

Atlantic City Heyday

by Kelley Anne McGee

Perhaps no other shore community around has had a more varied, storied or intriguing past than does Atlantic City. By the mid-1880s, AC was slowly gaining a reputation as a place that could soothe frayed nerves and cure a growing list of complaints and ailments including rheumatism.

Warm sunshine, bathing in salt water, as well as breathing in fresh air, seemed to have the most amazing affects on one's health and general wellbeing, and was being advertised as such in area newspapers. It was smart public relations on the part of those looking to push AC into the spotlight and onto the map as a popular tourist destination.

Discovered by the Lenni Lenape indians as a summer camp for fishing and hunting during the 1600s, one of the first to actually call AC home and set up roots there, was a loner by the name of Jeremiah Leeds around 1838. His widow received a license to operate a tavern in 1839.

By 1857, AC already had some homes, a few hotels and boarding houses, where one could also grab a meal, a hot bath house, several taverns and churches, a nearby lighthouse in Absecon, and a market place.

storm and covered by salted seawater. Of course no one knew if the story was true or not, but towards the turn of the century, it was enough to cause excitement and talk among people, who liked the way it tasted. From that time on, folks always associated AC with saltwater taffy and vice versa.

Thrill seekers could board crazy contraptions such as a wooden roller coaster or Ferris wheel. Or the Haunted Swing, which gave the illusion of throwing passengers upside down and hanging in midair, when in reality it was the room that moved and everything in it such as a picture on a wall or a vase on a table were mounted down.



The boardwalk became so popular it had to be widened; still it could hardly handle the crowds.



1921 view of rolling chair developed by William Hayday became a big hit on the boardwalk.

Once the railroads arrived, it was just a matter of time before America and the rest of the world for that matter, would be introduced to AC. Eventually it was realized that AC needed a wooden promenade as well, although it would take several attempts and years before a permanent one was built, that would actually last and hold up, as others were swallowed up by the sea and washed away in storms.

Ultimately the boardwalk would be expanded and divided into sections containing several famous piers such as Steel, Steeplechase and Million Dollar, where Captain John Young had a gracious villa and claimed he could fish from his windows.

Other businesses, services and vendors, some offering the craziest of merchandise or amusements, soon followed and set-up shop all along AC's streets, as well as its boardwalk. There was the James Salt Water Taffy stand, the candy from which was said to have gotten its name as a result of being hit by a

tended for the purpose of rescuing shipwreck and swimming victims, but unfortunately never really succeeded.

Others strolled the beach and admired artists and their sand sculptures, sometimes enough to even tip them. Of course if all else failed, there was al-

The faint of heart or conventional rode the carousel, and only the braved dare ride the revolving disk, where you hung on for dear life and hoped not to be thrown from it. But those looking for love rode on rolling chairs instead along AC's boards with someone beside them whom they fancied.

Those looking for entertainment by the sea could find it by watching fishermen trying to capture sea creatures, or the Sea Spider: a tall wooden platform with posts and wheels attached, originally in-



The tradition of the annual Easter Parade on the Atlantic City boardwalk started in 1876. Thousands of people packed the boardwalk to show off the latest fashions, especially hats.

ways the Atlantic Ocean to fall back on for swimming, sunbathing, fishing and sailing.

As time went on, AC came up with even more clever or wacky schemes to draw crowds. Those wondering how life might turn out went to Gypsy fortunetellers. Others seeking fortune and fame had a recording made of their voice, which was then sent off to early Hollywood in case they were looking for new talent. But some simply amused themselves by having postcards made up that featured them in funny scenarios such as landing a big fish, being aboard a boat or carried off the beach by a muscle man, thanks to a little trick photography booth.

It was possible to catch a good show in AC for a fraction of the cost of New York City Theater, and many plays were tried out on AC audiences first, before graduating to Broadway. The great W.C. Fields began his career here as a comedian juggler. He moonlighted on the side by playing a drowning victim, who was rescued many times, then brought to a nearby club to recover. Concerned patrons would anxiously hang around and order more drinks, then celebrate with even more rounds when he finally came to. It was a great gimmick, and AC had lots of them like having attractive women dress up as lobsters and stroll the boardwalk to advertise a local seafood restaurant.

The years rolled by and AC's high jinks and antics continued in order to keep folks coming back. Mr. Peanut strolled the boardwalk and handed out samples, and Heinz gave away pickles, as well as pickle pins.

AC loved a good parade, as well as contests, and there were plenty of both plus fireworks over the sea. Since 1876, folks strutted AC's boards in their best finery including women wearing unusual flowered hats for the annual Boardwalk Easter Parade, a tradition that still continues today.

AC held competitions for titles like the prettiest waitress, or for best chambermaid, where they had to make-up real beds on wheels in front of a live audience on the boardwalk. Best waiters and busboys had their own headaches walking at a rapid pace, while trying to balance a tray of dishes on their heads. AC was also the home of the Miss America Beauty Pageant, its roots going back to the 1920s.

Continued on page 11

Atlantic City Heyday

by Kelley Anne McGee

Continued from page 10

Animal shows were big. You could see a man box a kangaroo, a man dance with a wild tiger while a live orchestra played, or hold your breath as women saddled horses on a high platform then jumped off with them into a pool below. Then there was Rex the Wonder dog, who water-skied and rode AC's waves.

