



1999

# Amusement Parks as Landscapes of Popular Culture: An Analysis of Willow Grove Park and the Wildwoods

Joanna Mary Doherty  
*University of Pennsylvania*

Follow this and additional works at: [http://repository.upenn.edu/hp\\_theses](http://repository.upenn.edu/hp_theses)

 Part of the [Historic Preservation and Conservation Commons](#)

---

Doherty, Joanna Mary, "Amusement Parks as Landscapes of Popular Culture: An Analysis of Willow Grove Park and the Wildwoods" (1999). *Theses (Historic Preservation)*. 294.  
[http://repository.upenn.edu/hp\\_theses/294](http://repository.upenn.edu/hp_theses/294)

Copyright note: Penn School of Design permits distribution and display of this student work by University of Pennsylvania Libraries.

Suggested Citation:

Doherty, Joanna Mary (1999). *Amusement Parks as Landscapes of Popular Culture: An Analysis of Willow Grove Park and the Wildwoods*. (Masters Thesis). University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA.

This paper is posted at ScholarlyCommons. [http://repository.upenn.edu/hp\\_theses/294](http://repository.upenn.edu/hp_theses/294)

For more information, please contact [libraryrepository@pobox.upenn.edu](mailto:libraryrepository@pobox.upenn.edu).

---

# Amusement Parks as Landscapes of Popular Culture: An Analysis of Willow Grove Park and the Wildwoods

## **Disciplines**

Historic Preservation and Conservation

## **Comments**

Copyright note: Penn School of Design permits distribution and display of this student work by University of Pennsylvania Libraries.

## **Suggested Citation:**

Doherty, Joanna Mary (1999). *Amusement Parks as Landscapes of Popular Culture: An Analysis of Willow Grove Park and the Wildwoods*. (Masters Thesis). University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA.



UNIVERSITY OF  
PENNSYLVANIA  
LIBRARIES







AMUSEMENT PARKS AS LANDSCAPES  
OF POPULAR CULTURE:  
AN ANALYSIS OF  
WILLOW GROVE PARK  
AND  
THE WILDWOODS

Joanna Mary Doherty

A THESIS

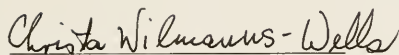
in

Historic Preservation

Presented to the Faculties of the University of Pennsylvania in  
Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

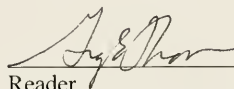
1999



Advisor

Christa Wilmanns-Wells, Ph.D.

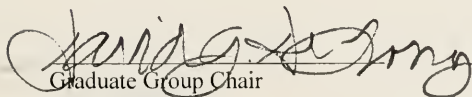
Lecturer in Historic Preservation



Reader

George E. Thomas, Ph.D.

Lecturer in Historic Preservation



Graduate Group Chair

David G. De Long

Professor of Architecture

Fine Arts / NA / 06 / 1999 / 2655

UNIVERSITY  
OF  
PENNSYLVANIA  
LIBRARIES



## *Acknowledgments*

Thanks must first go to my advisor, Christa Wilmanns-Wells, who guided me through all phases of my thesis with her tremendous knowledge, invaluable insight and characteristic enthusiasm. I am grateful also to George Thomas, who introduced me to the Wildwoods and generously shared his extensive knowledge of the Jersey shore with me. In addition, there are several individuals whose insight provided me with a deeper understanding of my subject: Max Hankin, former owner of Willow Grove Park; John Palmieri, former superintendent of Willow Grove Park; Jack Morey, Vice President of The Morey Organization; Ellen Collins, Executive Director of the Doo Wop Preservation League; and William Kemp, Chair of the Wildwood Historic Preservation Commission.

Finally, I wish to thank my partner, Lisa Dady, whose support was unflagging not only during the research and writing of my thesis, but throughout the course of my two years at Penn.



## *Table of Contents*

Acknowledgments	ii
List of Illustrations	iv
Chapter One <i>Introduction</i>	1
Chapter Two <i>The Democratization of Leisure and the Origins of the American Amusement Park</i>	6
Chapter Three <i>The Evolution and Demise of Willow Grove Park: A Case Study in the Life of a Landscape of Popular Recreation</i>	36
Chapter Four <i>The Wildwoods: Their History, Persistence and Role as a Repository of Amusement Park Memories</i>	82
Chapter Five <i>Preserving the Ephemeral: The Wildwoods as a Dynamic Cultural Landscape</i>	127
Chapter Six <i>Conclusions</i>	158
Bibliography	162
Index	173



## *Illustrations*

<i>Figure</i>		<i>Page</i>
2.1	Luna Park, Coney Island, 1909	10
2.2	Luna Park, Pittsburgh, 1905	10
2.3	Advertisement for “Hang the Coon,” an amusement park throwing game, 1914	14
2.4	Ferris wheel, World’s Columbian Exhibition, Chicago, 1893	20
2.5	The Court of Honor, World’s Columbian Exhibition, Chicago, 1893	22
2.6	Scene on the Midway Plaisance, World’s Columbian Exhibition, Chicago, 1893	22
2.7	The Switchback Railway at Mauch Chunk, Pennsylvania, 1870	26
2.8	Night view of Luna Park, Coney Island, 1904	28
3.1	Entrance to trolley station, Willow Grove Park, 1905	42
3.2	Night view of Willow Grove Park, 1907	42
3.3	The Bicycle Swing, Willow Grove Park, 1896	45
3.4	Audience at a band concert, Willow Grove Park, c. 1910	45
3.5	Bandstand, Willow Grove Park, 1907	51
3.6	Music Pavilion, Willow Grove Park, n.d.	51
3.7	Casino at night, Willow Grove Park, c. 1905	52
3.8	The Lodge, Willow Grove Park, 1896	52
3.9	The Joy Zone, Panama-Pacific International Exposition, San Francisco, 1915	55
3.10	Map of Willow Grove Park, 1897	55
3.11	Willowgraph Theater, Willow Grove Park, c. 1905	57



3.12	Mountain Scenic Railway, Willow Grove Park, 1910	57
3.13	The Captive Flying Machine, Willow Grove Park, c. 1905	59
3.14	Automobile Race Course, Willow Grove Park, 1910	59
3.15	St. Nicholas Coal Mine ride, Willow Grove Park, 1910	62
3.16	Tours of the World, Willow Grove Park, 1906	64
3.17	Venice, Willow Grove Park, 1910	64
3.18	Bird's eye view of Willow Grove Park, c. 1910	67
3.19	Night view of Willow Grove Park, 1907	67
3.20	Cartoon map of Willow Grove Park, 1940	72
3.21	Alligator wrestler at Willow Grove Park, c. 1965	76
3.22	Willow Grove Park management's trip to Disneyland, newspaper clipping, 1959	76
3.23	The "Bank" at Six Gun Territory, c. 1976	78
3.24	Demolition of the Alps roller coaster, Willow Grove Park, 1980	78
3.25	Interior of the Willow Grove Park mall, 1998	79
4.1	Partial map of the Wildwoods, showing boardwalk, 1998	84
4.2	Map showing railroad routes to the Wildwoods, c. 1905	90
4.3	A group of sea-bathers on the Wildwoods beach, c. 1905	90
4.4	Map showing the Wildwoods boardwalk, 1921	95
4.5	Blaker's Pavilion, Wildwood, c. 1900	97
4.6	The Casino Pier, Wildwood, 1907	97
4.7	Hunt's Comique theater, Wildwood, 1911	98
4.8	Night view of The Ocean Pier, Wildwood, c. 1910	98
4.9	The Ocean Pier, Wildwood, c. 1910	101
4.10	Steeplechase Pier, Atlantic City, c. 1900	101





4.11	Entrance to The Amusement Center, Wildwood, 1924	107
4.12	Map of The Amusement Center, Wildwood, 1921	107
4.13	The Amusement Center, Wildwood, c. 1945	108
4.14	Posing on the Wildwood beach, 1927	108
4.15	The Ocean Pier, Wildwood, after remodeling, c. 1925	110
4.16	Hunt's Ocean Pier, Wildwood, c. 1936	110
4.17	Map showing automobile routes to the Wildwoods, 1925	113
4.18	Map showing motel development in Wildwood Crest, 1958	116
4.19	Marine Pier, Wildwood, 1960s	118
4.20	Jungleland at Hunt's Pier, Wildwood, c. 1960	118
4.21	The Caribbean motel, 5600 Ocean Avenue, Wildwood Crest, 1998	121
4.22	The Tahiti motel, 7411 Atlantic Avenue, Wildwood Crest, 1998	121
4.23	The Stardust motel, 3900 Ocean Avenue, Wildwood, 1998	122
5.1	Map showing the Wildwood boardwalk, near Blaker's Pavilion, 1909	133
5.2	Aerial view of Mariner's Landing, Wildwood, 1998	137
5.3	Aerial view of Mariner's Landing, Wildwood, at night, c. 1998	137
5.4	Mariner's Landing, Wildwood, as seen from the beach, 1998	139
5.5	Venetian carousel, Mariner's Landing, Wildwood, 1998	141
5.6	Detail of Venetian carousel, Mariner's Landing, Wildwood, 1998	141
5.7	The Golden Nugget Mine Ride, Hunt's Pier, Wildwood, c. 1960	142
5.8	The Volcano ride, Hunt's Pier, Wildwood, 1998	142
5.9	Map of Wildwood historic districts	147
5.10	The Great White roller coaster at the Wild Wheels Pier, Wildwood, 1998	153
5.11	The Doo Wopper roller coaster at the Wild Wheels Pier, Wildwood, 1998	153



# Chapter One

## *Introduction*

*As art and symbol, amusement parks are so incandescent as to be considered an especially American art form, a new American muse. This muse leads us out of the showcase museum of elite art and artifact to the consummate popular culture institution: the living museum of our most cherished popular icons and images – our highest concentrate of artifact, fantasy, and imagination.<sup>1</sup>*

Since their emergence in the late nineteenth century, amusement parks have provided a visible record of modern American culture. They reflect broad trends in social history and, by acting as an antidote to the ordinary and routine, serve as barometers of everyday life. As microcosms of American culture, amusement parks offer historians another way to understand many of the major processes which have affected the twentieth-century American landscape, including urbanization and industrialization, the rise of the automobile and the development of a consumer culture. All of these factors have had an impact on the ways in which Americans interact with and shape the world around them, creating landscapes that are reflective of the culture.

Peirce Lewis, in his essay “Common Landscapes as Historic Documents,” defines the term cultural landscape as “the total assemblage of visible things that human beings have done to alter the face of the earth.” Lewis’ definition encompasses both overt and more subtle human

---

<sup>1</sup> Margaret J. King, “The New American Muse: Notes on the Amusement/Theme Park,” *Journal of Popular Culture* 15, no. 1 (Summer 1981): 57.



activity, noble and seemingly frivolous pursuits. According to Lewis, cultural landscapes include

mines and quarries and dams and jetties; the ubiquitous purposeful manipulation of the earth's vegetative cover in farms, forests, lawns, parks, and gardens; the things humans build on the earth, cities and towns, houses and barns, factories and office buildings; the spaces we create for worship and for play.<sup>2</sup>

Though undeniably landscapes of play, amusement parks reveal more than just society's desire for entertainment and diversion; they signify the formation of a collective identity which gave rise to a new kind of popular culture, centered around leisure and consumption. Because popular culture encompasses the "culture of the people, of *all* the people, as distinguished from a select, small group,"<sup>3</sup> an analysis of popular cultural manifestations in landscapes such as amusement parks can provide insight into the culture as a whole. According to Ray B. Browne, "The value of popular culture as a window to the human condition is timeless. Perhaps because it is less artful, less altered by the alchemy of the artist, popular culture is often a more truthful picture of what the people were thinking and doing at any given time than artistic creations are."<sup>4</sup>

The following study will explore the cultural landscape of American amusement parks through a historical analysis of two sites: Willow Grove Park, which opened at the end of a trolley line in 1896 and is now the site of a shopping mall; and the Wildwoods, a group of three New Jersey shore resort towns that have featured a boardwalk and several amusement piers since the early twentieth century. Of primary concern is the role that amusement parks have

---

<sup>2</sup> Peirce F. Lewis, "Common Landscapes as Historic Documents," in *History from Things: Essays on Material Culture*, ed. Steven Lubar and W. David Kingery (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1993), 115-116.

<sup>3</sup> Ray B. Browne, "Popular Culture: New Notes Toward a Definition," in *The Popular Culture Reader*, ed.

Christopher D. Geist and Jack Nachbar (Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1983), 13.

