

Way We Were

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Up, Up and Away!

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As a child growing up in central Illinois, I would, once in a blue moon, see a hot air balloon or two float gently over the corn fields that surrounded my family's farmhouse. They were so magical to me, and I delighted in spotting the colorful patterns in the sky and waving to the tiny people in the baskets above. I always secretly hoped one would land in my backyard, and I promised myself one day I would be up there looking down.

A few years ago, I was finally able to cross that off my bucket list. The weather was perfect, and I couldn't have been happier floating above the green rolling hills of Pennsylvania. When I first moved to Park City, I could often spot hot air balloons dotting the sky from my apartment, and it felt like home.

Imagine my disappointment when I learned that Park City used to host a hot air balloon festival in the fall, called Autumn Aloft. As the Curator here at the Park City Museum, I have occasionally come across items in the collection that relate to this event, and wondered the story behind it.

The first Autumn Aloft in Park City was September 16 – 19, 1983. The festival was billed as “a celebration of the 200th anniversary of man's first flight”.¹ Indeed, the first untethered manned flight was performed in a hot air balloon in 1783 by two Frenchmen. The idea for the balloon festival started with Park City resident and ballooning enthusiast Gene Moser and his friends Spence Smith and Dr. Tom Nevison; they set out to create the “classiest balloon rally in the world.”²

More than 8,500 people attended the first Autumn Aloft, and nearly two dozen hot air balloons floated above the Park Meadows Golf Course. The Smithsonian sent its balloon *Treaty of Paris*, to commemorate the 200th anniversary. Gene Moser, president of the Park City Balloon Club, made his first solo flight as a balloon pilot that weekend.³

After a decade of successful festivals, Autumn Aloft was abruptly canceled. Some say it was because the festival became *too* successful, and outgrew its location in Park Meadows. Others sited lack of sponsorship and financial hardships.⁴ Either way, the end of Autumn Aloft left Park City a little less colorful.

There is good news for those of you who enjoy the magic of hot air balloons – Autumn Aloft is returning to Park City this weekend after a 20-year hiatus! There will be balloon launches on Saturday and Sunday mornings, and a balloon glow over Main Street on Saturday evening.

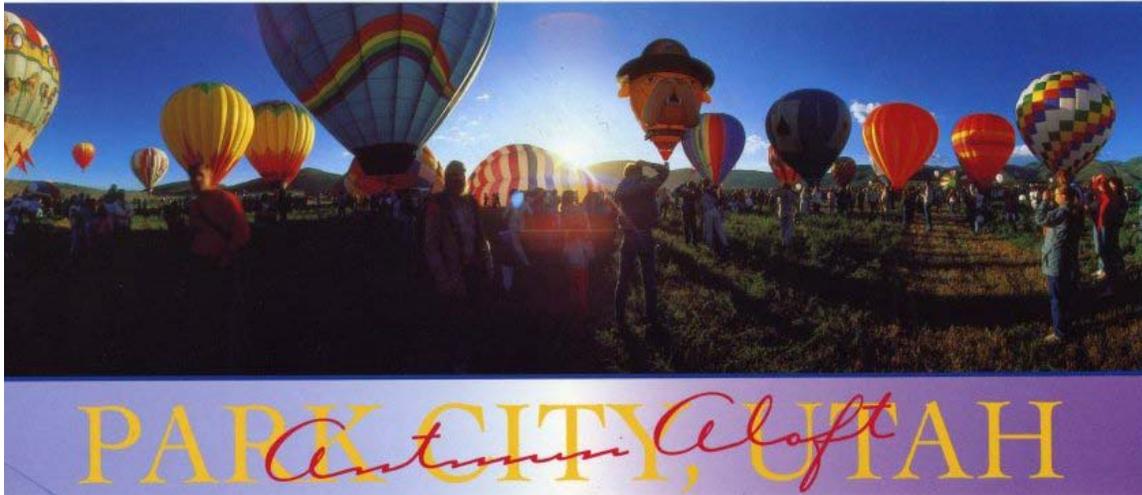
¹ Park Record, “Autumn Aloft Supplement,” September 15, 1983.

² Park City Magazine, “Delight in Flight,” Summer/Fall 2010.

³ Park Record, “Autumn Aloft Supplement,” September 15, 1983.

⁴ Deseret News, “Park City grounds balloon fest,” August 20, 1994.

The Park City Historical Society & Museum is celebrating 30 years of preserving, protecting, and promoting Park City's history and heritage.



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Caption: Postcard of Autumn Aloft, circa 1994

Credit: Park City Historical Society & Museum