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THE SEASIDE RESORT TOWNS OF CAPE MAY AND
ATLANTIC CITY, NEW JERSEY:
DEVELOPMENT, CLASS CONSCIOUSNESS, AND THE CULTURE OF LEISURE
IN THE MID TO LATE VICTORIAN ERA

by

TATYANA RESSETAR
B.A. University of Central Florida, 2008

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts
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Major Professor: Connie Lester

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ABSTRACT

“Victorianism” is a highly controversial, sometimes ironic, term penned by historians throughout various works that has come to hold dramatic weight in both its meaning and its influence. Though the term is usually most closely associated with nineteenth century England, Victorianism was a highly influential movement in American culture simultaneously as well, specifically in the spheres of home, work, and play. Of those, “play,” or leisure, is undoubtedly the least explored, especially before the latter decades of the twentieth century. Prior to this period, most literature about the Victorians, with the exception of a few works, only dealt with masculinity, religion, and the rigid dynamic of the nineteenth century household.

Recently, historians like James Walvin, Pamela Horn, and Hugh Cunningham have attempted to draw attention to Victorian leisure with excellent works on pastimes and society during the nineteenth century, but they represent only a few. However, many works of this caliber focus on England, the “birthplace” of Victorianism. Thus, this work attempts to emphasize that the cultural phenomenon of Victorianism was just as present in the United States. Despite the recurring themes of the home and the workplace so often chosen by scholars, it is actually within the realm of leisure that the controversial issues of the Victorian period and its people can be best observed. Class, race, and gender were three major components of the Victorian culture that shaped the various forms of leisure and recreation, as well as the specific restrictions on those amusements. All of these factors had a shared, tremendous influence on the progress (or lack thereof) towards a more modern era and society that occurred at the turn of the twentieth century.

In the pages to follow, the numerous contradictions and paradoxes of Victorian leisure in America will be examined, ultimately demonstrating how pastimes and recreation (and their outlets) in the mid to late nineteenth century were neither truly Victorian nor truly progressive, but indeed a combination of both. This creates further irony during this controversial period. However, before exploring these outlets, the term “Victorian” will be examined while placing it into the context of mid to late nineteenth century Americans who belonged to all classes of travelers. It will become apparent that American Victorians had much invested in their values, but were also willing to break the rules regarding certain amusements and pleasures. Moreover, the “democratization” of leisure will be highlighted as the upper and lower classes began to enjoy the same recreations. Marked innovations of the period will also be discussed, as to highlight their importance on Victorian leisure and its development, which will also be referred to throughout the chapters.

These topics will be addressed before examining the specific Victorian leisure culture of two of America’s oldest seaside destinations: Cape May and Atlantic City, both in New Jersey. The guests, accommodations and transportation, and offerings at these resort towns will act as a mirror into mid to late nineteenth century culture. There, the contradictory ideals and rules of Victorianism are exhibited as the resorts rose to prominence. The decline of “elite-only” leisure and the rise of the “excursionist” will be examined throughout the progression of the towns’ growth and boom periods. Exploring the ironies of Victorian leisure through the proverbial lens of Cape May and Atlantic City proves effective, as the towns came to represent opposite ends of the “socially acceptable” spectrum after a short period, and were full of similar inconsistencies and paradoxes themselves. Additionally, their current fates remain a product of their polarized

Victorian heydays, further proving the influence of seaside resort culture, the late Victorian period, and its ideals on the broader field of American leisure history.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Since its official opening season in the nineteenth century, the New Jersey shore and its diversions have earned the region a reputation in American culture that lures an assortment of visitors every year. Aside from the numerous portrayals in reality television, dramatic television series, and film, the state's eastern coast is also well known for its famous Atlantic City boardwalk, towering casinos, and the gingerbread architecture of Cape May's Victorian mansions. Before modern media began capturing the unique culture and amusements of the twenty-first century Jersey shore, Cape May and Atlantic City were originally a vacation retreat to waves of Victorian pleasure seekers, who eventually helped shape not only the two seaside resort towns themselves, but also transformed the American leisure culture for future generations.

While the term "Victorian" is typically most closely identified with nineteenth century England and its imminent culture and strong morals, it was also a highly influential term in the quickly transforming United States. The Victorian period and its people can be described as controversial, contradictory, and paradoxical, all of which can best be observed within the realm of their leisure practices. The major societal components of class, race, and gender were three chief concerns of the Victorian culture that shaped its pastimes and their restrictions. Because of this culture and its limitations, the New Jersey shore was faced with trying to uphold common Victorian traditions while trying to appeal to a new and more progressive part of the American public: the lower classes. Because the restrictions on leisure were shaped by common Victorian attitudes on those three chief components, a number of Cape May's and Atlantic City's amusements and accommodations originally targeted strictly elite clientele. However, as

transportation, values, and society began to change, the towns were forced to welcome a new kind of visitor even if it was at the expense of the wealthy: the excursionist.

While Cape May and Atlantic City experienced great success and rapid growth in the second half of the nineteenth century due to changes in late Victorian-era America, they also flourished because of the major technological advances in transportation. The burgeoning of railroads across the country directly influenced the accessibility of recreation outlets, and the New Jersey coast became quickly familiar with this new technology. Once the railroad had reached southern New Jersey and nearby Pennsylvania, it had a tremendous influence on the state's coastal resorts, which was exhibited in the record number of lower class excursionists that flocked to the shore in the following years. With these innovations in transportation, the Industrial Revolution, and the subsequent eras of Reconstruction and the Gilded Age, a new type of culture had officially emerged in America. This type of culture allowed for more opportunities for many families, enabling them to spend time away from church, work, or the solace of the household, depending on the echelon of society to which they belonged.

In addition to examining these rapid changes in everyday Victorian life and their influence on leisure at New Jersey's coastal resorts, it is crucial to comprehend the values and societal norms of the period in which they occurred. The Victorian period presents a number of paradoxes, and Cape May and Atlantic City follow suit. As many histories and textbooks have expressed, the Victorian period was a time of restrictions and morality with a strong desire for maintaining purity and gentility. It was a time when rules of decency and etiquette were rigid, and there were several restrictions regarding class and gender. In contrast, some histories of the Victorian period demonstrate it was not a "prudish" society, but simply a more private one,

particularly when it came to matters of sexuality and family life. In some cases, it was an era when many people decided that rules of decency were made to be broken.¹ Regardless of the complexity and debates of the true Victorian period, it was a society full of contradictions, and the seaside resorts at Cape May and Atlantic City were products of the same ironies.

With the arrival of the excursionist, Cape May and Atlantic City embarked on a controversial and somewhat contradictory path of their own within the wider sphere of leisure history, attempting to lure the upper class (and their money) to the resorts, while offering less tasteful, cheaper amusements and remarkable deals only made available to the lower classes. In a matter of time, the elite, whether forced or willing, began to immerse themselves in something called democratized leisure. This transformation can be astutely observed specifically in Cape May and Atlantic City, and further, their relationship to one another amidst these changes is telling of the societal issues of the time.

The contradictory ideals, technological changes, the subsequent development of the resort towns, and the dramatic changes to leisure and society that occurred can only be understood by first examining the rich history of the seaside vacation. Vacationing at the seashore boasts a past much earlier than even the most primitive New Jersey beach resorts, which is vital to the study of this pastime in the Victorian era.

Victorians and Leisure

The term “Victorian” can be an ambiguous one, and it and the society it produced are often debated amongst historians. To best understand the Victorians and their contradictory

¹ James Walvin, *Victorian Values* (Athens, G.A.: University of Georgia Press, 1987), 120.

ideals, it is helpful to separate the era into three periods: early, high, and late.² The seaside resort boom occurred throughout the high and late periods, but it is important not to neglect the earliest years of the Victorian era, often considered the 1830s through the 1860s. These early decades were responsible for the transformations in leisure and society that occurred in the high and late periods. The strong religious and conservative forces in early-to-mid-nineteenth century America shaped many of the Victorian era's ideals and societal norms for the following decades. As a period of peace that followed decades of war and revolution, the early Victorian era made recreation and non-working pastimes possible.

The Industrial Revolution was another major component that shaped the Victorian period, and like the resorts, it was also a contradiction in our nation's cultural history. The advancement in technology and the sophistication of industry meant more demanding, rough, and dangerous jobs for the average worker. However, many workers took on these jobs with pride, and they instilled a sense of worth, purpose, and discipline, which happened to be perfectly aligned with the Victorian belief. Undoubtedly, the products of this revolution allowed for seaside travel and created a number of amusement outlets, but the transition from a workshop and apprentice lifestyle to a factory, big machine industry was challenging for families of all classes.³ The working class, with their new sense of discipline and worth, developed many respectable associations during this period that served as an outlet for creativity and recreation since they typically could not afford common leisure at this time. Friendly societies, fraternal organizations, banks, trade unions, and building societies were created by the working class to encourage thrift

² Asa Briggs, *Victorian People: A Reassessment of Persons and Themes, 1851-1867* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), 7-8.

³ Laurence Lerner, ed., *The Victorians*. (New York: Holmes and Meier Publishers, Inc., 1978), 52-53.

and provide opportunities for improving their working and living conditions. Trade unions provided occasional excursions for their members, but the larger clientele at seaside resorts rested with the new managerial middle class.⁴

It has been argued that the middle class was essential to the grand concept of Victorianism, as they grew more populous *and* more prosperous over the course of the three periods.⁵ For the first time, middle class ideals set the standard for America, and the lines between wealthy and average grew more blurred, especially as plantation yields were no longer the “backbone of national prosperity” and agricultural giants became less prominent.⁶ The lifestyle that this group quickly embraced, and soon required, was much improved since the pre-industry early nineteenth century. This typical way of life included foodstuffs that were more substantial, improved sanitation, larger homes and slightly more spacious city dwellings, and a much more liberal approach to culture and education. In many ways, the middle class was rising to meet the upper echelon of society rapidly, something that had never existed in the class-structured Victorian society before. Most important to the rising class, however, was the growing number of days off from the workplace for men and a dramatic increase in domestic help for women.⁷

Women held a unique place in Victorian society, especially in the middle class home. Contemporary literature coined the “feminine sphere of duties,” which created a standard for Victorian women that demanded dependence, self-sacrifice and an insistence on virtues.⁸

⁴ Lerner, 92.

⁵ Ibid, 93.

⁶ Briggs, 20-21.

⁷ Lerner, 58.

⁸ Ibid, 174.

However, as the Victorian era progressed, many women changed as quickly as the country did. They became more athletic and less content with feminine recreations like sewing, needlework, and music. They were much more apt to take up tennis, croquet, or even horseback riding. There are many valid explanations for why this momentous change in the female existence occurred, but one major reason is the smaller number of children per married couple. As the Victorian era reached its high and late stages, families had fewer children on average than the early period. Fewer children obviously meant more money and more free time for leisure activities. Finally, middle class women had the means to afford the domestic help that freed them from the household chores associated with child rearing and family life.⁹

During the high Victorian era, citizens of all classes embraced the ideals of clear thinking, freeing oneself from impulse and spontaneity, and hard work as the foundation for material and societal advancement and progress. Schools, churches, and parents accentuated the preservation of these ideals in their culture, arguing they were the glue that bound their society together. However, the ideal of stability did not last, or perhaps was never fully achieved, and a spirit of rebellion soon reappeared in American society.¹⁰ Upheaval against these standardized moral codes changed American society and affected leisure activities.¹¹ Despite the rebellion against strict Victorian morals, a zealous belief in social duty developed. Quickly, one of those social duties became embarking on a seaside holiday.¹²

The Victorian era and its contradictions have been summed up rather simply by the editor of a collection of essays on the Victorian period, Laurence Lerner. He states, “There is a sense in

⁹ Lerner, 185.

¹⁰ Briggs, 1, 3-5.

¹¹ Ibid, 298-299.

¹² Lerner, 73-75.

which a society or culture defines itself through its own definition of social problems or statements of values.” It has since become apparent to historians that the Victorians did just so, placing extreme emphasis on the importance of shared moral beliefs and an ordered society, yet they experienced commercial greed and class segregation. Furthermore, he argues that social justice, survival, and efficiency were all forces that motivated the late Victorians to take an interest in the progress of their society and the issues of their time.¹³

After exploring the stages of the Victorian period and the meanings behind the contradictory society, one can much better appreciate the leisure culture that developed among many Americans during that era. Until the final decades of the nineteenth century, the people who were most likely to enjoy leisure activities were the wealthy or royalty. It has been written that “those whom fortune has favored can devote the season to travel.”¹⁴ Prices, class segregation, and location all contributed to the classification of elitism in essentially all forms of Victorian leisure, but specifically at the seaside resorts. The Victorians relished in the fact that their society was prestigious, prosperous, idyllic, and so organized that its members could enjoyably waste time on the tempting recreation and relaxation of the seaside. By the end of the Victorian period, the lower classes could share in this pride, for they naturally felt as though they belonged to this triumphant society, since they too could partake in some of the same amusements as the higher class, though not as freely or frequently.¹⁵

¹³ Lerner, 78, 131.

¹⁴ John B. Bachelder, *Popular Resorts & How to Reach Them: Combining a Brief Description of the Principal Summer Retreats in the United States, and the Routes of Travel Leading to Them* (Boston: John B. Bachelder, Publisher, 1875), 13.

¹⁵ Pamela Horn, *Pleasures and Pastimes in Victorian Britain* (Thrupp, Stroud, England: Sutton Publishing, 1999), 265.

The most obvious reason for increased leisure amongst all classes was undoubtedly the railroad. Railroads created special routes to and from the seaside resort towns and major cities nearby. For example, even the small towns of Cape May and Atlantic City became accessible to thousands of pleasure seekers, making them highly desirable destinations in their own right. The newly developed resort towns were quite far from the major cities, making it almost impossible for lower class city dwellers to enjoy their benefits, until the developments in transportation by mid-century. In most cases, the lower class did not own horses or carriages, and could not afford steamboat tickets for the entire family. Once the railroad routes to the beach were complete and cheap excursion and one-day tickets were sold, they took more advantage of their new travel opportunity, and began to change the leisure industry forever.¹⁶

For the upper echelon of society, Saturdays were gradually becoming the prime recreational day of the week. At the time, Sundays were still devoted to spiritual worship, as mid to late Victorian culture was very much enveloped by the Protestant values that helped to create it in the early 1800s.¹⁷ Soon after the recreation boom, leisure and religion were joined by the creation of religious resorts, which were dedicated to promoting healthy and respectable leisure activities for the upper class. Two of the most prominent early religious retreats were the resorts at Ocean Grove and Asbury Park, New Jersey. These destinations are some of the earliest American seaside resorts, even though they were created because of the search for “Christian perfection.” Over the following years, Ocean Grove and Asbury Park were just two retreats in a handful of prominent resorts that offered a blend of morality and the belief that leisure was

¹⁶ James Walvin, *Leisure and Society, 1830-1950* (New York, London: Longman, Inc., 1978), 70-71.

¹⁷ Kathryn Grover, *Hard at Play: Leisure in America, 1840-1940* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1992), 4.

important to leading a positive and respectable life to its guests.¹⁸ Those who were not able to spend their weekends at religious resorts were still in need of a similar outlet to practice the numerous types of popular recreation. The more affluent citizens began hosting balls and galas, similar to ones often associated with royal pageantry. In addition to hosting these types of soirees, there was an increased interest in yachting and other water sports amongst well-to-do Americans.¹⁹

It will become clear that greater prosperity, shorter work weeks, and improved means of transportation all contributed to the development of the seaside holiday for both the upper and lower classes of Victorian society.²⁰ The popularity of the seaside holiday also grew amongst working class Americans when they were regularly told that a trip to the seashore was essential to performing at their “industrious best” in the workplace. In addition, it was not only beneficial to the individual worker, but it boosted the morale of a family and even an entire community.²¹

As stated earlier, the most common restraint on taking these recommended beneficial trips to the beach was financial circumstances and work. By this time, the well-established families in society hosted summer-long stays for their entire families at the seashore, but this was not yet a reality for the working family. Very few working class families were able to take more than a day or two off from work at a time, thus eliminating the idea of a seaside vacation altogether. The typical recreations for a working class family at the time consisted of community affairs and household games if and when they were not at work or doing chores, but they

¹⁸ Grover, 8-9.

¹⁹ Foster Rhea Dulles, *America Learns to Play: A History of Popular Recreation 1607-1940* (New York: D. Appleton-Century Company, Inc., 1940), 148.

²⁰ Andrea Inglis, *Beside the Seaside: Victorian Resorts in the Nineteenth Century* (Victoria: Melbourne University Press, 1999), 23.

²¹ *Ibid*, 77.

eventually grew to include venues like Coney Island and carnivals and sideshows as time passed. More middle class “white-collar” workers did have more freedom, however, and their spending a summer’s week at the shore increasingly became the norm as the nineteenth century progressed.

²² However, personal finances absolutely dictated which resort a family could afford, very similar to the resorts of today and the star or diamond rating system utilized to secure a specific clientele. ²³ This pricing, which was often disclosed “upon application” is one example of the many significant paradoxes at the Victorian seaside, which was supposedly democratized and unassuming, that will be discussed later on.

The nineteenth century worker desired a plethora of amusements just like their wealthier counterparts. They took whatever form of leisure entertainment, whenever and wherever they could, as they felt a much greater need for escapism. The working classes relished in the fact that they too could enjoy the calmness of the seashore at a pristine establishment like an oceanfront resort. At the shore, they were more able to quickly forget their sometimes sub par living conditions and even worse working conditions and enjoy the sublime nature of the sea. ²⁴ More than any other social enterprise, the seaside resorts represented this growing need for leisure and escapism for all classes as well as the widening commercialization of leisure in America. ²⁵

Later on, it will become apparent that the rise of both spectator and participatory sports supplementing the growth of commercialized leisure led to the simultaneous decline of strict Victorian influence and standards. What had once been deemed indecent was now publicly sanctioned by resorts and other proprietors of leisure. Specifically in the final decades of the

²² Horn, 132.

²³ Walvin, *Leisure and Society*, 79-81.

²⁴ Howard Grey and Graham Stuart, *The Victorians by the Sea* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1973), 8.

²⁵ Walvin, *Leisure and Society*, 77.

century, from the 1870s through the 1890s, the interest in recreation grew tremendously. The era of indulgence and of letting go of one's inhibitions had finally arrived, but it can be argued, perhaps, that this culture always existed, though it had been masked by the limitations and suggested mores of Victorianism all along.²⁶ Regardless of its origin, this new and more diverse culture would emerge at the seaside resorts, and it would attempt to blend with, or in some cases, replace the old Victorian model.

“Taking to the Waters”: A Medicinal Craze

Unbeknownst to even the most avid beachgoers today, the pastime they ritually enjoy every summer is adopted from the past. While the craze of relaxing by the water experienced a resurgence in the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries, there is evidence that ancient Romans also enjoyed this popular activity. From the end of the Republic throughout the second century AD, seaside resorts thrived along the shores of Campania and Latium, both regions on the coast of southern Italy. At these resorts, wealthy Romans owned “leisure villas,” in similar fashion to many seaside visitors today. While staying at these villas, they relaxed, meditated, and engaged in innocent beachside games and entertainment.²⁷

After the Roman boom of seaside trips, the next noteworthy era in this history is seventeenth century Europe. Until that period, the sea held no particular appeal to the average citizen. Only merchants, fishermen, and naval soldiers who depended on it for their livelihood

²⁶ Dulles, 201.

²⁷ Alain Corbin, *The Lure of the Sea: The Discovery of the Seaside in the Western World 1750-1840* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 251-252.

had any real experience with the sea. In England, even fishermen turned the backs of their cottages to the sea.²⁸

The sudden change in taste and fashion in favor of the seashore experience rested on the claims of Renaissance scientists. England's seaside resorts trace their roots to the ritual that has been labeled "taking to the waters." Drinking and bathing in natural spring waters and inland "spas" began to grow in popularity throughout Europe around the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, but this practice experienced heightened recognition due to scientific reports in the seventeenth century that claimed these waters offered medicinal virtues. The subsequent growth of resort towns surrounding these sources of water were not only encouraged by the prescription of visiting them for medicinal benefits, but also by the fashionable patronage of the aristocracy and royal families.²⁹ Men and women were reported bathing at springs frequently and even publicly in the first decades of the eighteenth century, clearly acting as the forerunner to modern seaside bathing.³⁰ Early resorts offered sea bathing and even seawater drinking to replace the popularity of the inland mineral spas and to develop a new seaside phenomenon across the continent.³¹

Painters also exerted an enormous influence on the growing appreciation for the seaside.

Between 1635 and 1665, Dutch seascape painting enjoyed its own golden age. The representation of the beach in works of painters like Jan Van Goyen typically dealt with those

²⁸ Grey and Stuart, 1.

²⁹ Walvin, *Leisure and Society*, 69.

³⁰ Grey and Stuart, 1.

³¹ Inglis, 26.

sea laborers such as fishermen and merchants mentioned earlier. The concept of sea bathing and



Figure 1: *An Estuary with Fishing Boats and Two Frigates*, Jan Van Goyen c. 1650

the pleasure attached to it had not developed specifically in these artworks just yet. Painters originally chose seascape and sailing scenes because they were pleasing to the eye, but eventually, art encouraged people to experience the picturesque vistas for themselves. Thus, they began traveling to the ocean to turn these images of a calm, visual pleasure into a reality for observers, instead of just fishermen.³²

In England, the medical opinion that water upheld curative properties of climate and air contributed to the growing interest and now prescriptive character of “taking to the waters”. The popularity of the inland spas and springs grew, and locations like Bath boasted regular royal patronage that was recorded as early as the 1700s. In fact, the town remains a popular tourist destination today. The British medical opinion became so influential that it must be stressed that trips to the inland waters and to the seaside were not intended for fun and games, but instead for therapeutic relief for both the mind and body. Early beachgoers of the eighteenth

³² Corbin, 37-39.

century at first went to enjoy the visual intrigue of the shore, where the eye could indulge in the curative beauty of the elements.³³ The sea was indeed more of a health resort than a haven where tourists played.³⁴

Eventually, the sea vacation and the concept of medicinal sea bathing grew in popularity, and the most popular resorts across the country combined what is now considered “traditional seaside activity” with the prescriptive practices of the fashionable and historic inland spas.³⁵ Once seaside visitors started to explore the sea, they discovered the pleasures and heightened senses associated with it. A new freedom and a sense of the sublime were achieved when frolicking on the beach, and the seaside became a refuge where visitors could enjoy a true, natural, and simple lifestyle.³⁶ Much like in the 1600s, artists again played a crucial role in this redefinition of the sea. They not only painted seascapes in new and more appealing ways, but they also settled along the coast and developed small artist colonies. Instead of fishermen and sailboats, the painters’ artwork featured the esthetic combination of water, sun, and mist in landscape, which attracted even more settlers to their new home.³⁷

As the fashionable springs bathing developed, a distinct sea bathing “season” also emerged at resorts such as Margate and Brighton (both located in England) around the 1730s. This typically took place between the summer months of June and September, and was made possible and popular by the gentry and aristocracy. In all cases, at Bath, Brighton, and Margate, therapy and cure were the resonating themes throughout visitors’ stays. Guests came to enjoy

³³ Corbin, 37.

³⁴ Inglis, 23.

³⁵ Horn, 125.

³⁶ Orvar Lofgren, *On Holiday: A History of Vacationing* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 118.

³⁷ *Ibid*, 115.

sulfur baths and sea breezes, but also dabbled in pleasure boating, water sports, and open-air banquets and concerts at these early resorts.³⁸ Some visitor accounts report of people bathing publicly not only in the springs, but also in the ocean as early as 1768.³⁹ Medical case studies and travel accounts, as well as word of mouth publicity, were equally responsible for the boom in these first seaside resorts, and these sources also testify to the newfound appeal of the seaside during that period.⁴⁰

It can be argued that 1820s-era England is responsible for a turning point in the history of seaside resorts, as this was when the first major bathing establishments were constructed for the *specific purpose* of bathing, relaxation, and play. Because of this new purpose, a specific social life devoted to leisure had also developed.⁴¹ With this new leisure culture, the seaside resorts became an obvious choice to people searching for time away from the monotony of their household and usual social circles. Spending time at the ocean allowed people to embrace sensual pleasures and to experience and take care of their own bodies in a new manner.⁴² As resort popularity grew, so did the notion that taking special care of one's self, whether it be with restorative relaxation or outdoor activities, was necessary to one's happiness and overall physical and mental health.

The popularity of the English resorts spread rapidly around the turn of the nineteenth century, also allowing for similar development along the Dutch coasts and the shores along the

³⁸ Corbin, 252-254.

³⁹ Ibid, 37.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 94.

⁴¹ Ibid, 257.

⁴² Ibid, 95-96.

Baltic.⁴³ To add to the curative properties of taking a dip in the ocean, medical practitioners of the nineteenth century also began to argue in favor of the healing properties of the sea air.⁴⁴ Advertisements suggested that a number of common diseases could be significantly relieved by a change in climate (preferably a seaside one) and in scenery, along with the use of simple and pure tonic water.⁴⁵ With these claims, many resorts further defined their purpose as “health resorts.” There was intense competition among these resorts, and a variety of promotional literature attracted guests and lured potential visitors away from their competitors, all claiming medicinal benefits and prescriptive qualities.⁴⁶ Another form of attracting visitors that resorts utilized was doctors’ medical findings. Many renowned physicians offered claims that climate was as effective as medicine in many cases. These claims were often published in the various guidebooks and promotional literature that was distributed to potential patrons.⁴⁷

Competition between early resorts also extended beyond their claims of benefits to the mind and body. A growing interest in marine biology and botany combined with artistic creativity. The resorts capitalized on this new trend, and claimed they could offer a number of adventures and rewarding experiences to their guests. In addition to being the place for leisurely retreats, resorts advertised their beaches as hotspots for scientific exploration. They promoted themselves as “scientific treasure troves littered with nature’s handiwork.”⁴⁸ Activities at the beach, both adventurous and recuperative, molded a new type of atmosphere and lifestyle at the

⁴³ Ibid, 258-259.

⁴⁴ Inglis, 28.

⁴⁵ *A Traveler’s Criticism on our Health Resorts: Their Scenery, Climatic Peculiarities, and Curative Influence* (Boston: Billings, Clapp, & Co., 1885).

⁴⁶ Inglis, 51.

⁴⁷ Alfred M. Heston, *Heston’s Handbook: Atlantic City Illustrated* (Atlantic City: Heston, Publisher, 1887), 42.

⁴⁸ Inglis, 66.

seaside resorts of the nineteenth century. Now, a “social model” developed for the public use of the seashore. The relaxing trip to the beach became a civic duty, and the societal model that developed contributed to creating a popular ritual in what would eventually be known as the era of seaside holidays.⁴⁹

The Beginning of an Era: The American Seaside Holiday

As wealthy Victorians spent more time at the seashore and more time on recreation generally, a revolutionary transformation occurred at the resorts. The entire concept of summer recreation was defined in a contemporary guidebook as:

“The custom of setting apart a few weeks or months of the year as a respite from labor is fast gaining popularity; and each season adds to the number of those who leave their daily cares behind, and seek rest and recuperation for mind and body among the hills and deep green woods of the country, or at the seashore, bathing in the surf or sunlight, and cooled by the invigorating breezes of the sea.”⁵⁰

As this desire for leisure and the popularity of the shore grew, most of the traditional early spa resorts were transformed into what we now recognize as seaside hotels. These newly transformed resorts focused more heavily on pleasures and pastimes than health cures, marking the major difference between the old and the new.⁵¹ However, it must not be assumed that because resorts began focusing more heavily on leisure that they entirely dismissed the notion and promise of health cures and medicinal benefits of their beaches. People still visited the

⁴⁹ Corbin, 40.