<sup>4</sup> Browne, 17.



played in reflecting and shaping popular culture, and how this culture has been and continues to be manifested in the landscape of amusement parks. In addition to demonstrating the cultural significance of these sites, their histories emphasize the inherently ephemeral nature of popular landscapes of leisure. Finally, this study will consider the potential role for historic preservation at the boardwalk and amusement piers in the Wildwoods, by identifying historically significant characteristics, evaluating existing preservation methods and discussing potential challenges to the preservation of a landscape of constant change.

Both Willow Grove Park and the Wildwoods exemplify the dynamic nature of landscapes of recreation. Both sites were regularly reinvented in an effort to provide the latest in thrills and the most exotic, if temporary, means of escape from the everyday world. A comparison of Willow Grove Park and the Wildwoods allows for a discussion of two different types of amusement parks, each of which has responded differently to societal forces around it. Operated by a Philadelphia transit company and located at the end of a trolley line, Willow Grove Park was one of hundreds of turn-of-the-century “trolley parks” which were intended to increase traffic and, therefore, profits on public transit. In contrast, the boardwalk and amusement piers at the Wildwoods are part of a larger resort landscape, and their origins and persistence are dependent in part upon their proximity to a powerful natural feature, the ocean.

Despite their differences, Willow Grove Park and the Wildwoods share a common heritage, and an analysis of the two sites underscores the characteristics that have historically been prevalent at all amusement parks. As will be explored in greater depth in Chapter Two, amusement parks are one example of many public entertainment spaces which developed at the end of the nineteenth century. Public amusements like vaudeville theaters, movie houses and amusement parks were characterized by their relatively diverse crowds, which crossed ethnic, class and gender lines, and therefore signified a democratization of leisure in the United States.





Because they offered large numbers of Americans the opportunity to share experiences and to develop a collective identity, these spaces fostered a nascent form of popular culture, one which integrated the rising consumer and leisure cultures. Chapters Three and Four, which detail the histories of Willow Grove Park and the Wildwoods' amusement piers, explore the ways in which this shared culture has been reflected in the appearance and function of these landscapes.

In addition, an analysis of those factors which led to the decline of Willow Grove Park and those which have contributed to the endurance of the Wildwoods can inform a discussion of the future of the Wildwoods' amusement piers. Chapter Five identifies those features of the Wildwoods' boardwalk and amusement piers which have been historically consistent and which contribute to the landscape's character. Both the Wildwoods and Willow Grove Park are characterized by perpetual evolution, and Chapter Five addresses the problem of maintaining a sense of historical continuity in a landscape which derives much of its cultural meaning from its ephemeral nature. Recent interest in the preservation of the Wildwoods' 1950s architecture is discussed and consideration is given to the potential for incorporating the piers into existing preservation efforts.

What follows is not a comprehensive history of the American amusement park, but, rather, a detailed examination of two relatively typical amusement sites. In addition, this work is concerned primarily with parks whose origins date to the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and addresses Disneyland and other theme parks only to the extent that they relate to earlier parks. There is a wealth of recent scholarship on the origins of Disneyland, its historical significance and impact on American culture.<sup>5</sup> While this study does not address those topics,

---

<sup>5</sup> Karal Ann Marling has written extensively on the history and cultural significance of Disneyland. See her article, "Disneyland, 1955: Just Take the Santa Ana Freeway to the American Dream," *American Art* 5, nos. 1-2 (Winter/Spring 1991): 168-207 and her book, published in conjunction with an exhibit on the architecture of Disney, *Designing Disney's Theme Parks: The Architecture of Reassurance* (Montreal: Canadian Centre for Architecture, 1997). For more on Disney architecture, see Beth Dunlop, *Building a Dream: The Art of Disney Architecture* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1996) and John Pastier, "The Architecture of Escapism: Disney World and Las



it may provide a greater understanding of the roots of the theme park movement and the subsequent Disneyfication of the material world.

Similarly, the portion of this study that addresses the preservation of the Wildwoods' boardwalk and amusement piers is not intended to provide a formula for cultural landscape preservation. A thorough understanding of the unique history of a site is necessary in order to assess its salient characteristics, evaluate their integrity and develop strategies for their preservation. In addition, each site has its own peculiar challenges that must be considered when exploring preservation possibilities. However, amusement parks do provide a means of discussing some of the problems inherent in preserving any dynamic landscape, issues which, because of the extremity of the change evident in landscapes of popular leisure, are heightened at amusement parks. It is also hoped that a demonstration of the cultural significance of amusement parks may serve as an argument for the recognition of other landscapes of popular culture, which, while not always acknowledged by the preservation field, can contribute to a deeper understanding of the American experience.

---

Vegas." *ALA Journal* 67, no. 14 (December 1978): 26-37. The Project on Disney, *Inside the Mouse: Work and Play at Disney World* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995) includes essays on Disney's theme park in Florida. For a critical look at Celebration, Disney's residential project near Orlando, see Bettina Drew, *Crossing the Expendable Landscape* (St. Paul, MN: Graywolf Press, 1998).



## Chapter Two

### *The Democratization of Leisure and the Origins of the American Amusement Park*

*From 1900 to 1920, the amusement park was a perfect embodiment of the American spirit. It provided a delightful escape from drab, routine city existence .... People of all classes, including the vast immigrant population, could mingle with little regard for the strict social distinctions or mores of the time. Thus the parks reflected the increased democratic character of society.<sup>1</sup>*

The earliest amusement parks in America emerged during the latter part of the nineteenth century, as one manifestation of a broader cultural trend toward the pursuit of recreation in public spaces. David Nasaw, in his book *Going Out: The Rise and Fall of Public Amusements*, documents a wide range of entertainment spaces which appeared around this time, including movie palaces, dance halls, vaudeville theaters and baseball parks. Because they attracted a relatively diverse crowd, which came together in search of leisure and entertainment, these places represented a new and important stage in recreational history in the United States. Indeed, Nasaw argues, the rise of public amusements had a profound effect on American society in general, by creating a framework within which a collective cultural identity could begin to form. Millions of Americans participated in the new public amusements and, in the

---

<sup>1</sup> Judith Adams. *The American Amusement Park Industry: A History of Technology and Thrills* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1991), 63.



process, both experienced and helped to form a shared popular culture.<sup>2</sup>

The culture that grew out of public amusements at the turn of the century was not without precedent, as Lawrence Levine demonstrates in *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America*. Levine argues that, despite long-standing distinctions along ethnic, regional and class lines, early nineteenth-century Americans shared a common culture, devoid of the distinction between “high” and “low” art. Eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century entertainment spaces such as opera houses, theaters and auditoriums showcased entertainment “which blended together mixed elements of what we would today call high, low, and folk culture,” and were characterized by an atmosphere which encouraged audiences to act as both spectators and participants.<sup>3</sup> As the century came to a close, however, American society had become fragmented and hierarchical, and the new popular culture that emerged differed significantly from its predecessor:

Twentieth-century Americans, especially in the palaces they built to the movies and in their sporting arenas, continued to share public space and public culture. But with a difference. Cultural space became more sharply defined, more circumscribed, and less flexible than it had been. Americans might sit together to watch the same films and athletic contests, but those who also desired to experience “legitimate” theater or hear “serious” music went to segregated temples devoted to “high” or “classical” art.<sup>4</sup>

What distinguished the new popular culture from the old, then, was its placement at the bottom of a cultural hierarchy, and its functioning within an increasingly urban and commercial society. While the economy of the Victorian era was largely industrial, focused on the production of

---

<sup>2</sup> David Nasaw, *Going Out: The Rise and Fall of Public Amusements* (New York: BasicBooks, 1993), 1-9. Kathy Peiss’ study of working-class women’s recreation in turn-of-the-century New York stresses the role that participants in the new public amusements played in shaping, not just consuming, popular culture. See Kathy Peiss, *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in New York City, 1880-1920* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986), 10.

<sup>3</sup> Lawrence W. Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow. The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), 8-9, 208.





capital goods, by the turn of the century mass production, combined with increases in disposable income and free time, created a consumption-oriented society.<sup>5</sup> The new public amusements emerged at the same time as department stores and mail-order catalogs, suggesting that consumption was not limited to material goods but, rather, that “fun could be bought like anything else.”<sup>6</sup>

In addition, public amusements in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries existed on a scale unlike what had been seen before; Brooklyn’s Coney Island attracted over twenty million visitors in the 1909 season.<sup>7</sup> Every major American city supported at least one amusement park, and literally millions of people flocked to them.<sup>8</sup> For a period, Philadelphia supported three amusement parks: Woodside Park, which operated from 1897 to 1955, Chestnut Hill Park, open from 1898 to 1912, and Willow Grove, the first, largest and longest-lasting of the three.<sup>9</sup> Amusement parks across the country exhibited a remarkable similarity, which both reflected and perpetuated the new mass culture. Although the atmosphere might differ slightly from one park to the next, the basic experience was the same whether one was in Philadelphia or Chicago. The architecture, though of flimsy construction, was invariably exotic and fantastic in its design. Rides were engineered to provide the same thrilling sensations; indeed, parks across the country offered their audiences the exact same rides, produced by a relatively small

---

<sup>4</sup> Levine, 233-234.

<sup>5</sup> Nasaw, 1-9; George Lipsitz, *Time Passages: Collective Memory and American Popular Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990), 9-11; Thomas J. Schlereth, *Victorian America: Transformations in Everyday Life, 1876-1915* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1991), 141.

<sup>6</sup> Schlereth, 141.

<sup>7</sup> Nasaw, 3.

<sup>8</sup> Gary Kyriazi, *The Great American Amusement Parks: A Pictorial History* (Secaucus, NJ: Citadel Press, 1976), 98; Stephen B. Goddard, *Getting There: The Epic Struggle Between Road and Rail in the American Century* (New York: Basic Books, 1994), 72.

<sup>9</sup> Frederick Fried, “E. Joy Morris and the Evolution of the Philadelphia Toboggan Company,” *Merry-Go-Roundup* 6, no. 1 (Spring 1989): 8-9; David R. Contosta, *Suburb in the City: Chestnut Hill, Philadelphia, 1850-1990* (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 1992), 157-158: “Amusement Parks” file, Social Science and History Department, Free Library of Philadelphia, Philadelphia, PA.



number of amusement device manufacturers.<sup>10</sup> Parks competed with one another in an effort to stay up to date, mimicking each other in appearance as well as in the amusements offered, resulting in a homogenization among parks across the country.<sup>11</sup> (Figs. 2.1 and 2.2)

Cultural geographer Peirce Lewis has noted that, when landscapes begin to look similar despite geographic distance, it is an indication that the differences in the regional cultures that created them have become less pronounced.<sup>12</sup> Homogenization at amusement parks, then, can be interpreted as evidence of the development of a mass culture. Thomas Schlereth, in his book *Victorian America: Transformations in Everyday Life, 1876-1915*, discusses the formation of “consumption communities” at the turn of the century. Across regional and class lines, Americans began to consume the same products, creating a sense of shared identity.<sup>13</sup> Patrons of public amusement were creating the same sense of collective identity through their consumption of leisure activities and shared experiences.

Several factors contributed to the rise of public amusements at the turn of the century and to their integration into an increasingly commercialized culture. The last quarter of the nineteenth century was a period of significant demographic change in the United States, with

---

<sup>10</sup> Research for this study found repeated references to a small group of leading manufacturers, including several in Philadelphia, such as The Philadelphia Toboggan Company, which produced carousels and roller coasters, and is still in business today; carousel designer Gustav Dentzel; and E. Joy Morris, a roller coaster designer. For further information on these and other manufacturers, see Gary Kyriazi, *The Great American Amusement Parks: A Pictorial History* (Secaucus, NJ: Citadel Press, 1976); Frederick Fried, “E. Joy Morris and the Evolution of the Philadelphia Toboggan Company,” *Merry-Go-Roundup* 6, no. 1 (Spring 1989): 8-9; Charlotte Dinger, *Art of the Carousel* (Green Village, NJ: Carousel Art, Inc., 1983); and Linda Kowall, “The Merry-Go-Round Kings,” *Pennsylvania Heritage*, 14, no. 2 (Spring 1988): 24-33.

<sup>11</sup> For example, Conneaut Lake Park near Erie, Pennsylvania, featured an electric fountain, dance pavilion, swinging airship ride and “old mill” roller coaster as of 1901, much like Willow Grove Park. Luna Park and Dreamland, both at Coney Island, were notorious for copying one another and, in the early 1900s, both offered visitors a simulated trip through the canals of Venice, as did Willow Grove. Publications such as the *Street Railway Journal* reported on parks owned by transit companies, including Willow Grove. Lee O. Bush, and Richard F. Hershey, *Conneaut Lake Park: The First 100 Years* (Fairview Park, OH: Amusement Park Books, Inc., 1992), 28-29; Al Griffin, *Step Right Up, Folks!* (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1974), 13; Harold E. Cox, “Rise and Decline of Willow Grove Park: Paper Read Before the Old York Road Historical Society, March 19, 1963,” *Old York Road Historical Society Bulletin*, 25 (1964): 18; Peiss, 130.