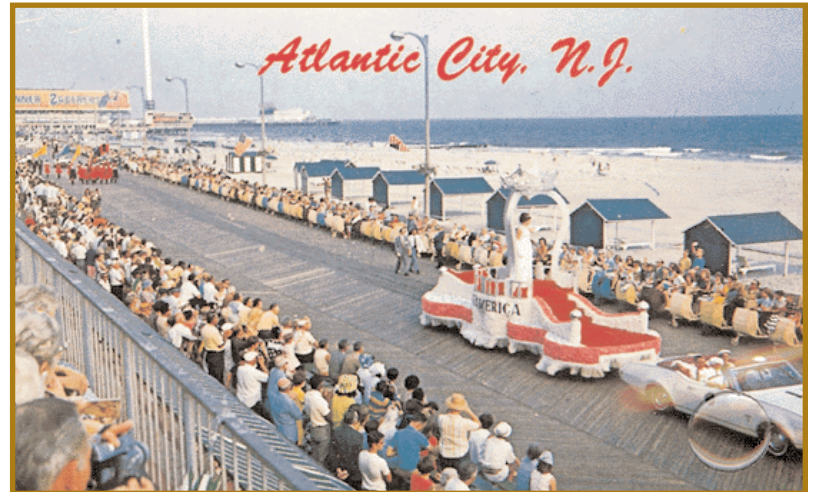


During the 1950s Frank Sinatra, Dean Martin, Sammy Davis, Jr. and many other celebrities, regularly appeared at Atlantic City clubs.

AC attracted the freakish and absurd too. You could see Siamese twins, midgets in a boxing match, a man stuff himself with 120 oysters in an oyster-eating contest, or just how many people could fit into a gigantic shirt. Also, you could see a huge typewriter that actually worked on display, as well as a large Goodyear tire.

By now AC had plenty of elegant restaurants, beer gardens, hotels and clubs, and even a bar designed just like a merry-go-round that rotated. When Prohibition hit, spirits still found their way to AC by way of rumrunners in boats who set bottles afloat to wash ashore, where they were then picked up and delivered to area clubs. Also AC had gambling long before it was legal, as well as brothels. Not surprising, AC was a popular gathering place for politicians like Nucky Johnson, and those with ties to the criminal underworld such as club owner Skinny D'Amato, and mobsters Lucky Luciano and Al "Scarface" Capone, who held their conventions there.

Over the years, AC drew big crowds thanks to fabulous headliners like Sammy Davis Jr., Frank Sinatra, Dean Martin, Jerry Lewis, Tony Bennett, Bob Hope, Abbott and Costello, the Three Stooges



For many years the Miss America Pageant was held in Atlantic City. One of the main pageant activities was a parade on the boardwalk.

and Marx Brothers, Milton Berle, Mae West and Joan Blondell, Jackie Gleason, Mickey Rooney, Marilyn Monroe, Sophie Tucker, Pinky Lee, Glenn Miller, Benny Goodman, Harry James, Irving Berlin, the Dorsey Brothers, Gershwin, Caruso, Harry Houdini, and many more. In fact, so famous was AC that it often turned up in either movies or songs.

This was the legendary Atlantic City the one many may reminisce about and long for. Or the precious memories lucky enough to be passed down to us from our parents, grandparents, or great grandparents generation. This was Atlantic City's glorious heyday.



All Island Marine

480 Reina Rd., Oceanside, N.Y. 11572

516-764-3300

www.allisland.com

YOUR HONDA RE-POWER CENTER

NOW IS THE TIME TO RE-POWER



CALL FOR SAVINGS

CUSTOM FACTORY PACKAGES AVAILABLE
HELP BUILD YOUR OWN BOAT, YOUR WAY!

Honda Clearance Sale:

There's No Better Price Than This!! Call or e-mail for price, re-power estimate.

HONDA MARINE



TRUE 5 non-declining factory warranty.

CALL FOR SALE PRICING ON INVENTORY PACKAGE
USED OUTBOARDS

225HP, 130HP, 15HP, 9.9HP & 2HP

Restrictions apply. See Dealer for Details.*

Always wear a personal flotation device while boating and read your owner's manual. 2009 American Motor Corp. Inc.

New & Used Boat Sales • Factory Trained Mechanics • Indoor Showroom
FUEL DOCK • FULL SERVICE • SUMMER DOCKAGE

HYDRA-SPORTS NO COMPROMISES

18' - 35' Center Consoles, Express, Dual Consoles



Stop In and Compare
OUR Boats, OUR Prices
and OUR Dealership

IT'S NEVER BEEN
CHEAPER TO BUY!!

"Your Family's Fun And Future
Is Your Best Investment"

"More Time On The Water" SPRING SALES EVENT

E-TEC 3+2 5 Year Limited Coverage
Up to \$1,000 in rebates
See dealer for details & restrictions

E-TEC LEFTOVER BEST PRICE

200hp S/B, 25" ...~~\$13,990~~ Call
225hp, 25"~~\$13,990~~ Call

Other outboard at similar savings!

SPECIALS OF THE MONTH

2004 225 DI, 25"\$10,000
2004 250 DI, 25"\$10,500



Below invoice pricing on inventory packages.
Factory Incentives and Rebates.

Don't Miss the Boat.
Stop In and Call Before
All the Deals are Gone!

