

Wildwood Historical Society, Inc.



George F. Boyer Museum

609.523.0277

WildwoodHistoricalMuseum.com

3907 Pacific Avenue
Wildwood, NJ 08260

*Gathering, preserving and presenting
the Wildwoods' history*

2021 Museum Hours

*Hours from Easter Weekend to Memorial Day
and Labor Day to Halloween:*

Fridays and Saturdays 10 am - 3 pm

Sundays 12-5 pm

Hours Memorial Day - Labor Day

Mondays, Wednesdays, Thursdays,

Fridays and Saturdays 10 am - 3 pm

Sundays 12-5 pm

Closed Tuesdays

Issue 47. Summer/Fall 2021

Wildwood History Quiz

Our secretary Larry Lillo made up this quiz of Wildwood nostalgia! Take the quiz and see how much you remember! The answers are on page 3 - no cheating!

1. Where was the original 3rd Ward lifeguard station?
2. What was the original name of the Hell Hole ride?
3. Where was Shaffer's Hot Dog stand?
4. Where was Joe Mauti's pizza store?
5. If you got a sandwich from Mike & Mary, where were you?
6. Where was Gittle's Candy Store located?

The Sun Deck Apartments: A Well-Loved Wildwood Oasis

by Jackson Betz, Board Member

While flashy attractions like roller coasters, the boardwalk, and bright neon signs often make the cut for postcards of the Wildwoods, ask anybody who has vacationed here and they will say that many of their memories involve sitting around the pool of some small rooming house, motel, or apartment building on a side street of Wildwood. It's often the plain, unpretentious, mom-and-pop places that serve as the setting for the best memories, and the Sun Deck Apartments, located almost across from the Wildwood Convention Center at Andrews and Ocean Avenue, are a prime example!

The Sun Deck began as a single apartment building around 1940. Benhardt (Ben) Schlenzig was a local carpenter who owned three consecutive blocks along Ocean Avenue in Wildwood. In 1939, he built the Ship Ahoy Apartments at Ocean and Taylor Avenues, a building that

still stands today, just moved several blocks away from the Ocean (at Washington and Baker Avenues, to be specific). About a year after that, Schlenzig built three more apartment buildings a block north of the Ship Ahoy, at Andrews and Ocean Avenues. These were the Sun Deck, Sun Dial,

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The Pacific Avenue Mall and the shops around it looked inviting at night, though as seen here, the mall hardly drew any customers.

Remembering the Pacific Avenue Mall

by Rob Ascough, Treasurer

I remember a time when you couldn't drive all the way down Pacific Avenue through the Wildwoods. That's because it suddenly transitioned into a pedestrian mall for a few blocks, closed off to vehicle traffic in the 1980s and 1990s. It was likely a brainstorm of the city's leaders believing the thoroughfare would be more appealing to businesses if their customers didn't have to worry about getting run down by a distracted tourist.

Watch the Dodge Caravan, please.

People of a younger age will associate me with an older generation because today one can drive Pacific Avenue uninterrupted, all the way from 26th Street in North Wildwood until it becomes Ocean Drive en route to Cape May. Of course there is a generation older than me remembering when that could be done, before it couldn't be done, before it could be done again.

Unlike other times I've looked back upon weeks of childhood summers spent in Wildwood, I have few memories of Pacific Avenue except for not having spent any time on Pacific Avenue. I'm under the impression my family wasn't alone, and the pedestrian mall didn't actually host too many pedestrians. Cape May got it right with their Washington Square Mall but Wildwood wasn't so lucky. (Maybe it's because Cape May didn't have the boardwalk to shame all other boardwalks, as Wildwood did. Or maybe Wildwood's pedestrian mall was ahead of its time.)

As last summer's pandemic threatened to decimate a much-needed summer season, statewide regulations forced the shutting of doors to indoor dining rooms. This figuratively

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Hanging out at the pool at the Sun Deck Apartments. (All Sun Deck photos shown here donated to the Wildwood Historical Society by the Schlenzig family)

Remembering the Pacific Avenue Mall

by Rob Ascough, Treasurer

(continued from page 1)

forced customers into the streets and, in the case of Pacific Avenue's restaurants, quite literally forced them into the street. Once again closed off to vehicle traffic roughly in the area of the defunct pedestrian mall, makeshift outdoor dining rooms spilled from the sidewalks onto the asphalt. They extended a financial lifeline to restaurant owners, as well as an emotional one to residents and vacationers needing an escape from sadness, uncertainty, and four ever-tightening walls.