<sup>12</sup> Peirce F. Lewis, “Axioms for Reading the Landscape: Some Guides to the American Scene,” in *The Interpretation of Ordinary Landscapes: Geographical Essays*, ed. D. W. Meinig, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 16.

<sup>13</sup> Schlereth, 162.





**Fig. 2.1**  
Luna Park, Coney Island, 1909

Reprinted from John F. Kasson, *Amusing the Million: Coney Island at the Turn of the Century*



**Fig. 2.2**  
Luna Park, Pittsburgh, 1905

Reprinted from David Nasaw, *Going Out: The Rise and Fall of Public Amusements*



growing numbers of immigrants, rapid expansion of the country's urban population and a corresponding decrease in the number of rural dwellers.<sup>14</sup> The concentration of the population in urban centers was a crucial element in the growth of large-scale amusement spaces. Equally important was the increase in discretionary income and leisure time among the working class during this period; between 1870 and 1900, the income of non-farm workers increased by 50%, while the number of work hours decreased. At the same time, the concept of "vacationing" – long a practice of the upper class – trickled down to the middle and working classes, providing a context of cultural approval, while growing transportation networks facilitated more widespread movement for less cost.<sup>15</sup> Entrepreneurs and transportation tycoons recognized this recreational revolution and exploited it to the maximum, establishing amusement parks across the country, and providing the transportation networks to get there.<sup>16</sup> In sum, by the end of the nineteenth century large numbers of Americans had the time and money to pursue leisure, and they lived in a society which encouraged them to do so.

Amusement parks offered their patrons an opportunity to escape their everyday existence. Not only did visitors find themselves in truly fantastic surroundings, but they mingled with people from a wide range of class and ethnic backgrounds, a cross section of humanity unlike most residential neighborhoods or workplaces.<sup>17</sup> Several sources present strong evidence that amusement parks were frequented by the working classes. Probably the best known is John Kasson's social history, *Amusing the Million: Coney Island at the Turn of the Century*, which argues that "Coney Island drew upon all social classes and especially upon the rising middle class and the more prosperous working-class visitors, salesmen, clerks, tradesmen, secretaries, shop attendants, laborers, and the like." Even those who could not

---

<sup>14</sup> Nasaw, 3; Schlereth, 8-12.

<sup>15</sup> Nasaw, 4; Adams, 60-61; Richard W. Flint, "Meet Me in Dreamland: The Early Development of Amusement Parks in America," *Nineteenth Century* 8, nos. 1-2 (1982): 99.





afford the nickel rides at Brooklyn's Coney Island came just to observe and be a part of the immense crowds, which were as much a part of the Coney experience as the thrills. Kasson cites surveys which indicate that working-class families in the early 1900s frequently spent their meager recreational budgets on Coney Island excursions, and notes the large numbers of single working-class men and women who came to Coney to meet and be with each other. In addition, Coney Island attracted an ethnic mix which reflected the growing diversity of New York city, and offered immigrants an opportunity "to participate in mainstream American culture on an equal footing."<sup>18</sup> Studies of amusement parks outside of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and Rochester, New York, found that they, too, appealed to a largely working-class clientele.<sup>19</sup>

David Nasaw argues that all turn-of-the-century public amusements were relatively integrated in terms of class, gender and ethnicity, but not in terms of race. In part, the financial success of such places depended upon providing entertainment that was "public in the sense that [it] belonged to no particular social groups, exciting enough to appeal to the millions, and respectable enough to offend no one." African Americans, however, were generally included not as audience members but as entertainers, often depicting "coons" or uncivilized savages. By drawing such sharp contrasts between whites and blacks, public amusements served as a vehicle for uniting the ethnically and socially diverse white audience in opposition to the black outsiders.<sup>20</sup>

---

<sup>16</sup> Flint, 100.

<sup>17</sup> Nasaw, 1.

<sup>18</sup> John F. Kasson, *Amusing the Million: Coney Island at the Turn of the Century* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1978), 39.

<sup>19</sup> On Rochester, see Flint. On Pittsburgh, see Francis G. Couvares, "The Triumph of Commerce: Class Culture and Mass Culture in Pittsburgh," in *Working-Class America: Essays on Labor, Community and American Society*, eds. Michael H. Frisch and Daniel J. Walkowitz (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1983): 123-152.

<sup>20</sup> Nasaw, 2, 5. Both David Nasaw and Robert Rydell, in his book *All the World's a Fair: Visions of Empire at American International Expositions, 1876-1916* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984) discuss racist and imperialist attitudes prevalent at World's Fairs held in the United States during this period. As will be discussed later, amusement parks are, in many respects, the progeny of these international exhibitions.



Most amusement parks effectively excluded African Americans in practice if not by policy, though many parks in the South were segregated by official procedure.<sup>21</sup> The racially hostile environment at many amusement parks is illustrated by some of the early games, which incorporated blatantly racist themes. A 1902 article in *Cosmopolitan* magazine described a typical throwing game popular with boys, which involved

hurling a ball at the shining face of a negro, who usually manages to duck just in time to avoid disaster, but not too easily to destroy the hope of nailing him next time. And it is wonderful with what savage zest the small boy will take aim until his last penny has been handed across the board.<sup>22</sup>

A 1914 catalog advertised the “Coontown Plunge” and “Hang the Coon,” which offered visitors the chance to hit a target and see an African American actor be plunged into water or appear to be hanged. (Fig. 2.3) Other racial minorities were similarly depicted. The “Chinese Laundry” shooting gallery game consisted of a mechanical display, with “figures moving to and fro, ironing and washing. The object being to knock their heads off....”<sup>23</sup> No wonder, then, that among the hundreds of images he reviewed when researching *Going Out*, David Nasaw never saw a single photograph of an African American among the crowds at a turn-of-the-century amusement park.<sup>24</sup>

To a certain extent, however, amusement parks did provide a place for a relatively diverse range of people to come together and, as such, represented a democratization of leisure in the United States. It is interesting to note that their role in popularizing leisure is recognized not just in retrospect, but was in fact praised during the parks’ heyday. A 1906 Coney Island

---

<sup>21</sup> Nasaw, 91-92.

<sup>22</sup> Day Allen Willey, “The Trolley Park,” *Cosmopolitan* 33 (July 1902): 269.

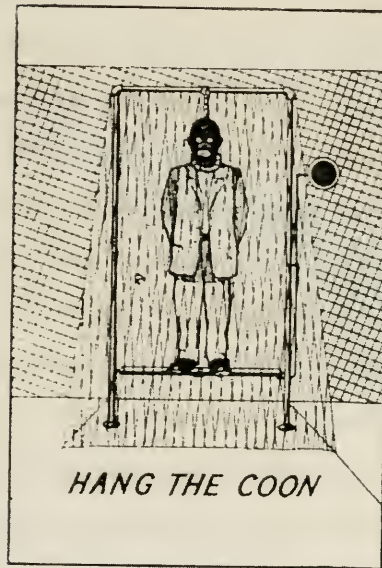
<sup>23</sup> A. J. Smith Manufacturing Company, Chicago, Catalog, 1914, p. 36-37, Hagley Museum Library and Archives, Wilmington, DE.

<sup>24</sup> Nasaw, 91.



# Hang the Coon

Another New One



**Fig. 2.3**  
Advertisement for "Hang the Coon," an  
amusement park throwing game from the early  
twentieth century

Reprinted from the A.J. Smith Manufacturing Company  
Catalog, 1914. Collection of the Hagley Museum Library  
and Archives, Wilmington, DE



souvenir album describes the resort as “thoroughly democratic...everybody is welcome at any time, provided they find it possible to submit to the laws of ordinary good behavior.”<sup>25</sup> A 1902 article refers to “trolley parks,” amusement centers located at the end of transit lines, as a “Mecca on holidays and Sundays not only of what we are pleased to term the working classes but of the ‘middle millions.’”<sup>26</sup>

The extent to which the new public amusements succeeded in attracting the masses can also be measured by the threat that they represented to some social reformers of the era. In her book *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the-Century New York*, Kathy Peiss argues that middle-class women’s reform organizations like the Young Women’s Christian Association tried to counteract typically working-class recreational activities such as excursions to Coney Island or frequenting dance halls and inexpensive theaters by promoting “well-regulated leisure, educational entertainment, and opportunities for orderly sociability [which] would teach standards of womanly deportment and respectability.”<sup>27</sup> In his study of working-class leisure in Pittsburgh at the turn of the century, Francis Couvares concludes that middle-class efforts to redirect the public toward more “respectable” and “worthwhile” pursuits ultimately backfired:

...militant leisure reformers merely accelerated the rush of working people (and many of their betters) into the arms of the merchants of leisure. They thereby helped to mobilize audiences for baseball, movies, and amusement parks rather than for churches, settlements, or libraries.<sup>28</sup>

The experiences that these public amusements offered were, for many, apparently too attractive to resist.

---

<sup>25</sup> *Views of Coney Island* (Portland, ME: L.H. Nelson Company, 1906).

<sup>26</sup> Willey, 267.

<sup>27</sup> Peiss, 163.





### *Precursors to the Amusement Park*

Amusement parks were in many ways the progeny of other recreational places and cultural events in America and Europe, including pleasure gardens, urban parks and, perhaps most importantly, World's Fairs. Pleasure gardens were established in France in the seventeenth century, and quickly spread across Europe, offering urban dwellers an opportunity to seek respite from the city in a naturally attractive setting on the edge of town. Increasingly, such gardens began to offer visitors entertainment such as music, dancing, circus acts and thrilling or dangerous events like balloon ascensions and parachute jumps.<sup>29</sup> The concept of pleasure gardens had been transferred to America by the early nineteenth century. Philadelphia had a number of such gardens by this time, the largest being Vauxhall, modeled after a garden of the same name in London. From 1814 to 1825, Philadelphia's Vauxhall occupied a city block at Walnut and Broad Streets, in what was then the outskirts of the city. The park was dotted with buildings in "exotic" styles, such as Moorish, Chinese and French. Visitors came not only to stroll amidst the landscaped grounds, but also to see summer concerts, fireworks and vaudeville theater. A balloon ascension in 1819 attracted so many people that an angry mob which gathered outside the fence forced its way in and set fire to the park, nearly spelling its demise.<sup>30</sup>

By the end of the nineteenth century, the urban park movement was underway in America. Unlike pleasure gardens, which emphasized leisure and entertainment, urban parks were meant to be an edifying refuge from the dense city centers, which were increasingly regarded as morally suspect. Frederick Law Olmsted's 1857 design for Central Park in New York City was intended to provide the urban poor not only with an opportunity to get fresh air

---

<sup>28</sup> Couvares, 124.

<sup>29</sup> Kyriazi, 12-13.

<sup>30</sup> Joseph Jackson, "Vauxhall Garden." *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 57 (1933): 289-298.



but also a chance to be exposed to the civilizing forces of beauty and nature.<sup>31</sup> Though often regarded as the earliest of the great urban parks, Central Park was actually preceded by Fairmount Park in Philadelphia, which traces its origins to the first public acquisition of land along the Schuylkill River in 1855.<sup>32</sup> Many other American cities followed suit in the decades to follow.

While amusement parks owe their origins in part to nineteenth-century pleasure gardens and urban parks, their greatest debt is to the World's Fairs. The first World's Fair to take place in the United States was the Philadelphia Centennial Exhibition of 1876, which was held on the grounds of Fairmount Park and commemorated the one hundredth anniversary of the birth of the nation. Millions attended the Fairs; the Centennial attracted nearly ten million people, or approximately 20% of the country's population. Over one hundred million people attended the twelve Fairs held in the United States between 1876 and 1916.<sup>33</sup> The Fairs, then, held enormous potential for disseminating cultural attitudes to large and relatively diverse audiences.

The World's Fairs propagated the values of an increasingly industrialized and consumer-oriented society and, like amusement parks, are credited with facilitating the development of a popular culture. Organizers of the Centennial Exposition encouraged companies to pay entrance fees for their workers, so that they could be exposed to – and learn to accept as part of their lives – the technological innovations on display there. In turn, it was hoped that displays from other countries would encourage manufacturers to expand into foreign

---

<sup>31</sup> Thomas Bender, *Toward an Urban Vision: Ideas and Institutions in Nineteenth-Century America* (Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 1975) 169-185.