⁵⁰ Bachelder, 13.

⁵¹ Lofgren, 120.

resorts believing that the sea air and overall climate of the shore were restorative to the mind and body, and that the seaside acted as a sanatorium.⁵²

From their early beginnings in seventeenth century Europe, resorts continued to attract droves of visitors well into the nineteenth century. At first, the quest for health cures and longevity drew the royals and aristocracy to the early inland spas. These spas, with a marked change in popularity, developed into the fashionable resorts that became commonplace by the end of the nineteenth century.⁵³ While the “summertime rush to the sea” has been labeled as “strikingly English,” the development throughout other European countries, and most notably in the United States, cannot be ignored. As leisure and recreation rapidly expanded in late Victorian culture, so were the many new coastal resorts in America. Guidebooks featured health restoring spas and seaside resorts in almost every single state in the country.⁵⁴

The activities of sea bathing and various resort recreations quickly grew into the most popular form of leisure during the Victorian period on both continents.⁵⁵ At first, the numerous physically and mentally rewarding aspects of the ocean attracted visitors who wished to appreciate the scenery. In addition, it later drew people who wished to experience that intangible sublime feeling often obtained while relaxing by the shore, due to the many stimulating affects the climate has on the senses. This focus on the senses and the overall calming, marine

⁵² Inglis, 28.

⁵³ Grey and Stuart, 1.

⁵⁴ John Disturnell, *Springs, Water-falls, Sea-bathing Resorts, and Mountain Scenery of the United States and Canada; Giving an Analysis of the Principal Mineral Springs with a Brief Description of the Most Fashionable Watering-Places, Mountain Resorts, etc. with Illustrations* (New York: J. Disturnell at 197 Broadway, 1855), iv.

⁵⁵ Walvin, *Leisure and Society*, 68.

atmosphere were some of the major components of a trip to the sea that had initially attracted the Victorians.⁵⁶

Particularly popular in the developing American east coast were the resorts at Newport, Rhode Island and Saratoga Springs, New York. Both boasted opulence and prestige, with equally suited clientele each summer. When examining the earliest seaside resorts in the United States, it would be unwise to ignore both of these destinations. As early as the colonial period, Newport was vacation home to many wealthy visitors, traveling from as far as the South and the West Indies.⁵⁷ During these earlier years at Newport, health was still the primary attraction, similar to its British counterparts. After health, religion was the second most important feature. Saratoga boasted the country's first organized Temperance Society as early as 1808. However, as the leisure revolution gained momentum throughout the nineteenth century, Newport and Saratoga were able to break from religious and puritan restraints and accepted new trends as they allowed for the new era of social seaside resorts to emerge.⁵⁸

Once the new trend of leisure had begun, Saratoga quickly became labeled as a resort where the liberal, enlightened sect of the population visit, increasing its popularity with wealthy, out-of-state intelligentsia. Its renowned spas and springs allowed for sustained popularity throughout the year and not solely the summer like most northeastern resorts at the time.⁵⁹ Its accommodations were known to be luxurious and convenient, hosting thousands of guests simultaneously without problems. Some of its principal hotels were listed as the United States

⁵⁶ Inglis, 69-71.

⁵⁷ Dulles, 64.

⁵⁸ Cleveland Amory, *The Last Resorts* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1952), 18-19.

⁵⁹ Disturnell, 63.

Hotel, Congress Hall, Union Hall, and the Columbia Hotel: all names that will soon become very familiar outside of Saratoga.⁶⁰

Only 165 miles from New York City by steamboat and resting on Narragansett Bay, its rival, Newport, offered splendid climate with cool, revitalizing ocean breezes and breathtaking views, making it one of the oldest yet most popular seaside resorts of the nineteenth century. Boasting superb sea bathing, fine air quality, tasty seafood, and well-tended hotels, it attracted both the invalid and the wealthy throughout the summer months.⁶¹ The two famed resorts were considered the country's most fashionable resorts for many years, as orderly, respectable gentlemen frequented Saratoga while the more romantic typically assembled along the beach in Newport.⁶²

In an effort to attract the newly developing "leisure class," (those who could afford to spend time and money on trips to the shore) and to keep them returning, the resorts added a number of amenities that fit Victorian tastes: new boutiques, bookshops, card rooms, libraries, rotundas, and assembly rooms.⁶³ These latest additions and the overall prim quality of the clientele at the resorts were positive element for a retreat that doctors had long maintained was healthy.⁶⁴

Although Newport remained one of the two so-called "fashionable queens" of American seaside resorts for a significant amount of time through the early to mid 1800s, it would not be protected from competition. Indeed, the most wealthy and socially distinct people from a number

⁶⁰ Disturnell, 67.

⁶¹ Ibid, 58-59.

⁶² Ibid, 223.

⁶³ Grey and Stuart, 1.

⁶⁴ Corbin, 254.

of states had accepted it, therefore making it the liveliest social watering hole on the eastern seaboard. However, amongst its numerous advantages, it suffered one disadvantage that would detriment its longstanding success. Newport's lack of railroad accessibility would restrict a number of pleasure seekers later in the century. This would prove to be a fatal shortcoming, as transportation in New Jersey soon allowed access for waves of visitors of all kinds.⁶⁵

By the middle decades of the nineteenth century, more prominent American seaside resorts had surfaced than just Newport and Saratoga, giving even the historically and socially deep-rooted towns legitimate competition throughout the remainder of the nineteenth century. The number of resorts that had developed in New England and the Mid-Atlantic by the 1880s and 1890s was astonishing. There is evidence of this growing popularity in a column in the *New York Tribune* from May of 1890. The newspaper featured eight columns strictly consisting of summer resort advertisements for these coastal regions. More noteworthy, these advertisements featured cheap resort rates and transportation fares, highlighting the different clientele resorts' attracted by the final decades of the 1800s.⁶⁶ Because of advertisements like these, and all of the above-mentioned reasons for the expansion of leisure, the popularity of more affordable resort destinations, like those in New Jersey, grew immensely. Cape May and Atlantic City quickly emerged onto the seaside resort scene, and replaced Newport and Saratoga as the number one (and two) most popular seaside resorts in the country.⁶⁷ The growth and development of these resorts allowed for the leisure culture to expand as the heyday of great eastern American resorts

⁶⁵ Bachelder, 104.

⁶⁶ Dulles, 202.

⁶⁷ Amory, 19-20.

arrived.⁶⁸ The next step in the evolution of the seaside holiday was so unpredicted and revolutionary in the history of leisure that it must be studied as a historical movement all its own.

After their initial popularity with wealthy Victorians, seaside resorts were given an entirely new and important place in society thanks to the middle and lower classes. The middle and lower classes' participation was essential in creating a new kind of leisure industry, which eventually reached both Europe and America.⁶⁹ After this, a social phenomenon occurred. Once an exclusive and posh activity, the seaside holiday was invaded by the lower classes, which eventually forced most of the upper class out of the resorts and into even more exclusive summertime establishments.

As we continue to explore this radical period of history, many marked changes will become apparent. Perhaps one of the most noticeable differences will involve the clientele at seaside resorts, and how amusements were changed in order to meet their needs and interests. An interesting theory about this change in resort clientele over the years was developed by leisure historian and author Cleveland Amory. Regarding the different, ever-changing stages of seaside resort guests, he argues that there were five notable phases, all of which have been touched upon briefly throughout the chapter. The first and earliest phase consisted of artists and writers, searching for a solitary and peaceful environment to enhance their creativity. The second phase he believes consisted of religious travelers and clergymen, seeking religious perfection in a sublime atmosphere. Third, he argues, arrived the "nice millionaires," looking for medicinal benefits and a place to enjoy a relaxing trip with their families. Fourth came the "naughty millionaires" who wished to elevate their social status and segregate those not of their upbringing

⁶⁸ Amory, 4.

⁶⁹ Grover, 4.

or class. They were most focused on hosting balls, galas, and dressing in elaborate contemporary fashions, essentially destroying the simple life and original purpose of the seashore visit. Fifth, was trouble.⁷⁰

What Amory calls trouble were the throngs of middle and lower class visitors of the late nineteenth century who were interested in cheaper and tawdrier amusements than their more rigid predecessors. Whether these visitors were indeed troublesome will be explored. However, one certainty is that they were responsible for changing the leisure industry and for forever altering the concept of the seaside holiday.

It is apparent that no other component of the Victorian Age was more groundbreaking and revolutionary to American culture than within the realms of leisure and recreation. In the beginning decades of the nineteenth century, leisure and travel were a realism only for the elite and advantaged. By the 1870s, these privileges had grown to reach the middle and working classes at some level, allowing for the massive explosion of marketable amusements, pastimes, and leisure establishments.⁷¹ The resort towns of Cape May and Atlantic City are two prime examples of these occurrences, and in fact, Amory's evolution of resorts, and their patrons, can be seen at both destinations.

⁷⁰ Amory, 23.

⁷¹ Sir Charles Petrie, *The Victorians* (New York: David McKay Company, Inc., 1962), 160.

CHAPTER TWO: TRANSFORMING TRANSPORTATION AND THE GROWTH OF THE RAILROAD

From inland spas and mineral springs to luxurious resorts, the railroad played a starring role in the development of the seaside resorts in American culture. In this chapter, we will see just how *transportation* triggered *transformation*. Before the bustling resorts and boardwalk amusements became commonplace during the late nineteenth century, there was a period in New Jersey's past that was just as important in shaping the seaside resort culture as the early claims of medicinal benefits and therapeutic cures. After the initial craze of "taking to the waters" grew more popular in the United States, there were also marked innovations in transportation occurring all over the country, many of which eventually found their way to coastal New Jersey. From canals, to steamships, to trains, these were all revolutionary innovations in the American life during the nineteenth century. All of these changes in transportation greatly affected business and industry, but most importantly, they affected leisure and recreation.⁷²

Canals, or artificial rivers as they were commonly dubbed, began to enter the tourism sector not too long after their initial debut in the early nineteenth century. Once people witnessed how canals transported goods and cargo safely and efficiently, they saw an opportunity to ease their travel conditions. Packet boats carried dozens of travelers at one time along the canal, even overnight. The packet boats had separate ladies and men's cabins, but they were often overbooked, leaving many without a bed, and creating cramped conditions during the voyage. Within an enclosed, narrow space on water lived men, women, babies, and more bugs than all three combined. Clearly, people neglected to realize that cargo is not the typical traveler, as

⁷² Dulles, 148.

people require much more space and a certain level of comfort. Another problem canal travelers dealt with was dysfunctional locks, which often increased travel time. However, the canal's greatest disadvantage was its inability to cope with weather. Most canals in the United States were in a region that experienced seasons and harsh weather conditions at some point. Thus, many canals shut down from December through April when freezes, winds, rain, and snow caused danger on the water.⁷³ To many travelers, the canal had come to be viewed as a nuisance rather than a sign of progress.

Overall, the canal as a form of public transportation and travel began to fall out of favor with the leisure class. The initial success of its novelty and its efficient cargo shipping had been too little to please the upscale passengers, and its inability to face weather conditions left it disgraced. Because of these factors, the canals helped lead people to instead embrace other forms of travel, as the steamships and trains ran year-round and offered better travel conditions, meeting people's expectations more successfully.⁷⁴

The specific impact of the railroad on New Jersey must be highlighted when discussing the shore destinations in the southern part of the state. Leisure class Americans began to see the advantages of this new mode of transport as it accustomed travelers to venturing long distances for enjoyment rather than for work or religious purposes. With this realization, there can be little protest that the railroad began to transform leisure.⁷⁵ However, before the railroad became commonplace, a more primitive mode of transportation brought droves of early visitors and health seekers to the beaches of New Jersey.

⁷³ Carol Sheriff, *The Artificial River: The Erie Canal and the Paradox of Progress, 1817-1862* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1996), 69-78.

⁷⁴ Ibid, 78-79, 173.

⁷⁵ Horn, 127.

Before the railways surfaced across the eastern part of the country and helped create a more leisure-oriented society, the “recreation revolution,” as author Pamela Horn labels it, was originally initiated by steamboats.⁷⁶ Dating back as early as 1825, there are records of the steamship *Pennsylvania*, which transported passengers from Philadelphia to Cape Island. Its passengers were primarily guests at the cape’s Atlantic Hotel, one of the oldest hotels on Cape



Figure 2: Highway Map of Southern New Jersey
 (http://www.aaccessmaps.com/show/map/us/nj/newjersey_s) Copyright City Maps, 2000

Island.⁷⁷ When traveling to the shore became more popular by mid-century, more steamships were making the journey. Many steamer companies embarked on advertising campaigns in Philadelphia, perhaps securing the New Jersey resort a wealthy clientele for years to come. One

⁷⁶ Horn, 123.

⁷⁷ William McMahon, *Historic South Jersey Towns* (Atlantic City: Press Publishing Company, 1964), 164.

of the surviving advertisements from 1856 that promoted a steamer heading to the new and improved Atlantic Hotel on Cape Island, which would be traveling from Philadelphia to Trenton on every day of the week, except for Sundays. Passengers could board the steamer for 25 cents (an amount equivalent to \$5 today), which was considered moderately pricey for transportation at the time.⁷⁸

Geographically, Trenton is not what one would call *close* to the early resorts, and there were no common ports in the area. Therefore, once disembarking from the ship, passengers had to acquire some form of land transportation to the resort destination. This would have only been possible by the use of horse carriages, a mode of travel strictly reserved for the wealthier citizens.

While Sunday in the 1850s was primarily devoted to religion, it emerged as the shore's most popular excursion day. Even though the steamship voyages provided a form of mass transportation to the newly developing shore towns, the Sunday exclusion appealed primarily to the working class. By the mid to late nineteenth century, Sunday was typically the only day that working and middle class families could travel, if at all. Until this point, access to Cape Island and the rest of the New Jersey shore was limited to steamer routes. In just a few years, this changed drastically, forever transforming the New Jersey coast. "Democratization" of seaside travel and patronage had not yet begun, but was on its way to changing leisure.⁷⁹

⁷⁸ "Philadelphia and Trenton: Every Day, (Sundays Excepted)," advertisement, (Philadelphia: Scott, Printer, 1856).

⁷⁹ James B. Kirk II, *Golden Light: The 1878 Diary of Captain Thomas Rose Lake* (Harvey Cedars, N.J.: Down the Shore Publishing, 2003), 169.

“The Road to Nowhere”

Across the Eastern seaboard, resorts are indebted to the railroad for their origin, development, and success. However, their impediments ranged from financial and political, to social in nature. Alfred Cooper, in *My Traditions and Memories, 1859-1938*, briefly discusses these earlier years of railroading, and recalls just how much the railroads, their problems, and their politics, dominated the state of New Jersey with debates during the mid-nineteenth century. The political agendas of northern politicians differed from those of the south, especially regarding the building and placement of railroad tracks near homes and businesses on the coastline.⁸⁰ Bringing a railroad to New Jersey, specifically in the southern coastal region, affected average residents, for better or for worse.

Despite New Jersey’s old connection to the advent of railroads, Pennsylvania actually developed its tracks and travel routes much earlier and promoted rail lines to New Jersey. The first constructed railroad for the Pennsylvania Railroad Company was officially in business by April 16, 1834, as a part of the Pennsylvania State Public Works Department.⁸¹ The Pennsylvania and later New Jersey railroads were not always intended for passengers. They began their routes shipping freight items such as timber and coal, and gradually developed into the commercial passenger market. These timber and coal freight trains frequently passed through the shore towns, offering the New Jersey shore a glimpse into its railroading future.⁸²

⁸⁰ Alfred M. Cooper, *My Traditions and Memories: 1859-1938* (Cape May Court House, NJ: Gazette Print Shop, 1938), 218.

⁸¹ H.W. Schotter, *The Growth of the Pennsylvania Railroad Company: A Review of the Charter and Annual Reports of the Pennsylvania Railroad Company, 1846-1926, Inclusive* (Philadelphia: Allen, Lane, & Scott, 1927), 3.

⁸² Lorett Treese, *Railroads of Pennsylvania: Fragments of the Past in the Keystone Landscape* (Mechanicsburg, P.A.: Stackpole Books, 2003), 140.

When the Pennsylvania Railroad opened its doors and depots to passengers, it charged no more than three cents per mile for “express” passengers and four cents for local passengers.⁸³ Evidently, the train was marketed as an affordable and efficient means of transportation, wherever the destination may be. Once farmers and businessmen in New Jersey heard about the cheap fares and low freight rates on the Pennsylvania Railroad, they petitioned for a similar development in the garden state. They figured if they could promote their goods and services to Pennsylvanians, their markets would expand and business would boom.⁸⁴ The only hurdle proved to be convincing state lawmakers of the railroad’s advantages.

It was no secret that after years of steamship travel, no part of New Jersey demanded a railroad more than the Cape Island peninsula. Steamboats were increasingly unpopular among wealthy travelers. The ships were considered uncomfortable, as well as unsafe and far too time-consuming. As Cape May’s popularity increased over the years, and its alleged medicinal and curative properties drew more visitors to its shores, the “toxic” steamboat seemed an ironic mode of transportation. Health seekers and invalids were often repulsed during the voyage, frequently becoming seasick or more exhausted. Clearly, this defeated the purpose of a curative trip to the new health resort of Cape May. The town lost potential visitors, mainly the invalids, because this detrimental steamer was the sole mode of travel. Furthermore, as Cape May transformed from a health haven into a recreational resort, steamships proved unable to accommodate the heightened crowds, especially during the prime summer weeks. Change was essential, and a railroad that promised quicker, more direct, and more comfortable travel seemed to be the resort’s best

⁸³ Schotter, 7.

⁸⁴ Lorett Treese, *Railroads of New Jersey: Fragments of the Past in the Garden State Landscape* (Mechanicsburg, P.A.: Stackpole Books, 2006), ix.

remedy.⁸⁵ In an effort to ease the transportation problem, stagecoaches made routine runs from Philadelphia to Cape May for \$2 per ticket. Stagecoaches operated as early as 1801, before the advent of regularly scheduled boat transportation. However, the service was available only once a week in the summer months, and required two days travel time each way.⁸⁶ A \$2 ticket was a somewhat competitive price by the 1850s compared to the steamship or horse drawn carriage rates at the time, given the improved comfort of a personal coach.⁸⁷ However, it was still not ideal transportation for most travelers.

Despite the apparent demand for a railroad, discord between state officials sparked a dispute that delayed construction of something so unquestionably needed, desired, and beneficial. Locked in an enduring, heated dispute over the value, necessity, and practicality of building a railroad to the New Jersey beaches, politicians prevented the plan from moving forward. Nevertheless, one man had a vision that, despite its critics, would eventually come to fruition. Dr. Jonathan Pitney, a local physician with a passion for coastal New Jersey, was the man behind creating what is now one of the most visited travel destinations north of the Cape Island resort town. From building roads and lighthouses in and around the area known as Absecon Island, to ultimately dreaming up this “city by the sea,” Pitney was the town’s most influential resident. After helping to create Atlantic County, where the resort town would eventually be located, Pitney moved on to bigger, statewide projects, such as plying state legislators to build a railroad in southern and coastal New Jersey.

⁸⁵ West Jersey Railroad Company, “Bylaws and Organization,” 1885.

⁸⁶ Robert Crozer Alexander, *Ho! For Cape Island!* (Cape May, N.J.: Robert Crozer Alexander, Publisher, 1956), 16.

⁸⁷ Ben Miller, *The First Resort: Fun, Sun, Fire and War in Cape May, America’s Original Seaside Town* (Rio Grande, NJ: Exit Zero Publishing Co., 2009), 36.

In 1851, Pitney attempted to obtain a charter from the state to build the railroad into his potential resort town that now consumed him.⁸⁸ Pitney soon discovered that one of the main problems with building a railroad in New Jersey was that the state's northern politicians wanted no part of the project. Not only did they not want to fund this sort of endeavor, but they also believed it to be a completely preposterous idea. They remained unsympathetic to claims of the need for a railroad anywhere south of Camden. Coastal boosters decried the lack of rail transportation to the growing resort town of Cape May, and its seaside neighbors to the north. Northerners protested that rail construction would not only be a waste of time and money, but was physically impossible. The consensus was that there was simply no way a train would be able to cross the salty meadows of southeastern New Jersey, and Pitney was ultimately denied.⁸⁹

After being rejected by most of the state politicians, Pitney created his own private railroad, the Camden and Atlantic Railroad Company, in 1852.⁹⁰ With the creation of this company, Pitney managed to persuade many southern politicians that building a railroad to the shore towns offered potential for economic and social growth. With some last minute pleadings and agreements, the bill to build a railroad to southern New Jersey was reluctantly passed. One of the railroad's main destinations, aside from Cape Island, was of course to be Pitney's own Absecon Island where he envisioned the creation of a new resort community that would rival Cape May. However, most viewed Pitney's Absecon Island dream as an unrealistic and impractical route that was even swampier and marshier than any southern location. Lawmakers

⁸⁸ McMahon, 113.

⁸⁹ Frank M. Butler, *Atlantic City Press*, 24 March 1940, p.3.

⁹⁰ McMahon, 113.

found a resort concept in this location to be outlandish; even more ridiculous than the possibility of any form of transportation being physically able to reach it.

However, with the persistence and help of Dr. Pitney, the southern farmers, businessmen, and recently swayed politicians again successfully persuaded their northern counterparts to develop the new resort town. Maps were drawn, tracks were laid, and the brand new route was snobbishly called “the road to nowhere” by many of those involved. At the very end of the route lay the future site of the resort town on Absecon Island, which had no name at the time of its inception. With permission from the local and state governments, planners scurried to begin building the railroad, and hastily gave the ill-fated resort town a temporary name that no one expected to last: “Atlantic City.”

All Aboard: The First Trains Depart for the Jersey Shore

Pitney’s Camden and Atlantic Railroad was completed and had routes reaching the nearby town of Hammonton as early as 1853, but it was on July 1, 1854 that the first train arrived in the now-realized Atlantic City. Six hundred passengers leaving from Philadelphia, made up of local and state officials, wealthy socialites, farmers, and prominent businessmen, arrived on the lone train track in the new resort town, which at the time consisted of only twenty-five houses and approximately one hundred residents.⁹¹ A letter sent to an Atlantic City official and historian, Alfred M. Heston, by a passenger on that first train details what it was like on “opening day” of the now-famed resort. Rider Joseph Griffith describes his time on the train as well as his experience on the island with his fellow farmers, even composing a sketch of how he remembers the arrival scene. Griffith recalls that the train stopped in front of a makeshift wooden

⁹¹ McMahan, 113.

restaurant, or dining hall, after an isolated ride through New Jersey's many wooded and marshy areas. He notes that there was nothing else in sight except the restaurant and a forest of small trees nearby. After dining, the passengers ventured onto the sand, where boards had been laid in order to make a path to the ocean. Griffith recalls that there were even a small number of bathing closets on the beach, complete with red flannel suits to rent. Even in its infancy, Atlantic City attempted to lure its visitors to dine on their shores and bathe in their waters.⁹² This letter from Joseph Griffith illustrates just how new and underdeveloped Atlantic City was at the time the first train arrived. Locals were not making the short trek to its beach or its restaurant. Therefore, the city depended on the out of town visitors like those onboard this first train.

As the railroad successfully ventured to Atlantic City before it made its maiden voyage to Cape Island, it brought more visitors from Philadelphia during the following months and years, (many of whom favored Cape May), and the Pennsylvania Railroad Company saw the potential for a successful business maneuver. In 1862, they began negotiating with a New Jersey business group, The Joint Companies, to construct train lines that would connect Pennsylvania Railroad Company tracks with the newly successful Camden and Atlantic tracks. By 1867, the line was complete, bringing in more visitors from the neighboring state.⁹³ The success of the Atlantic City routes on these railroads seemed to conjure up worry amongst Cape May hotel and business owners. Their strong and urgent desire to build a similar railroad to the cape proves that brand new Atlantic City was offering them decent competition. Many of Cape May's regulars, while not entirely deserting the town, began traveling to Atlantic City simply because it was more

⁹² Joseph Griffith, passenger, to Alfred M. Heston, Atlantic City, 1917, Alfred M. Heston Collection, Atlantic City Free Public Library, Atlantic City, N.J..

⁹³ Treese, *Railroads of New Jersey*, 3.

convenient and more comfortable. The days of delicate socialites trekking on harsh roads by horse and carriage while dealing with the elements were no more. This would not be the last evidence of competition between the two popular resorts, but it certainly was enough to give Atlantic City a prominent place on the map with many wealthy travelers.

In order to reclaim its prominence on the New Jersey coast, Cape May moved quickly to build the first railroad to its resort by 1863.⁹⁴ By the mid 1860s, the newest and very popular West Jersey Railroad Company completed its tracks to Cape May. With this, Cape May became more accessible, comfortable, and attractive to its visitors, both old and new. The train ride itself was even made more comfortable, as the journey was made shorter, and also with the addition of more luxurious passenger cars for the wealthiest of families. Passengers were even treated to exquisite depots upon arrival and departure in Cape May, many with a beachfront location and in close proximity to the major hotels.⁹⁵ For example, the Old Stockton Hotel in Cape May was actually built by the West Jersey Railroad Company in 1869, further reinforcing the beneficial relationship between railroads and resorts.⁹⁶ The hotel industry was not the only one to be grateful of the railroad, as the residential area of Cape May also prospered, with increased property values and numerous cottages and seaside mansions built after its emergence in the 1860s.⁹⁷

Many of the visitors who had turned their backs on Cape May in favor of Atlantic City returned to their former playground in the late 1860s, pleased with the transportation and accommodations available. Not surprisingly, Philadelphians dominated the tourist population,

⁹⁴ Treese, *Railroads of New Jersey*, 200.

⁹⁵ *The Ocean Resort: Life at Cape May* (Philadelphia: Allen, Lane, & Scott, 1876), 15.

⁹⁶ McMahon, 162.

⁹⁷ Bachelder, 232.

and more of them continued coming to Cape May with the creation of express train routes, which advertised no stops.⁹⁸ Not only did the West Jersey Railroad allow Cape May to regain its prominence with travelers of elite status, but it also enabled business owners and farmers to ship their goods to Philadelphia much quicker than before. While this allowed farming to flourish in southern New Jersey, it also created a new and prosperous industry that had never been possible before: dairy farming. With express train routes, dairy products could travel between Philadelphia and the coastal resorts before spoiling. This new type of farming and shipping created many new jobs, and simultaneously gave both well-established farmers and railroad employees more opportunities for work and pay.⁹⁹ In addition to dairy farming, railroad materials were often shipped across the southern part of the state. There is evidence of much correspondence between lumber and other various building material companies and the major railroads about the urgent need for more goods such as railroad ties, track materials, and sufficient supplies of lumber in the new seaside resort towns. The quick success of Atlantic City and the recovered popularity of Cape May heightened this demand for shipping throughout the state, further promoting New Jersey's growing industries.¹⁰⁰

By 1877, a third railroad was constructed to accommodate the seashore boom in the towns of Cape May and Atlantic City. This railroad, the "Narrow Gauge Railroad," traveled directly from Camden, New Jersey (technically more of a "suburb" of Philadelphia than a New Jersey town), to the growing resort town of Atlantic City. Its official name was the Philadelphia and Atlantic, but it was nicknamed the Narrow Gauge because it consisted of one single,

⁹⁸ *Ocean Resort*, 15.

