

Wildwood Historical Society, Inc.



George F. Boyer Museum

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WildwoodHistoricalMuseum.com
3907 Pacific Avenue
Wildwood, NJ 08260

*Gathering, preserving and presenting
the Wildwoods' history*

2022 Museum Hours
April to Memorial Day, and Labor Day to Halloween:
Fridays and Saturdays 10 am - 3 pm
Sundays 12-5 pm
Memorial Day to Labor Day
Mondays, Wednesdays, Thursdays, Fridays and
Saturdays: 10 am - 3 pm
Sundays 12-5 pm.
Closed Tuesdays, Easter, Memorial Day, Labor Day

Issue 48. Winter/Spring 2022

Cafes and Bars of Wildwood Yesteryear

by Larry Lillo, Secretary

A few days ago, I was recalling some of the cafes and bars that were in Wildwood. It then came to my recollection just how many were near where I lived. Well, the first that came to my mind was right next door, the Pacific House located at Andrews and Pacific Avenues. It was destroyed by fire in 1966. The next street up in the middle of the 200 block of Burk Avenue was the old Philadelphia house, now gone, demolished. Going up to the next corner was Charlie Johnson's Cafe: 15 cent drafts and all the shrimp you could eat, Saturday and Sunday jam sessions. Now it is a liquor store.

Heading west to Burk and New Jersey avenues stood the 7 Seas. Great clam chowder and now an empty building, but it was recently renovated and sold. Turning south

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Urie's Fish Fry, the midcentury origins of Urie's Surf & Turf, now known as Urie's Restaurant.



(Above) The Philadelphia Hotel, once a Wildwood mainstay at 226 E. Burk Avenue. (Below) The Central Inn, formerly of 100 E. Taylor Avenue. Both photos were taken in 1960.



1 of 500: Scenes From a Unique Surf & Turf

by Rob Ascough, Treasurer

"This is one of the 500 best restaurants in the county," my father would boast every time we pulled into the parking lot. I think the idea of one of our annual traditions in our favorite vacation spot filled him with an immense sense of pride, as if it validated the Wildwoods or announced to the world it belonged on the main stage. I've never been able to uncover proof of the claim being true, and definitely never identified who might have made it, but also never had reason for doubt – if my father knew, there was no reason for questioning. Besides, we always had fantastic meals there, and the hour-long waits for a table suggested everyone knew what my father knew: Dinner at Urie's was an event.

Years ago, I remember Wildwood also being home to Urie's Surf & Turf, although you'll have to excuse me if the actual name of the place escapes my fading memory. We never went there, likely because the "real" Urie's restaurant (as we called it; the one that still stands to this day at the

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1 of 500: Scenes from a Unique Surf & Turf

by Rob Ascough, Treasurer

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foot of the George Redding Bridge) always offered food in both the surf and turf varieties, meaning everyone in the family could get whatever it was they desired. It was the flounder that swam in the dreams of me and my father, possibly leaving behind an actual trail of breadcrumbs – it never tasted as good as it did while on summer vacation, and never as good as it tasted at Urie's.

Because Urie's has been an enormous place since before I can remember, it was often a challenge finding a place to park. My father would let my mother out at the front door so she could put our name on the waiting list while he drove up and down the rows of parked cars, the sound of crushed seashells crunching beneath the yacht-sized family station wagon's tires forever etched into my brain like zeros and ones onto a compact disc (remember those?). We might as well have moored the Ascough vessel somewhere on the perimeter of Grassy Sound by the time we found something.

Today, the space to the left of the main entrance to the building is a small arcade; years ago it was a gift shop, and before that the gift shop was a trailer-like structure in the middle of the parking lot (I can't recall what the more-recent gift shop was before it was a gift shop.) We'd find my mother there after having given the hostess our information, and it seemed she didn't leave until she examined every single sea-worthy item for sale. After a few minutes, me and my brother would get bored and walk along the water between Urie's and the (then) newly-constructed Boat-house Restaurant with my father close behind, reminding us not to venture onto the dock and board anything. It was difficult to resist – boats were always sitting there unattended with nothing to prevent curious children from satisfying their newly-discovered maritime tendencies. That, and we were getting impatient. The long wait for a table at Urie's meant a night on the boardwalk wasn't on the horizon.

"Relax, it's one of the 500 best restaurants in the country," my father reminded.

Eventually our name would be called and we'd get seated, always in the back dining room at a table adjacent to the floor-to-ceiling netting with carved wooden seagulls attached to it. It was comfortable, like a second home, although we wondered why we were never seated elsewhere inside the gigantic catacomb-like structure. My father has always suspected restaurants set aside sections for families so the ones with unruly kids didn't disturb other guests without kids. Looking back, I wonder if the back room in Urie's was a non-smoking section. Hard to believe but when I was a kid (not too, too long ago) restaurants had smoking and non-smoking sections, and despite my mother being a smoker she never lit up a cigarette at the dinner table and hated when others did.