<sup>32</sup> Esther M. Klein, *Fairmount Park: A History and a Guidebook* (Bryn Mawr, PA: Harcum Junior College Press, 1974), 20-21. While the city established Fairmount Park in part as a means of protecting the city's water supply from contamination by industry located along the river, the park was also intended, and used, for recreational purposes very early in its history.

<sup>33</sup> Robert W. Rydell, *All the World's a Fair: Visions of Empire at American International Expositions, 1876-1916* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 2, 10.



markets, and spread American goods throughout the world.<sup>34</sup> At the same time, the international exhibits, with their foreign products and inventions arranged for the visitor's eye, have been compared to the department store window displays of the period.<sup>35</sup> Many innovations, such as the telephone, typewriter and electric appliances, made their debuts at the Fairs, where potential consumers could marvel at their novelty and be positioned to purchase them once they were on the market.<sup>36</sup> With a captive audience in the millions, companies advertised their products heavily at Fairs, in new and innovative ways: trade cards, inexpensive to reproduce and small enough for the consumer to take home, made their debut at the Centennial Exposition.<sup>37</sup>

The World's Fairs, then, contributed to the rise of a consumer culture by displaying and advertising products to large audiences, in a manner and on a scale that was unprecedented. Similarly, the World's Fairs both reflected and reinforced the development of an American culture of leisure and entertainment, most notably in the "Midways" or "amusement zones" which were an integral part of most of the Fairs, offering visitors mechanized rides and amusements to complement the Fairs' more high-minded exhibits. It is this aspect of the World's Fairs that is most obviously a precursor to the amusement parks of the turn of the century.

The Philadelphia Centennial Exposition, while not including a designated amusement zone, provided visitors with a few attractions, including the 300' tall Sawyer Observatory (later moved to Coney Island) and miniature railroads, an adaptation of technological innovation for

---

<sup>34</sup> Rydell, 29-33.

<sup>35</sup> Schlereth, 148.

<sup>36</sup> Schlereth, 3, 171.

<sup>37</sup> For more information on the relationship between the origins of modern advertising and the Centennial, see Theresa R. Snyder. "Better than Fair: Ephemera and the Centennial Exhibition of 1876." *Popular Culture in Libraries*, 4, no. 1 (1996): 21-62.



entertainment which would become an amusement park staple for years to come.<sup>38</sup> The bulk of the popular entertainment, however, was relegated to an unsanctioned area just outside of the grounds, on Elm Street, where entrepreneurs and hucksters set up shop in an area that came to be known as Centennial City or Shantytown. Centennial City consisted of about a mile of small hotels, restaurants, beer gardens, saloons and attractions reminiscent of a carnival freak show.<sup>39</sup> Visitors could look at a five-legged cow, a team of “learned pigs,” a 602-pound woman and “man-eaters” from Fiji.<sup>40</sup> Centennial organizers were concerned about this counterpoint to the stately Exposition grounds, and, with the help of the city mayor, closed down the concessionaires, evicted all people living in illegally-constructed buildings along Elm Street, and demolished the ramshackle structures in Centennial City.<sup>41</sup>

It was not until the 1893 Columbian Exposition in Chicago that a World’s Fair on American soil included a large-scale amusement zone within official Fair grounds. The “Midway Plaisance” occupied a plot of land one mile long and nearly six hundred feet wide, crowded with restaurants, amusement booths and “ethnic villages,” pseudo-anthropological displays of people and customs from “exotic” lands like Egypt, Samoa and Brazil, as well as Native Americans.<sup>42</sup> Such supposedly educational displays were intended to attract a wide range of people to the Midway, beyond the typical vaudeville theater crowd, and to acclimate them to “a new type of setting where ‘fun’ came first.”<sup>43</sup>

Once visitors were lured to the Midway by the promise of enlightenment, they might be tempted to try out the Ferris wheel, which made its debut at the Chicago World’s Fair. (Fig. 2.4)

---

<sup>38</sup> Kyriazi, 110; Al Griffin, *Step Right Up, Folks!* (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1974), 70; Edo McCullough, *World’s Fair Midways: An Affectionate Account of American Amusement Areas from the Crystal Palace to the Crystal Ball* (New York: Exposition Press, 1966), 32.

<sup>39</sup> Rydell, 33-35; McCullough, 34.

<sup>40</sup> McCullough, 34.

<sup>41</sup> Rydell, 34-35.

<sup>42</sup> Rydell, 60-63.

<sup>43</sup> Nasaw, 72-73.







**Fig. 2.4**  
Ferris wheel, World's Columbian Exhibition, Chicago, 1893

Reprinted from John F. Kasson. *Amusing the Million: Coney Island at the Turn of the Century*



Designed by George Washington Ferris, the head of the Pittsburgh Bridge Company, the wheel differed from earlier “pleasure wheels” mostly in terms of size. At 264’ tall, and with thirty-six cars which each held sixty people, Ferris’ wheel carried 2,160 people at a time, and a single revolution took twenty minutes.<sup>44</sup> It was “a striking instance of modern machine engineering in the service of pleasure.”<sup>45</sup> The Ferris wheel remained in Chicago until 1903, when it was moved to St. Louis for the 1904 Louisiana Purchase Exposition, and was dynamited in 1906.<sup>46</sup> Other Ferris wheels began to appear at amusement parks across the country, and they remain a standard amusement device.

The Chicago Midway contrasted sharply with the remainder of the Exposition grounds. Called the “White City,” the buildings at the Exposition were characterized by their uniformity and classically-inspired design, and provided a highly influential example of urban design, inaugurating the City Beautiful movement in planning.<sup>47</sup> While the White City was a model of order and stateliness, the Midway was its polar opposite, exhibiting no sense of order or overall design, but, rather, offering its visitors a “jumble of shacks, sheds, stalls, tents, and booths.”<sup>48</sup> (Figs. 2.5 and 2.6) Lawrence Levine regards the contrast of these “two separate universes” as a manifestation of the cultural fragmentation evident at the end of the nineteenth century in America, and representative of the demise of the type of shared culture that characterized the country in the early 1800s.<sup>49</sup> In its place was a shared culture oriented toward the consumption of both leisure and material goods: “If the White City represented the collaborative climax of architects, landscape gardeners, artists, and sculptors, then the [Midway] Plaisance, where

---

<sup>44</sup> Griffin, 49-50.

<sup>45</sup> Kasson, 26.

<sup>46</sup> Norman D. Anderson, *Ferris Wheels: An Illustrated History* (Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1992), 75-81.

<sup>47</sup> David B. Brownlee, *Building the City Beautiful: The Benjamin Franklin Parkway and the Philadelphia Museum of Art* (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1989), 13-14.

<sup>48</sup> Nasaw, 67.

<sup>49</sup> Levine, 208-210.





**Fig. 2.5**  
The Court of Honor, World's Columbian Exhibition, Chicago, 1893

Reprinted from John F. Kasson, *Amusing the Million: Coney Island at the Turn of the Century*



**Fig. 2.6**  
Scene on the Midway Plaisance, World's Columbian Exhibition, Chicago, 1893

Reprinted from Robert W. Rydell, *All the World's a Fair: Visions of Empire at American International Expositions, 1876-1916*



pleasurable rides and exotic amusements reigned, was the competitive bazaar of modern capitalism.”<sup>50</sup>

The Chicago Midway had an enormous impact on subsequent World’s Fairs and on the development of amusement parks in America. It was an undeniable success; despite the fact that, unlike the rest of the Fair, attractions on the Midway were not free, it proved more popular than the more high-minded parts of the Fair.<sup>51</sup> Every subsequent Fair held in America recognized the potential draw of entertainment, and incorporated an amusement zone into its grounds. The 1901 Fair in Buffalo, for example, featured a familiar mix of instructive and amusing elements, ranging from “ethnic villages” to trained animal shows, roller coasters to recreations of disasters like the Johnstown Flood and the great Chicago fire.<sup>52</sup> In addition, the terminology used at the World’s Fairs entered the modern American lexicon. Amusement parks often included a stretch called the Midway, and numerous parks, including one in the Chestnut Hill section of Philadelphia, were known as “White City,” a reference to – and an interesting co-optation of – the “high” culture zone at the Chicago Fair.<sup>53</sup> Indeed, amusement parks would serve much the same function as World’s Fairs, acting as barometers of cultural beliefs and values, contributing to the development of a consumer culture, and providing the same “promiscuous juxtaposition of sedate and seditious entertainments.”<sup>54</sup>

### *Harnessing Technology for Fun*

What differentiated World’s Fairs and amusement parks from pleasure gardens and urban parks was the introduction of mechanized rides into the landscape of leisure. These rides

---

<sup>50</sup> M. Christine Boyer, *The City of Collective Memory: Its Historical Imagery and Architectural Entertainments* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1994), 268.

<sup>51</sup> Kasson, 23.

<sup>52</sup> Rydell, 144-145; McCullough, 54.

<sup>53</sup> Kyriazai, 131; Fried, 1989, 9.





transformed technological innovations into sources of amusement and thrills. The miniature railroad at the Centennial Exhibition drew upon the novelty of the iron horse, and, as noted earlier, the designer of the Ferris wheel at the Columbian Exposition was a bridge engineer by trade. The connection between amusement park rides and transportation technology was particularly strong. Roller coasters mimicked the railroad, while Ferris wheels and observation towers, which offered visitors views from thrilling heights, recalled the elevator. Facsimiles of boats, airplanes and rocket ships were integrated into later rides.<sup>55</sup> By utilizing the technology of the everyday, amusement park rides provided thrills while also allowing “everyone to participate in the new technologies of transportation, gears, steel, and electricity.”<sup>56</sup> While amusement parks provided a certain degree of escape, then, in some respects they represented more an intensification of the city and its modern technology than a refuge from it.<sup>57</sup>

An important influence underlying the adaptation of technology for the sake of amusement was the nineteenth-century concept of the industrial sublime, which regarded industrial landscapes as awe-inspiring and, while not necessarily beautiful in a conventional sense, strangely picturesque.<sup>58</sup> In *Sacred Places: American Tourist Attractions in the Nineteenth Century*, John Sears describes the transformation of the mining town of Mauch Chunk, Pennsylvania into a tourist destination. Originally established as a shipping hub for the Lehigh Coal and Navigation Company, Mauch Chunk was attracting visitors by the 1820s. Many came for a ride on the gravity-powered coal train, which by the 1840s had been expanded into a “switchback railway,” offering riders views from high peaks, thrilling plunges down the

---

<sup>54</sup> Nasaw, 85.

<sup>55</sup> Russel B. Nye, “Eight Ways of Looking at an Amusement Park,” *Journal of Popular Culture* 15, no. 1 (Summer 1981): 71.

<sup>56</sup> Adams, 60.

<sup>57</sup> Nye, 65.

<sup>58</sup> For a discussion of the relationship between natural and industrial landscapes as perceived by nineteenth-century American tourists, see John F. Sears, *Sacred Places: American Tourist Attractions in the Nineteenth Century* (New



mountain slopes, and a zig-zagging ride through a series of self-operating switches. (Fig. 2.7) Even after the system ceased to be used for transporting coal in 1870, the railroad remained in place to serve tourists who came from Philadelphia and New York.<sup>59</sup> Intense promotion kept visitors coming until the 1920s, by which time an amusement park had been established at the end of a trolley line on a mountain south of town. The park closed shortly after the trolley stopped running in 1929, and the Switchback Railway shut down four years later.<sup>60</sup>

The impact of Mauch Chunk on amusement parks can be seen in roller coasters, whose dips and turns recall the ride on the coal car railway. The earliest roller coaster in the country was erected at Coney Island in 1884, designed by LaMarcus Adna Thompson. Thompson called his invention a Switchback Railway, quite possibly in reference to the one at Mauch Chunk a mere three hours away from his native Philadelphia.<sup>61</sup> Mauch Chunk's legacy can be felt even more specifically in those rides which utilize the theme of mining. Early examples of mine rides included elaborate scenery which drew upon the same notions of the industrial sublime and the picturesque.<sup>62</sup> A 1960s ride called the Runaway Mine Train utilized modern all-steel construction, but relied on a traditional theme.<sup>63</sup> One of the oldest steel roller coasters in operation is the 1960 Golden Nugget Mine Ride at Hunt's Pier in Wildwood, New Jersey.<sup>64</sup> It has since been joined by a 1990s variation on the same theme, the Volcano, a virtual ride through a mine shaft.

---

York: Oxford University Press, 1989), especially Chapter Eight, "Tourism and the Industrial Age: Niagara Falls and Mauch Chunk," 182-208.

<sup>59</sup> Sears, 191-195.

<sup>60</sup> Sears, 206-207.