⁹⁹ Treese, *Railroads of New Jersey*, 193.

¹⁰⁰ South Jersey Realty Company letters, Frank H. Stewart Collection, Rowan University, Glassboro, N.J.

extremely narrow track. Builders laid fifty-four miles of this thin track in a matter of ninety-eight days, a major triumph for the period.¹⁰¹ Although the proposed success of the Narrow Gauge eventually came to fruition, it was not without problems. Captain Thomas Rose Lake comments in his 1878 diary that its novel and narrow track was actually a disadvantage, making the trains more susceptible to violent storms, accidents, and unpredictably high tides. Ultimately, the Narrow Gauge was taken over by the Pennsylvania Railroad, but it was still used and enjoyed much success over the years, despite its occasional setbacks.¹⁰²

Despite their success, the various rail companies felt the need to entice their potential customers to return to the shore via their lines. They developed the concept of the “excursion.” Passengers could purchase a \$1 excursion ticket that was good for one round trip between Camden and Atlantic City on a train cleverly named “Excursion.” This special train met the Philadelphia Ferry at Camden and transferred the day-trippers from the city to the resort town. Since the round trip was meant to be completed in one day, it included no overnight accommodations at the hotels, another local business industry that had vastly expanded alongside the railroad. This alarmed many hotel owners, who not long ago had been thankful for the rail routes in and out of the shore towns, because they had been undoubtedly helping their businesses. Another source of worry for the owners was the fact that these excursion trains produced “excursion houses.” Interestingly, these excursion houses were often built by the railroad companies themselves. By the late 1870s, there were two principal excursion houses in Atlantic City: the Seaview Excursion House and the Narrow Gauge Excursion House. Passengers were conveniently let off their respective trains at one of these houses, where they

¹⁰¹ McMahan, 115.

¹⁰² Kirk, 73.

could use the restrooms and enjoy various refreshments before heading out to the beach and boardwalk.¹⁰³ Marketing would change the future, for better or for worse.

The Railroad as an Everyday Institution

In 1882 and 1883 the principal train companies traveling to Atlantic City were listed as the Camden and Atlantic Railroad, the Philadelphia and the Atlantic City Railway Company, and the West Jersey Railroad Company.¹⁰⁴ However, by 1896, all of the railroads in the West Jersey system were successfully united under the newly created, and highly profitable, West Jersey and Seashore Railroad Company.¹⁰⁵ With the help of more profits, more stock, and more safety regulation, the railroad of the late nineteenth century became a much more efficient operation that was also arguably the country's most successful innovation and luxury to date. Trains cut more minutes from their overall travel time with the addition of new and faster locomotives.¹⁰⁶ Although these faster trains were more prominent during the latter years of the 1800s, they actually made their debut as early as 1875 when express routes from Philadelphia to Atlantic City on the Camden and Atlantic Railroad were advertised.¹⁰⁷ A few years following the West Jersey and Seashore Railroad Company merger, it became the first company to electrify one of their routes on the Camden to Atlantic City line in 1906. This quicker travel better suited the

¹⁰³ Kirk, 70-71, 170.

¹⁰⁴ James Gopsill, *Gopsill's Atlantic City Directory for 1882-1883* (Philadelphia: James Gopsill, Publisher, 1883), 168.

¹⁰⁵ Treese, *Railroads of New Jersey*, 194.

¹⁰⁶ *Atlantic City Gazette*. 1898. "Fast Railroading," July 2.

¹⁰⁷ C.K. Hammitt and W.D. Hammitt, *Hammitt's Business Directory for 1875-1876 of Camden, Gloucester, Salem, Cumberland, Cape May, and Atlantic Counties* (Philadelphia: C.K. and W.D. Hammitt, Publishers, 1876), 241.

visitors coming through Camden, most of whom originated their travel in Philadelphia, headed to the New Jersey seaside.¹⁰⁸

With rail travel to the shore towns growing increasingly popular, the rail companies created a number of rules, regulations, and traveler “perks” for those riding on their cars. For most passengers, excluding those in the most expensive cars, baggage was limited to fifty pounds per person. In some cases, the passenger was required to sign the back of the ticket, agreeing to the baggage terms and risks of accident or injury while on board. The throngs of ocean-seeking visitors, especially the elite families of Philadelphia, Washington D.C., and Baltimore, were beginning to require more comfortable conditions during their rail travel to the shore, and many companies quickly complied. In particular, the Pennsylvania Railroad offered roomy, airy “day coaches” as well as exquisite parlor cars, sometimes available with an upgraded fee. With this feature, it is evident that the rail companies were trying to please both their wealthy patrons and their day-tripping excursionists. While those time cards that passengers carried sometimes listed a number of Sunday Excursion trains on the back to suit the working class visitors, the train also catered to its wealthier and more faultfinding patrons.¹⁰⁹ Therefore, many of the trains also boasted fine club cars for men and chair cars for women, and many headed for Atlantic City advertised a gentleman’s smoking room on board.¹¹⁰ This is an example of the prudish, Victorian values that separated men from women and the higher class from the lower class.

However, these more traditional values had now intermingled with one of the most modern and

¹⁰⁸ Schotter, 293.

¹⁰⁹ Philadelphia and Atlantic City Railway Company, tickets and time cards, 1889, Alfred M. Heston Collection, Atlantic City Free Public Library, Atlantic City, N.J..

¹¹⁰ Pennsylvania Railroad Passenger Department, *Atlantic City: A Review of its Attractions as a Pleasure Resort, and Incidentally, the Comfort and Convenience of Reaching the Same* (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania Railroad Company, 1898).

advanced attractions of the period, which had simultaneously opened the leisure market to a larger segment of consumers. With the mixture of Victorian restrictions, modern technology, and a new, lower class of travelers on board, the railroad had become one of the most obvious contradictions and principal paradoxes found in Cape May and Atlantic City.

In a further boost to the rail industry's success, the 1876 Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia brought railroad excursion travel to the forefront of many Americans' everyday lives. There, the Pennsylvania Railroad Company advertised and demonstrated its wondrous technology to all exposition visitors.¹¹¹ Before the railroad became commonplace in and around the seaside towns, transportation was limited to the upper class, creating a sense of apathy about the train amongst poorer Americans. Considering they did not have access to modes of

WEST JERSEY RAILROAD CO.

PASSENGER DEPARTMENT.

CAPE MAY.

Season of 1876.

SCHEDULE OF TRAINS.

	Leave Philadelphia.	Arrive Cape May.		Leave Cape May.	Arrive Philadelphia.
EXPRESS.	5.00 A. M.	7.14 P. M.	MAIL.	5.30 A. M.	10.04 A. M.
EXPRESS.	2.00 P. M.	4.30	FAST EXPRESS.	7.00	8.21
MAIL.	1.15	7.03	FAST EXPRESS.	8.00	11.21
FAST EXPRESS.	4.00	6.23	EXPRESS.	4.42 P. M.	8.00 P. M.
PASSENGER (SUNDAY).	5.30	6.15	SUNDAY MAIL.	5.00	8.21
SUNDAY MAIL.	7.30 A. M.	9.45 A. M.			

RATES OF FARE

BETWEEN

Philadelphia and Cape May.

Regular Tickets,		\$2 50
Excursion Tickets,	(Valid for the return trip on day of issue or next succeeding day, or when called on Saturday prior to return on the following Sunday.)	4 00
Sunday Excursion Tickets,	(Valid only on day of issue.)	2 50
Servants' Tickets,	(Valid only to servants accompanying families on grand excursions under their masters, and not good for passage on their regular freight trains unless paying freight.)	2 00
10-Trip Family Tickets,	(Valid from issue till the 30th day of June, for the transportation of one member of the family in each direction.)	20 00
25-Trip Family Tickets,	(Valid from issue till the 30th day of June, for the transportation of one member of the family in each direction.)	40 00
Season Tickets,	(Valid only for the transportation of the passenger from June 1st to September 30th.)	80 00
Round Trip Tickets,	(Valid only for the transportation of the passenger during the year of issue.)	100 00

SPECIAL EXCURSION PARTIES AT SPECIAL RATES.

J. W. J. SEWELL, Agent.

Figure 3: Schedule and Rates of Fare

¹¹¹ *The Centennial Exposition and the Pennsylvania Railroad* (Philadelphia: The Pennsylvania Railroad Company, 1876).

transportation such as horses, carriages, and boats, they rarely ventured to the seashore that was many miles away from their inner city dwellings.¹¹² However, by 1876, the combination of the Centennial Exposition's exposure to this latest innovation and the rail companies offering of cheap "excursions," traveling to the seashore finally became somewhat surprisingly realistic for those lower classes.

The peaked interest and railroad building boom throughout southern New Jersey in the mid nineteenth century undeniably allowed for a similar boom in the hotel and amusement industries in the following years. Nevertheless, what must be made clear is that without one, the other could have been possible, but perhaps would not have enjoyed the same degree of success and popularity. However, this must not be misinterpreted as a claim that the railroad created seaside resorts. As discussed earlier, seaside resorts and spas had existed long before the first rail tracks had ever been laid, but they were not nearly as fashionable with a wide range of the American population as later nineteenth century Cape May and Atlantic City turned out to be. While these resorts are responsible for creating the socially acceptable pastime of the summer pilgrimage to the shore, their development, accommodations, and curative attractions were aimed exclusively at the wealthy, assuming no one from even the middle class could afford their luxuries. However, with the advent of the railroad, the clientele at these resorts quickly transformed.¹¹³

Another prominent effect of the New Jersey railroads was the idea of living at the shore all year round. With improved routes and faster travel in the later years of the century,

¹¹² Walvin, *Leisure and Society*, 71.

¹¹³ Hugh Cunningham, *Leisure in the Industrial Revolution, c.1780-1880* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1980), 160-161.

businessmen were able to live in the quieter shore towns and still commute to the major cities. This commuting, as with many other elements of the New Jersey shore, has never changed. Nevertheless, the quiet little shore towns would not remain entirely sleepy for long. The development of these towns was so quickly hastened by the railroad and resorts that one hundred person towns sometimes rapidly transformed into major cities themselves.¹¹⁴ As historian Foster Rhea Dulles puts it, the fashionable members of this late Victorian society instantly turned these quiet little coastal havens into bustling social centers.¹¹⁵

Dr. Jonathan Pitney and his building of the Camden and Atlantic Railroad, the first from Philadelphia to reach his beloved Absecon Island and later, Cape Island, undoubtedly enabled the once isolated coastal area to flourish.¹¹⁶ Although not without political problems in the beginning and various accidents later on, the railroad in New Jersey was ultimately a successful enterprise that shaped the destiny of towns like Atlantic City, and that further promoted towns like Cape May.¹¹⁷ Its eventual lower fares, special excursion tickets, Sunday specials, and excursion houses combined with the overall increase in the standard of living in the later nineteenth century, allowed for a new sort of traveler to occasionally venture to the New Jersey shore. Therefore, there should be no contest to the claim “the railroad democratized the seaside resort.”¹¹⁸

Although it has become clear that these options for less wealthy passengers did indeed break through financial and class barriers of the period, the railroad, and its democratization of

¹¹⁴ Walvin, *Leisure and Society*, 70, 72.

¹¹⁵ Dulles, 149.

¹¹⁶ Heston, 46.

¹¹⁷ Kirk, 70-71.

¹¹⁸ Grey and Stuart, 6.

the shore, would eventually begin to divide the resorts that it originally unified. Cape May quickly became the resort for the elite and fashionable of Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Washington, while Atlantic City would soon house a motlier crowd.¹¹⁹ Changes in both towns would occur over the last three decades of the century, ultimately securing their fates, which, in many ways, have remained until the present day.

¹¹⁹ Bachelder, 232.

CHAPTER THREE: VICTORIAN SEASIDE SOCIETY

A Changing and Conflicted Society

*“It would be a great convenience to have a railway to the resort,
yet one hardly desires to see its quiet seclusion from the busy world disturbed
by ugly rushes of those buoyant spirits known as excursionists.”*¹²⁰

Thus was the sentiment amongst most upper class Victorians after the country’s greatest innovation took the coast by storm. Before the emergence of the railroad to the coastal towns, seaside resorts and inland spas and springs seemed to embody everything that was considered decent, fashionable, and in good order and taste. Since they were originally intended for the aristocracy and more “leisured” classes, these traits were found at almost every establishment, and were strictly enforced. With the rise of the middle class during the mid to late nineteenth century, people in the United States, England, France, and other coastal countries were coping the sudden change and growth of the seaside resorts in their respective locales. While the resorts of the early nineteenth century catered to the upper class, it would seem reasonable that guests accepted the new, more socially unified lodgings of the later decades, after the railroad created opportunities for almost everyone to visit the shore. However, this was not the case. In England, many of the wealthiest resort patrons, including the royal family, anxiously escaped the beachfront resort scene, relocating in much more isolated and demure retreats. In the United States, the opposite occurred, with places like Saratoga Springs remaining quite popular, but losing some of their clientele to the new and more popular seaside resorts in New Jersey. These older, inland springs and spas like Saratoga simply did not allow for as much health, exercise, and leisure activity as the resorts directly on the beach, and came to be viewed as stuffy and

¹²⁰ Horn, 9.

more old-fashioned. At the shore, the exercise was more challenging, and the elements more therapeutic.¹²¹

Although there were some differences between the resorts of England and the United States and the spas and the shore, many of the intended, wealthier patrons behaved similarly once the railroads unleashed numerous crowds of middle and lower classes onto their summertime havens. As early as mid-century, the train allowed middle class and some lower class industrial, city-dwellers to visit the shore. Certain resorts became the unofficial meeting grounds for the upper echelon of the working class: wealthier merchants, manufacturers, and craftsmen. When they arrived, they enjoyed their own customs and habits, but this did not stop them from attempting to imitate the upper class. Once these workers began to invade the shore during the summer months, the remaining members of the lower class took advantage of the day excursion fares. Perhaps this is because they felt more comfortable amongst the merchants and craftsmen than the elite, as the wealthy dominated the seaside when excursion rates were first promoted.¹²²

Upper class guests beseeched railroad companies to raise fares or eliminate the day excursion trips altogether, in hope of returning some “sense of order” and class to the developing resorts. The railroads and resorts were torn over this, because to them, a poor man’s dollar was just as good and equal as a rich man’s dollar, despite the well-known, sometimes rowdy antics of

¹²¹ Walvin, *Leisure and Society*, 69-73.

¹²² Corbin, 269-270, 278.

the day-trippers.¹²³ The upper class found it increasingly difficult to accept that the exclusive and exquisite resorts of earlier decades were fading.¹²⁴

Once this new approach to resort life was conceived, many small hotel, boarding house, and restaurant proprietors set out to target the masses in lieu of the wealthy. For the first time, the railroads were not the only businesses aiming to reel in less affluent customers with target marketing and competitive “deals” on their product. Once the hoteliers began doing so, a number of seashore entertainments and concepts followed suit. Brass bands, snack stands, beer gardens, gypsies, and street entertainers flooded the shore, catering to the demands of the middle and lower classes. In fact, by the 1870s, the demand for cheap lodging and like amusements was so high that hotel proprietors abandoned the popular trend of constructing grand seaside palaces and instead opted to build boarding house structures.¹²⁵ In addition to the new resort owners, well-established resorts were forced to make changes as well. The same resorts that had catered to the upper class Victorians since their opening were now almost required to attract the lower class excursionists, especially if they planned to stay in business all season long.¹²⁶

Changes were also taking place throughout different, broader aspects of Victorian society. Recently, some historians have addressed that several institutions had now officially accepted and welcomed the culture of leisure, including, but not limited to, the church and the workplace. For example, beach outings became so popular and typical by the later part of the

¹²³ Grey and Stuart, 7-8.

¹²⁴ H. Cunningham, 160.

¹²⁵ Ibid, 163.

¹²⁶ Grey and Stuart, 7-8.

nineteenth century that church groups, youth groups, and Sunday school classes were frequenting the shore.¹²⁷

After these societal transformations were fully underway, it would come as no surprise that resort culture was consequentially influenced and altered. It was a time when many households grew accustomed to modern conveniences and an age of cheaper and more efficient transportation. In addition, some working Americans had more ability to enjoy leisure with the creation of regular and legal holidays.¹²⁸ Due to both the new methods of advertisement and trends in amusement and changes in the average American household, the American resorts of the late 1800s began to consistently boom with various types of travelers, as they offered a seemingly democratized way of life and leisure. Nevertheless, this unification was ill-fated in such a structured society, and it eventually divided the guests and the reputation and clientele of individual resorts. Despite the widened range of guests that the trains allowed, the communal quest for leisure and therapy, and the somewhat equal-opportunity transportation and amusements, the Victorians often remained intentionally segregated at the resorts.

Class Consciousness and Conduct at a Late Victorian Resort

Besides the restorative properties of sea bathing and the curative tonic of the sea air, a trip to the shore in the latter part of the century began to serve only one purpose: that of a social function. There is a small yet significant period of time that falls between the years of medicinal and curative trips to the shore and the later decades of early entertainments and the first boardwalk amusements. It is a period when seaside visitors focused mainly on establishing and

¹²⁷ H. Cunningham, 181.

¹²⁸ Horn, 122-123.

maintaining their place in society, and this was nowhere more evident than at the individual resorts. At this time, one of the most important things to a Victorian socialite, or aspirant socialite, was to *be seen*. If you were not present at the resort at the start of the summer, you may as well have been buried for the entire season. The elite and even some middle-class hopefuls made sure to commence the summer at their resort of choice.¹²⁹ This is a social practice that is still relevant in our society today, but it was an essential component of upper class Victorian public life. Those who were deemed to be of a slightly lesser social standing in their year-round communities were anxious to visit the shore, where they could walk among the most genteel families and pretend they were their equals.¹³⁰

This inter-period can unofficially be labeled as the age of high resort culture in the late Victorian era, with its distinct cultural trends and social segregation. As it has been discussed, the railroad democratized the resorts, or at least, so it appeared. The railroad had now too become one of the paradoxes found in the culture of leisure, and more specifically, in the Victorian seaside resort towns. Before this transformation, higher class morals, values, and forms of etiquette defined proper conduct at the seaside resorts. These practices and forms of social expression would inflict a much higher degree of formality, social awareness, and class-consciousness upon guests of all means.¹³¹ This resort culture would shape the next few decades of American resort towns, their patrons, and their divisions.

This class-consciousness exhibited by upper class Victorians did not occur only at the resorts, but also in their cities, suburbs, and small towns. Residential areas were segregated in

¹²⁹ Disturnell, 224.

¹³⁰ Dulles, 150.

¹³¹ Inglis, 23.

many parts of the country, and this type of attitude and concept was fully carried over into their summertime dwellings at the shore.¹³² This aspect of segregated leisure can initially be found in the rates charged by the resorts, many of them hoping to obtain an element of exclusivity. Many hotels advertised which particular distinguished patrons stayed at their resort in tour-and guidebooks, hoping to attract guests of a similar caliber.¹³³ In addition, resorts often varied their rates and sometimes advertised them as “based on application.” When hoteliers chose to disclose more information, they advertised one rate for “transients” and a separate rate for “permanents.” For example, a transient guest was charged a daily rate of \$3 while a permanent guest was charged \$15 for an entire seven day week. (At this time, a typical stay at the shore lasted three full weeks).¹³⁴ While these ads offered rate and hotel information, they also specifically noted that their businesses were popular and frequented by the “elite of the best society.” These were “subtle” ways of attempting to target only those who could afford to stay for more than one week and those who would consider themselves of equal standing to those mentioned elite society members. All of these aspects of a simple resort advertisement in a guidebook demonstrate the segregation and ideal class restrictions of this late Victorian resort community to the highest degree.¹³⁵

Aside from the prejudiced rates many resorts charged, their accommodations and attractions also became part of the ulterior motive to segregate this newly “democratized” society. The so-called “purpose-built properties,” intended for the wealthy, boasted a number of

¹³² H.J Perkin, “The Social ‘Tone’ of Victorian Seaside Resorts in the North-West,” *Northern History* 2 (1975-1976): 180.

¹³³ Heston.

¹³⁴ John T. Cunningham, *The New Jersey Shore* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1958), 125.

¹³⁵ *Industries of New Jersey Part II*, 1882, Frank M. Stewart Collection, Rowan University, Glassboro, N.J., 326, 344.

special services and facilities for the guest's comfort. What historian Andrea Inglis calls "the demonstration of prosperity" became the most obvious and deliberate attempt to segregate the resorts according to Victorian class-consciousness. Resort owners strived to provide exquisite accommodations with the intention of displaying affluence and social standing while their guests were eager to maintain it.¹³⁶ These hotels also began to include restaurants, smoking rooms, and parlors on their grounds. At these premier lodgings, fortune tellers, cheap meals, kegs of beer, and rowdy bathers were neither advertised or tolerated, in an attempt to deter lower class excursionists from trying to stay or spend recreation time there.¹³⁷ These high-end resorts offered a variety of entertainments that reflected the developing leisure culture, such as archery, croquet, lawn tennis, other proper Victorian amusements, and of course, sea bathing. By this period, despite the Victorian class-consciousness and obsession with etiquette and demeanor, more traditional beliefs and cynical predispositions about men and women bathing at the same beach together had begun to disappear.¹³⁸ Many first class hotels advertised both hot and cold baths on site, in addition to the popular pastime of dipping in the surf during bathing hour.¹³⁹

Much like the seaside resort scene of present day, weekdays at the shore were enjoyed by women and their children, mostly of the upper and middle classes, who entertained themselves while their husbands and fathers conducted business in nearby cities. Within this secluded environment, many of the elite's essential habits and behaviors were demonstrated. For Victorian parents, just the general practice of taking their children on seaside holidays for reasonably lengthy stays in the summer allowed them to inculcate the idea of class-consciousness into the

¹³⁶ Inglis, 81.

¹³⁷ Horn, 130, 132.

¹³⁸ Dulles, 202-203.

¹³⁹ *Industries of New Jersey*, 344.

minds of their youth. However, no matter how hard Victorian mothers urged customs and mores on their own children, they could not control the influx of day-tripping visitors that had recently “discovered” the shore. Once this occurred, it became clear that familiar and acceptable standards of conduct and behavior among resort clientele could no longer be guaranteed, making the older, upper class guests uncomfortable. When this intermingling became too much to handle, the wealthy felt it was necessary to promote and suggest appropriate behaviors. Etiquette guides were distributed and made readily available to all resort patrons. These guides covered everything from resort and bathing hour dress codes to language and decorum. Unfortunately, for the upper classes, these guidebooks came to represent simply an idyllic expectation rather than reality.¹⁴⁰

After the consistent failures of the upper class to mold their subordinates, it was understood that even when pastimes were to be shared, they must be segregated. Resorts that housed a broader range of guests were forced to divide their properties into class-specific zones for all aspects of resort life including rooms, dining, and recreation.¹⁴¹ Towards the end of the century, many resorts embarked on this path in order to open their doors to more excursionists and lower class patrons in order to remain financially stable. Less affluent visitors enjoyed their own means of leisure, which are most commonly associated with circus and midway types of entertainments. In addition to carnivals and tawdry pastimes, many of their favorite activities included sea bathing, strolling, shell collecting, laying on the sand, or attending beach parties.¹⁴² The late nineteenth century beach party was actually a highly popular social event, specifically

¹⁴⁰ Inglis, 83-94.

¹⁴¹ Horn, 256.

¹⁴² Ibid, 88, 123.

for young adults and adolescents. In his 1878 diary, Captain Thomas Lake described one of these parties held by the middle and lower classes on a Cape May beach, stating the partygoers enjoyed various group games and immense quantities of food. Lake described the attendees and speculated that they were probably a church-organized group. This is indicative of how popular both the beach party and the church's acceptance of leisure at the seaside had become.¹⁴³

This separated, yet integrated, contradictory Victorian seaside culture was about to emerge at the coastal resorts of New Jersey as it grew increasingly popular on the eastern coast of the United States. Pleasure stays at seaside resorts became so common that the question for Victorian families became not if they would visit during the summer, but which particular beach and resort they would visit.¹⁴⁴ This growing form of recreation expanded as the nineteenth century progressed, and it would experience some of its greatest success in Cape May, New Jersey.

¹⁴³ Kirk, 188, 197.

¹⁴⁴ *Baltimore Sun*, 20 June 1885.

CHAPTER FOUR: CAPE MAY- RESORT LIFE AND VICTORIAN SEASIDE AMUSEMENTS

A Quaint Seaside Colony

Cape May's existence has encompassed several stages, beginning with the Dutch settlers, natives, and early whalers, through the Revolutionary War, to its antebellum fame for being a health resort before the Civil War, and finally to its late Victorian supremacy.¹⁴⁵ Cape May was sought for health, sustenance, and pleasure long before the railroads, by all sorts of people, marking its special place in North American history.¹⁴⁶

Prior to the seventeenth century and Dutch exploration and settlement of the cape, the area was a popular fishing and leisure location for the natives, searching its prime beaches for oysters and clams.¹⁴⁷ The natives, who were members of the Lenni Lenapi tribe, made Cape Island their home due to the abundance of both salt and fresh water sources. Another natural feature that drew the natives to the cape was the plentiful amount of quartz crystals found on the sand. These crystals later became known as the Cape May Diamonds, a tourist phenomenon to this day. The tribes believed these quartz crystals to have mystical powers, and they often used them to trade and barter for goods and services with neighboring tribes or early European settlers.¹⁴⁸

Dutch Captain Cornelius Mey, whose surname would eventually be given to the island, performed the first known exploration of the cape. It is believed that Captain Mey was chosen by the Dutch government to investigate the area after famed explorer Henry Hudson sailed around

¹⁴⁵ McMahon, 163.

¹⁴⁶ *Industries of New Jersey*, 383.

¹⁴⁷ Cooper, 108.

¹⁴⁸ Miller, 14.

the cape in 1609. Hudson and Mey's voyages, it is important to note, occurred roughly a decade before the arrival of the Mayflower. At this time, there were no European inhabitants in the northeastern part of what is now the United States, and the few lingering survivors from the Jamestown colony were farther south. Years passed after their initial findings before an official exploration was conducted in the early 1620s. All that was recorded of this voyage was that Mey fell in love with the area and scenery, but particularly the climate. Comparing the coast to his native Holland, he decided to name the island after himself. In 1630, Captain Mey and the Dutch government officially purchased the cape from the Lenne Lenape tribe. The agreement that took place was misinterpreted by the natives, as they thought they were giving the West Indies Company the right to fish and hunt on their land, not that they were selling the land entirely. Luckily for the natives, their loss of land would not last. The Dutch colony on Cape May struggled immensely, and the Captain himself gave up and returned home to Holland. The settlers who remained also fled the cape, relocating in what would prove to be a much more prosperous area of the coast; they named their new home to the north New Amsterdam.¹⁴⁹

After the evacuation of the Dutch, the island continued under native, and later, English Puritan control. These Puritans had fled their colonies in New England, traveling southward to the cape for the salt and fresh water, just as the Lenne Lenape originally had done. The travel records of the English created an interest in the cape, and it grew in popularity as consistent waves of settlers arrived from the 1640s onward. After the conflict over the control of New Amsterdam harbor, the English prevailed over the Dutch, and the area was divided into two portions. The northern part was renamed New York while the southern portion was named New

¹⁴⁹ Miller, 12-15.