Wildwood would be wise to investigate the possibility of turning a portion of Pacific Avenue into a pedestrian mall once again, embracing the belief it can evolve into an alternative to the whirling rides and dive-bombing seagulls of the boardwalk in the distance. Because even though outdoor dining is no longer a necessity, it may very well have become an acquired taste. At least I can hope, because for me there are few things more sublime than a good meal enjoyed in a sunset's summer breeze.

It would also give yet another generation the opportunity to reflect on a time when Pacific Avenue could once be driven uninterrupted, all the way from 26th Street to where it becomes Ocean Drive. Then maybe the rest of us won't feel so old thinking about another time it couldn't be done.



Building the Pacific Avenue Mall, 1987. Note the Oasis nightclub on the left, which was later briefly known as MT Bottle.

“The Wildwood Days of Doo Wop” Graphic Novel Release and Signing

Sunday, August 15, 2021 from 12 PM to 5 PM
at the Wildwood Historical Museum

Journey back through American mid-century Doo Wop architecture at a special event commemorating the release of a new graphic novel about the Wildwoods' Doo Wop motels!

Join author Michael Jasorka and editor Kirk Hastings to celebrate the Wildwoods' architectural legacy and hear about an exciting new book. If you're into mid-century architecture or Wildwoods nostalgia, don't miss this book and this event!

Pre-order your copy of The Wildwood Days of Doo Wop at www.bombshell-comics.com! The book ships on August 2, 2021. Or buy a copy at our museum at this in-person event!



Wildwood Memories From the 1950s

by Larry Lillo, Secretary

Just reminiscing about my pre-teen days growing up in the Wildwoods during the 1950's. Taking the 5 mile beach bus to school at St. Ann's, sometimes riding my bike. We had a hour for lunch and went downtown to eat. Sometimes it would be Fitzgerald's or Jackson's but after lunch we would stop at the places that had pinball machines. A quick look in at Woolworth's to check on the parakeets and fish tanks was always a possibility. Maybe a stop in Murphy's to drink from their water cooler. A 27 cent banana split was always enticing at Murphy's. By the time the bell rang, we were playing street football with one of those little rubber footballs.

Other things that were exciting were Wildwood High football games on Saturday and Wildwood Catholic basketball on Sundays. Halloween parade and Fun Fair at the Wildwood "rec". Boy's and Girl's week and Hobby show at the "rec" once a year. We had 3 Boy Scout troops and a cub pack on the island. We had many camping trips and events. We had dinners at Zaberer's, ate at the Tom Cat and Cherry Cokes at Lock's.

The summer started out with swimming lesson for all the kids in Wildwood at Sportland Pool. In the summer we shined shoes by the nightclubs and the Boardwalk. Sold newspapers on the beach. Collected soda bottles from the beach to return to the stores for the 2 cents or 5 cents deposits. Most of all we spent a lot of time at the beach. Saturday nights we would go to the old convention hall at Young's and the Boardwalk for wrestling. We got to watching our favorite or evil wrestlers from television live and in person. They would put the ad signs in my father's barber-shop window for wrestling and the drive in theater and we would get free tickets to the events.

These were some of the things we did back in the 50's and I could go on and on. It was a great time to grow up and not as complicated like it is today. Hope you enjoyed and lived these memories from the past.



The Tom Cat in the 1940s. It was demolished in 2020.

Buy-A-Brick Program

We just revamped our Buy-A-Brick Program! The bricks, which you can engrave with a message of your choice, are a great way to honor a loved one.

We will install the bricks in the sidewalk in front of our museum at 3907 Pacific Avenue, where they will commemorate fond Wildwood memories forever!

Now, you can order bricks online, using our brand new order form! Different sizes of bricks cost between \$100 and \$250. For more information and to order a brick, visit wildwoodhistoricalmuseum.com/buy-a-brick-campaign.





The Sun Deck around the time it opened.
Check out that smokestack!

The Sun Deck Apartments

by Jackson Betz, Board Member

(continued from page 1)

and Sun Beam Apartments. The Sun Deck and Sun Dial were together along Ocean Avenue, while the Sun Beam was around the corner, next to the Hotel Oceanic (which also survives today). The Sun Deck had a playful Art Deco smokestack emerging from its roof - this use of vernacular architecture made it a precursor to the wacky Doo Wop motels that would emerge all over the island a decade later!