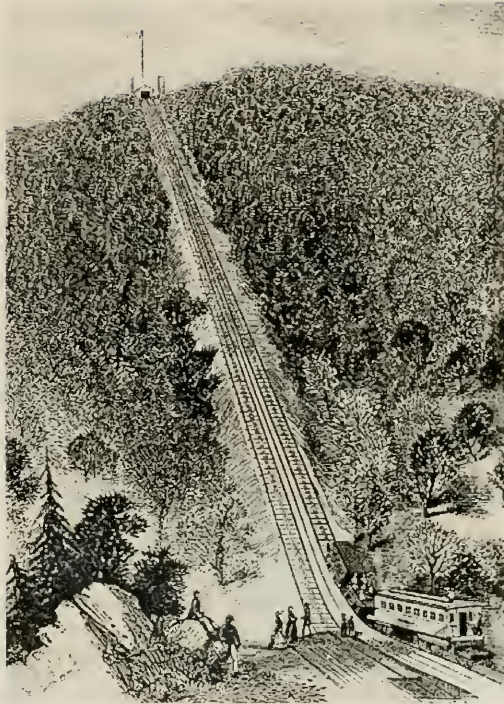
<sup>61</sup> Todd H. Throgmorton, *Roller Coasters of America* (Osceola, WI: Motorola International Publishers, 1994), 12-13; Kyriazi, 34.

<sup>62</sup> As will be discussed in detail later, Willow Grove Park's Saint Nicholas Coal Mine ride included mechanical figures of gritty miners and breaker boys, who were presented as curiosities. *Willow Grove Park - Philadelphia's Fairyland - Season 1906*, Pennsylvania - Montgomery County, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

<sup>63</sup> Throgmorton, 1994, 33.

<sup>64</sup> Throgmorton, 1994, 47.





Mauch Chunk Switchback Railway - 1870

**Fig. 2.7**

The Switchback Railway at Mauch Chunk, Pennsylvania, 1870

Reprinted from William F. Mangels, *The Outdoor Amusement Industry*



### *Early Amusement Parks: The Coney Island Model*

One of the earliest and most famous places to exploit the novelty of mechanized amusement devices was Coney Island, long considered the quintessential example of a modern amusement park. Located in Brooklyn, Coney Island was a resort destination by the early 1800s, at one time stretching two miles along the beach.<sup>65</sup> In the 1870s, railroads began to bring guests to the area, where hotels fronted the sea, the principal attraction for visitors. By the early 1880s, Coney was home to both elegant and whimsical hotels, such as the 1882 Elephant Hotel, which concealed guest rooms, a shopping mall and a diorama within its elephant form. As mentioned previously, some of the earliest human-made attractions at Coney Island included the Sawyer Observatory, moved to Coney Island from the Centennial Exposition in 1877, and L.A. Thompson's Switchback Railway, erected in 1884.<sup>66</sup>

It was not until the establishment of Sea Lion Park in 1895, however, that Coney Island had an enclosed park organized by a single concessionaire. Other enclosed amusement zones soon followed. Steeplechase Park opened in 1897, Luna Park was erected on the grounds of Sea Lion Park in 1903, and Dreamland followed in 1904.<sup>67</sup> Luna was the most ambitious of the parks at Coney Island, and was characterized by its eclectic, "Oriental" architecture, which was illuminated at night by 250,000 electric lights to create a truly fantastic landscape.<sup>68</sup> (Fig. 2.8)

Coney Island embodies the significance of amusement parks at the turn of the century. Its development is directly linked to the growth of the urban metropolis; it attracted a demographically diverse crowd, including large numbers of immigrants and working-class people; and it seemed to signify the birth of a new culture oriented toward pleasure and

---

<sup>65</sup> Kasson, 3.

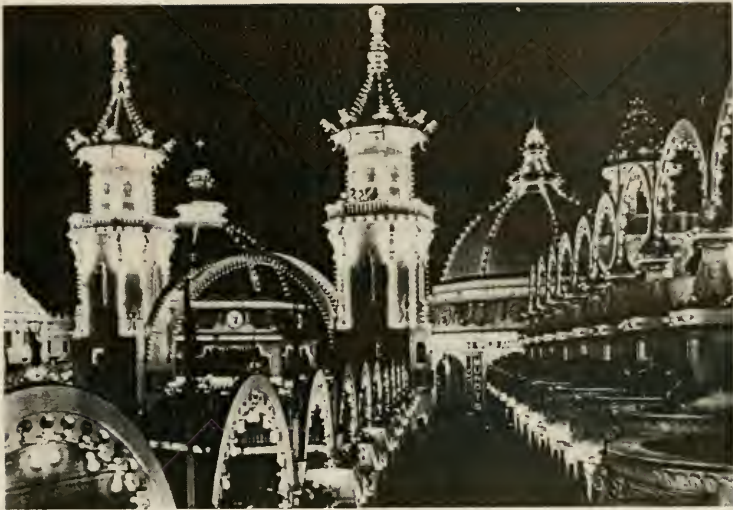
<sup>66</sup> Kyriazi, 19-34; Kasson, 33.

<sup>67</sup> Kasson, 34-35.

<sup>68</sup> Kasson, 61-66.







**Fig. 2.8**  
Night view of Luna Park, Coney Island, 1904

Reprinted from John F. Kasson. *Amusing the Million: Coney Island at the Turn of the Century*



consumption.<sup>69</sup> In addition, Coney Island was famous throughout the country and was extremely influential among other parks of the period.<sup>70</sup> Many amusement parks emulated Coney's model and tried to profit from its success, offering their visitors some of the same rides within similarly wondrous landscapes of exotic architecture and startling brilliance. Some parks were more blatant in their imitation; there were Luna Parks in both Pittsburgh and Scranton, Pennsylvania, while Seabreeze in upstate New York referred to itself as "Rochester's Coney Island."<sup>71</sup>

Despite its undeniable importance, Coney Island was not particularly typical among amusement parks at the turn of the century. A great many amusement parks were owned by transit companies that established attractions at the ends of their lines as a means of increasing ridership. So-called "trolley parks" differed from Coney Island in some significant ways. Unlike trolley parks, Coney Island included three amusement parks, competing with one another for clientele, resulting in an amusement zone on a scale that dwarfed most other parks. Without the tight control of a transit conglomerate, Coney Island became notorious as a place where ordinary standards of respectability could be temporarily suspended in favor of fun, where illicit activities like gambling flourished, and where Victorian sexual mores were abandoned, earning it the nickname "Sodom by the Sea."<sup>72</sup> Far more typical were the trolley parks, which, because of their ubiquity throughout the national landscape, played a crucial role in the dissemination of the new popular culture of leisure. Coney Island may have set the

---

<sup>69</sup> For more on the relationship between Coney Island and the development of a culture of consumption, see Kasson, *Amusing the Million* and Peiss, *Cheap Amusements*.

<sup>70</sup> *Views of Coney Island* (Portland, ME: L.H. Nelson Company, 1906).

<sup>71</sup> Nasaw, 85-86; Flint, 101-102.

<sup>72</sup> Bruce Watson, "Three's a Crowd, They Say, But Not at Coney Island!" *Smithsonian*, 27, no. 9 (December 1996): 102. For a sentimental account of Coney Island's lascivious reputation, see Oliver Pilat and Jo Ranson, *Sodom by the Sea: An Affectionate History of Coney Island* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, Doran & Company, Inc., 1941). New Jersey's Atlantic City also had a reputation as a landscape of vice at the turn of the century. See Charles E. Funnell, *By the Beautiful Sea: The Rise and High Times of that Great American Resort, Atlantic City* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1983), especially Chapter Five, "Babylonian Days," 93-118.



standard against which other parks measured themselves, but it was the trolley parks that delivered the amusement park experience to millions throughout the country.

### *Early Amusement Parks: The Trolley Park Model*

The first electric trolley system in the United States was installed by Frank Julian Sprague in 1888, marking the beginning of what was to become a revolution in mass transit. As of 1890, 70% of urban rail cars were still pulled by a horse, but within ten years almost all had been switched over to electric power. The five-cent fare was standard in most cities, resulting in relatively fixed revenues for trolley companies, who did not dare raise their fares for fear of losing riders.<sup>73</sup> In addition, trolley companies were often charged a fixed rate for their electricity, regardless of how much the trolleys were used.<sup>74</sup> Increased profit, then, was dependent on increased ridership.

A study of streetcar patronage in nineteenth-century Philadelphia found greater traffic on weekends, especially when the weather was good, and estimated that recreation was the primary purpose of approximately 25% of trolley riders.<sup>75</sup> To further entice recreational users, trolley companies established attractions at the end of their lines, including resorts and skating rinks as well as amusement parks. A 1907 survey of electric railway companies in the United States identified 467 such amusement areas, with over 50 million visitors per year.<sup>76</sup> By 1919, there were between 1500 and 2000 amusement parks in the United States; although it is not known how many of those were established and run by transit companies, it is fair to say that

---

<sup>73</sup> Sprague installed an experimental trolley track in Richmond, VA in 1888, and later that year persuaded transit developers from Boston to install the first trolley system. Goddard, 65-67, 121.

<sup>74</sup> Adams, 57; Griffin, 1.

<sup>75</sup> Theodore Hershberg, Harold E. Cox, Dale B. Light, Jr., and Richard R. Greenfield, "The 'Journey-to-Work': An Empirical Investigation of Work, Residence and Transportation, Philadelphia, 1850 and 1880," in *Philadelphia: Work, Space, Family, and Group Experience in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. Theodore Hershberg (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), 147-148.

<sup>76</sup> Goddard, 72.



the trolley parks, which proliferated across the country, were largely responsible for the spread of the amusement park idea. David Nasaw states unequivocally that “The companies that built the trolley lines were directly responsible for the establishment of the amusement park as an American institution.”<sup>77</sup>

Trolley parks were typically located near a body of water or some other source of natural beauty, and incorporated groves of trees into their landscaped grounds. Where water wasn't present, it was usually created, via either an artificial lake, fountain or natatorium. Park buildings were often executed in a picturesque rustic style, although some favored more formal designs.<sup>78</sup> The natural and human-made features of the landscape were carefully manipulated to create a setting which was both bucolic and, at the same time, inextricably linked with urbanization and its attendant industrialization. The parks existed because of the trolleys that connected them to the cities and, as such, were a sort of extension of the city.<sup>79</sup>

The amusement devices that ultimately completed the trolley park experience were, as noted previously, also dependent on and derivative of technology. Early parks offered attractions such as band concerts, vaudeville performances, primitive carousels and swings.<sup>80</sup> As the parks grew, however, their attractions became increasingly technologically advanced. Electric fountains which incorporated colored lights into their water jet displays became a common park feature, and rides such as roller coasters, Ferris wheels and miniature railroads were added to the mix.<sup>81</sup>

The heyday for most trolley parks came in the first two decades of the twentieth century, when high attendance figures prompted growth and expansion. Many parks were sold

---

<sup>77</sup> Nasaw, 57.

<sup>78</sup> Millicent Hall, “The Park at the End of the Trolley,” *Landscape* 22, no. 1 (Autumn 1977): 12-17.

<sup>79</sup> Nye, 65.

<sup>80</sup> Sylvester Baxter, “The Trolley in Rural Parts,” *Harper's Monthly*, 97 (June 1898): 61.





by the transit companies in the 1920s, partly because the operation of the parks had become too complex and outside of the transit companies' area of expertise. Additionally, in many instances the trolley lines encouraged suburban growth, and the parks became consumed by the cities from which they originally offered an escape. One of the most important factors in the decline of the parks was the proliferation of the automobile, which seriously undermined the viability of the transit companies and also provided people with a means to visit attractions farther from home. There were two million registered cars in the United States in 1914 and nine million by 1921, a figure which would double by 1926.<sup>82</sup> As will be discussed in Chapters Three and Four, the rise of the automobile, while detrimental to trolley parks like Willow Grove, played a crucial role in the survival and endurance of the Wildwoods.

The economic depression of the 1930s was the end for many amusement parks. Attendance declined and park operators did not have the finances to maintain existing rides, much less to add new attractions. As of 1938, there were only approximately 500 parks in the United States.<sup>83</sup> Similarly, the rationing of wood and rubber during World War Two limited the upkeep and expansion of the parks.<sup>84</sup> Though some parks experienced a rebirth with the post-War economic boom, most declined irrevocably in the 1950s and 1960s, and the public came to perceive, rightly or wrongly, that amusement parks were not only run-down, but dangerous.