Jersey. At the turn of the eighteenth century, whaling and farming served as the primary economic activities in and around Cape May. Roads were constructed in order to facilitate farming as the region slowly grew into a self sustaining colony.¹⁵⁰

Later that century, Cape May was exposed to the rest of the country after the Revolutionary War. Soldiers who were stationed nearby and trekking around the area noticed the coastal town and reported their fondness of it to their friends and family once they returned home. The city that heard the most about Cape May was its closest neighbor, the new nation's capital, Philadelphia. At the turn of the eighteenth century, city dwellers explored the shores of New Jersey, but were ultimately faced with the predicament of acquiring transportation and lodging. Thus, this first small wave of travelers began paying Cape May residents for room and board in their homes. After this trend became more popular, many locals erected guest houses on their property for this purpose, acting as a precursor to the future hotel industry on the cape.¹⁵¹

The Newspaper Advertisement that Started It All

A Philadelphia newspaper called *The Aurora* is credited with printing the first advertisement for a seaside stay in Cape May. The article was published in an 1801 edition by early hotel proprietor, Ellis Hughes. In fact, the ad claimed that Hughes had already prepared himself for the summer's sea bathers, indicating that his "resort" has been open to guests in seasons prior.¹⁵² Hughes had recently been granted permission to legally operate this inn on his property, and he planned to attract as much business as possible. He named his inn The Atlantic House, and it became the first official hotel on Cape Island. The hotel is far from what today's or

¹⁵⁰ Miller, 18-21.

¹⁵¹ Ibid, 30.

¹⁵² McMahon, 164.

late Victorian standards on proper lodging. The Atlantic House was similar to barracks, simply offering a place to eat, sleep, and change into bathing attire for its summertime visitors. Hughes became a well known name, and so did The Atlantic House. Despite its shabby accommodations, the elite of Philadelphia flocked to the inn at the shore.¹⁵³ This wave of visitors is the earliest of consistent and substantial tourism to the New Jersey shore on record.¹⁵⁴ By 1844, Cape May boasted three large hotels and an annual visitor count of three thousand.¹⁵⁵ The first official local government was established four years later, officially incorporating Cape May into the state of New Jersey.¹⁵⁶

Despite the cape's sudden popularity as a seaside haven, its serene setting and sublime nature was not enough for it to be immune to the Civil War. It had been subjected to division and pressure from secessionists as it was considered a border region between the North and South. There are reports that one of Cape May's most popular hotels boldly flew a Confederate flag outside its doors, symbolizing how truly divided and fragile society in southern New Jersey became.¹⁵⁷

Cape May was able to recover as a popular summer destination towards the end of the Civil War. In fact, its recovery single handedly helped the postwar business revival across all of southern New Jersey. Tourists returned, hotel owners began renovations and refurbishment projects on their aging resorts, and as of 1863, the railroad had changed the fate of Cape May.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵³ Miller, 30.

¹⁵⁴ *Ocean Resort*, 2.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid*, 2.

¹⁵⁶ Miller, 54.

¹⁵⁷ Jeffrey M. Dorwart, *Cape May County, New Jersey: The Making of an American Resort Community* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1992), 99.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid*, 117.

Cape May's society also recovered during the postwar period, and town residents resumed their normal livelihoods, which consisted of hospitality, fishing, whaling, and farming, the first now being the most prominent. Eventually, the latter three grew more obsolete, and "hotelier" became the most common occupation on the cape. Residents' personal lives were still centered on traditional, old-fashioned, Victorian community values and of course, the church, but now focused on the new opportunities for health, leisure, and recreation.¹⁵⁹ The post war period proved a fruitful one in Cape May, as the war's end returned the summer visitor count to over 50,000 as wealthy southerners returned. On the eve of Reconstruction and Industrialization, the once quaint shore town enjoyed a massive boom.¹⁶⁰ The financial success would last for a while; however, the state of unity and prosperity within Cape May would not last among its residents. With the Civil War a distant memory and the promise of Industrialization on the horizon, the seaside town was forced to deal with a new set of problems, enabled by differences in class, values, and money.

Who's Who in Late Victorian Cape May

As conflicts over liquor, racial tensions, and gender restrictions persisted throughout the postwar period, the Victorian seaside community was faced with heightened turmoil and violence. Unfortunately, much of this was manifested in the form of consistent arson and vandalism to the up and coming resorts. Bar fights and drunken crimes were common in the resorts' early years after guests frequented the bars and restaurants within them. In response to this increased chaos, Cape May residents underwent massive attempts at temperance

¹⁵⁹ Dorwart, 100-103.

¹⁶⁰ Miller, 72.

organization. Antiliquor sentiments had existed prior to the war, but many felt this was the answer to stopping the violence that frequently occurred after hours and due to intoxication. At this time, religious resorts were created throughout New Jersey in response to this wave of antics, including the well known Ocean Grove and the Sea Grove, which was located right in Cape May.¹⁶¹ The Sea Grove House became one of the most prominent establishments in Cape May after its opening in 1875. As a Presbyterian resort, Sea Grove intended to combine a proper mix of the healthful properties of the seaside and traditional Christian values. One of the latest establishments that closely tied to the puritan ideals of the era, its motto read, “A moral and religious seaside home for the glory of God and the welfare of man, where he may be refreshed and invigorated, body and soul, and better fitted for the highest and noblest duties of life.”¹⁶²

In addition to the growing religious movement in the area, the traditional, wealthy Victorian families who dominated Cape May’s residential and tourist scene also resisted change and the new attitudes and values that seemed to be brought about by industrialization. Many residents fought against the sale of liquor to tourists, and in turn, opposed their own local hotels that possessed a liquor license. They felt that the sale of liquor to out of town visitors (particularly those who stayed at the cheaper lodgings) led to the frequent destruction and defacing of their businesses. In addition, the residents argued that they were simply made uncomfortable by the rowdy, drunk guests. However, just as in present times, the sale and availability of liquor often meant financial stability and steady business for a particular hotel. Therefore, the anti-liquor movement became a massive controversy that divided hoteliers, tourists, and the established families of Cape May, only advancing the already brewing class

¹⁶¹ Dorwart, 119, 122.

¹⁶² *Ocean Resort*, 17-19.

wars amongst them. The fight against alcohol at the hotels is one of the shore's earliest and most obvious contradictions, as the tourists faced restrictions but the elite, who often hosted grand events with plenty of liquor, did not.¹⁶³

While the divisions on ideals and values clearly affected the town's residents, officials, and business owners, they had their biggest influence on tourists. What Walt Whitman once called a "staunch, old, popular, aristocratic summer resort" was slowly slipping away from the elite socialites who once monopolized the resorts.¹⁶⁴ Originally, Cape May's high society arrived every summer in droves mainly from Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Washington D.C. Although New York was nearby, its residents predominantly still frequented Newport.¹⁶⁵ In fact, Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Washington are all closer to Cape May than New York, even though New Jersey is often tied to New York by the tri-state area classification. These three cities are credited with first realizing Cape May's potential as a fashionable seaside resort, originally coaxing the elite southern planters and socialites from Maryland and Virginia northward on horse drawn carriages.¹⁶⁶ As the best families of Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Washington began to make Cape May their regular getaway location, they inadvertently created there a "strong, healthful public opinion in the direction of morality, culture, and refinement." From their arrival forward, Cape May's patronage remained dominated by a class of high expectations and prominent social standing for a number of years.¹⁶⁷ Cape May, with its more conservative local government and permanent residents, claimed itself to be far ahead of its

¹⁶³ Dorwart, 162.

¹⁶⁴ Margaret T. Buchholz, ed., *Shore Chronicles: Diaries and Travelers' Tales from the Jersey Shore 1764-1955* (Harvey Cedars, N.J.: Down the Shore Publishing Corporation, 1999), 150.

¹⁶⁵ Hammitt and Hammitt, 201.

¹⁶⁶ J. Cunningham, 112, 114.

¹⁶⁷ *Industries of New Jersey*, 383.

seaside competitors in respect to morals and ideals, and it is because of these patrons that the growing resort town could do so.¹⁶⁸

There are many reasons that Philadelphia elites and their fellow metropolitan neighbors found solace in the shores of Cape May. Many of Cape May's advantages were often listed as concrete facts in newspapers, guidebooks, and steamship and railroad flyers. It will come as no surprise that the beneficial reasons of visiting Cape May in the late Victorian era bore some resemblance to the earlier advertisements that promised therapeutic cures and health restoration. One of the late Victorian advertisements noted that Cape May, "health's cheerful haunt," and its many premier hotels are crowded with "fashionable victors" primarily from Philadelphia and the South.¹⁶⁹ This particular statement is indicative of how times had changed at Cape May. Now, it was equally as important to visit the *proper* hotels with the rest of wealthy society, as it was to seek health and pleasure, the resorts' original purpose.

Other advertisements take a more literal approach and list the various scenic and healthful benefits of its beaches. Victorian bathers would have required and desired a fun, but more importantly, safe and clean atmosphere, and many advertisements catered to those needs. For example, one publication labels Cape May as old, established, and celebrated but specifically notes its impeccable safety in matters of surf bathing, and also its clean, unbroken beaches.¹⁷⁰ Another labels the surf at Cape May "nature's best" and describes its decent, consistent swells of surf, making famous rival Newport's waves seem like a millpond.¹⁷¹ The same account later

¹⁶⁸ *Historical Diary of Cape Island* (Historical Celebration Committee, 1964).

¹⁶⁹ B.F. DeCosta, *The Atlantic Coast Guide: A Companion for the Tourist Between Newfoundland and Cape May... With an Account of all Summer Resorts* (New York: E.P. Dutton and Company, 1873). 136.

¹⁷⁰ Bachelder, 232.

¹⁷¹ *Ocean Resort*, 11.

praises the overall great quality of bathing and goes on to commend the layout of the town and its immaculate streets, which were paved to comfort carriage riders and pedestrians.¹⁷² Another attraction was the abundance of clean water. The town even erected an artesian well for guests to enjoy, and a natural mineral spring was discovered in 1873, adding to the cleanliness of the waters. The mineral spring was proven to have powerful, medicinal benefits for its visitors. Last of the advantages of Cape May's waters discussed was the peninsula's own natural drainage system. The inlet that separated the island from the mainland acted as a drainage system, eliminating impurities and disease. Because of this, offensive odors, unsanitary sewage, and risk of malaria commonly found at other seaside resorts, were all reduced.¹⁷³

However great the water in Cape May was, the main draw for visitors was still the wonderful climate, which seemed to have medicinal benefits of its own. According to an 1874 almanac, Cape May's summer months boasted an extremely mild mean temperature of 68.9 degrees and virtually no humidity, unlike its competitors. A local physician, Dr. Marcy, promoted the resort town claiming that people who reside or consistently visit the cape were amongst the healthiest Americans he had ever encountered, thus making it a perfect retreat for the invalid and the typical pleasure and health seeker. Cape May's peninsular shape allowed for swift movement of sea breezes, which had long been thought to cure bronchial infections and other ailments. The doctor further noted typhoid fever and epidemics were much less frequent in Cape May and among those who spent much time sea bathing. He prescribed a visit to Cape May

¹⁷² *Ocean Resort*, 5.

¹⁷³ *Ibid*, 13-14.

for the invalid and unwell, promising a rapid recovery in the serene seaside conditions and away from the big cities.¹⁷⁴

The prescribed time at the health resorts would include activities like bathing, typically on the emptiest stomach possible, an hour or two before dinner. Pavilions were erected near the waterfront at the resorts for the invalid to induce mingling and good cheer. After bathing, a “delicate palate of food” was offered for dinner to soothe the body and promote healthy digestion amongst the guests.¹⁷⁵ Combined with the advertised and intended resort clientele, these advantages were said to create the perfect Victorian retreat. Although these curative benefits are what originally attracted and kept the elite returning to Cape May, a new wave of resorts and amusements would find their way to the shore town. With these newer resorts and amusements also came the new wave of visitors, and the elite were forced to watch their affluent vacation spot slip away into the favor of the masses.

Cape May: “Queen of the Ocean Resorts”

Prior to the infiltration of tawdry amusements and day trippers’ rowdy antics, Victorian Cape May advertised itself to wealthy patrons as a resort that would once and for all end one’s quest for health. The town promoted its natural advantages to the higher classes, who were sure to appreciate them. These were obvious, simple properties such as healing sun rays, energizing salt water, and the level of iodine in the sea air, which allegedly could not be found elsewhere.

¹⁷⁴ *Ocean Resort*, 13-14.

¹⁷⁵ Nathaniel Parker Willis, *Rural Letters and Other Records of Thought at Leisure, Written in the Intervals of More Hurried Literary Labor* (New York: Charles Scribner, 1854), 310-311.

Advertisements that claimed such elements also were careful to note that *health* was free.¹⁷⁶

However, for the true seaside experience, any proper, visiting family would require accommodations at one of the luxurious resorts.

Dating back as early as the conclusion of the War of 1812, Cape May boasted the best and the biggest places to stay. These hotels were said to be in every way equal to the grandest, principal hotels in the United States. Here in Cape May, over the decades of the nineteenth century, the leading resorts quickly became Congress Hall, the Columbia, the Mount Vernon, and the Stockton, with many other successful establishments in between. Each of these eventually accommodated up to 1000 to 1200 guests, comfortably.¹⁷⁷ This was almost unheard of in the 1800s, specifically in a small yet blossoming seaside town in New Jersey.



Figure 4: Congress Hall Today

Prior to this expansion, the resorts existed on a smaller scale. After the 1812 skirmish, the biggest hotel was simply titled The Big House. After being destroyed by a fire, it was rebuilt in

¹⁷⁶ *15th Annual Cape May County Resort Guide 1930-1931*, (Cape May County, N.J., 1930) 20-21. (Guide is a large brochure that includes excerpts from late 19th century advertisements for hotels and amusements in Cape May County).

¹⁷⁷ Bachelder, 232.

1816 and renamed Congress Hall.¹⁷⁸ In its rebuilding, it could accommodate one hundred guests at capacity, who paid maximum board of ten dollars per week. Guests were fed meals of various seafood and game, even importing fine meats from Philadelphia at times.¹⁷⁹ By requiring ten dollars per guest for the week, the hotel was able to offer delicacies like fresh seafood and meats to its patrons, setting the standard of Cape May resorts for many years to come. With this policy, only the elite were able to afford a trip to the resort. It is not surprising that hotel proprietors wished to uphold these standards and policies, even in these earliest of summers. Because of its early success and standard-setting principles, Congress Hall is often called Cape May's own monument to shore tourism, and an updated version still rests on the shores of Cape May today.

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By 1832, Cape May's population had expanded to five thousand inhabitants and a third grandiose resort in town, the Mansion House, was constructed. It advertised the most luxurious amenities to date, such as separate guest rooms (instead of curtains) and plastered and finished interior walls.¹⁸¹ As Victorian beliefs and values rose to the forefront of society in the following years, the more primitive accommodations of earlier years were no longer acceptable, prompting the start of the modern hotel industry in Cape May.

Following the Mansion House's success came a building boom along the shores of Cape May. The Ocean House became the town's fourth "official" hotel, offering a new concept to its guests: panoramic views of the ocean, ironically a standard requirement for beach resorts today. These views increased the hotel's popularity so much that other resorts began to offer a similar

¹⁷⁸ Miller, 40-41.

¹⁷⁹ McMahon, 164.

¹⁸⁰ Treese, *Railroads of New Jersey*, 208.

¹⁸¹ Miller, 48.

view. In 1840, the Centre House was constructed, accommodating up to four hundred guests and spanning one entire block of the cape's coastline. Many other resorts began to follow suit, competing with one another as they conjured up different, new types of amenities and experiences to offer their guests. One of the most common newly conceived benefits of the hotels were dining halls, where guests could enjoy proper meals throughout the day from attentive and hospitable servants. However, Cape May's most elaborate resort to date was built in 1852 and named the Mount Vernon Hotel. It planned to include "ensuite" bathrooms while accommodating up to 3,500 people. In addition to private bathrooms, running cold and hot water, and gas lighting in every room, the Mount Vernon allotted much space for pleasures and pastimes such as a substantial dining hall, a pistol range, and a bowling alley.¹⁸² This is one of the earliest examples in resort history where there was an attempt to combine Victorian ideals and necessities with modern leisure and entertainment all at one establishment.

Advertisements for the Mount Vernon flooded newspapers, guidebooks, and travel pamphlets throughout the country, and it is said that engravings of the resort had been published worldwide.¹⁸³ However, the Mount Vernon was not to escape one of the more depressing traditions in Cape May: fire. Because of its size, it was built in phases so that the completed sections could board patrons as soon as possible, therefore bringing in as much revenue as possible. In 1856, as the final phase was to be completed, a fire consumed the new wooden structure, killing no guests, but taking the lives of the owner and his three children, which affected the spirit of Cape May.¹⁸⁴

¹⁸² Miller, 50-54.

¹⁸³ Disturnell, 118.

¹⁸⁴ Miller, 54.

Following the devastation of the Mount Vernon fire, Cape May managed to literally rise from the ashes and continue forward with its popularity with elite travelers. By 1867, Cape May's name was officially changed from Cape Island, since it had not been designated as that for some time now. With the new official charter for the city of Cape May also came building works. The town was able to build approximately seventy new cottages within the city limits, an addition that would eventually change resort life at Cape May.¹⁸⁵

What was soon dubbed "cottage life" became a prominent feature during the summer seasons at the shore. The cottages were usually set back from the beach a couple of blocks and were large and roomy, especially for nineteenth century standards. They were situated close to one another and in a central location for typical daily activities. They were always kept immaculate and well furnished in accord with the Victorian taste. Initially, rates at the cottages were moderate and affordable, even for some of the middle and upper-middle class visitors. However, these refined attributes quickly made the cottages a favorite among elite families visiting the cape, and eventually served as an escape from the excursionists staying at the hotels.¹⁸⁶ By the end of the century, cottages were individually purchased from the city by wealthy families, who went on to form cottagers associations. These associations were also formed in neighboring shore towns, and played an important role in local politics and in Cape May's inability to advance to modernity.¹⁸⁷

In an attempt to rival the up and coming cottage scene in Cape May, the railroad companies became involved more closely with tourism at the shore, extending beyond their early

¹⁸⁵ Miller, 72.

¹⁸⁶ *Baltimore Sun*. 20 June 1885.

¹⁸⁷ Cottagers Association of Atlantic City, documents, (1888-1890).

excursion houses and depots. In 1867, the West Jersey Railroad Company took over the Cape May Railroad and began to work on a hotel project. The railroad managers elected to build the new property, The Sea Breeze, on the site of the former Mount Vernon. The Sea Breeze, once completed, was still considered to be more of an excursion house than a luxury hotel since it catered to both overnight guests and the growing population of day trippers. However, it did offer some advantages of a hotel, such as a dining hall, tavern, bowling alley, and billiards. The railroad company's second hotel project changed the face of railroad-built resorts in Cape May. By the beginning of the 1869 season, the West Jersey Railroad had completed and opened The Stockton. The Stockton was, at the time, considered the largest and most luxurious hotel in the country, with 475 guest rooms, a theater, two large dining halls, and other amenities suitable to Victorian taste. Quickly a favorite of high society visitors, the publicity surrounding the Stockton upon its grand opening offered Cape May its busiest season to date. In fact, the surge in visitors after the Stockton was built enabled the city of Cape May to build more hotels and sea cottages as well as a main drainage system, while rebuilding main roads and establishing a city water system. However, probably the most important creation during this period was Beach Avenue, a main street along the beach that would house shops, restaurants, and various amusements.¹⁸⁸

The building of the Stockton became a turning point in the history of Cape May. It was labeled an "architectural titan" and was said to be comparable only to the palace fronts of competing resorts in Saratoga. With over four hundred rooms that could accommodate 1500 guests at once, it seemed ahead of its time.¹⁸⁹ In a contemporary guidebook, it was said to be the most attractive hotel to be found at any seaside resort, and was a combination of mechanical and

¹⁸⁸ Miller, 72.

¹⁸⁹ *Ocean Resort*, 9.

architectural beauty, which was unsurpassed.¹⁹⁰ Because of the Stockton's grandeur and popularity, its rates were only available on application at first, perhaps aiming to secure a specific and elite demographic from the very beginning.¹⁹¹ In addition, the types of amusements that were offered at hotels like Congress Hall and the Stockton in their heyday were typically geared towards the privileged families who were able to afford the guestrooms.



Figure 5: Artist Rendition of The Stockton Hotel

Despite the success and notoriety Cape May enjoyed that season, mostly because of the Stockton, it faced devastation again. A fire swept Cape May on August 31, which had been started by an arsonist. In a matter of hours, the fire spread to consume roughly 25% of the town, and the New Atlantic Hotel and the United States Hotel were just two of many losses.¹⁹² However, the residents and businesses of Cape May attempted to resume normalcy as soon as possible and began to rebuild their resort town. The summer following the fire again proved to

¹⁹⁰ Bachelder, 232.

¹⁹¹ *15th Annual Cape May County Resort Guide*, 42.

¹⁹² Miller, 74.

be a successful one for local resorts and businesses, and minor renovations and additions were commissioned with the profits of that season. The wreck of the United States Hotel was cleared to make room for a row of shops, businesses, and additional private cottages. More cottages were also built throughout the 1870s, demonstrating the rise of “cottage life” and its popularity with Victorians, and the beginning of a new path for Cape May.¹⁹³

While the 1870s was a successful decade for the resort town, another fire consumed the town in 1878. Starting at the Ocean Hotel, the fire blazed uncontrollably for eighteen hours, burning much of the hotel district. The recently formed Cape May fire brigade was unable to cope with the ferocity, and was forced to receive aid from a Philadelphia fire station. Equipment was rushed on a train, but arrived too late. The Stockton was saved, but parts of Congress Hall, the Atlantic Hotel, the Columbia, and the Center House were destroyed, while others lay in complete ruins.¹⁹⁴ After this devastating fire, it seemed as though all was lost for the resort town, and doubt and embarrassment clouded the shores. However, Cape May once again rose from the ashes and was able to rebuild. One of the first projects was the rebuilding of Congress Hall, which would be constructed with brick instead of wood. This innovation sparked curiosity and appeal, and advertisements of the new all-brick hotel flooded local newspapers and tourist guides. With its grand reopening, Congress Hall began offering new sorts of amusements to attract more visitors. These consisted of typical Victorian pleasures such as billiards, shuffleboard, and musical entertainment. Some of the more modern amusements that Congress Hall offered were golf, tennis, horseback riding, and cycling.¹⁹⁵ At the dawn of the 1880s, it

¹⁹³ Miller, 88.

¹⁹⁴ McMahon, 166.

¹⁹⁵ Miller, 106.

appeared new forms of leisure, which included exercise and sport, were developing at seaside resorts, breaking from the Victorian mold ever so slightly. This is an important change in the history of leisure and pastimes, and it will be explored more closely.

Leisure and Recreation at Cape May's Resorts

Before this new direction in Cape May took precedence and before the wave of cheaper entertainments found their way to the shore, the New Jersey coast was still home to a number of amusing, yet proper, Victorian pastimes. Victorian ideals can be seen through the various amusements that were made popular by the resorts. In turn, certain hotels became more favored than others, specifically by the elite Victorians. This was often based on the activities and offerings of a particular resort, in conjunction with the class and social standing of its clientele. Because the typical guest at a Cape May resort was wealthy and traveling with family members, many of the recreations were refined and suitable for almost all vacationers. Cape May was said to have the most notable and dignified society of all the competing seaside towns in the east. It is due to this clientele that Cape May's summer life was highly recognized in the United States, as many resorts planned successive social events and galas. Included in these "suitable" entertainments were beach parties, yachting, balls, concerts, and fishing.¹⁹⁶ In addition to offering various social activities, Cape May was home to a number of grocers, physicians, jewelers, tailors, shoemakers, barbers, and even some saloons and tobacco shops.¹⁹⁷ Although it was now a Victorian resort town with a primary focus on hotels and boarding houses, it managed to offer its upper class visitors many of the comforts of home.

¹⁹⁶ *Baltimore Sun*.

¹⁹⁷ Hammitt and Hammitt, 201-206.

In a town where “titled gentlemen were quite numerous” and men and women once had separate allotted bathing times in its early days, 1860s and 1870s Cape May became a mixture of Victorian traditions and the home of a quest for new forms of recreation.¹⁹⁸ Resort culture was changing with Victorian society in the sense that there was a gradual increase in the need for outdoor activities and large social get-togethers. New seaside resorts began offering excursions like nature walks and bathing trips, while most had bookshops with reading rooms, conversation rooms, and gaming rooms, highlighting the desire for both old and new activities. In addition to the reading and conversation rooms, guests were able to enjoy the company of other wealthy guests at the numerous balls and dances each hotel offered on a given evening.¹⁹⁹ Even though nature walks and swimming were growing in popularity, exercise was still considered unfashionable at the resorts during the early seasons. This would remain true until later in the century, when individual athletic games would become popular, such as cycling, tennis, and golf. Interestingly, one of the most popular (and free) amusements at the seaside resorts was flirtation. Some resorts even boasted a Courting Yard, where young ladies and gentlemen could be found talking and getting to know one another in a proper setting.²⁰⁰ Young women were often warned not to grow too attached to suitors and acquaintances they met in Cape May, for they were only “of the hour.” Despite this, most single women quickly identified the most eligible bachelor of the season upon arrival, and made many attempts to converse, dance, or enjoy a stroll with him during their stay. For many years of Cape May’s popularity, the sports and amusements commonly associated with seaside entertainment ceased to exist, and the guests were forced to

¹⁹⁸ Alexander, 40, 81.

¹⁹⁹ Corbin, 254.

²⁰⁰ Dulles, 150.

make due in the evenings with these types of diversions after the bathing hours had passed.

However, some simple pleasures have proved timeless in Cape May. Digging for shells and sand “critters” and visiting the ice cream parlor were as common in the resort’s early years as they are at the seashore today.²⁰¹

One of the many ways visitors slowly began their journey towards more modern practices of leisure was in the form of beach parties. The beach party quickly became a prominent feature of social life in Cape May, both private and public. At times, general beach parties were held for the public, and every family, whether they were guests or residents, was present. After bathing for a few hours, a picnic would be held right on the beach often accompanied by live music and plenty of fresh oysters.²⁰² In addition to a typical beach party, crabbing parties were often held in front of some of the premier resorts, and groups often hosted trips to visit the lighthouse at sunset.²⁰³ After a beach picnic or party, it was common to return to one’s lodging by carriage on one of the many smooth streets through town or on the newly constructed boardwalk above the sand.²⁰⁴

Bathing was of course one of the principal activities in Cape May, but there were many rules and regulations attached to it. One of the main restrictions was, as mentioned earlier, separate bathing hours for men and women. Another dealt with bathing attire. Once men and women were able to bathe in the sea at the same time, there were more restrictions on what was considered appropriate swimwear. Most bathers adhered to the dress code, and donned

²⁰¹ Buchholz, “1848 Diary of Rebecca Sharp and Henrietta Roberts,” 57-61.

²⁰² Cooper, 104.