Ben Schlenzig kept busy expanding the Sun Deck. He built a tourist court behind the Hotel Oceanic in the late 1940s and added it to the Sun Deck complex (ads from the time call these cottages the "Sun Deck Bungalows"). In the 1950s, Schlenzig built a second Sun Deck building and added a courtyard with a pool between the two. Around the same time, he built the Rio Motel at Rio Grande and Ocean Avenues, which would come to be a quintessential Wildwood motel, loved by generations of vacationers.

Schlenzig sold the Rio Motel to Carl Aspenburg shortly after building it, and he sold the Ship Ahoy's lot to developers in 1966 (they built the Aquarius Motor Inn on its lot). He still kept expanding his the Sun Deck, though. In the late 1950s,

he added an iconic neon sign featuring a silhouetted bathing beauty. The next decade, he dispensed with the separate names for each of his buildings, running them all together under the name Sun Deck, which is how most vacationers remember them.

In 1986, Ben Schlenzig finally sold the Sun Deck complex, which was torn down to make way for today's Days Inn. But fond memories remain. Two Sun Deck buildings remain today, on Burk Avenue - they're the cottages, which today are part of the Hotel Oceanic!



Wildwood History Quiz - Answers

Here are the answers to our quiz from page 1! Are you a real islander? Let's find out!

1. Ocean & Burk Avenues
2. The Rotor
3. Cedar & the Boardwalk
4. Youngs & Boardwalk (also Schellenger off of Pacific Ave)
5. Luigi's Davis & Pacific
6. Next to The Shamrock Cafe on Pacific Avenue

Now Through August: 2021 Street Sign & More Auction To Benefit Wildwood Historical Museum

The Wildwood Historical Society is excited to offer more than 70 authentic signs: street signs from the City of Wildwood plus neon signs from the Tom Cat Diner! The city has been replacing its old signs and very generously passing the old ones on to us as a fundraiser for our nonprofit's mission of preserving Wildwoods' history. The owner of the parcel that was once the Tom Cat generously donated the authentic neon signs that hung in the windows.

This eBay auction event runs from June-August 2021, and every day a different sign will be posted for a seven-day duration auction. On Saturdays and Sundays, two signs will be listed. For the list of signs with starting prices and dates visit wildwoodhistoricalmuseum.com. The signs are listed on the eBay account "wildwoodhistoricalsociety1963."

Buy Our Historic House Photos!

Do you have a house in Wildwood or North Wildwood? Are you looking for a vintage photo of that house? Would you like to support a local organization? You're in luck. We're selling digital copies of photos from our tax photo collection!

We've got a photo of almost every building in the town of Wildwood from 1960 and almost every building in North Wildwood from 1982-1983, and we're selling those pictures for \$10 apiece. Visit <https://www.wildwoodhistoricalmuseum.com/research> to order.

Correction: In the winter 2021 issue, the story *Ours Alone in Wintertime* by Grace Sedotti Zambardi was reprinted from *The Sun-By-the-Sea* magazine.

New in Our Gift Shop!

Official 2022 Wildwood Historical Society calendar.

Only for a limited time. Don't miss out — order yours now! Full of photos of your favorite places in Wildwoods history, from the boardwalk, downtown, and much more! Features North Wildwood too. All proceeds benefit the Wildwood Historical Society. Printed on 8.5x11" photo paper by Leader Printers in Wildwood, NJ, USA. \$20

Wildwood Legends Mugs. Ceramic mugs printed in Wildwood by Wildwood Legends. Different designs from all over the Wildwoods, including Castle Dracula, the Tram Car, Bobby Rydell, Tom Cat Diner, Golden Nugget and Sportland Pier. \$15



Wildwood by the Sea Pennant. Mini felt pennants designed by local artist Dorothy Kulisek, based on the 1935 pennants on display at our museum! Made in the USA. \$15

Shop these and more items at our museum gift shop or at wildwoodhistoricalmuseum.com/shop

Then and Now



The V.I.P. Motel, at Atlantic Avenue and Forget-Me-Not Road in Wildwood Crest, is shown in 1965, the year it opened.



The V.I.P. Motel is still going strong in 2021! The Roy family, one of the families who built the motel, still maintain it well.

Visit <https://www.wildwoodhistoricalmuseum.com/research> to buy a vintage photo of your favorite Wildwood spot for just \$10!

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wildwoodhistoricalmuseum.com

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!

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