Disneyland, which opened in southern California in July of 1955, was designed as an antidote to "the dirtiness, sham, deterioration, and menacing atmosphere that dominated all existing amusement enterprises." Organized around a single unifying idea or theme,

---

<sup>81</sup> For example, both Conneaut Lake Park near Erie, PA and Olympic Park near Newark, NJ had fountains with light displays. Bush, 28-29; Alan A. Siegel, *Smile: A Picture History of Olympic Park, 1887-1965* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1983), 98.

<sup>82</sup> Adams, 62-67; Kyriazi, 117; Hall, 1977, 18.

<sup>83</sup> Kyriazi, 165.

<sup>84</sup> Throgmorton, 1994, 30-31.



Disneyland would revolutionize the amusement park industry, ushering in a wave of “theme parks” across the country. Within the overarching umbrella of the magical world of Disney, visitors (or “guests”) travel to several “lands” – some historically-inspired, some purely fantastic. “Frontierland” depicts wild west America, “Adventureland” recreates the jungles of Asia and Africa, “Fantasyland” includes magical, fairy-tale settings, and “Tomorrowland” looks to the future with space age motifs. All visitors to Disneyland enter through “Main Street, U.S.A.,” a nostalgic recreation of a turn-of-the-century American town center, as Walt Disney envisioned it.<sup>85</sup> While in some respects Disney’s “lands” offered an escapism not unlike that at early amusement parks, the visitor experience was much more highly controlled; Disneyland had “the exoticism of Coney Island but none of the sensuality and chaos.”<sup>86</sup> In addition, Disneyland represented a level of commercialism unlike what had been seen at any amusement park to date, with a weekly television program created for the sole purpose of promoting the opening of the park, which itself was broadcast on live TV.<sup>87</sup>

In recent years, Disneyland has received enormous attention from scholars interested not just in its place in amusement park history, but in its impact on the culture as a whole. For the purpose of this study, Disneyland, and the smaller-scale imitations it inspired, are significant because of their impact on traditional amusement parks and the way in which they represent larger trends in the American cultural landscape. Unlike trolley parks, theme parks like Disneyland are designed for an automobile-oriented society. Typically located on large tracts of land near highways, theme parks are accessible not by public transit but by private car. In addition, the accessibility of airline travel, at least for the middle and upper classes, has put

---

<sup>85</sup> Randy Bright, *Disneyland: Inside Story* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1987), 69-92; Adams, 95-99.

<sup>86</sup> Adams, 87, 93, 96-99.

<sup>87</sup> Adams, 94-95; Karal Ann Marling, “Disneyland, 1955: Just Take the Santa Ana Freeway to the American Dream,” *American Art* 5, nos. 1-2 (Winter/Spring 1991): 203.



theme parks like Disneyland within the reach of those who don't live in the immediate area, luring people away from their local amusement parks.<sup>88</sup>

Traditional amusement parks were not only victims of these new trends in leisure, but were also susceptible to the social conflicts which had begun to plague American cities in general. Racial tension was evident at parks across the country in the 1960s. White patrons were often reluctant to share the parks with the growing urban black population, and racially-motivated fights were not uncommon. Olympic Park outside Newark, New Jersey was damaged by a mob of teenagers in 1965 and closed shortly thereafter. Racial and gang fights at Chicago's Riverview Park contributed to its closure in 1967, while Glen Echo, outside of Washington, D.C., experienced similar problems and closed in 1966.<sup>89</sup> The few parks that did survive beyond the 1960s generally succumbed to the pressures of urban growth and suburban development. Occupying large tracts of valuable land in the expanding suburbs, parks were sold off in favor of housing and commercial developments.<sup>90</sup> Today, very few early amusement parks survive, and those that do have often been altered markedly from their original form.

The history of amusement parks, then, touches on broader issues in American social history, including transportation, urbanization, class and race. Because they offered millions of Americans a new way to experience leisure, the parks also played an important role in creating and disseminating new ideas in popular culture, ideas that to a great degree crossed ethnic, class and regional lines. As products of the new American consumer culture, amusement parks can be considered popular cultural landscapes. Their constant evolution, which will be explored in

---

<sup>88</sup> Nasaw, 254-255; Millicent Hall, "Theme Parks: Around the World in 80 Minutes," *Landscape* 21, no. 1 (Autumn 1976): 3.

<sup>89</sup> Adams, 71-73; Nasaw, 243-254.

<sup>90</sup> Griffin, 25; Frederick Fried, "Last Ride for Carousel Figures?" *Historic Preservation* 29, no. 3 (July - September 1977): 26.



greater depth in the analyses of Willow Grove Park and the Wildwoods that follow, exemplifies the inherently ephemeral nature of landscapes that are created by a consumer economy and are responsive to the demands of a public always eager for something new.





## Chapter Three

### *The Evolution and Demise of Willow Grove Park: A Case Study in the Life of a Landscape of Popular Recreation*

*A wonderful change has been wrought, the old has been supplanted by the new.... The New Willow Grove Park is now an accomplished fact, and it stands forth as, in all respects, the most wonderful, the most enjoyable, the grandest of all resorts.<sup>1</sup>*

Of the hundreds of trolley parks which proliferated across the country at the turn of the century, one of the largest, most famous and most admired was Philadelphia's Willow Grove Park, nicknamed "Philadelphia's Fairyland." Located just thirteen miles and an hour-long trolley ride from the city, the park occupied 110 carefully landscaped acres on the outskirts of the city, and entertained millions of Philadelphians from its establishment in 1896 until its closure in the spring of 1976.<sup>2</sup> During its first summer of operation, Willow Grove Park reportedly played host to five million visitors.<sup>3</sup> Throughout its heyday in the early part of the twentieth century, Willow Grove "was looked to as a model of what the properly operated park

---

<sup>1</sup> *The Saturday Review* – *Special Willow Grove Park Number*, 1 August 1896. File Folder – Parks, Montgomery County Historical Society, Norristown, PA (hereinafter referred to as MCHS).

<sup>2</sup> Judith A. Adams, *The American Amusement Park Industry: A History of Technology and Thrills* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1991), 59-60; Torrence V. Jenkins, Jr. "Willow Grove Park: Gone But Not Forgotten." *Roller Coaster!* (Spring 1996): 4; Ray Thompson. "Willow Grove: The Disneyland of the Early 1900s." *Pennsylvania Illustrated* 3, no. 1 (October 1978): 27; *The Saturday Review* – *Special Willow Grove Park Number*, 1 August 1896, File Folder – Parks, MCHS; *Willow Grove Park – Philadelphia's Fairyland – Season 1908*. Manuscripts Department, Library Company of Philadelphia, Philadelphia, PA (hereinafter referred to as LCP).

<sup>3</sup> Willow Grove Park Souvenir Album, 1897, "Amusement Parks" file, Social Science and History Department, Free Library of Philadelphia, Philadelphia, PA (hereinafter referred to as FLP).



should be.”<sup>4</sup> Because Willow Grove Park typified the trolley park model and lasted for a relatively long time, its story is particularly suited to an inquiry into the changing role of the amusement park in American society, and illustrates the inherently ephemeral nature of these landscapes of leisure.

The site of Willow Grove Park has a long history of recreational use, and therefore has experienced numerous incarnations, responding to the changing expectations of the public, as well as reflecting broader trends in the culture around it. The town of Willow Grove was a resort destination by the eighteenth century, attracting visitors with its purportedly medicinal mineral springs. When Willow Grove Park opened in 1896, it boasted picnic groves and free music, but little in the way of mechanized rides. The park experienced a steady growth in the number of amusement devices over the years, with such attractions taking center stage after World War I. After years of decline and a brief stint as a Wild West theme park, Willow Grove Park closed for good in the spring of 1976, to be replaced by a shopping mall – a new kind of public amusement. The history of Willow Grove Park that follows will analyze the stages of its evolution in an effort to understand both its early success and ultimate demise. Particular attention is given to the relationship between the landscape of amusement parks and the rise of a popular, consumer-oriented culture.

### *Early Resort Days: Willow Grove Mineral Springs*

The town of Willow Grove enjoyed its first incarnation as a tourist destination during the eighteenth century, when its mineral springs attracted visitors in search of healthful recreation. The practice of visiting spas and mineral springs was well-established in the Philadelphia area by the early eighteenth century, predating, and later competing with,

---

<sup>4</sup> Harold E. Cox. "Rise and Decline of Willow Grove Park: Paper Read Before the Old York Road Historical



vacationing by the seashore. There were at least seven springs near the city that advertised in Philadelphia newspapers during the colonial and revolutionary periods. Travelers came by stagecoach to Willow Grove in order to partake of the supposedly healing waters at the springs, in an effort to counteract “the effects perhaps of too much turtle soup and madeira.”<sup>5</sup>

By 1719 a hotel had been built in Willow Grove in order to accommodate its many visitors, to be replaced in 1808 with the Mineral Springs Hotel, which remained standing until 1938.<sup>6</sup> With the advent of the railroad, however, staging went out of fashion and, according to one source from 1923, “the old Mineral Springs Hotel vegetated into almost nothing until the building of the great trolley park there.”<sup>7</sup> The mineral springs continued to leave its mark on the landscape, however. An atlas from 1897 shows Willow Grove Mineral Spring Park, which included a lake and springs as well as the old Hotel and several unidentified buildings, just to the north of the newly-established trolley park.<sup>8</sup> In 1916, the park remained in much the same form, perhaps boosted by the presence of the amusement park to the south.<sup>9</sup> Today, the mineral springs is largely forgotten, with only a small public park at the end of Mineral Avenue giving any indication of its existence.

### ***Creating Willow Grove Park: Its Physical and Social Landscape***

When it opened in 1896, Willow Grove Park was more pleasure garden than amusement park, with a landscape that emphasized natural attractions to a greater degree than mechanized rides. Over the years, however, the park was developed into one of the most

---

Society, March 19, 1963,” *Old York Road Historical Society Bulletin*. 25 (1964): 18.

<sup>5</sup> F. H. Shelton. “Springs and Spas of Old-Time Philadelphians,” *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 47 (1923): 207-213, 222.

<sup>6</sup> Shelton, 222; “Willow Grove Park – History and Description” file, Newspaper Clippings Collection, Temple University Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA (hereinafter referred to as TUUA).

<sup>7</sup> Shelton, 224.

<sup>8</sup> A. H. Mueller & Co., *Atlas of Cheltenham, Abington and Springfield Townships and Vicinity, Montgomery Co., Penna* (Philadelphia: A.H. Mueller & Co., 1897).



extensive amusement centers in the country, where millions came to experience a magical setting characterized by whimsical architecture, bright lights and elaborate rides which offered the opportunity to escape the ordinary. Though “Philadelphia’s Fairyland” may have seemed to visitors like another world, its existence was, in fact, dependent upon some very material factors, including the development of a transportation system that could bring the people to this fantastic setting.

Just as the advent of the railroad played a role in the decline of the mineral springs resort at Willow Grove, advances in transportation technology were crucial in the establishment and evolution of Willow Grove Park. Like the majority of turn-of-the-century amusement parks in the United States, Willow Grove Park was established at the end of a trolley line, in hopes of attracting recreational weekend riders. Philadelphia established horse-drawn streetcar service in the 1850s, and the development of its public transit was, as in other major American cities, characterized by private investment and frequent corporate mergers.<sup>10</sup> Peter Widener and William Elkins, two of the biggest names in Philadelphia transit history, joined forces with William Kemble to form the Philadelphia Traction Company in 1883.<sup>11</sup> In 1895, the Union Traction Company (UTC) was formed, leasing the Philadelphia Traction Company as well as two other competitors, the Electric Traction Company and the People’s Traction Company. Widener and Elkins assumed leadership within the UTC shortly thereafter.<sup>12</sup> Ultimately, the

---

<sup>9</sup> A. H. Mueller, *Atlas of the North Penn Section of Montgomery County, Pa* (Philadelphia: A.H. Mueller, 1916).

<sup>10</sup> Theodore Hershberg, Harold E. Cox, Dale B. Light, Jr., and Richard R. Greenfield, “The ‘Journey-to-Work’: An Empirical Investigation of Work, Residence and Transportation, Philadelphia, 1850 and 1880,” in *Philadelphia: Work, Space, Family, and Group Experience in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. Theodore Hershberg (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), 141-142; Stephen B. Goddard, *Getting There: The Epic Struggle Between Road and Rail in the American Century* (New York: Basic Books, 1994), 70-73; Charles W. Cheape, *Moving the Masses: Urban Public Transit in New York, Boston and Philadelphia, 1880-1912* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980), 159.

<sup>11</sup> Cheape, 162-163.

<sup>12</sup> Cheape, 174-175; *Annual Report, Union Traction Company of Philadelphia, June 30, 1896*, Philadelphia—Annual Reports of the Union Traction Co. and the Philadelphia Rapid Transit Co., 1896-1938. Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA (hereinafter referred to as HSP).