²⁰³ Buchholz, “1848 Diary of Rebecca Sharp and Henrietta Roberts,” 57-61.

²⁰⁴ *Ocean Resort*, 12-13.

themselves in red, blue, and yellow dresses, pantaloons, and straw hats with colored ribbons.²⁰⁵

If a woman was caught with improper bathing attire in Cape May, she became the talk of the town and was subsequently ostracized. In the late Victorian town, improper meant that her swimsuit had no sleeves and it was too fitted. Observers were quoted saying it was “hardly the thing for Cape May,” and, “It may be she will go to Atlantic City. Let her go.,” highlighting the level of class and refinement that embodied the typical resort guest. Not only does this speak for the society of Cape May, but it also offers a firsthand look at how contemporary travelers felt about the fast growing Atlantic City, solidifying the divide between the two popular resort destinations.²⁰⁶

After gender no longer prohibited mixed bathing, another societal division took its place among bathers in Cape May. As excursionists and day-trippers increasingly flooded Cape May, wealthier resort guests grew irritated with them on the beach and in the ocean. While the excursionists could not always enjoy the amusements at the resorts (because they were not paying guests), there was no way of keeping them separate on the beach. They were described as unruly, distasteful, and rowdy. Whether it was due to horseplay or roughhousing, these activities occurred too close to the elite visitors. Men and women had finally been allowed to bathe together, and many races and ethnicities were found testing the waters alongside them, specifically blacks and natives. However, the higher classes often complained of the rowdiness associated with the mix of classes and races to the hotel owners, and some even began to avoid the beach by the end of the century. By the mid 1880s, there was markedly less sea bathing in Cape May than in decades prior, perhaps a direct result of the upper class’s dissatisfaction. A

²⁰⁵ Buchholz, “1850 Diary of Frederika Bremer,” 63-73.

²⁰⁶ *Historical Diary of Cape Island*.

journalist noted the only bathers seemed to be the excursionists, even well into June. This “ocean war” of sorts is another contribution to the decline of Cape May’s resorts and popularity with the elite, and was a contribution to Atlantic City’s growth.²⁰⁷

Despite some wealthy guests avoiding the beach, many still chose to enjoy their bathing hour, regardless of the various annoyances and disturbances from the excursionists. Because of this, the bathing hour is another interesting contradiction in Cape May’s history. Observers of this odd mix of Victorianism with modern tolerance found that regardless of convictions, race, shape, or gender, people were always in their element while bathing and frolicking in the sea, full of merriment and laughter. One specific traveler noted,

“The sea is more equal and more fraternized than any upon dry land, because the sea, the great mighty sea, treats all alike, roars around all and over all with such a superiority of power that it is not worth anyone’s while to set themselves up in opposition to it, or to be as anything beside it. The sea dashes over them all, enlivens them all, caresses them all, purifies them all, [and] unites them all.”²⁰⁸

This is an interesting concept, as something that is clearly larger than life, can unite the classes in such a conscientious society, whether it was realized or not. When splashing about in the sea, one does not show their inferiority or superiority over another, as they all appear equally ungraceful.

The rules of sea bathing have also changed over the years, and it is no longer a scheduled activity as in the Victorian period. Nineteenth century typically only went in the ocean for fifteen minutes. After a few hours on the sand, most visitors would retire to their accommodations to

²⁰⁷ *Baltimore Sun*.

²⁰⁸ Buchholz, “1850 Diary of Frederika Bremer,” 63-73.

dress for the dinner hour, which was at 2 o'clock and was held in the various dining halls. These dinners were described as noisy and crowded, with only two long tables to seat hundreds of guests. After dinner, a second bathing hour occurred if one chose to participate. For those who did not bathe in the evening, they prepared for their evening walk on the promenade or to the neighboring hotels, where music, dancing, and fireworks were among the entertainments.²⁰⁹

Despite the occasional class war on the beach, one thing most resort guests and excursionists could agree on was the musical entertainment provided in Cape May. Music was provided at most resorts, mostly by German or military type bands, light orchestras, and the occasional individual performer.²¹⁰ Music became so popular at the shore that three songs were written to honor Cape May. One was the "Mount Vernon Polka," clearly completed in 1855, before the large resort's demise.²¹¹ The other composition was titled "Cape May Polka" also in 1855.²¹² A third titled "On the Beach at Cape May!" was completed in 1868.²¹³ These polkas were all published in Philadelphia and Baltimore, again showing the deep connection Cape May resort life had to both metropolitan areas' high society.

One way vacationers could enjoy this music was by attending one of the many casual dances held at the resorts, known as hops. Hops had grown popular in other resort towns like Newport, but were "prescription only," meaning each attendee had to pay for their ticket. These prescription style hops remarkably did not fair well in Cape May, despite its prestigious clientele and Victorian characteristics, as most visitors preferred to attend the free hops that were held by

²⁰⁹ Buchholz, "1850 Diary of Frederika Bremer," 63-73.

²¹⁰ Horn, 138.

²¹¹ Charles W. Reinhart, *Mount Vernon Polka* (Philadelphia: Edward L. Walker, Publisher, 1855).

²¹² G. Boettger, *Cape May Polka* (Baltimore: Miller and Beacham, 1855).

²¹³ E. N. Slocum, *On the Beach at Cape May!* (Philadelphia: R. Wittig and Co., 1868).

some resorts. These free hops were scheduled successively by the guests of the large hotels, and guests of neighboring hotels were all invited.²¹⁴ At these hops, guests danced to music, mingled, conversed, and donned their latest fashions. The desire of the wealthy guests to attend and hold free hops shows another break from the traditional Victorian mold. Although these free hops allowed all fellow resort guests, they were not open to the entire public. Therefore, day-trippers and lower class excursionists were not allowed to attend, but some of the less prominent families who were lucky enough to be staying at the resorts were able to enjoy the privilege. This is an example of the slow change in societal distinctions at the seaside resorts.

However, one form of entertainment that strictly the wealthy enjoyed and participated in was yachting. Coincidentally, yachting grew highly fashionable around the same time as seaside resorts did, allowing them to be united on the shores of Cape May.²¹⁵ Boating races were a popular form of entertainment in Cape May as early as the 1840s, but the activity had reached its peak in 1870.²¹⁶ To satisfy this, Cape May hosted its first Grand Regatta that year with the help of its own resorts and vessels from New York and Philadelphia yacht clubs. The regatta was a phenomenal success, bringing travelers from all over the eastern seaboard to Cape May, helping to establish it as a prime yachting location. In addition, many of the visitors who attended the regatta were typically partial to Newport and Saratoga, but quickly became patrons of the New Jersey town. Unsurprisingly, shortly after in 1872, the Cape May Yacht Club was founded, hosting yearly races from that point forward.²¹⁷ A wharf was also constructed directly in front of

²¹⁴ Alexander, 115.

²¹⁵ Corbin, 254.

²¹⁶ Buchholz, "1848 Diary of Rebecca Sharp and Henrietta Roberts," 57-61.

²¹⁷ Miller, 88-90.

Congress Hall, allowing more access to yachting and other popular water activities like fishing and seaside bird hunting.²¹⁸

Although many of Cape May's guests began to take part in these beachside recreations, many activities were still considered men's leisure or the elite's leisure. However, one beachfront activity every visitor could enjoy was simply walking the shoreline. It sounds primitive in nature, but it is actually one of the few Victorian beach amusements that remains a part of modern seaside culture today. Steeped in resort tradition, the practice of taking strolls along the beach after a day of sea bathing allowed for a development that would contribute to the ultimate reinvention of a beachfront town. As the Victorian travelers grew increasingly displeased with having to walk on the sand and its dunes, the concept of building a pier promenade was born. With a promenade, elite visitors could not only enjoy the same serene ocean experience, but could do so while staying clean in their fine apparel.²¹⁹ Perhaps the most enjoyable time to promenade became in the evening at sunset. After tea, visitors enjoyed sea breezes and purple skies, weather permitting. Even though many evening promenades departed from Congress Hall, all of Cape May's summer visitors could meet there and join the resort's own guests.²²⁰ While evening promenades seemed the perfect, relaxing end to a day at the shore, the morning promenade was also highly regarded among the Victorian travelers. Men, women, and children of all ages flooded the walkway in their finest attire, especially on Sundays after church services. Dubbed the "The Ladies Mile," the promenade pier quickly became associated

²¹⁸ *Ocean Resort*, 12-13.

²¹⁹ Corbin, 264-265.

²²⁰ Alexander, 93.

with expensive carriages, “staring dandies,” and “well-groomed hackneys.”²²¹ The men labeled “dandies” were typical of the Victorian period in Cape May, adhering to social constructs and always acting like a gentleman while remaining extremely refined, composed, and well kept. Again, there is a contradiction in the Victorian seascape as in many other aspects of resort life. This new idea of promenading acted as a demonstration of a new social concept mixed with more steeped Victorian values and practices.

Initially, these piers served only promenading pedestrians and docked a number of boats, but eventually they became complete amusement centers in the heyday of Cape May’s resorts.

²²² In addition to amusements, piers often boasted shops, restaurants, theaters, taverns, and music and dance halls.²²³ The most historical pier in Cape May’s history, the Iron Pier, was completed in 1884 with the financial aid of a stock company formed in the resort town. This pier extended the rather primitive and basic boardwalk along the beach to one thousand feet over the ocean. Resting over the sea over thirty feet wide, a public fishing pier was constructed beneath it. The pier became the premier place for local gatherings, social events, concerts, and dances. Most importantly, the Iron Pier was where visitors went *to be seen*. The dance pavilion itself, which lay at the far tip of the pier, was eight thousand square feet, an example of the structure’s grandeur. Another popular pier was added in front of the newly built Ocean View Hotel, and was said to house the finest restaurant in Cape May. In addition, it offered small amusements on its beach end, with simple games of chance and circus entertainments. Perhaps this Ocean View pier was the first in Cape May to integrate cheaper amusements into the refined Cape May beach

²²¹ *Ocean Resort*, 11.

²²² Horn, 137.

²²³ Walvin, *Leisure and Society*, 74-75.

society. Unsurprisingly, this caused mixed emotions amongst residents and wealthy visitors, but it also brought in substantial profits for hotel and pier owners.²²⁴

With the addition of amusements and shops, the pier's popularity grew to new heights, and the simple promenade of earlier days reached a new level. For this reason, it can be argued that the improved pier is a crucial aspect to the history of leisure and culture in Cape May, but also in the broader field of late Victorian America.²²⁵ At first, the town's residents and business owners took great pride in the pier and felt it was symbolic of the modernity that was beginning to consume their refined coastal haven. However, this reception of the "pier and boardwalk culture" and its success soon faltered.

The Decline of Nineteenth Century Cape May

While the early years of the 1880s were momentous for Cape May with the rebuilding of the hotel district and the construction of the Iron Pier and similar successors, it would prove not enough to keep the resort town at its peak. Electrical and gas lines were ran throughout the city and fire precautions were taken, but Cape May once again succumbed to fire. The Columbia Hotel burned to the ground in 1889, despite its all-brick construction. Even with rebuilding attempts and new amusement and hotel additions, Cape May would never completely regain its past level of popularity, perhaps until the latter years of the twentieth century.²²⁶

There are many theories as to why this is, including placing blame on transportation, fire, world events, and the influx of lower class visitors. Interestingly, transportation, including both steam navigation and the railroad, gave Cape May its biggest impetus, securing its place of

²²⁴ Miller, 108-110.

²²⁵ Ibid, 111.

²²⁶ Ibid, 110-111.

prominence amongst the most well known seaside resorts in America. Immediately following the railroad's success, Cape May showed a steady influx of visitors, and no signs of stagnation.²²⁷ Once these trends began to occur, town officials and proprietors turned their backs on the very entity that created their initial spark. Some blamed the entire railroad system because it linked Philadelphia to Atlantic City via Camden in 1854, "stealing" Philadelphians from Cape May. Another reason Cape May blamed the West Jersey Railroad Company was that they were not distributing free passes to Cape May, like their competitor the Atlantic City Railroad was to the now bustling Atlantic City.²²⁸ They were beginning to feel the competition from their northern neighbor, and it would only grow in the years to come.

The fire of 1878 is often said to mark the end of the "high Cape May era," contributing to a steady economic decline and the constant depletion of finances with numerous rebuilding attempts.²²⁹ The attempt to revive and modernize the town after the fire failed, despite the development of new streets, plumbing, electricity, and a race track that was hoped to single-handedly revitalize Cape May's economy.²³⁰ Regardless of the success throughout the 1870s and 1880s, one of the reasons Cape May struggled during its rebuilding years was due to the lack of city planning and engineering. Since it had swiftly grown into a renowned seaside resort in a matter of years, the early local government was never fully prepared for the popularity Cape May eventually achieved. All of the streets and neighborhoods had been added and created on an as-needed basis, instead of being properly laid out in a grid form like most other popular tourist

²²⁷ *Ocean Resort*, 5.

²²⁸ Dorwart, 120.

²²⁹ *Ibid*, 120.

²³⁰ *Ibid*, 158.

havens at the time.²³¹ In many cases, this restricted the potential growth of the leisure and hotel industry there, and it was just a matter of time before Cape May was unable to grow.

Due to this lack of acreage and beachfront property, the only logical route Cape May could take was in the direction of the flourishing private cottages. Many of these cottages took the place of hotel fire ruins, and by the late 1890s, Cape May did not offer the grandiose resorts of its heyday. This embarked the town on a new trend, a “cottagers” trend, which would last throughout the next century. The new cottages were built predominantly on a smaller scale than past structures in town, and almost all boasted the well-known Victorian style architecture, which can still be found there today.²³² After the cottage boom, cottager’s pastimes were becoming prominent in Cape May. In 1896, Cape May experienced a small peak in summer visitors, after the building of a handful of oceanfront cottages and a dance pavilion alongside them for social events.²³³



Figure 6: Surviving Cape May Cottages

²³¹ Lewis Townsend Stevens, *The History of Cape May County, NJ* (1897), 406.

²³² Stevens, 434.

²³³ *Philadelphia Inquirer*. 1896. “Cape May Has a Boom.”

As the blossoming Atlantic City continued to provide Cape May with strong competition, the wave of cottage life allowed Cape May to develop a reputation as an old-fashioned town that was perhaps too steeped in tradition. While some may find these qualities charming, they did not manage to appeal to the modern seaside visitor of the late nineteenth century, especially the excursionists. The late-century visitor to Cape May was a new breed of traveler, and in many cases, from the lower class or from another country. They required cheaper amusements, cheaper hotels, and cheaper transportation. These were all needs far removed from the original Cape May visitors, who now found comfort and solace in their cottages, set back a number of blocks off the beach.²³⁴ Cape May's boardwalk and piers began to offer amusements that targeted the lower classes, but at the same time, cottagers and wealthy residents also rejected the idea of an electric trolley, putting Cape May even further behind Atlantic City in technology and efficiency.²³⁵ Despite these efforts to appeal to the influx of lower class visitors, the conservative community of Cape May proved unable to keep pace with the modern, livelier Atlantic City, which took its toll on the seaside town.

While the cottage movement in Cape May provided the town with a rich, traditional appeal, it also contributed to the dilapidation of the once elite oceanfront resorts. The flight of the wealthy out of the resorts and into the cottages left the magnificent hotels to the less wealthy and less refined pleasure seekers. Not surprisingly, this created a need for lower rates, which depleted money from hotel costs like employment, repairs, and quality of food, furnishings, and entertainments.²³⁶ Although these resorts were once prime socialite locations, outside investors

²³⁴ Miller, 136.

²³⁵ Dorwart, 159.

²³⁶ *Philadelphia Inquirer*.

became aware of this trend, and no longer endowed any money in the building, renovating, or upkeep of any of the hotels. After falling into such disrepair, many resorts and attractions were sold and destroyed, including the hopeful racetrack.²³⁷

Another scapegoat Cape May officials and hoteliers used to explain the decline was the overall deterioration of the farming and shipbuilding industries, two of Cape May's original sources of prosperity. The waning of these contributed to the increased economic problems at the end of the nineteenth century in New Jersey, which was another general source of blame. The 1870s through the turn of the century was a period of economic unrest and consistent panic and depression. A national depression occurred in 1873 and another nationwide panic followed twenty years later. Cape May was not immune to these national problems, and their affect on tourism and seaside visits cannot be ignored.²³⁸

While all of these occurrences are valid explanations for the decline of Victorian Cape May in the final years of the nineteenth century, there is only one substantial claim, one that the officials and proprietors of Cape May refused to admit. Similar to its history with fire, Cape May fell victim to the expanding and transforming world of modern leisure and tourism. Moreover, Cape May's newest and fiercest competition, Atlantic City, was a prime reason for their ultimate demise. Atlantic City offered contemporary hotels, a long and bustling boardwalk, and "typical" seaside amusements. These had progressed in the last few years to include more carnival-type games, fortunetellers, and fun house exhibits, not to mention rides like carousels and the Ferris wheel. Atlantic City's hotels were built nearly twice as large as Cape May's biggest resort,

²³⁷ Dorwart, 159.

²³⁸ Ibid, 156-157, 160-161.

accommodating more beachgoers.²³⁹ In fact, some of Cape May's cottage society even tested the waters of Atlantic City late in the century, and returned to the popular destination the next year.²⁴⁰

Throughout its years as a prominent Victorian summer retreat, visitors to Cape May primarily fell into two categories. The first being middle and upper-middle class families who came to enjoy wholesome fun with their loved ones. The second was of course the upper class who visited the resorts because it was fashionable to do so, and to debut their family to the fellow society members in Cape May. As the town's reputation weakened, its resorts and entertainments lost their appeal, and as the breed of clientele changed, its main competitor rose to prominence, with both levels of classes. Some Cape May enthusiasts reverted to Newport, but most assumed a cottagers life or switched their summer destination to Atlantic City permanently.²⁴¹ As Cape May reached its fullest stage of decline in the 1890s, Atlantic City had been growing in popularity in the years prior, slowly urging visitors north from the cape. Its success over Cape May lies within its ability to leave a number of Victorian values behind while simultaneously accepting the new wave of leisure and its participants.

²³⁹ Miller, 136.

²⁴⁰ *Baltimore Sun*.

²⁴¹ Miller, 136.

CHAPTER FIVE: ATLANTIC CITY- ITS RISE TO PROMINENCE IN A CHANGING SOCIETY

Cape May's deterioration in the final years of the nineteenth century can be credited with much of Atlantic City's success during that period. Changing values and means of recreation allowed the young resort town to flourish, surpassing the esteemed Cape May in number of bathhouses, confectioners, hotels, ice cream saloons, restaurants, and much more.²⁴² Cape May's mayor and city council members traveled to Atlantic City in 1880 to investigate their biggest competitor as it began to replace their Victorian haven since the late 1870s, taking special note of the town's fire department and its resources. The Cape May officials also inquired about Atlantic City's financial condition, drainage system, and overall sanitation. It was reported the visitors recognized a need of these systems in their own town, as well as expressing satisfaction with their stay in Atlantic City.²⁴³

Early Years: Absecon Island

Before Atlantic City rose to prominence over the declining Cape May, it shared a similar rural past with its neighbor and one-time competitor. Atlantic City, first known as Absecon Island, was first purchased by early settler Thomas Budd from natives on October 11, 1695. The ten thousand acre acquisition of this coastal area and nearby small islands was highly criticized, many feeling they were nothing but marshy farmlands and "worthless islands."²⁴⁴ Another criticism was that Absecon Island was separated from the mainland by what has been compared to a maze of bays, inlets and salt marshes, all typical components of the southern New Jersey

²⁴² Hammitt and Hammitt, 216-234.

²⁴³ Atlantic City Improvement Association, Minutes, 1879.

²⁴⁴ McMahon, 109.

coast. Many felt it was a lot of trouble to reach the island and offered very few advantages or little appeal. Budd began to share these sentiments as the days passed, not putting much faith into the small island fishing village.²⁴⁵ Unknown to Budd and his critics, this acreage would eventually provide the home for one of America's most well known pleasure resorts.

Despite Thomas Budd's initial opinion of or initial hopes for this land, Dr. Jonathan Pitney truly brought it to importance years later. As mentioned earlier, Pitney was first to envision Absecon Island as a potential health resort. In 1837, Pitney led a campaign to change Absecon's county name from Old Gloucester to Atlantic County. Following that feat, he was elected director of the first board of freeholders of the new Atlantic County.

Finally able to begin work on the future health resort with the help of his new title, Pitney addressed what he felt was a major problem with Absecon Island. Well aware of the already blossoming Cape May, Pitney aimed to match its many advantages. One of those advantages was transportation, as the cape was easily accessible by boat on the Delaware River, unlike Absecon Island to its northeast.²⁴⁶ In order to compete with Cape May and divert some Philadelphians away from the cape, Pitney petitioned the building of a railroad and was eventually granted his request, as discussed in the earlier chapters. Not only were railroads responsible for transporting tourists to Absecon Island, but they also enabled town builders to import various types of lumber and construction materials.²⁴⁷ Because of Pitney and his railroad visions, it has been argued that

²⁴⁵ American Automobile Association, *AAA Tourbook: New Jersey, Pennsylvania: An Annual Catalog of Selected Travel Information* (Heathrow, FL: American Automobile Association, 1996), 29-30.

²⁴⁶ McMahon, 112.

²⁴⁷ Edward Arthur Mauger, *Atlantic City: Then and Now* (San Diego: Thunder Bay Press, 2008), 5.

transportation, along with promotion, were the main components of transforming Atlantic City from a barren marshland into a bustling and seaside resort.²⁴⁸

Some of that promotion included newly popular and widespread travel guidebooks. As mentioned earlier, these guidebooks were published for large audiences in the mid to late nineteenth century as the concept of leisure and travel spread among Americans. One referred to Absecon Beach, while noting it was forty miles northeast of already popular Cape May, as a new and desirable watering place that has recently been connected to Philadelphia through a railroad running through the city of Camden, New Jersey.²⁴⁹ Another popular handbook from the 1880s claimed the building of the railroad made this so-called hidden gem blossom, and declared it was well ahead of its kind in its accommodations, its varied attractions, and its newfound popularity.

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Since the first railroad to Atlantic City proved to be a monumental triumph for the resort town in the 1850s, another rail route was created in 1877 to accommodate the increased number of travelers and to keep the Atlantic City area's transportation up to standard with the improving technology. This new rail which also served Cape May, called the Narrow Gauge Railroad, served Atlantic City via Camden. Surprisingly, the fifty-four miles of track were laid in only ninety-eight days. Due to the buzz this created, the Narrow Gauge boasted record numbers in its opening weeks, allowing the company to cut fare prices. By doing so, the Narrow Gauge gave the original Camden and Atlantic Railroad great competition, drawing more attention to the former marshland.²⁵¹ Atlantic City now had two rail lines to transport visitors to the several new

²⁴⁸ J. Cunningham, 100.

²⁴⁹ Disturnell, 118.

²⁵⁰ Heston, 46.

²⁵¹ J. Cunningham, 101.

hotels that would prove to lure thousands of pleasure and health seekers, and would lure away a number of Cape May loyalists with its many advantages.

Advantages and Explanations for Growth in Atlantic City

Historians like Ben Miller and Edward Arthur Mauger have candidly expressed their belief that much of America's popular culture was birthed in the earliest days of Atlantic City's growth and popularity. Since the 1870s, Atlantic City had begun to surpass Cape May as our country's oldest and best known seaside resort for a number of reasons.²⁵² The city's early promoters had originally intended to develop a socially elite resort that could compete with and potentially exceed the fashionably Victorian Cape May. However, they were forced to "settle" for a simple family resort town that could entice all sorts of people. Interestingly, this so-called settling would be the reason Atlantic City remained more popular and successful for years than Cape May, which had slipped into a decline and earned a stuffy reputation.²⁵³ One of the main enchantments of the newly appreciated Atlantic City was very simple: it boasted a "sense of holiday...a holiday of ease and sensible pleasure, bringing health and vitality in its train."²⁵⁴

By the 1870s, Atlantic City had transformed from a tiny seaside village with basic accommodations that catered to anglers and sportsmen to a modern and urban resort by the sea. With the help of the Narrow Gauge by 1877, Atlantic City was accessible to all types of visitors, particularly those who could only afford, in terms of time and money, to spend one day at the shore.²⁵⁵ According to New Jersey historian John T. Cunningham, there was a reported 34,000

²⁵² Ibid, 99.

²⁵³ Buchholz, 206-207.

²⁵⁴ Pennsylvania Railroad Passenger Department, *Atlantic City: A Review of its Attractions as a Pleasure Resort*.

²⁵⁵ Buchholz, 124.

visitors that came to Atlantic City the summer after the Narrow Gauge was built, more than most prior summers combined.²⁵⁶ In 1878, in addition to boats and trains, Atlantic City was accessible by a small unpaved road known as Plank Road. Plank Road was privately owned by a local family, who charged users tolls when entering and exiting the resort town. This small road was eventually paved and became known as the Atlantic City Turnpike, a main access to the resort once automobiles became common.²⁵⁷ To accommodate the influx of guests, Atlantic City incorporated and formed a city council, which held their very first meeting in the United States Hotel.²⁵⁸ Created primarily to deal with the rapidly increasing popularity of both the resorts and the town itself, the council oversaw many city operations and improvements during the following years. Later in 1898, a train called the Atlantic City Flyer traveled between Camden and Atlantic City for the first time at a record speed of 74.4 mph. The entire trip took just 44 minutes, a crucial improvement in the eyes of excursionists who only had time for one day away from work and household duties.²⁵⁹

The increased popularity of Atlantic City can certainly be attributed to the increased number and speed of trains, but it was the natural, physical qualities of the seaside town that drew visitors from all over the country. Since its earliest days as a working resort town, the island of Atlantic City had been described as a city *in* the sea rather than *on* it.²⁶⁰ It is believed that this oceanic location is what gives Atlantic City its unique and curative climate, which had been one of the biggest draws since its beginning. Due to its island nature, its breezes and sea

²⁵⁶ J. Cunningham, 101.

²⁵⁷ Kirk, 96-97.

²⁵⁸ McMahon, 113.

²⁵⁹ Buchholz, 124.

²⁶⁰ Pennsylvania Railroad Passenger Department, *Atlantic City, N.J.: A Midwinter Retreat for Health and Pleasure Seekers, with a Guide to the Best Manner and Means of Reaching It* (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania Railroad, 1888).

sprays were said to be of the highest therapeutic value. Another advantage over its counterparts, especially in New England, is that the beaches of Atlantic City are not rocky, but soft and sandy. This enticed many people, specifically parents, who felt the new resort was a safer playground for their children than the more northern beaches.²⁶¹ In addition to its comfortable sands and climate, Atlantic City has less rainfall than any other coastal resort. In the 1880s, the average rainfall over an eight-year span was only 40.24 inches while Cape May had 46.70 and Newport had a whopping 59.98.²⁶²

Because of these lower numbers, Atlantic City's atmosphere is freer from humidity, which had been known to be better for one's health. Atlantic City has been praised for its uniqueness in the fact that even though it is surrounded by water, it is one of the purest and driest areas in the country. Interestingly, many of Atlantic City's elite cottage owners were doctors who attested to the curative properties of the resort town and promoted the scientific findings that confirmed this.²⁶³ In fact, Atlantic City's renowned sea air had been thoroughly tested by scientists and medical professionals during the 1870s and 1880s, concluding its wonderful tonic and curative influences. It had been discovered in these tests that air in Atlantic City is different than any other resort in the world because it is filled with iodine. In addition, it was revealed that the seawater itself had higher levels of sodium chloride, also known to be beneficial to the skin and to one's breathing. The scientists who performed these tests agreed that the air in Atlantic City promised recuperation and a permanent reestablishment of one's health, corresponding to the centuries-old belief that climate is often better than medicine. Specifically, scientists noted

²⁶¹ Pennsylvania Railroad Passenger Department, *Atlantic City: A Review of its Attractions as a Pleasure Resort*.

