz employee, said any information would help build a timeline. They are welcoming anecdotes, photographs, videos, journal entries, or any other archival materials, and stated that they would respect anonymity with tips. According to Barrett, even small details; such as the weather that day, are helpful.

Many theories surround the disappearance of the dress. According to Ferriero, the most popular is that a sister company to Land of Oz started the fire to take the dress in for insurance purposes. Another theory suggests a disgruntled park balloon operator took the dress. None of these

theories have been proven, and according to the Beech Mountain Police Department, the dress was not reported as stolen.

While the Land of Oz amusement park's website claims the fire was set, the State Bureau of Investigation said there are no reports of arson related to Beech Mountain during that time.

Ferriero has been working on the project since 2023 and it remains in production, with a mission under way to find the dress. Those with information regarding the events surrounding the *Land of Oz* fire and stolen property are encouraged to contact Ferriero through his email, peter@sunspotfilms.com.

Call Land of Oz for their perspective

- Try phone and Facebook
- 1 Yellow Brick Rd, Beech Mountain, NC 28604

Called Josh Hawk- SBI

-Couldn't find anything in the system regarding arson claims or the dress being reported as stolen

Call Land of Oz and ask if they have theories or why they believe the fire was "set".