UTC acquired all the other transit franchises in the city and established the Philadelphia Rapid Transit Company, the forerunner to today's Southeastern Pennsylvania Transit Authority.<sup>13</sup>

By providing a means for workers to commute to their workplaces from greater distances, trolleys played a crucial role in the expansion of the American city. Trolley companies recognized the potential for capitalizing on this urban growth, and often had subsidiary companies that sold real estate along the trolley lines.<sup>14</sup> In Philadelphia, both Widener and Elkins had substantial real estate interests, especially in the northern suburbs and northwest sector of the city. Their desire to sell housing lots may have led them to become involved in the transit business in the first place.<sup>15</sup> A Willow Grove Park souvenir album from 1897 includes several real estate advertisements placed by companies based in downtown Philadelphia. These developers were attempting to capitalize on proximity not only to public transit, but also to recreational opportunities; the ad for Willow Grove Heights promised buyers the opportunity to "look down on Fairyland."<sup>16</sup>

When the Union Traction Company was formed in 1895, it acquired rights to a trolley line already under construction by the People's Traction Company, which ran north from the city along the Old York Road. In May of 1895, service was initiated to the new suburb of Willow Grove. It is quite possible that the transit company always intended this line to lead to an attraction of some sort. One source asserts that the idea for Willow Grove Park was germinated in 1892, though it gives no documentation to support the claim.<sup>17</sup> Regardless,

---

<sup>13</sup> Robert L. Abrams. "The Story of Rapid Transit: Philadelphia." *The National Railway Historical Society Bulletin* 26, no. 1 (First Quarter, 1961): 4.

<sup>14</sup> Goddard, 68-72.

<sup>15</sup> Cheape, 164: *Dictionary of American Biography*. Vol. VI (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1931), 85.

<sup>16</sup> Willow Grove Park Souvenir Album, 1897, "Amusement Parks" file, Social Science and History Department, FLP.

<sup>17</sup> Cox, 18-20.



construction began early in the winter of 1895-1896, and was completed in time for the grand opening of Willow Grove Park on May 30, 1896.<sup>18</sup>

The trip on the trolley up the Old York Road was promoted as “an entertainment in itself,”<sup>19</sup> capitalizing on the public’s fascination with technological innovation and new modes of transportation, and promotional literature emphasized the historic sights along the route.<sup>20</sup> Due to the popularity of the park, another trolley line was constructed in 1896, supplemental summer service to the park was established in 1899 and, due to the “decided success” of the park, a third line was constructed in 1905.<sup>21</sup> That same year, a trolley terminal was built at the park which, with eleven loading platforms and twelve storage tracks for cars, could accommodate up to 15,000 passengers per hour.<sup>22</sup> (Fig. 3.1)

Under the direction of Widener and Elkins, the Union Traction Company spent \$500,000.00 on improving the site of the park before it opened.<sup>23</sup> The Civil Engineer for the project was Chester Albright, who would go on to co-found the Philadelphia Toboggan Company, one of the largest amusement device manufacturers in the country. Wendell & Smith were the primary contractors, and Philadelphia architect Horace Trumbauer designed the principal structures.<sup>24</sup>

While many trolley parks were located at sites that already possessed natural beauty, a great deal of work was done at Willow Grove Park to create the desired surroundings. What

---

<sup>18</sup> Thompson, 1978, 28; *The Saturday Review – Special Willow Grove Park Number*, 1 August 1896. File Folder – Parks, MCHS.

<sup>19</sup> *The Saturday Review – Special Willow Grove Park Number*, 1 August 1896. File Folder – Parks, MCHS.

<sup>20</sup> Willow Grove Park Souvenir Album, 1897, “Amusement Parks” file, Social Science and History Department, FLP; Willow Grove Park, 1899 brochure, Pennsylvania – Montgomery County, HSP.

<sup>21</sup> *Annual Report, Union Traction Company of Philadelphia, June 30, 1905*. Philadelphia – Annual Reports of the Union Traction Co. and the Philadelphia Rapid Transit Co., 1896-1938, HSP; Cox, 28-29.

<sup>22</sup> Cox, 28-29.

<sup>23</sup> *The Saturday Review – Special Willow Grove Park Number*, 1 August 1896, File Folder – Parks, MCHS.

<sup>24</sup> Linda Kowall. “The Merry-Go-Round Kings,” *Pennsylvania Heritage*, 14, no. 2 (Spring 1988): 31; Frederick Fried. “E. Joy Morris and the Evolution of the Philadelphia Toboggan Company,” *Merry-Go-Roundup* 6, no. 1 (Spring 1989): 8-9.





**Fig. 3.1**  
Entrance to trolley station, Willow Grove Park, 1905

John Gibbs Smith Photograph Collection. Print and Picture Department, Free Library of Philadelphia, Philadelphia, PA



**Fig. 3.2**  
Night view of Willow Grove Park, showing Ferris wheel and electric fountain, 1907

Society Print Collection, Historical Society of Pennsylvania. Philadelphia, PA



had been the site of a “limpid stream” was transformed into a four acre lake, complete with “a pretty arched bridge [which] spans the lake, dividing it into two divisions, like the main lagoon at the [Chicago] World’s Fair.” On what had been “a swampy wilderness,” 750 trees and 3,500 “pieces of assorted shrubbery” were planted. Three groves of trees could accommodate 25,000 picnickers, and were equipped with tables, fresh water and kitchens with stoves and utensils.

Amidst all this “natural” beauty were some technological wonders, an element of the Willow Grove Park landscape which would expand greatly in the years to follow. A \$100,000.00 electric fountain was located in the middle of the lake, with thirty-eight nozzles and 867 jets shooting water high into the sky. The water was pumped from the lake and regulated by an electrical motor housed beneath the shore-side Music Pavilion. At night, colored lights were directed at the water, creating a spectacular show which became a focal point of the park.<sup>25</sup> (Fig. 3.2)

Nevertheless, in its first season of operation Willow Grove Park emphasized more simple pleasures like picnicking and boating on the lake, and was home to only a few amusement devices. A carousel, with horses, giraffes, lions and other animals, was in place when the park opened.<sup>26</sup> Shoot-the-Chutes, a ride which originated at Coney Island’s Sea Lion Park in 1895,<sup>27</sup> offered patrons a chance to get into a flat-bottomed boat and “slide with the swiftness of the wind down an incline and descend with a mighty splash into the water.”<sup>28</sup> The Scenic Railway roller coaster took visitors through the tops of trees on its 3100’ undulating

---

<sup>25</sup> *The Saturday Review – Special Willow Grove Park Number*, 1 August 1896, File Folder – Parks, MCHS: Willow Grove Park Souvenir Album, 1897, “Amusement Parks” file, Social Science and History Department, FLP.

<sup>26</sup> *The Saturday Review – Special Willow Grove Park Number*, 1 August 1896, File Folder – Parks, MCHS.

<sup>27</sup> John F. Kasson. *Amusing the Million: Coney Island at the Turn of the Century* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1978), 57.

<sup>28</sup> *The Saturday Review – Special Willow Grove Park Number*, 1 August 1896, File Folder – Parks, MCHS.





journey, and remained in place until the park closed in 1976.<sup>29</sup> A quarter-mile long bicycle track was indicative of the craze for bicycle-riding at the turn of the century, as was the Bicycle Swing, an “entirely new and novel” ride that was “intended for the use of all who desire to experience the sensation of a bicycle ride without the attending dangers which menace beginners.”<sup>30</sup> (Fig. 3.3)

The main focus of Willow Grove Park in its early years, however, was the free band music. During the first season, music was provided by Frederick N. Innes, a military band leader and renowned trombonist. Walter Damrosch led the New York Symphony Orchestra at Willow Grove Park in 1897.<sup>31</sup> Typically, several bands were booked to play over the course of the summer, and concerts were offered every afternoon and evening, with the Electric Fountain providing a display of water, color and light during the intermissions. By far the most popular attraction was the John Philip Sousa Band, which performed at Willow Grove Park every season but one between 1901 and 1926.<sup>32</sup> A former leader of the United States Marine Band, Sousa’s performances included a mix of classical music with popular military tunes. Sousa aimed both to entertain and to educate his audiences, and regarded his task as “missionary work for the better class of music.”<sup>33</sup>

The free music at Willow Grove Park was no doubt principally intended as a means of attracting visitors who would not only add to the trolley fare box, but also spend their nickels

---

<sup>29</sup> *The Saturday Review – Special Willow Grove Park Number*, 1 August 1896, File Folder – Parks, MCHS; Willow Grove Park Souvenir Album, 1897, “Amusement Parks” file, Social Science and History Department, FLP; Jenkins, 4.

<sup>30</sup> *The Saturday Review – Special Willow Grove Park Number*, 1 August 1896, File Folder – Parks, MCHS; Willow Grove Park Souvenir Album, 1897, “Amusement Parks” file, Social Science and History Department, FLP.

<sup>31</sup> *The Saturday Review – Special Willow Grove Park Number*, 1 August 1896, File Folder – Parks, MCHS; Willow Grove Park Souvenir Album, 1897, “Amusement Parks” file, Social Science and History Department, FLP; Frederick P. Williams, “Willow Grove Park Concerts, 1896-1925,” *Chestnut Hill Local News*, 8 August 1982; Cox, 21.

<sup>32</sup> Thompson, 1978, 28.

<sup>33</sup> John Philip Sousa, as quoted in Lawrence W. Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), 166.





**Fig. 3.3**  
The Bicycle Swing, Willow Grove Park, 1896

Collection of the Montgomery County Historical Society, Norristown, PA



**Fig. 3.4**  
Audience at a band concert, Willow Grove Park, c. 1910. Two African American men are visible in the lower left corner of the photo.

News Photograph Collection (Suburbs), Temple University Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA



and quarters on the rides and concessions once at the park. It is worth noting, however, that the management promoted the musical programming as an edifying force, suggesting that, like the World's Fairs, early amusement parks tried to appeal to a wide range of people, including those who might resist going to a park dedicated purely to the consumption of fun. In addition, those in the audience who were less cultured would benefit from the "inspiring and educational influence" of the music. The author of a 1908 brochure described how, at the concerts at Willow Grove, "I have seen men and women whose appearance bespoke lives of labor lived amid cramped surroundings, cling to the outer edge of a crowd of 30,000 as if their last hope depended thereon...."<sup>34</sup> Promotional material from 1909 described the music as a source of "stimulation of the intellect through the imagination and the acquisition of refinement, which is the corner-stone of culture. It means the repression of the baser and the rousing of the nobler passions."<sup>35</sup>

Willow Grove's "air of refinement" was further enhanced by an enforced dress code and security guards, who made sure visitors were well-behaved.<sup>36</sup> Like many trolley parks of the period, Willow Grove prohibited alcohol, a fact which was emphasized in promotional literature. An 1897 brochure stated,

The objectionable feature of men under the influence of liquor, which is encountered at many summer resorts, will not be found at this one, for no liquor of any kind will be allowed to be sold on the premises. So rigid are the established rules under this heading that any one seen using liquor from a private flask or on the tables in the groves will be requested to leave the grounds. This insures protection to women and children that heads of family will fully appreciate.<sup>37</sup>

---

<sup>34</sup> *Willow Grove Park – Philadelphia's Fairyland – Season 1908*, Manuscripts Department, LCP.

<sup>35</sup> Ray Thompson, *Willow Grove Park: A Look Back in Time to Another Era of Entertainment* (Southampton, PA: Cassidy Printing, Inc., 1977), 5.

<sup>36</sup> *The Saturday Review – Special Willow Grove Park Number*, 1 August 1896, File Folder – Parks, MCHS; Willow Grove Park Souvenir Album, 1897, "Amusement Parks" file, Social Science and History Department, FLP; Thompson, 1978, 28.

<sup>37</sup> Willow Grove Park Souvenir Album, 1897, "Amusement Parks" file, Social Science and History Department, FLP.