A meal at Urie's today feels much like the ones we used to enjoy despite the wooden seagulls having flown off, perhaps in search of the gift shop that's no longer filled to the brim with seashore-themed tchotchke. The salad comes in bowls for the entire table, the butter for the bread remains perfect little individually-wrapped rectangles, and golden brown mozzarella sticks and fried flounder can all be enjoyed against a backdrop of boat traffic on the waterway in the near distance while a band performs on the tropical-themed outdoor patio. Urie's, like most things in the Wildwoods, has changed throughout the years (not always for the better, but this isn't the proper venue for that kind of conversation.) Still, when it comes to memories, it's a delightful beast – a 500-pound beast, in fact.

"It used to be one of the 500 best restaurants in the country," my father will recite to this day.

Museum Minutes: Looking Back and Forward

by Taylor Henry, President

The year 2021 was a strong comeback year for our museum.

We saw a resurgence of summer visitors after the pandemic affected '20 attendance. The fall car show -- moved to Pacific Avenue while the boardwalk undergoes structural repairs -- gave us our busiest weekend ever.

Our board welcomed Chris Pohle as our new Vice President, John Seprico as Board Member, and Al Brannen as Emeritus. President Taylor Henry received the Young Preservationist Award from Preservation NJ (right), an honor given to someone under 40 making significant contributions to the state's preservation field.

We had another successful **sign auction** last year, totaling \$11,000 in revenue from west-side street signs like Arctic, Park and Hudson, plus neons from the Tom Cat Diner. For the past few years, the City of Wildwood has donated old signs as they've been replaced, and we are extremely grateful because the auctions have been some of our most successful fundraisers ever. This summer, we will list the highly sought-after **Pacific Avenue signs** thanks to the city's generosity. Stay tuned on wildwoodhistoricalmuseum.com for details including streets, starting dates and bids!

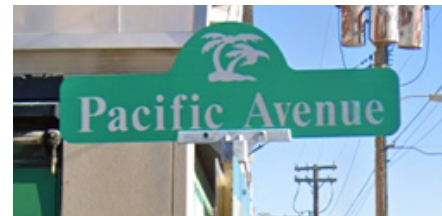
Jackson Betz, a Board Member and longtime volunteer, is the author of new book **Motels of Wildwood: Postwar to Present**, which you can preorder on [Amazon Smile](https://www.amazon.com) (be sure to select us as your benefiting charity)! Pending a spring release date, the release party and signing is scheduled to take place at our museum **April 30 from 12-3 pm** (but check wildwoodhistoricalmuseum.com as the date approaches to confirm). We are thrilled for Jackson, who has spent years writing this definitive compendium.

Mike Jasorka, author of graphic novel *Wildwood Days of Doo Wop* (available in our gift shop and at wildwoodhistoricalmuseum.com/shop) will soon release a **comic on Castle Dracula**. In our next newsletter we will announce the date and details on a release party for that, plus a panel discussion featuring several authors of Wildwoods books. You can, however, follow us at [facebook.com/wwhistoricalsociety](https://www.facebook.com/wwhistoricalsociety) to find out sooner.

Our collection of artifacts is always growing. We recently received **donations** including a Groff's Uniform from Linda Smith Izett; Raging Waters T-Shirt and Bars of Wildwood t-shirt from Edward & Margarita Gordon; Policeman, John Gares' uniform jackets (officer who shot "Tuffy") from Susan Gares Farrell; Vintage box lot of postcards from Lynn Boyer's garage; Bar Rail from Shamrock Bar from Mike Budd; Pierre's Restaurant Sign from Charles Eyster; Sightseer Life Preserver and 2 child's Mae West jackets, brass nozzle WHS, Fire Hat from Kevin T. Murray Sr.; and so much more. Although there isn't enough room to name all of them here, we thank ALL of our generous donors!

The museum is **seeking new volunteers** who are passionate about the Wildwoods' history. If you have skills in organization, building care and maintenance, day-to-day cleaning, clerical work, customer service, or retail, or if you have interest in joining our digital preservation team, please send a resume and email expressing your interest to wildwoodhistoricalsociety@hotmail.com.

The museum is closed for the winter but will reopen and resume our spring hours in April. We look forward to seeing you then!



Why A Museum?

Recent PA Amusement Park Razing Echoes Painful Loss of Hunt's Pier

by Rob Ascough, Treasurer

As I compose this after dinner on January 4th, one of the corners of the internet I frequent is ablaze over news of the Blue Streak roller coaster at Conneaut Lake Park having caught fire. Even if you're one of the few readers of this newsletter familiar with an old amusement park in northwest Pennsylvania, you're probably wondering how it connects to the Wildwoods. For that bit of information, I won't keep you waiting: There is no direct link. Yet still, there is something to be appreciated about this if you are a supporter of a history-minded organization like the Wildwood Historical Society.

The CliffsNotes version of the story: Conneaut Lake Park, dating back to 1892, spent much of the last three decades as an unlikely survivor, having endured crushing debt, various fires destroying historic buildings, and increased competition from other area amusement parks. It was the determination of the park's supporters that kept it alive under the oversight of a non-profit that resulted in volunteers rehabilitating the property and its classic rides like the carousel, Devil's Den, and iconic Blue Streak.