²⁶² Camden and Atlantic Railroad, *Sea-Side Views* (Philadelphia: Allen, Lane, & Scott Printers, c. 1870), 7.

²⁶³ *Ibid.*, 7.

pulmonary and bronchial problems that would be relieved by the warm and temperate climate of Atlantic City.²⁶⁴ In addition, people suffering from anemia, overall weakness, or fevers, were advised to spend at least a few days in Atlantic City while maintaining a regular tonic consumption. It was speculated this mixture would be a tremendous cure for invalids.²⁶⁵

Because of these reports, Atlantic City began to grow as a winter resort as well. It promoted itself as a year-round resort, claiming to be warmer than other parts of the northeast. Atlantic City once again joined efforts with the railroads to advertise as a winter retreat with numerous pamphlets distributed by the rail companies.²⁶⁶ Famed poet Walt Whitman was one of Atlantic City's winter guests year after year, noting that despite the lack of amusements, he preferred the shore town in the winter months. He argued that the weather in Atlantic City was no worse than other locations, but it still had a quaint seaside charm, so it was preferable to the cities.²⁶⁷ A doctor named Boardman Reed published a finding on the winter air in Atlantic City in *Medical Times* that confirmed the sea air is just as valuable for health in the winter as it is in the summer. However, due to the lack of sea bathing and open amusements, the majority of winter visitors were typically the unwell.²⁶⁸ This population was still a large one, and one that was able to keep Atlantic City afloat in the off-season. In fact, the police force only dropped from 140 men to 100 men from summer to winter, demonstrating a fairly steady resident and guest population year round.²⁶⁹ Despite the positive traits of wintertime Atlantic City, it was not protected from cold ocean breezes. In the summer, these breezes are considered one of the draws

²⁶⁴ Heston, 29-39, 76.

²⁶⁵ Traveler's Criticism.

²⁶⁶ Mauger, 114.

²⁶⁷ Buchholz, 145-151.

²⁶⁸ Heston, 37-39.

²⁶⁹ Atlantic City Business League, documents, (1909), 21.

to the resort town, but in the winter, they could be quite unbearable. In addition, the winter atmosphere produces dense fogs that can last for many days and be highly uncomfortable and unsafe to the numerous health seekers traveling in and out of the city.²⁷⁰ Despite these setbacks, the winter resort concept was overall a successful venture for Atlantic City, and the presence of a substantial year-round population encouraged investment in a number of safety and sanitation improvements.

Many visitors found Atlantic City's hygienic advantages to be as much of a draw as the climate itself. Unlike most towns and leisure destinations, a modern sanitation system kept the streets (and the people) clean and healthy.²⁷¹ With the help of the railroads, the resort town advertised these sanitary advantages, which included waste disposal, fire safety, and drinking water obtained from springs and artesian wells.²⁷² An Improvement Association was formed in 1879 with the purpose of protecting the property in Atlantic City and enhancing its value. In addition, it was determined to "place before the public, in the most pronounced manner, Atlantic City's superior advantages as a resort for health, comfort, and pleasure." With this type of organization and goals in place, Atlantic City surpassed its competitors. Some of the organization's feats included a Permanent Board of Health to regulate waste and drinking water, as well as a petition campaign to construct the new boardwalk with a raised area to allow vehicles of all types to pass. The organization also requested a building inspector and building

²⁷⁰ Traveler's Criticism.

²⁷¹ Heston, 30.

²⁷² Pennsylvania Railroad Passenger Department, *Atlantic City: A Review of its Attractions as a Pleasure Resort*.

committee in April of 1880. After years of avoidable disasters and destruction, this was a crucial triumph for Atlantic City, and is evidence of its massive growth during these years.²⁷³

The year 1882 marked two outstanding achievements for the resort town. The first was when Atlantic City Water Works gave the town its first running water. Prior to this, water was obtained from shallow wells, but the abundance of salt caused many problems. The second achievement was the first recorded use of electricity in Atlantic City when the Atlantic City Gas and Water Company turned on the town's streetlights.²⁷⁴ The next few decades in Atlantic City saw the building of modern hotels complete with fireproofing, elevators, and private baths, placing the town in a more secure position.²⁷⁵

Resorts in the Height of Late Victorian Atlantic City

Three entities "made" Atlantic City: railroads, hoteliers, and leisure technology.²⁷⁶ In similar fashion to Cape May, many of Atlantic City's hotels offered "rates upon application." However, the up and coming resort town also built enough hotels to suit all classes and people. Everyone could find accommodations suited to their means, and this gave the city its great surge in popularity during the late 19th century. It did not serve as a resort for the elite, nor did it become a haven for only the rift raft of society. Often described as "motley," the summertime crowd in Atlantic City seemed to combine both of these classes, which attested to the fact that the ocean and its beaches were indeed *democratized*. Bathers frolicked together, often in the exact same apparel, regardless of and unknowing of their neighbors' social standing. In Atlantic

²⁷³ Atlantic City Improvement Association.

²⁷⁴ Ed Davis, *Atlantic City Diary: A Century of Memories: 1880-1985* (Atlantic City, N.J.: Atlantic City News Agency, 1989), 4.

²⁷⁵ J. Cunningham, 127-128.

²⁷⁶ *Ibid*, 128.

City, this strange mixture of young and old, rich and poor, and distinguished and ordinary, occurred every year.²⁷⁷

Whether it can be called settling or not, Atlantic City had successfully become a simple, unrefined, yet respectable family destination. However, with respectable average families also came the young, single, working class men and women in thousands on the weekends. These types of people seemed attracted to Atlantic City for its relaxed setting, both in the serenity of the beach and in social construct, especially when compared to places like Cape May and Newport. Unmarried, young day trippers found excitement on the shores of Atlantic City, where they could meet fellow young adults on the beach, boardwalk, and amusement piers. This was an occurrence that would never have been imagined in a structured Victorian society of the decades earlier with promenades, courting rituals, and families choosing proper suitors, and it was an example that seaside culture had begun to mirror the changes in general American culture.²⁷⁸

Although Atlantic City was seemingly less refined than other elite seaside resorts, it never became a completely reckless and crude destination either. Middle-class families spent weeks in the hotels to keep the town decently polished. A number of wealthier guests also enjoyed Atlantic City's simple amusements and made their way to the hotels and boardwalk throughout the year. Many hotels capitalized on these more respectable visitors, advertising they housed distinguished guests as an attempt to lure potential patrons. In other advertisements, Atlantic City was portrayed as being different from "stuffy" Cape May, claiming it was summer home to intelligent, liberal, and cosmopolitan people. However, it was also noted that these types of people, sometimes prudish and intellectual, were able to enjoy the simplicities of childhood

²⁷⁷ Heston, 55.

²⁷⁸ Buchholz, 206-207.

and the relaxation found in Atlantic City.²⁷⁹ Many of these wealthier patrons came from Philadelphia, Baltimore and New York City, and did not limit their travels to the summer months. They hosted teas, luncheons, receptions, and hops throughout the year.²⁸⁰ Atlantic City was said to have quickly become one of Philadelphia's suburbs because of this year round patronage.²⁸¹ This had become so evident that many Philadelphia businesses began advertising in the Atlantic City Directory for all sorts of goods and services.²⁸²

Atlantic City was not free from the contradictions and class consciousness that characterized Cape May. Although the town officials, hoteliers, and a number of loyal visitors claimed that Atlantic City was a cultural and financial melting pot of sorts, guide books focused on the city's resort culture. For example, the very same literature that commended Atlantic City for that intermingling of classes where the senator and the servant have equal opportunities for enjoyment also made a point to reassure elite visitors in regard to the resorts' clientele and the number of day excursionists. Although the town was supposed to mirror the an equalitarian sentiment, visitors were assured that the accommodations in Atlantic City were so ample that the thousands of day trippers in no way would interfere with the comfort and enjoyment of others whether on the beach or boardwalk.²⁸³ Many similar examples of the break from Victorian prejudices can be seen in the types of amusements to be discussed later.

Although the first "hotel" was the Atlantic House, which was essentially just the home of Jeremiah Leeds that was used to entertain guests, it must also be remembered that two

²⁷⁹ Heston, 31, 55, 82.

²⁸⁰ Pennsylvania Railroad Passenger Department, *Atlantic City, A Midwinter Retreat for Health and Pleasure Seekers*.

²⁸¹ Pennsylvania Railroad Passenger Department, *Atlantic City: A Review of its Attractions as a Pleasure Resort*.

²⁸² Gopsill, 154.

²⁸³ Pennsylvania Railroad Passenger Department, *Atlantic City: A Review of its Attractions as a Pleasure Resort*.

commercial hotels were also being built right after the time the first railroad delivered passengers in 1854. The first was The Bedloe House, built by Thomas Bedloe, who was issued the first city license for a hotel at a fee of 50 cents. Miraculously, this early relic of Atlantic City's hotel industry survived until it was torn down in 1902.²⁸⁴ The second commercial hotel built during that period was the United States Hotel. It boasted a private set of rails that ran two blocks from the hotel straight to the beach. The hotel also offered guests transportation to the seaside bathhouses in horse drawn rail cars. Even though it was under construction during the arrival of the famous first 600 guests, this was the hotel that managed to serve them a full dinner simultaneously.²⁸⁵

In the decades to follow, hotels transformed into resorts, coming a long way from the Atlantic House, Bedloe House, and the early years of the United States Hotel. This transformation accommodated the substantial increase in high-season visitors. Reportedly over 200,000 people had been accommodated at the height of the summer, which was considered to be from mid-July to the end of August.²⁸⁶ Much like in Cape May, specific types of hotels were built to lodge the growing number of railroad excursionists, and especially those with lower incomes. These hotels were often the first to offer various types of amusements, adding their own dance halls, billiard rooms, and skating rinks.²⁸⁷ Excursion houses were predominantly located on the lower end of Atlantic City, which allowed for easy access to the trains and other forms of public transportation. Beginning in 1869, merry-go-rounds, observation wheels, and

²⁸⁴ McMahon, 114.

²⁸⁵ Mauger, 98.

²⁸⁶ Pennsylvania Railroad Passenger Department, *Atlantic City: A Review of its Attractions as a Pleasure Resort*.

²⁸⁷ Frank M. Butler, *The Book of the Boardwalk and the Atlantic City Story* (Atlantic City, N.J.: Haines and Co., 1953), 52.

other carnival-type amusements sprang up at these hotels, eventually making their way to the boardwalk once it was built in 1871.²⁸⁸

By 1876, hotels like The Brighton Hotel had elected to stay open all year, complying with the surge in winter visitors to the shore. It also chose to stay open to accommodate any people attending the Centennial Exhibition in Philadelphia who elected to explore the famed resort town during their stay. After the success of The Brighton, many other hotels followed the same pattern, and Atlantic City's hotels have not been seasonal since.²⁸⁹ On October 9, 1878, Atlantic City's success was temporarily masked by a devastating fire. Strong winds and lack of notice allowed this fire to compromise nine of the town's largest resorts.²⁹⁰ But within years, Atlantic City once again boasted a large number of beautiful hotels, the most prominent being The United States Hotel (which encompassed an entire city block), Congress Hall, The Columbia, Surf House (also spanning one block), and Schaufler's Hotel and Garden.²⁹¹

Schaufler's was a fixture in 1880s Atlantic City, complete with accommodations, a restaurant, and a beer garden. Offering five-cent pints to everyone, not only hotel guests, it quickly became a local hot spot. It was reported that train conductors had to give the last call for boarding inside the Schaufler's beer garden because it had become so popular with rail passengers, particularly the excursionists.²⁹² The United States Hotel had its own enticements too, including electric bells, fire escapes, and a hydraulic elevator. The elevator was such a

²⁸⁸ Ellis Kiser, "Atlas of Atlantic City, New Jersey: Including South Atlantic City, Chelsea, Ventnor, Oberon, and Longport; Compiled and Drawn from Official Plans and Actual Surveys," map, (Philadelphia: A.H. Mueller Company, 1896).

²⁸⁹ Butler, *The Book of the Boardwalk*, 47-48.

²⁹⁰ Kirk, 239.

²⁹¹ Davis, 5.

²⁹² Mauger, 12-13.

novelty that many considered it an amusement ride, much like a roller coaster, when it first arrived in Atlantic City.²⁹³ Congress Hall, modeled after the successful giant in Cape May, was also a first class resort that offered hot and cold baths, tasteful furnishings, gas lit rooms, and a public pavilion for concerts and dancing. It remained open all year by the 1880s, offering nearby cottages for rent in the winter months. Rates were \$3 per day for transient guests, but special rates were offered to permanent guests staying at least a week or more. This was most likely to attract wealthier guests to stay while charging the lower classes a higher daily rate.²⁹⁴ The Columbia Hotel's grounds were equally as massive and impressive as its neighbors, offering visitors a café on site, hot and cold baths, a carousel, gardens, and the Columbia Pleasure Railway. All of these attractions were located directly on the boardwalk side of the hotel, making them easily accessible to all of Atlantic City's tourists.²⁹⁵

During the later decades of the nineteenth century, many hotels offered modern conveniences to their guests. Most desirable was what was advertised as "telephonic communication," which had been established at certain hotels by the 1880s. Other amenities sometimes included heat during the winter and early spring months, gas and electric lighting, neat and obliging servants, and both fire and burglar alarm systems.²⁹⁶ In fact, Atlantic City was one of the first destinations in the country to install an electric fire alarm system throughout the town. This easily complied with the regulations and enhancements the Improvement Organization attempted to implement. The electric alarm came as no surprise to many observers

²⁹³ Heston, 3.

²⁹⁴ *Industries of New Jersey*, 344.

²⁹⁵ Kiser.

²⁹⁶ Heston, 5-6, 14, 30.

due to the previous disasters other resorts experienced.²⁹⁷ By the turn of the century, Atlantic City began building modern, fireproof hotels, plucking guests away from deteriorating Cape May.²⁹⁸ Although these types of grand hotels of the late 1800s became a fixture on the Atlantic City boardwalk, there were never more than thirty on the boardwalk at once, a tradition that remains today.²⁹⁹

An Early “Boardwalk Empire”

While hotels certainly benefited from a locale on the boardwalk, the boardwalk amusements flourished due to the many ocean front resorts that supplied throngs of pleasure seekers willing to pay for fun. Originally intended to keep sand out of hotel lobbies, the boardwalk was completed in 1871. However, before its inception, daytime amusements in Atlantic City basically consisted of sea bathing and evenings were spent on hotel porticoes conversing with other guests, rarely venturing past the hotel grounds. One of the probable causes for this was that the permanent, year-round population of Atlantic City was still too small to support a booming amusement industry.

To solve this problem and eliminate boredom among guests, premier hotels began to host dances or “hops” just as they did in Cape May. In addition to hops, or perhaps to perform at them, traveling musicians were also found playing at the hotels, and brass band concerts were held at the largest resorts. The first hotel to have its own orchestra was The Seaside in 1880, but music halls were built on hotel grounds for the sole purpose of entertainment as far back as 1857.

²⁹⁷ Davis, 10.

²⁹⁸ Amory, 35.

²⁹⁹ Butler, *The Book of the Boardwalk*, 47.

³⁰⁰ Another activity both residents and guests could enjoy was the Atlantic City Country Club. The club was limited to the leading gentlemen of society and their guests, but it was also open to some of the premier resorts' guests under specified conditions and for a fee. Similar to country clubs of today, some recreations visitors enjoyed were tennis, golf, bowling, card playing, afternoon teas, and fine dining. ³⁰¹ Interestingly, Atlantic City had become a middle class, less "class-restricted" destination compared to Cape May, but the country club was one of the attempts made to retain the image of an elite resort where high society could continue to visit.

In addition to musical entertainment, dancing, and country club events, one of the earliest amusements guests in Atlantic City enjoyed was, of course, sea bathing. There were dozens of bathhouses in early Atlantic City before boardwalk culture reigned, most of them featuring hot and cold seawater pools. Often renting bathing suits to guests, bathhouses were frequently advertised in brochures promising that their garments would provide ladies with full privacy according to Victorian standards. ³⁰²

Victorian customs, as well as official city rules, required that early bathing suits, whether rented or owned, cover the entire body except for the face and hands. The suits were made of wool flannel, with stockings, canvas shoes, and straw hats completing the outfit. Women's suit's required seven yards of cloth to construct, and the skirts extended to the ankles. Most women wore their corsets while bathing. ³⁰³ Not desiring a sun tan, it did not seem impractical to wear such heavy and constricting swim wear. In fact, the middle and upper class Victorian sea bathers were so adamant about not having any color from the sun, they used witch hazel on the exposed

³⁰⁰ Butler, *The Book of the Boardwalk*, 49-52.

³⁰¹ Pennsylvania Railroad Passenger Department, *Atlantic City: A Review of its Attractions as a Pleasure Resort*.

³⁰² Mauger, 114.

³⁰³ Butler, *The Book of the Boardwalk*, 22-23.

parts of their bodies, such as hands and faces. Victorians associated sun tans with the lower, working classes who were forced to spend time exposed to the elements.³⁰⁴ By the 1890s, stripes were “in vogue” for bathing attire, but complete Victorian dress was not abandoned for several years, despite other modernizing advancements in society. Aside from clothing, we have also learned that women faced restrictions on the length of bathing activities. Similar to the beaches in Cape May, it was recommended and socially acceptable for women to take two or three baths a day, but each bath should require fifteen minutes or less.³⁰⁵ Some minor changes occurred around the turn of the century when a number of young women gave up wearing stockings while bathing. In doing this, they faced harsh social judgment and were deemed less respectable than girls who continued to wear them. It is also reported that it was unacceptable to wear bathing attire while promenading the boardwalk, despite the modest nature of the swimsuit.³⁰⁶

In an effort to keep bathing a fairly “class-less” activity in Atlantic City, swimsuits could be rented for a quarter right on the beach to accommodate day trippers. After bathing all day, they would rinse off in the beachfront bathhouses, dress in their regular attire, and return home to the cities on the train.³⁰⁷ However, it was once again beneficial to have enough money to stay longer than one day. While daily baths with swimsuit rental cost only 25 cents a day, baths cost only 50 cents for an entire week if you were fortunate enough to have owned and brought your own suit. This is similar to hotels offering lower rates based on length of stay, which of course

³⁰⁴ Buchholz, 198-205.

³⁰⁵ Mauger, 94.

³⁰⁶ Buchholz, 198.

³⁰⁷ Mauger, 5, 68.

limited many people. In true Victorian seaside fashion, a seemingly democratized amusement had quickly become a paradox.³⁰⁸

Clearly, the shore's largest and most abundant attraction withstood the test of time and class, but bathing also received a boost of sorts with the help of Atlantic City's next biggest attraction: the boardwalk. Once the boardwalk was built in 1870, permanent commercial bathhouses were constructed, completing the luxury of the bathing experience.³⁰⁹ The boardwalk itself has enjoyed and accumulated a rich history since its inception, and has often been single-handedly credited with bringing Atlantic City into true prominence. Originally conceptualized by Camden and Atlantic Railroad conductor Alexander Boardman and Chester County House boarding house director Jacob Klein, the boardwalk was designed to serve one purpose: to keep sand and salt out of the fine furniture and carpets of the numerous hotels and trains in the resort town.³¹⁰ At a cost to the Atlantic City council of \$5000, the boardwalk met a number of critics in 1870, who claimed it was foolish and expensive. As a compromise, the boardwalk was approved as a temporary structure, laid on the sand plank by plank in the beginning of the summer and removed at the end. This boardwalk lasted until 1883 when it was destroyed by storms, and a more permanent fixture replaced it the following year, but an even later renovation occurred in 1896.³¹¹

Though an eventual success, the early years of the boardwalk were not without problems. The earliest boardwalk had absolutely no railings or barricades, and many people were reported

³⁰⁸ *A Complete Guide to Atlantic City, Containing Among Other Useful Information, a List of Hotels, Their Capacity and Rates, and Leading Stores, with Shopping Guide* (Philadelphia: Burk and McFetridge, 1885).

³⁰⁹ Butler, *The Book of the Boardwalk*, 21.

³¹⁰ Mauger, 122.

³¹¹ McMahon, 114-115.

to have fallen off, breaking limbs and seriously injuring themselves.³¹² A number of evening strollers also expressed dissatisfaction with the darkness and lack of security on the boardwalk. To appease these guests, electric lamps were installed the length of the boardwalk in 1883.³¹³ The earliest years of the boardwalk awed and entertained Victorian visitors, and perhaps, brought in more year round residents as well.

When the boardwalk was first built in 1870, Atlantic City's population was 1,043. By 1880 it had grown to 5,477, and when the third boardwalk arrived in 1884, the population jumped to 7,942. Most likely due to the success and popularity of this permanent boardwalk and its amusements, the 1890 population was recorded at 13,055.³¹⁴ The resort town had become so popular with both permanent residents and tourists alike, that the city's stores attempted to match the prices of Philadelphia's so the guests could not complain, or have to transport goods from home on the train.³¹⁵ The cost of seashore living had always been known to be rather high, but Atlantic City was the first on the east coast to accommodate its visitors in this manner. In addition to offering basic goods of convenience and need, many Atlantic City stores began selling a number of fine goods and luxuries for the comfort of the upper class guests.³¹⁶

The boardwalk became the center of seaside resort life, offering both exciting games and pastimes as well as social and religious spectacles. But before the circus-like attractions, Sundays quickly became the "main event" of boardwalk culture. Two of the most popular pastimes on this early boardwalk were the simple yet refined promenade and the use of rolling chairs, which had

³¹² Butler, *The Book of the Boardwalk*, 7.

³¹³ Davis, 5.

³¹⁴ Butler, *The Book of the Boardwalk*, 9.

³¹⁵ *A Complete Guide to Atlantic City*.

³¹⁶ Heston, 82.

quickly become a cultural fad. These wheeled chairs were first seen at the Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia in 1876 to help attendees navigate the numerous buildings of the exhibit, but they became a phenomenon on the boardwalk in Atlantic City, lasting as a form of transportation and a seaside tradition.³¹⁷ As novel as the rolling chairs were, the Sunday promenade was the one spectacle where everyone could be found on the boardwalk in their finest apparel. This exhibition was not limited to the wealthy class, giving middle to lower class visitors a chance to promenade alongside the elite.³¹⁸ Women purchased bright colored dresses for the purpose of the Sunday boardwalk promenade.³¹⁹

Sundays were a popular day on the beach and boardwalk because it was the day most people had time away from work, especially the excursionists. Some of the wealthy resort guests were seen donning their bathing suits even on Sundays, which was unusual, as Sunday was the most common day for the lower classes.³²⁰ This provides another example of a changing society, and perhaps, how Atlantic City allowed Americans to behave as a less prejudiced culture, at least on the beach.

It was common for some visitors to seek a place of worship immediately upon disembarking the train early Sunday morning since the departure time was very early in the morning. To accommodate this need, the town of Atlantic City and the boardwalk built churches and created ways for guests to attend services. By the turn of the century, there were over thirty churches in Atlantic City, and many resorts and boardwalk establishments also held open air services on their roofs or directly on the piers. Church on the boardwalk became so popular that

³¹⁷ Mauger, 100.

³¹⁸ Pennsylvania Railroad Passenger Department, *Atlantic City: A Review of its Attractions as a Pleasure Resort*.

³¹⁹ Buchholz, 198-205.

³²⁰ Ibid, 198-205.

services were held at the merry go round every Sunday afternoon.³²¹ Many establishments also attempted to combine religion with entertainment, advertising “sacred concerts” on their roofs on Sundays. Bands and string quartets played hymns and other popular tunes before, during, and after group prayers.³²² After church services or sacred concerts, it was a common Sunday activity for permanent residents of Atlantic City to sit on their porches and count the numerous bicycles riding by. Especially by the 1890s, “bicycle runs” to Atlantic City’s boardwalk were popular, and it was common on any given Sunday to see 3000-4000 bicycles headed to the ocean. This number only increased as bicycles grew into a more socially acceptable and popular recreational pastime.³²³

New Forms of Leisure

Once the boardwalk had triumphantly endured its early years, a number of amusements invaded the shoreline and changed the popular wooden walkway. These amusements would typically be found on individual piers, jutting out over the ocean from the main boardwalk, similar to Cape May. Although Atlantic City’s piers faced a rocky start, they eventually grew into successful enterprises along the shore. The first pier built off the boardwalk was Howard’s Pier, built by Colonel George W. Howard, opening July 12, 1882. It extended 650 feet over the ocean, a true marvel for the time, but it lasted one season due to faulty pilings and a fierce September storm. After witnessing the easy destruction of Howard’s Pier, steps were made to build to the iron pier in Atlantic City in 1886. Built by the Ocean Pier Company, the iron pier

³²¹ Mauger, 72.

³²² “Summer Day on the Old Boardwalk,” photograph, (c. 1900).

³²³ McMahon, 53.

enjoyed an early season opening on April 25th of that year.³²⁴ It was an instant success, partially due to its prime location near the boardwalk between the popular Connecticut and Massachusetts Avenues.³²⁵

Following the triumph of the iron pier, others were built and also enjoyed immediate and phenomenal success, including Applegate's Atlantic City Pier and the famous Steel Pier. Applegate's Pier quickly became known as the "original 5 cent home of recreation," offering various cheap amusements.³²⁶ The 1,780 foot Steel Pier was opened years later on June 18, 1898 but earned its fame and notoriety as a hot spot in a matter of weeks. The pier cost over \$200,000 to build, making it the most expensive of all ocean piers to date.³²⁷ Many guests rushed to the Steel Pier upon arrival, not even stopping to check into their hotels. It was the "it" place, the place to be seen, which was crucial in Victorian society. Because it was such a hot spot in Atlantic City, it became a common practice for young men and women to meet one another standing on the piers donned in their finest clothes. After choosing the proper suitors, the couples would dance all night right on the pier, often retiring with an ice cream soda and a box of taffy on the way back to their resorts or cottages.³²⁸ While the piers were attractions in themselves, the amusements made them the place to be in late Victorian Atlantic City.

One of the most recognizable diversions on the boardwalk piers was William Somers' observation roundabout. His first was built in 1891 in Atlantic City, and he continued to build similar structures in Coney Island and Asbury Park. He lost the rights to his creation after a man

³²⁴ Davis, 4, 7.

³²⁵ Kiser.

³²⁶ Heston, 15.

³²⁷ Davis, 22.

³²⁸ Buchholz, 198-205.

by the name of Ferris debuted his version at the 1893 Chicago World's Fair. Many Somers defenders still exist today, maintaining it should not be called a Ferris Wheel, but a Somers Wheel instead.³²⁹ Another popular, and still relevant, pier amusement was the merry go round or carousel. They became extremely popular because of their universality, allowing people of all ages and sizes could enjoy the ride. They became so widespread that some carousels were placed only one block away from each other. Other amusements were merry go rounds, smaller-scaled "Somers Wheels," and shuffleboard courts.³³⁰ One of the more thrilling pastimes on the piers was the inclined railway. It became considered an "amusement ride" because of the height and novelty, and is often considered one of the world's most primitive roller coasters. Less archaic roller coasters were eventually attempted on the piers, but they often left riders with neck and back injuries. Surprisingly, people seemed un-phased by their injuries and continued to ride them because they simply enjoyed the thrill of these innovative machines.³³¹

Aside from rides, the boardwalk offered a number of amusements that were a bit less stimulating but equally as popular. These included "Punch and Judy" shows, family vaudeville acts, Japanese gardens, beer gardens, swimming pools, and even shooting galleries.³³² There were also bowling alleys, ponds, imperial baths, a bicycle academy, a large music academy, a Crystal Maze, and a midway section of cheaper, more tawdry pleasures called The Streets of Cairo, very similar to a world's fair.³³³ The indoor swimming pools on the boardwalk were opened and maintained by individuals on the boardwalk. They were not associated with hotels

³²⁹ Mauger, 112.

³³⁰ Kiser.

³³¹ Mauger, 54, 64.

³³² Pennsylvania Railroad Passenger Department, *Atlantic City: A Review of its Attractions as a Pleasure Resort*.

³³³ Kiser.

and resorts like they are today, demonstrating the apparent interest in the simple recreation of bathing and swimming.³³⁴

One of modern Atlantic City's most well-known attractions enjoyed a place in early boardwalk history as well. The town's first casino, Brighton Casino, was built in 1892. It was not home to blackjack or craps tables, slot machines, or even professional dealers, but to a wide variety of common Victorian pastimes. Brighton Casino did feature an area for upper class gentlemen to enjoy common card games while sipping brandy and enjoying cigars, in addition to a sun deck, bowling alley, swimming pool, and a dance floor. These were included in the casino to appease the wives, offering them a sequestered place for "healthy seashore diversions."³³⁵ Another benefit to the casino was the frequent balls and social events that were held there, mainly because the size of the building could accommodate many people. Ladies and gentlemen of the upper class frequently found themselves spending much of their designated boardwalk and leisure time in the casino.³³⁶

Rental booths were set up along the boardwalk offering transportation such as boats, carriages, drivers, and streetcars. Boats were rented, depending on number of people and the size of the watercraft, for anywhere from 25 cents to one dollar per hour. Carriages with two horses and one driver were also available at \$1.50 per hour. In order to accommodate railroad passengers, carriages to and from railroad depots were 50 cents an hour while streetcars along Atlantic Avenue to the West Jersey Railroad Excursion House were only 6 cents total. Even

³³⁴ Butler, *The Book of the Boardwalk*, 24.

³³⁵ Mauger, 118.

³³⁶ Pennsylvania Railroad Passenger Department, *Atlantic City: A Review of its Attractions as a Pleasure Resort*.

though they were forms of transportation, many visitors found these to be another “ride” in Atlantic City.³³⁷

The End of an Era or the Beginning of a New One?

As Atlantic City embraced the turn of the century with its middle-class appeal combined with elements of both the exclusive and the tacky, many assumed it would remain a success just the way it was for years to come. Not quite haughty and traditional like Cape May and not quite the total carnival atmosphere like Coney Island, Atlantic City seemed to have carved out a niche for itself in the leisure industry that would endure the test of time. It had successfully promoted itself as a family destination with both Victorian virtues and the modern lures of a seaside resort. One city official had said, “I’d like Atlantic City to be known as a place where mothers could send their daughters and husbands send their wives without fear.”³³⁸ It is safe to say the new vacation spot had managed that, while still offering excitement, novelty, and modern recreations.

Atlantic City continued to make improvements and add modern technologies, complete with an electric railroad near the Philadelphia and Reading Railroad depot.³³⁹ By 1900, Atlantic City had grown to 27,838 permanent residents. Its popularity and longevity seemed steadfast a year later when the first national Christmas Club was approved by bankers for a Philadelphian who thought it was an easy way to save for his summer trip to Atlantic City.³⁴⁰ However, the young yet established resort town faced a number of problems that affected its success. The Panic of 1893 hit the resort town very hard, as the number of visitors decreased and city finances

³³⁷ *A Complete Guide to Atlantic City.*

³³⁸ Mauger, 66.

³³⁹ Kiser.

³⁴⁰ Davis, 27.

suffered.³⁴¹ Just three years after the panic, a train accident raised questions about the safety of travel to Atlantic City. All passengers on board were killed, and the train was destroyed, making this event a double tragedy for the resort town.³⁴² People were more hesitant to travel via rail for a period following the accident, especially on the fast trains that had been such success just years prior, again hurting Atlantic City's economy.

Despite its lasting success over Cape May, Atlantic City faced a tough period in the first decades of the 20th century. Another phenomenon negatively affected Atlantic City that the town could not control: the automobile. Once cars increased in popularity and decreased in price, many people traveled to different places that were not easily accessible by trains. Decades later, Atlantic City suffered a similar fate due to the airplane and commercialized airlines. However, one occurrence Atlantic City could have possibly controlled was its physical condition. Age and neglect was visible throughout the resort town, as both took their toll on the amusements, hotels, and boardwalk. Consequentially, many of the rides were deemed unsafe and were abandoned as they fell into disrepair. It would not be until a few decades into the 20th century that a new wave of leisure would invade and return notoriety and popularity to the old Victorian resort town, specifically on the boardwalk: the modern casino.³⁴³

³⁴¹ Davis, 15.

³⁴² "Accident on Train to Atlantic City," *Philadelphia Times*, 1 August 1896.

³⁴³ American Automobile Association, 29-30.

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION

It is apparent that Cape May's initial downfall was largely responsible for the surge in popularity of Atlantic City with all classes of society in the late nineteenth century. However, Cape May did experience a slight turnaround in the late 1890s. This has been attributed to national events such as the Klondike rush of 1897 and the Spanish American War, both of which instilled a sense of unity and pride amongst Americans, specifically in the once traditional and elitist society of Cape May. With this sense of unity and the improved national financial situation, pleasure seekers were generally more apt to travel to the New Jersey coast and spend time alongside fellow tourists. Observing the success of the less-restricted Atlantic City, Cape May began to ease into a pattern of acceptance of foreign immigrants and working class Americans by the turn of the century, but did so very slowly.³⁴⁴

In true late Victorian fashion, and as has been observed in many instances involving society, values, and amusements, Cape May exemplified a contradiction in approach to the acceptance of the lower classes. By enabling lower class visitors to travel to Cape May and afford its lodgings in the 1890s with lower rates and increased rail routes, they had seemingly embarked on a social trend that had been proven successful in competing resort towns. However, just a few years later, Cape May once again favored and targeted the wealthy. The first years of the new century brought rebuilding attempts and hopeful ventures to Cape May's leisure industry, including the building of a million dollar resort simply named Hotel Cape May. This was just one of several plans to revive Cape May as a fashionable playground for the wealthy. The town celebrated the groundbreaking of this project with luxurious fanfare, including historic

³⁴⁴ Dorwart, 164-165.

automobile races on the beach at the new seashore track. Some of the race participants included Henry Ford and Louis Chevrolet. The grand opening of the Hotel Cape May took place in 1908 boasting the title of “largest in the world” with 330 rooms and accommodations for well over one thousand guests. The grandiose hotel operated only six months before being forced to close due to financial problems. The ill fated million dollar project unfortunately set a trend for Cape May over the next few decades. Many significant resort and financial leaders faced untimely deaths and bankruptcy after the demise of the Hotel Cape May, and it would take years for Cape May to reclaim its popularity and charm amongst seaside tourists.³⁴⁵

With the rise of the casino within the spectrum of leisure, Atlantic City enjoyed a healthier early twentieth century than its counterpart did. Although it too was faced with sporadic financial problems and deterioration, the boardwalk and its casinos were enough to keep the resort town afloat. In addition to the surge in gambling in the early decades of the 1900s, a beauty contest held in Atlantic City sent shockwaves across the nation. In 1921, the first Miss America Pageant was held, crowning Margaret Gorman as the reigning beauty. The contest continued to help bring in millions of visitors and dollars to the resort town consistently for many years.

Cape May and Atlantic City Today

Over the middle decades of the twentieth century, the Jersey shore sustained its appeal to tourists and locals as both a family and “singles” hot spot. While Cape May and Atlantic City remain successful, popular travel destinations sharing a rich history, they could not be more different. As Cape May was more reluctant to mirror its lively competitor, something interesting

³⁴⁵ Miller, 138-140.

occurred. Its resistance to honky-tonk amusements and skyscraper hotels secured its place as one of the top American seaside resorts.

Cape May has often been faced with the struggle between modernization and tradition, as was exhibited as early as the late 1800s when the town clung to Victorian values and beliefs on leisure and class in a transforming society. Luckily, its refusal to change has now become the top reason visitors flock to Cape May every year. Much of the resort town remains preserved just as it was in its Victorian heyday, complete with “gingerbread” mansions, horse drawn carriages,



Figure 7: Victorian Beachfront Bed and Breakfasts

and trolleys throughout the gas lamp-lit streets. It has thrived on a new and unique facet of the leisure industry: the Bed and Breakfast. Although there are still a number of hotels and resorts lining the oceanfront, the positive influence of the bed and breakfast is undeniable. Much as in years past, the shore town remains afloat in the winter seasons largely because of these preserved mansions-turned-bed and breakfasts. Cape May hosts a yearly Christmas event that lasts all season, where the homes are all adorned in holiday trim, securing a steady winter visitor population of both the old and young.

Although many visitors come to Cape May to experience its preserved Victorian nature, with the shops, museums, and homes acting as living history, its original draw remains equally as popular: the beach. Cape May's sand and surf attracts visitors from all over the country, as well as Canada and Europe, with its cleanliness and restorative properties. In fact, many of the beachfront accommodations are still in their Victorian form, adding to the beauty and history of Cape May. Another famous beachfront accommodation has also been drawing visitors for decades, and remains in its Victorian splendor. Acting as the premier resort of Cape May,



Figure 8: Congress Hall Today

Congress Hall remains the housing option for guests willing to pay a higher price for their seaside experience, while offering the luxuries of today with the charm of yesterday. Its lobby serves as a museum, with pictures, maps, and memorabilia all telling the story of the grandiose resort from its opening in 1816, to its devastating fire, and finally to its present state as a four star resort. Additionally, it is now the premier location for weddings and special events in Cape May. Nestled in the historic district with the numerous shops, restaurants, and ice cream parlors within

walking distance, Congress Hall maintains its popularity and standing within the resort community, and is likely to last through another century of seaside pleasure seekers.

Atlantic City's growth and modernization throughout the middle of the twentieth century set a standard for resort destinations around the world. Unlike Cape May, the main attractions in Atlantic City are the casinos, resorts, restaurants, and nightlife. While the ocean and boardwalk still attract summertime crowds, it is mainly the gamblers, "foodies," and drinkers who have kept



Figure 9: Atlantic City Today
Copyright Soul of America Travel, Inc. (http://www.soulofamerica.com/soagalleries/ac/casino/AC-skyline_night.jpg)

the town alive. Although similar to Cape May in the fact that it remains a top travel destination for visitors from around the globe, Atlantic City has landed on the opposite end of the spectrum of seaside towns from its quaint and preserved Victorian neighbor. Aside from the magnificent structures and dazzling lights of the boardwalk, Atlantic City has unfortunately been plagued in recent years with poverty, homelessness, and crime. Many of the streets resemble a run down,

inner city section, complete with trash, traffic, violence, and smog. Worse, Atlantic City was unofficially named as one of the world's "failed cities" amongst other notorious crime spots like Gary, Indiana, and Detroit, Michigan.³⁴⁶ Despite this negative association and the dilapidated condition of much of the city, thousands still flock to the historic resort town, spending money on its modern leisure enterprises, just as many did in the town's lucrative past.

Perhaps, with the gift of retrospection and hindsight, one can hypothesize that Cape May's original disadvantages, which included its strict tradition, refusal to modernize, and overall elitist values, have actually preserved the town as a successful enterprise into the twenty-first century. Without its unchanged Victorian homes, its quiet village appeal, and seemingly untouched by technology, there is a strong chance Cape May would be just another average seaside town along the coast of New Jersey. In many ways, its current residents, resort and bed and breakfast proprietors, and shopkeepers are still thanking their Victorian predecessors for upholding such a tradition in their town. As for Atlantic City, the quaint beauty and charm of Cape May cannot overshadow it, for it too embodies unique and undoubtedly successful characteristics of its own, and has proved itself just as vital to the state of New Jersey. The two resort towns, much like in their early days, host different crowds who enjoy different forms of amusement. Despite their polarized fates in the present day, they share more than what the average visitor can observe, again epitomizing the paradox that has consistently encompassed these two historical seaside towns for more than a century.

³⁴⁶ J.N. Nielsen, "Failed Cities," *Grand Strategy: The View from Oregon. Grand strategy and Geopolitics from the Perspective of the Pacific Northwest* (2009) <http://geopoliticraticus.wordpress.com/2009/11/06/failed-cities/>; accessed 28 June 2011.

The Influence of the Victorian Seaside on Leisure History

The ironies and contradictions exhibited throughout the history of daily life at the Victorian seaside is a telling lesson that the period trapped in a historiographical debate does not fall entirely onto one side as many have argued since the early 1900s. As seen in the small yet revolutionary towns of Cape May and Atlantic City, the Victorian leisure culture was one that was torn between exciting desires and adventures and strict moral codes and class distinctions. These facets of a liberated, transforming society, as well as its restraints, were nowhere more firmly exhibited than at the seaside resorts and their boardwalks during the final decades of the nineteenth century.³⁴⁷ With the Industrial Revolution and its products, Cape May and Atlantic City were no longer isolated, quickly opening their doors to an entirely new group of visitors: the seashore excursionists.³⁴⁸ It has been argued that the Industrial revolution solved one set of problems while creating another for these small seaside towns. Though gaining revenue, popularity, and fame, they were forced to relinquish traditions and Victorian values. Undoubtedly, one of the reasons class consciousness and prejudice never disappeared in Victorian Cape May and Atlantic City was many of the resorts' quests for exclusivity.³⁴⁹ Whether the Industrial Revolution proved to have a negative or positive affect on seaside culture, it can be confirmed that the new technologies it brought, and consequently, the new types of visitors it brought, transformed Cape May and Atlantic City forever.

Throughout the twentieth century, Americans grew to become more self-made, more independent from industry, and more entrepreneurial. With the help of national holidays and

³⁴⁷ Dulles, 151.

³⁴⁸ Dorwart, 160-161.

³⁴⁹ H. Cunningham, 136.

regulated work hours, most full-time workers can usually afford to take off for leisure purposes. Finally, the practice of leisure had come to be recognized as a legitimate part of our culture. The modern city also produced something called urban leisure, which would grow into an entire leisure culture of its own throughout the twentieth century.³⁵⁰

Placing both New Jersey shore towns into the wider realm of cultural history allows for a better understanding of how leisure and recreation has been transformed since its initial conception, eventually transcending race, class, and privilege, into a now accepted and legitimate form of the study of history. Since the early days of fishing villages and health spas to the era of recreation palaces and the formation of their own culture, seaside resorts have mirrored the constantly changing society surrounding them. No other institution encapsulates the contradictory and fascinating late Victorian era than the individual resorts and their amusements, a true microcosm within the history of leisure.

³⁵⁰ Gunther Barth, *City People: The Rise of Modern City Culture in Nineteenth-Century America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), 153, 195, 231.

REFERENCES

Primary Sources:

Atlantic City Business League. Documents. 1909. Alfred M. Heston Collection, Atlantic City Free Public Library, Atlantic City, N.J.

Official documents from the Atlantic City Business League provide useful information about the struggles and ultimate desires for the booming town. Although these particular papers are from 1909, they are still relevant to the thesis and the period in question, as a number of similar problems with business owners, laws, and city finances were prevalent in the decades prior. Most importantly, it details the differences in the resort town between summer and winter, and it was easily discovered that there was not as much of a drop in visitors as one might expect. This find was helpful to the section on Atlantic City as a winter retreat. The Atlantic City Free Public Library has many other similar official documents in its collection.

Atlantic City Improvement Association. Minutes. 1879. Alfred M. Heston Collection, Atlantic City Free Public Library, Atlantic City, N.J.

Also from the Alfred M. Heston Collection at the Atlantic City Free Public Library, the meeting minutes from the Improvement Association offer wonderful insight to the operations of Atlantic City in its heyday. These minutes show what officials and citizens deemed important, and much of the minutes include discussion on ways to improve sanitation, streets, and transportation throughout the booming city.

Bachelder, John B. *Popular Resorts & How to Reach Them: Combining a Brief Description of the Principal Summer Retreats in the United States, and the Routes of Travel Leading to Them*. Boston: John B. Bachelder, Publisher, 1875.

Bachelder's book describes in depth (despite his usage of the word brief in the title) the most visited resorts in the country. His main focus is seaside and natural spring resorts, so the mountainous and western resorts do not receive as much attention. Thus, most of the resorts he describes were on the east coast, and even more specifically in the Mid Atlantic and New England regions. He discusses Newport, Saratoga, and the New Jersey coast, as well as the railroads, water routes, and best carriage routes to reach these destinations. His account is useful because it too demonstrates what the nineteenth century traveler deemed important to their experience.

Boettger, G. "Cape May Polka." 1855. Special Collections and University Archives, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, N.J.

This is a piece of beautifully preserved sheet music that is substantial in size. It shows that Cape May was enough of a popular destination as early as 1855 to have its own "polka" written to honor the resort. It is thought that this music was frequently performed at the various dances, concerts, and galas throughout Cape May.

Camden and Atlantic Railroad. *Sea-Side Views*. Philadelphia: Allen, Lane, & Scott Printers, c. 1870.

This guide is one of the major primary sources used, and is especially important because it was published by one of the railroad companies that are discussed throughout this thesis. While it is clearly a promotional piece, it offered much information on individual train routes and fares, hotels, and points of interest at the New Jersey shore. It also includes artist renditions of some of the most prominent resorts, which were used for advertisement purposes as well.

Cooper, Alfred M. *My Traditions and Memories, 1859-1938*. Cape May Court House, N.J.: Gazette Print Shop, 1938.

Alfred Cooper's work is somewhat of an autobiography, and includes much information about his travels to the New Jersey shore during the boom periods of the seaside resorts. A New Jersey native, he offers a different and personal viewpoint about his experiences which is not often found in historical works. The work appears to be a compilation of journal entries he wrote throughout his life, and finally published in 1938.

Cottagers Association of Atlantic City. Minutes. 1888.

The Cottagers Association minutes are especially helpful because their meeting minutes and overall purpose highlights the division between classes and the old and the new in Atlantic City. This document offers insight to the cottage movement that was seen in both Atlantic City and Cape May in the late 1800s after the flood of lower class excursionists invaded the once prominent seaside resorts and the surrounding attractions. The organization's bylaws are also included in these minutes, and it notes that admission fees were \$500. This proves the wealth of the cottagers who were so determined to flee the ocean front resorts.

DeCosta, B.F. *The Atlantic Coast Guide: A Companion for the Tourist Between Newfoundland and Cape May... With an Account of all Summer Resorts*. New York: E.P. Dutton and Company, 1873.

This travel article compiled by B.F. DeCosta represents one of the most important primary sources used for this thesis, and served as an anchor for contemporary information. The guide includes a helpful table of contents for quick research as well as a multitude of maps.

Unfortunately, even though this guide is a full-sized book, it does focus on virtually all seaside towns in the northeast. Therefore, Cape May and Atlantic City are not addressed as closely as desired. Nonetheless, it is a very insightful piece of literature that demonstrates just how popular seaside holidays had become in the United States during that time.

Disturnell, John. *Springs, Water-falls, Sea-bathing Resorts, and Mountain Scenery of the United States and Canada; Giving an Analysis of the Principal Mineral Springs with a Brief Description of the Most Fashionable Watering-Places, Mountain Resorts, etc. with Illustrations*. New York: J. Disturnell at 197 Broadway, 1855.

Disturnell's piece is similar to Bachelder's, as it is a contemporary traveler's guide written more like a complete book that describes the most noted resorts. His focus is also the more luxurious and established resorts. However, his account is less specific than Bachelder's because it

includes Canada and does not spend as much time discussing the means of transportation used to reach these springs and resorts.

Gopsill, James. *Gopsill's Atlantic City Directory for 1882-1883*. Philadelphia: James Gopsill, Publisher, 1883.

This particular primary source was essential to the study of resort life in late nineteenth century Atlantic City. It offered complete listings of hotels, excursion and boarding houses, railroad stations, and even shops, restaurants, and bars for travelers. With these listings came an in depth description and location, along with what type of traveler could be found there and what was offered. In addition, certain Philadelphia businesses were advertised, confirming the droves of Philadelphians that traveled to Atlantic City year after year.

Griffith, Joseph. 1917. *Alfred M. Heston Collection*. Atlantic City Free Public Library, Atlantic City, N.J.

Griffith is the author of the telling letter to Alfred Heston about his experience on the first train to ever reach Absecon Island in the 1850s. This first hand letter was also an essential source to the thesis, even though it was recalled years after the event. It is extremely descriptive and specific, and Griffith even included his own sketch of how the barren marsh land and “restaurant” appeared to the passengers. Heston found this letter important enough to keep for decades and to include in his historical collection.

Hammitt, C.K. and W.D. *Hammitt's Business Directory for 1875-1876 of Camden, Gloucester, Salem, Cumberland, Cape May, and Atlantic Counties*. Philadelphia: C.K. and W.D. Hammitt, Publishers, 1876.

The business directory is a similar guide book to Gopsill's, except it covered all of the southern shore counties. Thus, the information on Cape May or Atlantic City was more limited, but what was included was extremely useful. Furthermore, there was much more information on Atlantic City than Cape May. The directory described individual hotels and restaurants like the others, but went further to list grocers, salons, confectioners, tobacconists, and other places of interest and need for travelers, specifically those of the upper class.

Heston, Alfred M. *Heston's Handbook: Atlantic City Illustrated*. Atlantic City, N.J.: Alfred M. Heston, Publisher, 1887.

Alfred Heston, noted Atlantic City historian, created an extensive guide book for travelers visiting the resort in the 1880s. There were several editions and additions to these works, but the 1887 version was full of pertinent information and was undoubtedly the most useful primary source in this project. The handbook was similar to the others listed here, but was much more in depth and honest. Heston defined the many hotels according to price, class, and patrons, and noted when resort rates were only available upon an application. He did not feel the need to advertise every establishment as one for all types of people, thus making it the most “realistic” guide book found in the researching process.

Kiser, Ellis. "Atlas of Atlantic City, New Jersey: Including South Atlantic City, Chelsea, Ventnor, Oberon, and Longport; Compiled and Drawn from Official Plans and Actual Surveys." Philadelphia: A.H. Mueller Company, 1896.

This atlas is also a wonderfully preserved and large piece at the Rutgers University collection, in full color and large font. It was extremely helpful during the beginning of the research process because it allowed for an understanding of the city's layout and the location of premier resorts, excursion houses, private cottages, and attractions. It was frequently referred to during the writing process as well.

Pennsylvania Railroad Passenger Department. *Atlantic City: A Midwinter Retreat for Health and Pleasure Seekers, with a Guide to the Best Manner and Means of Reaching It*. Philadelphia: Pennsylvania Railroad, 1888.

This is another one of many contemporary travelers' guides used in the thesis, except this particular one pays special attention to transportation. The Pennsylvania Railroad published it, so it advertises much of the railroad's amenities while simultaneously promoting Atlantic City. What made this guide particularly useful was that it was one of few documents found that discussed at length the off-season at the famed resort. Most sources found only focused on the high season, so it was interesting to find that the seaside town still remained popular in the winter months. It was also useful in confirming that health reasons were still a major purpose of visiting the seashore, as Atlantic City became home to many invalids during the colder seasons.

Pennsylvania Railroad Passenger Department. *Atlantic City: A Review of its Attractions as a Pleasure Resort, and Incidentally, the Comfort and Convenience of Reaching the Same*. Philadelphia: Pennsylvania Railroad, 1898.

Very similar to the other guide published by the Pennsylvania Railroad, this also focuses heavily on how the train was an integral part of the travel experience to Atlantic City. However, it does spend time discussing points of interest in the town, and offers firsthand information as to how the trains operated and how often they made the voyage to the shore from Philadelphia.

Reinhart, Charles W. "Mount Vernon Polka." 1855. Special Collections and University Archives, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, N.J.

This is another piece of sheet music dedicated to Cape May. However, this is more specifically about one of the town's most prominent resorts, the Mount Vernon. The Mount Vernon did not enjoy longevity, but it was highly commemorated at its opening with similar materials like this song. Like the other music, this song was said to have been performed at dances, concerts, and dinners at the resort.

Schotter, H.W. *The Growth and Development of the Pennsylvania Railroad Company: A Review of the Charter and Annual Reports of the Pennsylvania Railroad Company 1846 to 1926, Inclusive*. Philadelphia: Allen, Lane, & Scott, 1927.

Although this source was published in the 1920s, it offered substantial primary information on the developmental stages of the Pennsylvania Railroad and its impact on Atlantic City and Cape

May. It includes charts, tables, and photographs, one of which being the excursionist rates and train schedules used earlier in the thesis.

Slocum, E.N. "On the Beach at Cape May!" 1868. Special Collections and University Archives, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, N.J.

This is another piece of sheet music that is dedicated to resort life at the New Jersey shore, but specifically Cape May. Like the above mentioned, it was featured at the resorts' social events and was a well-known tune.

Stevens, Lewis Townsend. *The History of Cape May County, New Jersey*. 1897.

Another fine primary source, this historical guide to Cape May County over the years provided much detailed information since it is strictly about Cape May County. It includes information on the early years of Cape Island through the then-recent resort and cottage boom. It was a valuable source because it was a history of the area published right at the end of the period being discussed in this thesis, which offered a unique insight.

West Jersey Railroad Company. "Bylaws and Organization." 1885.

These official papers of the West Jersey Railroad Company offer information on the business aspect of providing a new railroad to the New Jersey coast, one that was built specifically for the purpose of transporting leisure participants. It stresses the need for another railroad to the New Jersey cape, as travelers were displeased with steamboat travel by this time.

Willis, Nathaniel Parker. *Rural Letters and Other Records of Thought at Leisure, Written in the Intervals of More Hurried Literary Labor*. New York: Charles Scribner, 1854.

Although a primary source, the information pulled from this compilation was minimal. However, it was an interesting find since it dealt with the concept of leisure versus labor. It did include tidbits on health resorts in relation to the idea of practicing leisure as it grew to become a social duty in the mid-1800s.

"Accident on Train to Atlantic City." *Philadelphia Times*. 1 August 1896.

A short article from the Philadelphia newspaper that describes a recent railroad tragedy. The train in question crashed and killed many people on its way to Atlantic City, causing much grief in the 1896 season. Many people canceled their plans to visit the shore after hearing of this accident, which was financially detrimental to the resort town. The article itself could have aided this fear of traveling to Atlantic City, as it questions how safe rail travel truly was.

Baltimore Sun. 20 June 1885.