Finally having paid down back taxes owed and looking better than it had in years, the future for Conneaut Lake Park was looking up when new ownership took control early in 2021. Initially providing further optimism, fans and followers of the park grew skeptical when old rides were unceremoniously scrapped and ownership refused to comment on the future of the remainder of the amusements. Rumors of the Blue Streak's demise circulated for months, and tonight's news of the wooden structure having caught fire surprised no one. The roller coaster was in the process of being demolished and a "controlled burn" of the wood debris claimed much of what was still standing at the time. Burned along with the Blue Streak were 120 years of history and the selfless efforts of countless people who believed it deserved to be preserved.

For me, the news brought back awful memories of the summer of 1989 when we arrived in Wildwood for our summer vacation to discover the Flyer roller coaster I'd fallen in love with the previous year had been demolished along with most everything else of historic, nostalgic value on Hunt's Pier. I recalled having shed many tears over the realization of never again being able to enjoy something that had become so close to my heart, like having lost a dear friend. The real estate of the Wildwoods is littered with hundreds of structures that replaced other structures that meant so much to people – hotels, motels, houses, restaurants, stores, and even places of worship. Everyone has their Conneaut Lake

Park Blue Streak; everyone has their Hunt's Pier Flyer. Everyone has something they wish they could still touch and experience.

As someone without the financial means or the political clout to make a meaningful difference, it shines light on a problem plaguing preservation-minded individuals – how to balance the desire to save the past while simultaneously being at the mercy of property owners being

Cafes and Bars of Wildwood Yesteryear

by Larry Lillo, Secretary

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at Taylor and New Jersey Aves. was the Central Inn, now the Dogtooth Grill. Looking east to Taylor and Atlantic was the Lucky Club with all its great entertainment. Now if you want to go an extra block in any direction you would find Grande's, Johnny's and the Anchor Inn, which have now all been all demolished.

Kelly's and Delaney's (gone) was just another block away, but nearby was Russo's and Rickey's across from the harbor area. I could keep going on and on just walking a few more blocks. Most of these places had good food, good crowds, music and the lore of the summer folks. If you went to any of these places you would recall the great times you had eating and drinking and enjoying the wonderful summers in the Wildwoods.

I enjoyed all these places and the best part of it, I did not have to walk far.



The Lucky Club at Taylor and Atlantic Avenues, shown here in 1960, was once a popular nightclub.

free to do as they wish with their assets. Even a covenant issued by the Pennsylvania Historical and Museums Commission wasn't enough to save Conneaut Lake Park from demolition and eventual redevelopment. The Blue Streak is now a historical footnote, as is the Satellite Motel, Jack Rabbit/Scream Machine, and Starlight Ballroom.

I'm further conflicted because on one hand, I'm thrilled to be part of an organization staffed with and supported by individuals with the same intense passion as those who worked for years to give Conneaut Lake Park another chance of survival. When visitors walk in the doors of our George F. Boyer museum, they're warmly enveloped by hundreds of remnants and thousands of photos depicting the rich history of the Wildwoods. All the unpaid hours invested by volunteers become worth the sacrifices when one of those countless artifacts connects with a visitor – they either smile, laugh, or cry as they tell anyone within earshot why one specific memory means so much.

On the other hand, it's frustrating how so little can be done in the realm of preservation. While the photos of the Hunt's Pier Flyer covering one of the Boyer's many walls simultaneously make me smile, laugh, and cry, I sure wish I could walk to the boardwalk for another ride instead of living through memories in a museum. Still, we are lucky, because those with a connection to the Wildwoods have a wonderful organization and museum to keep history alive. I can only hope those with a connection to Conneaut Lake Park can claim to have the same.

Then and Now



The Martha Shop (formerly the Konowitch Bros' grocery store) and Tot Town are shown occupying these two storefronts at 3405-3407 Pacific Avenue in 1960.



Today, the two storefronts have been combined into Hooked On Books, a Wildwood institution that Kieran Linnane opened in 1990.

Our Team

Taylor Henry, *President*
 Chris Pohle, *Vice President*
 Rob Ascough, *Treasurer*
 Larry Lillo, *Secretary*
 Jackson Betz, *Board Member & Newsletter*
 John Serpico, *Board Member*
 Al Brannen, *Emeritus*
 Bob Scully, *Emeritus*

Managers: Kathi Johnson, Jim Adair

Volunteers: Inge Laine, Judy Carr, Vicki Bundschu, Anne Vinci, Lew Vinci, Al Alven, Mark Giuseppe

The Wildwood Historical Society, Inc. received an operating support grant administered by the Cape May County Culture & Heritage Commission, from funds granted by the New Jersey Historical Commission.

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Other ways you can donate!



FOR CHARITY 



Membership

Please renew your membership if you haven't done so recently! If you have already done so, thank you! Donations are welcome, too! Membership donations help cover the costs of newsletters and mailings, and help us keep the lights on at the museum!

Visit wildwoodhistoricalmuseum.com to renew your membership, view past newsletters, buy items from our gift shop, and get a hit of Wildwoods history!

For more Wildwoods nostalgia, vintage photos and museum updates, subscribe to our free monthly E-newsletter! Visit wildwoodhistoricalmuseum.com

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