A small article from the Baltimore newspaper served two purposes. It demonstrated that Baltimore was one of the major sources of travel promotion to the New Jersey shore, much like Philadelphia. More importantly, this article focused much on the wealthy society at the shore and their leisure outings. It paid special attention to noting that there was an existing "cottage life" at the shore, which was suitable to most dignified families now that the hotels were overrun with excursionists.

“Cape May Has a Boom.” *Philadelphia Inquirer*. 1896.

This article was also helpful to the discussion on the developing cottage life in Cape May. It claims that with the rise of cottages, Cape May experienced resurgence after years of neglect and excursionist usage. It read like a promotional article, but it provided enough information on the positive effects of a cottager’s life on the city of Cape May and its future.

The Centennial Exposition and the Pennsylvania Railroad. Philadelphia: The Pennsylvania Railroad Company, 1876.

This source was a publication printed for the purpose of advertising the Pennsylvania Railroad and its success and prominence through the Centennial Exposition. The exposition gave the railroad even more notoriety than it already enjoyed, and this document offers specifics on the railroading industry and more so within the state of Pennsylvania and to the shore resorts of New Jersey.

A Complete Guide to Atlantic City, Containing Among Other Useful Information, a List of Hotels, Their Capacity and Rates, and Leading Stores, with Shopping Guide. Philadelphia: Burk and McFetridge, 1885.

Another substantial and helpful traveler’s guide to Atlantic City that, like the others, provided excellent information on the many resorts and shops within the resort town. This guide was particularly useful because it offered more detailed information on hotel rates and the types of visitors that could obtain those rates, demonstrating the division amongst classes once again. The guide was also fascinating because it listed major stores and their “fine goods,” which offered great perception of the Victorian lifestyle.

“Fast Railroading,” *Atlantic City Gazette*, 1898.

A small article from the local newspaper that discusses how railroading had improved in the 1890s, by cutting travel time significantly and improving its travel conditions.

Industries of New Jersey, Part II. Frank H. Stewart Collection, Rowan University, 1882.

Similar to the Heston and Gopsill guides, this large work advertises the numerous businesses that served New Jersey. The businesses included railroads and restaurants, but paid particular attention to hotels and their clientele. This was one of the most useful sources on the advertisement of wealthy patrons at hotels as a way to lure potential guests. Despite its title and intended focus on the entire state of New Jersey, the guide focused mostly on the southern resort towns.

The Ocean Resort: Life at Cape May. Philadelphia: Allen, Lane, & Scott, 1876.

Much like DeCosta’s guide, this article is another fine primary source. Even though it is shorter than the guide, it focuses solely on Cape May, and even better, during its heyday. The literature offers wonderful charts of train schedules, hotel listings, and summertime excursions in and around Cape May. The piece truly showcases what daily life would have been like at the

Victorian resort. Little is known of its origin and publication information, but it is likely that the railroad companies of Pennsylvania and New Jersey commissioned the article.

Philadelphia and Atlantic City Railway Company, Tickets and Time Cards, Alfred M. Heston Collection, Atlantic City Free Public Library, 1889.

The Heston collection is primarily documents, photos, and maps, but these train tickets and times cards are some of its artifacts. There were dozens of cards that stated train times, fares, and passenger rules and regulations for the various railroads that serviced Atlantic City, some with travelers' personal information written on the back. These were not crucial items to the thesis, but they offered a glimpse into a traveler's experience nonetheless.

Philadelphia and Trenton: Every Day, (Sundays Excepted) Philadelphia: Scott, Printer, 1856.

Also another well preserved item at the Rutgers University collection, this one-page printed advertisement offered specific information on the use of steamboats to travel to the New Jersey coast before the railroads were completed.

A Traveler's Criticism on our Health Resorts: Their Scenery, Climatic Peculiarities, and Curative Influence. Boston: Billings, Clapp, & Company, 1885.

This pamphlet was essential to the discussion on visiting the sea to improve mental and physical health. In between it's less than subtle advertisements for tonic, it offered surprising information and critique on the American resorts. Luckily, New Jersey was included in this criticism. The pamphlet describes how the New Jersey resorts' air quality and curative properties were exceptionally high, making them popular all year round.

South Jersey Realty Company Letters, Frank H. Stewart Collection, Rowan University.

These nineteenth century letters pertain to railroad products that were shipped to various locations at the New Jersey shore, such as lumber, railroad ties, and track materials. Although they were short and few in number, they aided the discussion on the growing popularity of the railroad, as the amount of shipping these materials increased substantially once the resort towns began to boom.

Secondary Sources:

Alexander, Robert Crozer. *Ho! For Cape Island!* Cape May, N.J.: Robert Crozer Alexander, Publisher, 1956.

Alexander's work is a descriptive account of the early years of exploration in the area surrounding New Jersey's southern cape. He provides much information on the natives and early Dutch settlers that eventually shaped the peninsula's future as a seaside resort town. Alexander's book is one of few that focuses on Cape Island prior to the resort and railroad boom of the mid nineteenth century, thus making it a rare and useful source.

American Automobile Association. *AAA Tourbook: New Jersey, Pennsylvania: An Annual Catalog of Selected Travel Information*. Heathrow, FL: American Automobile Association, 1996.

The AAA Tourbook is a simple yet helpful resource on some of the basic history and vital information of a number of cities and towns in New Jersey, which is often overlooked in other histories of Cape May and Atlantic City. Its specific sections on the two towns are some of the most encompassing passages in the book. Both listings offer a general history of the seaside resort towns, as well as suggestions on where to see the remnants of a bustling Victorian town. The book also includes information such as population history and estimates, year round climate, and popular modern-day resorts and places of interest. The well-known Victorian “gingerbread” homes and hotels are also mentioned when addressing historic Cape May.

Amory, Cleveland. *The Last Resorts*. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1948.

Cleveland Amory’s work on a number of prominent American resorts is a great resource. He is one of few who focuses solely on American seaside resorts in the 19th century instead of the many noted British destinations like fellow leisure historians. He brings attention to the social culture at places like Newport, Saratoga, Palm Beach, White Sulfur Springs, Palm Springs, and many others. While his primary focus is on those listed above, he mentions New Jersey’s seaside resorts such as Cape May, Atlantic City, and the lesser-known Long Branch. Amory includes information on the very early days of American resorts, but spends the most time on the late 19th century and early 20th century, specifically the “boom periods” of the turn of the century and the 1920s. Although the book lacks a bibliography, there is an in depth index and many photographs of the resorts in question. Amory also uses personal accounts from diaries and letters of many resort guests to give the reader a solid idea of what society was like during this era, specifically at some of America’s wealthiest resorts.

Barth, Gunther. *City People: The Rise of Modern City Culture in Nineteenth-Century America*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980.

Barth focuses on the development of city life and urban culture, which developed simultaneously with the seaside resorts during the nineteenth century. He pays particular attention to the inception and growth of cultural outlets such as department stores, apartment living, and also leisure pastimes like baseball and vaudeville. The book provides a basis for understanding the time period and home life of the many travelers who ventured to the shore. It is especially helpful in understanding the excursionists and their desire to mirror their wealthier, urban counterparts.

Briggs, Asa. *Victorian People: A Reassessment of Persons and Themes, 1851-1867*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970.

Asa Briggs is a renowned British historian and expert on the Victorian period. This particular book is part of a trilogy, the other two dealing with Victorian cities and Victorian “things.” It was a highly academic read, but provided extremely specific information on the minds of Victorian people. In addition, the period addressed in this book is short, making the assessment more detailed and in depth. This was an advantage to my research, as it covered the earlier years

discussed in the thesis, which helped to set up the section on understanding the ways of the Victorian people, and furthermore, Victorian travelers.

Buchholz, Margaret T., ed. *Shore Chronicles: Diaries and Travelers' Tales from the Jersey Shore 1764-1955*. Harvey Cedars, N.J.: Down the Shore Publishing Corporation, 1999. This collection of diary excerpts was a rare and lucrative find. It proved to be one of the only concise and edited works on daily life for guests visiting the New Jersey shore during the past 250 years. This is the one piece that offered the most insight to day by day activities and lifestyle at the resorts, but it was limited to upper class accounts. While it would have been helpful to read excursionist accounts of their visits to the shore, this source was still excellent for the purposes of this study.

Butler, Frank M. Atlantic City, N.J.: Atlantic City Press, 1940. Frank Butler has been described as an Atlantic City expert since the 1940s, and has written a number of articles and books on the resort town. This particular source is an article from the local newspaper about Atlantic City from 1940, and it offers a brief history and specific information on the earliest years of Atlantic City, which was helpful in writing this thesis.

Butler, Frank M. *The Book of the Boardwalk and the Atlantic City Story*. Atlantic City, N.J.: Haines and Co., 1953. This work serves this thesis a great purpose, for it was actually approved by the Atlantic City Board of Education to be used as an official textbook in their public schools. The very same Butler as listed above, he takes the time to discuss not only Atlantic City, but the beginnings of the American boardwalk and seaside resorts. He places emphasis on the notion that what was once designed to simply keep sand out of resort lobbies turned into a national institution that was eventually copied all over the world. Butler analyzes everything from boardwalks, piers, amusements, resort life, Miss America Pageants, transportation, disasters, and successes over an entire century at Atlantic City. Again, Butler thankfully falls into the ranks of some historians who chose to write an entire book, not just a chapter or paragraph, on one of the country's most prominent seaside resorts.

Corbin, Alain. *The Lure of the Sea: The Discovery of the Seaside in the Western World 1750-1840*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994. Alain Corbin's work is considered one of the most influential and dominant studies on the seaside and concept of resorting to the beach. Corbin is widely recognized as one of the primary French historians of the 19th century and is viewed as a pioneer of cultural history. Originally written in French, the translated version is a highly intellectual piece. Corbin heavily stresses the classical, sociological, psychological, and even philosophical reasons that humans flock to the sea and for various reasons. His primary discussion focuses on the earliest years of this trend, which are responsible for and the precursor for the boom of resorts and seaside holidays later in the century. Since the years in question are before the real expansion of American resorts, the places discussed in his book are primarily in his native France and also England. These two countries both boasted exquisite seaside resorts and are known to have had some of the most

popular 19th century beaches such as Brighton and Boulogne. Throughout the book, Corbin's main thesis is that the irresistible awakening of a collective desire for the shore arises in the period from 1750 to 1840. He analyzes the formation of resorts and their change over time as the middle and lower classes were able to spend time at the beach, and exactly what this meant for the seaside culture and society as a whole. This work shows the change in views of nature and the outdoors, and how it was someplace to be enjoyed, not only worked in or feared.

Cunningham, Hugh. *Leisure in the Industrial Revolution, c.1780-1880*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1980.

Hugh Cunningham's work on leisure during the Industrial Revolution is an informative study not only on the different forms and venues for leisure, but also on the sociology behind it. The author explores a century's worth of leisure, including its early stages and growth through its boom during the last few decades of the 19th century. He discusses both public and private forms of leisure, and the types of people who typically partook in these activities. Cunningham's work is unique in the sense that it pays special attention to the social class distinctions in Victorian society, more so than the typical works on leisure during that period. His arguments are all based on the foundation of a strictly divided society where leisure, like work, was defined by class.

Cunningham, John T. *The New Jersey Shore*. New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1958.

John Cunningham delivers an excellent account of the New Jersey beaches, covering every coastal town from northernmost Sandy Hook to southernmost Cape May. He studied these towns year round, not just during the busy summer months, which allows for a better understanding of their true character. Cunningham argues that no single area of the country, possibly even the world, is so much frequented yet so little understood as the New Jersey Shore. His book is narrative and includes numerous photographs, but since it covers so many towns, Cape May and Atlantic City receive less attention than they do in works by Frank Butler, Ed Davis, and Jeffrey Dorwart, for example.

Davis, Ed. *Atlantic City Diary: A Century of Memories: 1880-1985*. Atlantic City, N.J.: Atlantic City News Agency, 1989.

Ed Davis offers wonderful insight into the history of Atlantic City during its Victorian heyday and up until recent times. He follows the fishing village-turned-casino resort haven year by year for the dates mentioned in his title. He writes a few paragraphs or pages on events that took place in the given year, allowing for a more efficient examination of the years addressed in this thesis.

Dorwart, Jeffrey M. *Cape May County, New Jersey: The Making of an American Resort Community*. New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1992.

Jeffrey Dorwart's book is unique because it focuses only on Cape May and its development as a resort destination. In fact, it is hoped that this thesis will join the ranks of Dorwart's book and be a contribution to the specific study of Cape May, New Jersey. Like McMahon, Dorwart offers early historical facts on the seaside town, but he continues on through the Victorian period and into the late twentieth century. He discusses the impact the Revolutionary, Civil, and World

Wars had on the community, as well as the railroad and the Great Depression. He completed the work in 1992 in honor of the three hundredth anniversary of the incorporation of Cape May County, showing the long history of the small New Jersey town. Dorwart includes an extensive bibliography in his book, and has proven to be a valuable source for this thesis.

Dulles, Foster Rhea. *America Learns to Play: A History of Popular Recreation 1607-1940*. New York: D. Appleton-Century Company, Inc., 1940.

Foster Rhea Dulles produces an encompassing work on American leisure over three centuries. His work discusses popular forms of leisure and recreation such as the theater, spectator sports, country fairs, the circus, resort life, and even the growth of film and radio in the early 1900s. Because his focus is so broad, unfortunately only a small section of a chapter is devoted to seaside resorts. However, the little information there is, is fantastic research that also strictly focuses on America's resorts; a unique asset. He addresses the usual Newport and Saratoga histories, but discusses New Jersey's many beaches and their growing prominence as the 19th century progressed. Dulles argues many social restrictions and changes, such as the break from Victorianism, led to a more modern form of leisure, specifically at the summer resorts. Dulles also offers a plethora of information on societal rituals in 19th century America, as well as basic background information on popular leisure and its transformation throughout the centuries. Dulles's work is undoubtedly one of the most vital and scholarly works on the topic, and is also an entertaining and compelling read.

Grey, Howard and Graham Stuart. *The Victorians by the Sea*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1973.

The Victorians by the Sea is a collection of photographs taken at English beaches and seaside resorts in the Victorian era. Margaret Challen is responsible for the introduction of the book, which offers all of the written material in the work, aside from captions beneath the photos. Despite its limited pages of written material, the book offers great insight to what life was really like at a Victorian seaside resort with its photos, mostly all of which are candid. Like many others sources, this focuses on England's shores but is helpful to the American researcher, for it is important to understand where America's seaside culture derived from. The similarities between the two countries, not only in pastimes and amusements, but also in society and class distinctions, are striking. With this book, a visual representation of these similarities is offered to the reader, which is important because these visual representations define the public's interests of the era.

Grover, Kathryn, ed. *Hard at Play: Leisure in America, 1840-1940*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1992.

Kathryn Grover's book is a collection of essays and articles from different authors all dealing with leisure and recreation in mid to late nineteenth century America, and even touches upon the early 1900s. One of the articles discusses two primary resorts in New Jersey that had a different purpose than the simplicity and fun of the well-known seaside resorts at Cape May and Atlantic City. These are the Christian resorts at Ocean Grove and Asbury Park, two of the "respectable" resorts in the late nineteenth century. The discussion of these two resorts allows the reader to see

a different form of leisure at an entirely different type of “resort.” Although these resorts were first and foremost Christian institutions, they offered various forms of recreation, as the visitors and proprietors felt simple, natural “play” was healthy and even necessary for the Christian spirit. The accounts of the two resorts demonstrate the pious society of nineteenth century America and how those sentiments affected outlets for leisure and entertainment.

Historical Celebration Committee. *Historical Diary of Cape Island*. 1964.

A small book of about fifty pages, this diary is more of a guide and brochure. The celebration committee published the work to commemorate the history of the resort town after more than a century’s worth of being summer home to millions of beachgoers. Since it is more of a brochure, it includes only a brief history, but does include many excellent photographs and artistic renditions of hotels and local places over the past century. It includes an excerpt from old newspaper clippings from the 1890s, one of which provided the useful quote about “letting” the scantily clad woman leave Cape May and head for Atlantic City, aiding my argument.

Horn, Pamela. *Pleasures and Pastimes in Victorian Britain*. Thrupp: Sutton, 1999.

Pamela Horn presents an expansive study on the various forms of leisure in Victorian Britain. She discusses all forms of recreation from domestic amusements to horse racing and mass sports to fashion and excursions and holidays. Horn also spends time discussing gender roles, which are very apparent in Victorian society, although she does not make that the primary focus of her book. Most importantly, Horn focuses on the growth of leisure itself, as a physical activity and as a social norm. Horn’s work is much less philosophical and sociology-oriented than some of her fellow historians, but she still touches upon these ideas when necessary. Her book is derived from more of a tourism-based standpoint rather than an in depth study of culture and society in Victorian Britain. Again, the studies on Britain during this period are numerous, and her work is one of many. However, her book is organized extremely well and is one of the most facilitating sources on 19th century leisure. Her work also contains more general hypotheses and arguments that are not strictly reserved for British culture, but can also be applied to Americans of the same era.

Inglis, Andrea. *Beside the Seaside: Victorian Resorts in the Nineteenth Century*. Victoria: Melbourne University Press, 1999.

In her book, Inglis explores the attitudes of nineteenth century Victorians during a seaside holiday. Her principal focus is on some of the earliest and most popular seaside resorts in Victoria, Australia. She uses tourist guidebooks, personal visitor accounts, and collections of postcards, photographs, and paintings of the seaside vacation to draw her conclusions. Some of these are included throughout the pages of the book. Like many others, Inglis discusses the importance that medical opinion had on marketing resorts at the time, but she stands apart as one of the biggest contenders of the medicinal benefits and properties of the sea. She also explores the social classes in Victorian Australia and argues that upper and middle class values profoundly affected the behavior of the seaside visitor. For the most part, she claims, the seaside of the nineteenth century differed dramatically from that of today, as health was the overriding preoccupation. She contends that one went to the beach to improve mind and body, as a kind of

restorative duty. Like Corbin, Inglis also discusses the concept of the seaside as sublime, and is one of few historians who touch upon the sea as a powerful, metaphorical entity.

Kirk II, James B. *Golden Light: The 1878 Diary of Captain Thomas Rose Lake*. Harvey Cedars, N.J.: Down the Shore Publishing, 2003.

Author James B. Kirk edited the nineteenth century diary of Captain Lake, which offers detailed accounts of his trips around the Cape Island peninsula. He describes various leisure activities and the types of people he encountered, which was especially helpful in writing this thesis. One of the most useful accounts was of an evening beach party near the resorts.

Lerner, Laurence, ed. *The Victorians*. New York: Holmes and Meier Publishers, Inc., 1978. This is a collection of essays and articles edited by historian Laurence Lerner. Lerner is most known for his work on British literature and poetry, and he begins this collection with a brief history on those matters. The collection then covers topics that range from England's Victorian culture, home, and workplace to politics and sex. While these essays deal with these topics and their effect on literature, there is still a plethora of useful information on how the Victorian people behaved. This was particularly helpful in setting up the type of people that ventured to the shore, similar to many other sources I used. A typical downfall to this particular book was that it was about England and made little to no references to America.

Lofgren, Orvar. *On Holiday: A History of Vacationing*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999.

Orvar Lofgren's work looks at some of the ways in which vacationing has evolved as such an important part of modern life. He sets out to explain modern tourism by tracing the roots of vacationing, and offers a wealth of information on some of these early resorts and destinations, the seashore being one of them. His book explores two vital centuries in the making of modern tourist experiences and sensibilities. He views vacationing as a cultural laboratory where people have been able to experiment with new aspects of their identities, their social relations, or their interaction with nature. Similar to Corbin, Lofgren includes an entire section on the microphysics of travel, exploring the physical and psychological aspects involved with a tourist experience. Overall, Lofgren's work is a good balance of cultural, social, and tourism histories.

Mauger, Edward Arthur. *Atlantic City: Then and Now*. San Diego: Thunder Bay Press, 2008. Mauger's book is part of a major series that studies cities in the United States, titled "Then and Now." This particular edition on Atlantic City was extremely helpful in supporting one of my arguments. It showcases perfectly how Atlantic City transformed over the years, particularly right when it became popular with the excursionists and fell out of favor with the upper class. It uses hundreds of photographs that compare famous intersections, hotels, and local institutions with descriptions and historical information listed beneath. While it may not be considered one of the more scholarly pieces used, it was certainly one of the most interesting and closely associated with one of the main arguments of the thesis.

McGerr, Michael E. *The Decline of Popular Politics: The American North, 1865-1928*.

Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986.

This book aided the discussion on understanding the late nineteenth century political culture. Not only did it offer insight to the late Victorian Americans and the rapid changes that occurred in their lives, but some of the book's chapters dealt with how leisure negatively affected participation in politics, both local and national. This was of particular interest because it proves the major expansion of leisure that occurred in the late Victorian period, and credits it with becoming so popular that it actually contributed to political apathy and less responsibility in civic duties amongst many Americans. Overall, while it was not cited a number of times, it was one of the most interesting books and one worth recommending to anyone studying that period in our nation's history, no matter the topic.

McMahon, William. *Historic South Jersey Towns*. Atlantic City, N.J.: Press Publishing Company, 1964.

William McMahon is one of few authors that studies southern New Jersey specifically. His work encompasses all towns within Atlantic, Cape May, Cumberland, and Salem counties. Although his focus is more on the pre-Revolution and Revolutionary period, he presents a descriptive and unique book on much lesser known towns in South Jersey. McMahon notes the medicinal values of sea bathing at Cape May and Atlantic City as well as valuable background information and a timetable of events. Since there are many cities addressed, the information on the two resort towns is limited, but the book remains one of few works where the primary study is southern New Jersey.

Miller, Ben. *The First Resort: Fun, Sun, Fire and War in Cape May, America's Original Seaside Town*. Rio Grande, N.J.: Exit Zero Publishing, 2009.

Ben Miller's recent publication is a large and illustrative account of Cape May. Oversized and complete with photographs on every page, the book first appears as merely a coffee table accessory, but it has a plethora of valuable information. Just as the title states, Miller traces the history of the resort town in relation to major events and trends. He begins with the early history of the town dating back to the seventeenth century and studies through the hotel building boom, glory days, and closes with the present-day "battle for the soul of Cape May", as he likes to call it.

Nielsen, J.N. "Failed Cities," 2009. *Grand Strategy: The View from Oregon. Grand strategy and Geopolitics from the Perspective of the Pacific Northwest*. Available from <http://geopoliticraticus.wordpress.com/2009/11/06/failed-cities/>. Internet. Accessed 28 June 2011.

This recent article was a helpful source, as it mirrored my argument about Atlantic City's current fate. While my argument does not stress that the city has "failed" entirely, it corresponds with the decline of Atlantic City since its resort prominence in the late 1800s. It also provided helpful photographs and more up-to-date city statistics to include in the conclusion chapter of the thesis. Overall, this article helped in the comparison of modern day Atlantic City to Cape May's rather opposite current state.

Perkin, H.J. "The Social 'Tone' of Victorian Seaside Resorts in the North-West." *Northern History*. Volume II, 1975-1976.

Perkin's article focuses on a very specific topic and area, and thus was used scarcely in the thesis. However, his points about the overall social tone and class divisions at seaside resorts were a major asset to my argument. The comparison of seaside resorts to large cities and the class warfare that was already occurring there is particularly useful. The article inspired the lengthy discussion on the class-consciousness that occurred at the resorts.

Petrie, Sir Charles. *The Victorians*. New York: David McKay Company, Inc., 1962.

Sir Charles Petrie's work on the Victorians is an inclusive study on all aspects of Victorian society and the Victorian individual. His work is a highly regarded account in British cultural history and offers a plethora of wide ranging information on Victorian society. His study ranges from the Victorian monarchy to leisure, women, religion, and even the armed services and politics. While Petrie does not discuss the seashore in specifics or great detail, he spends much time discussing the Victorian traveler and the rise of tourism in the 19th century. Petrie's book is almost fifty years old, and for a work on culture and sociology, this could be a problem, for attitudes and feelings, specifically about the Victorians, have changed since the 1960s. Despite this, his insights on the Victorian mind and way of thinking are beneficial to the reader, and therefore allow for a much better understanding of the seaside and resort culture of the 19th century via the likes and dislikes of a "typical" Victorian tourist.

Sheriff, Carol. *The Artificial River: The Erie Canal and the Paradox of Progress, 1817-1862*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1996.

Carol Sheriff's book was helpful when researching early forms of public transportation in the nineteenth century. Although she deals primarily with canals, she offers information on the railroad as the use of canals disintegrated as the century progressed. Specifically, her book was most useful for the discussion on the changes in transportation that led up to the railroad reaching New Jersey's coast. Moreover, she presents an interesting argument about the paradox of progress within the realm of transportation and technological advancement, much like the controversial "progress" at the resort towns.

Treese, Loretta. *Railroads of New Jersey: Fragments of the Past in the Garden State Landscape*. Mechanicsburg, P.A.: Stackpole Books, 2006.

Unsurprisingly, Treese's book provided substantial information on the development of the railroad in New Jersey. It discusses the railroad system in regions, and then specifically focuses on the southern lines used for transporting the millions of tourists to Cape May and Atlantic City. The book is one of the few dedicated to the railroad and its effects solely in New Jersey, which was helpful.

Treese, Loretta. *Railroads of Pennsylvania: Fragments of the Past in the Keystone Landscape*. Mechanicsburg, P.A.: Stackpole Books, 2003.

The earlier published of the two railroad works used in this thesis, this book on Pennsylvania's railroad is almost identical to the piece on New Jersey. The railroad industry was originally much more dominant and significant in Pennsylvania, so I felt it was necessary to look into this work as well. In addition, Philadelphia was southern New Jersey's biggest tourist pool, so it was helpful to understand the railroading system there before dealing with New Jersey's own. Furthermore, many of New Jersey's railroad lines originated in Pennsylvania stations, so the connection between the two was important.

Walvin, James. *Leisure and Society 1830-1950*. New York, London: Longman, Inc., 1978. James Walvin delivers an in depth look at society as the leisure culture formed and expanded over the decades in question. The second part of his book focuses specifically on the years 1870-1914. In this section, there is an entire chapter dedicated to the development of seaside resorts and the growing popularity of vacationing at the beach, which is appropriately titled, "Down to the Sea in Drovers." In this chapter, he explains, as many other historians do, the importance the railroad had on the development and success of these resorts. Walvin also notes the societal values of the era and their place in the emerging seaside culture. He discusses the separation of classes at the resorts and the transformation of leisure from an elite activity into something for the masses, mainly through the expansion of the railroad. Walvin also focuses on England's many popular resorts instead of America's, but his work is nonetheless a pertinent source on class and specific forms of leisure in the late 1800s.

Walvin, James. *Victorian Values*. Athens, G.A.: University of Georgia Press, 1987. While this book by James Walvin was not nearly as helpful and influential to the thesis, it did provide basic information on the Victorian spirit. This book delves into how Victorians dealt with the social issues of their time, and he analyzes that in regard to their inherent morals. It provided information on the misconceptions about Victorians, especially regarding sex, gender, and the public, which were undoubtedly helpful to this study.

15th Annual Cape May County Resort Guide 1930-1931, 1930.

Another Cape May guide that provided information on the various hotels and amusements offered in Cape May. The guide is a large brochure that includes excerpts from late nineteenth century advertisements for those hotels and amusements, so it was able to still provide useful contemporary information. It is very similar in nature to the 1964 Diary of Cape May presented by the Celebration Committee.