The management promoted the park as refined in an effort to attract “respectable” clientele. Sunday schools and other organizations were encouraged to take their summer outings at Willow Grove Park, and were lured with special groups trolley rates.<sup>38</sup> A promotional newspaper published at the end of the 1896 season said the park had “attracted to it the very best classes.”<sup>39</sup> While some of this might have been wishful thinking rather than a realistic portrayal of the park’s clientele, Willow Grove does seem to have had a reputation for being a relatively civilized place. The author of a 1956 article recalled that the crowds at Willow Grove were of a “higher” type than those at Chestnut Hill Park, which opened in Philadelphia in 1898 and was closed in 1912, after a group of wealthy residents in the area, concerned about the rowdy clientele, purchased the property and demolished the park.<sup>40</sup>

It is difficult, however, to assess the demographic characteristics of the patronage at Willow Grove Park. As discussed in Chapter Two, there is abundant evidence that many turn-of-the-century amusement parks attracted largely a middle- and working-class clientele, who were often diverse ethnically, but typically not as mixed in terms of race. It is not unreasonable to assume that Willow Grove Park was similar. Of the scores of late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century images of Willow Park reviewed by this researcher, only one showed any non-white patrons, a 1910s photograph of an audience in the Bandstand, with two African American men in the foreground. (Fig. 3.4)

An assessment of the socioeconomic or class background of visitors to Willow Grove Park is more difficult, and is based on relatively scant evidence. While it is not known whether working-class Philadelphians dominated the crowds, it is clear that they frequented the park, at

---

<sup>38</sup> Willow Grove Park Souvenir Album, 1897, “Amusement Parks” file, Social Science and History Department, FLP.

<sup>39</sup> *The Saturday Review – Special Willow Grove Park Number*, 1 August 1896, File Folder – Parks, MCHS.





least by the 1920s. The records of the Germantown Young Women's Christian Association, an organization which catered to women working in Philadelphia's textile mills and factories, include references to organizational outings to Willow Grove in the summers of 1920 and 1924.<sup>41</sup> Even more intriguing is the description of an event sponsored by the Germantown YWCA in May of 1917, for which the young women recreated portions of the Buffalo Pan-American Exposition of 1901. They created a setting which recalled the Expo's "Amusement Zone, Hawaiian Village,... Wild Animal Show, Gypsy Camp, Picture Gallery. Music Hall, Water Sports, Moving Pictures."<sup>42</sup> Such an event is indicative of the degree to which the experiences and images of World's Fairs and amusement parks pervaded working-class culture.

### ***The Expansion and Transformation of Willow Grove Park: Towards a Landscape of Popular Culture***

Throughout the first two decades of the twentieth century, Willow Grove Park retained most of its essential characteristics, despite some significant changes and additions to the landscape. It remained an attraction reached by trolley, offering urban dwellers a chance to escape the heat of the city and the realities of everyday life. As the definition of "everyday life" changed and the expectations of an increasingly leisure-oriented public evolved, however, so too did the landscape of the park. New attractions were added and increasingly elaborate rides vied with the band music that had played such a prominent role at the park at its inception. A concern for respectability still pervaded the park, but there was a new emphasis on creating a truly fantastic and whimsical atmosphere. Willow Grove Park was on its way to becoming a

---

<sup>40</sup> Newspaper clipping, Scrap Book B-8, vol. 8, p. 15. MCHS; Fried, 1989, 8; David R. Contosta, *Suburb in the City Chestnut Hill, Philadelphia, 1850-1990* (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 1992), 157-158.

<sup>41</sup> Folders 24-23 and 24-28. Young Women's Christian Association, Germantown Collection, TUUA.

<sup>42</sup> Scrap Book 1908-1920. Young Women's Christian Association, Germantown Collection, TUUA.



landscape dedicated to unadulterated amusement and its buildings began to reflect the popular culture that amusement parks had helped to create.

At the end of the 1896 season, a promotional newspaper characterized the grounds at Willow Grove Park as follows: “Nothing gaudy mars the place. The Coney Island aspect is entirely done away with, and it is a pleasant surprise to note the perfect taste with which the entire park is planned.”<sup>43</sup> In addition to the landscaping described previously, several structures dotted the grounds at the time of the park’s opening, designed by the Philadelphia architect Horace Trumbauer. Trumbauer was responsible for the design of the Bandstand, Music Pavilion, Casino, Lodge and Ladies’ Clubhouse, and possibly a number of smaller structures.<sup>44</sup>

Though Trumbauer was only twenty-seven when he completed his projects at Willow Grove Park, he had already earned a reputation for suburban house design, having completed a series of houses for Wendell & Smith, the builders of Willow Grove Park. He eventually designed many elaborate homes in the northern suburbs of Philadelphia, including projects for the Widener and Elkins families, as well as mansions in the resort town of Newport, Rhode Island. He is perhaps best known for his work on the Philadelphia Museum of Art and the Free Library of Philadelphia.<sup>45</sup>

That Trumbauer could design buildings of popular recreation at Willow Grove Park and later be responsible for projects of major cultural significance like the Philadelphia Museum of Art may simply reflect a natural progression in his architectural career. It is also possible that

---

<sup>43</sup> *The Saturday Review – Special Willow Grove Park Number*, 1 August 1896, File Folder – Parks, MCHS.

<sup>44</sup> Frederick Platt, “Horace Trumbauer in Abington,” *Old York Road Historical Society Bulletin*, 43 (1983): 56.

<sup>45</sup> Platt, 1983, 49, 55; Frederick Platt, “Horace Trumbauer’s Later Works in Glenside,” *Old York Road Historical Society Bulletin*, 40 (1980), 3; Frederick Platt, “Horace Trumbauer in Haiboro and the Morelands,” *Old York Road Historical Society Bulletin*, 42 (1982): 28; Sandra L. Tatman and Roger W. Moss, *Biographical Dictionary of Philadelphia Architects, 1700-1930* (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1985), 799. For more on Horace Trumbauer’s work on the Philadelphia Museum of Art and the Free Library, see David B. Brownlee, *Building the City Beautiful: The*



the modern dichotomy between “high” and “low” culture, as discussed in Chapter Two, was not fully developed by the end of the nineteenth century, and Trumbauer, therefore, saw no contradiction in designing pavilions for the masses at Willow Grove while simultaneously designing mansions for Philadelphia’s wealthy. The choice of Trumbauer as the architect for Willow Grove Park certainly also reflects a desire on the part of the Union Traction Company to create a refined atmosphere at the park, one which would attract “respectable” people and encourage “proper” behavior.

Appropriately, then, Trumbauer’s designs were restrained and austere, reflecting the influence of the “White City” of the Chicago World’s Fair three years earlier. The Bandstand took the form of a half-shell, flanked by immense columns and topped with a colonnade. (Fig. 3.5) In 1900, a shed was added by a different architect, providing shelter for a total of 4,000 patrons, while benches beyond the shed sat an additional 10,000. The Music Pavilion was a round eight-columned structure that not only provided a place for occasional musical performances, but also, in its base, housed the controls for the Electric Fountain.<sup>46</sup> (Fig. 3.6) The Casino – a term which in the nineteenth century referred to buildings used for dancing, theater and musical performances, typically located at a resort<sup>47</sup> – housed room for dancing and a restaurant. (Fig. 3.7) Executed in a style similar to that of the Bandstand and Music Pavilion, the Casino was located such that diners sitting on the broad piazza could hear the music emanating from the half-shell. The Lodge, with red sandstone rubble walls and a tile roof, exhibited the influence of Henry Hobson Richardson in its continuity of materials and large arched entry, and served as the home of the park superintendent. (Fig. 3.8) Finally, the Ladies’

---

*Benjamin Franklin Parkway and the Philadelphia Museum of Art* (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1989), 44-70, 72-77.

<sup>46</sup> Platt, 1983, 56-57, 60.

<sup>47</sup> Richard Guy Wilson. “From Informality to Pomposity: The Resort Casino in the Later 19<sup>th</sup> Century.” *Nineteenth Century* 8, nos. 1-2 (1982): 111.





**Fig. 3.5**  
Bandstand, Willow Grove Park, 1907

Society Print Collection, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA



**Fig. 3.6**  
Music Pavilion, Willow Grove Park. n.d.

Keeney Collection, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA







**Fig. 3.7**  
Casino at night, Willow Grove Park, as shown in a 1905 souvenir album  
Collection of the Athenaeum of Philadelphia, Philadelphia, PA



**Fig. 3.8**  
The Lodge, Willow Grove Park, 1896  
Collection of the Montgomery County Historical Society, Norristown, PA



Clubhouse, though housing a more utilitarian purpose – a restroom facility for women and children – was no less carefully designed. The clapboard building was surrounded by porches where women could seek rest, and the hipped roof was topped by gabled dormers and a balustrade. Trumbauer’s colonial revival rest room was replaced by a new women’s lavatory in the early 1900s.<sup>48</sup>

Many of Trumbauer’s designs at Willow Grove Park would remain important elements of the landscape for years to come. The Bandstand stood until 1959, the Casino lasted until taken by fire in 1974, and the Music Pavilion, one of the last structures to remain when the park closed in 1976, was chosen as the logo for the Willow Grove Park shopping mall now on the site.<sup>49</sup> In time, however, Trumbauer’s buildings were joined by structures of less permanence and greater whimsy, reflecting the increased emphasis on pure and unadulterated fun at the park.

In addition, these structures incorporated increasingly commercialized architectural components, utilizing large signs, bright lights and iconic forms which reflected the nature of the rides housed within. Thomas Schlereth has written about the highly visual nature of American society by the 1910s, when advertisers utilized iconographic imagery to promote their products to consumers.<sup>50</sup> The architecture of World’s Fairs and amusement parks came to serve much the same purpose, with forms that symbolized the experiences they offered. The imagery used at amusement parks across the country helped to create a “unified language and sign system” among patrons.<sup>51</sup> In other words, patrons came to share a common experience as well as a shared sense of place.

---

<sup>48</sup> Platt, 1983, 57-59, 61.

<sup>49</sup> Platt, 1983, 57-59; “Willow Grove Park – History and Description” file, Newspaper Clippings Collection, TUUA.

<sup>50</sup> Thomas J. Schlereth. *Victorian America: Transformations in Everyday Life, 1876-1915* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1991). 158.

<sup>51</sup> George Lipsitz, *Time Passages: Collective Memory and American Popular Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990). 7.



Barbara Rubin has explored the relationship between the imagery employed at World's Fairs and twentieth century roadside architecture. Rubin notes that the Midway Plaisance at the 1893 Columbian Exposition in Chicago was laid out on an axial grid, which, in "its straightforward presentation of commercial functions and in its morphology...anticipated the twentieth century string commercial strip..."<sup>52</sup> The connection was even more evident at the 1915 Exposition in San Francisco, which prohibited the use of signage on the Midway, thereby encouraging the development of an architecture that could speak for itself. (Fig. 3.9) A giant Buddha announced a Japanese concession, while the Union Pacific Railway tried to attract tourists to their western railroad lines with a model of Yellowstone National Park.<sup>53</sup> A similar tendency was evident at Willow Grove Park by the early twentieth century, suggesting that amusement parks contributed not only to the formation of a popular, consumer culture, but also to the architectural forms associated with that culture.

The transformation of Willow Grove Park began gradually; in the first few years following the park's establishment, only a small number of attractions were added, and Trumbauer's buildings still dominated the landscape. An 1897 map of the park shows the rides and buildings that were constructed for the park's opening the previous year, as well as a miniature railroad and a theater.<sup>54</sup> (Fig. 3.10) The only other addition before the turn of the century was the Moorish Maze, a "funny mirror house," which stood until the park closed in 1976.<sup>55</sup>

In the first decade of the 1900s, Willow Grove Park experienced rapid and substantial

---

<sup>52</sup> Barbara Rubin. "Aesthetic Ideology and Urban Design." *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*. 69, no. 3 (September 1979): 345.

<sup>53</sup> Rubin, 349.

<sup>54</sup> A. H. Mueller, & Co., *Atlas of Cheltenham, Abington and Springfield Townships and Vicinity, Montgomery Co., Penna* (Philadelphia: A. H. Mueller & Co., 1897).

<sup>55</sup> Willow Grove Park. 1899 brochure, Pennsylvania – Montgomery County. HSP: *Willow Grove Park – Philadelphia's Fairyland – Season 1908*, Manuscripts Department, LCP: Thompson, 1977, 33.





**Fig. 3.9**  
The Joy Zone, Panama-Pacific International Exposition, San Francisco, 1915. The gigantic toy soldiers shown here were typical of this Fair's iconic Midway architecture.

Reprinted from Robert W. Rydell, *All the World's a Fair: Visions of Empire at American International Expositions, 1876-1916*



**Fig. 3.10**  
Map of Willow Grove Park, 1897

A.H. Mueller & Co., *Atlas of Cheltenham, Abington and Springfield Townships and Vicinity, Montgomery Co., Penna.*, 1897, pl. 13. Map Collection, Free Library of Philadelphia, Philadelphia, PA





redevelopment. In 1902, the Philadelphia Rapid Transit Company (PRT) was created through a merger of smaller transit entities, one of which was the Union Traction Company.<sup>56</sup> PRT invested a great deal of capital into the renovation of Willow Grove; between 1902 and 1907 the company spent \$108,353.77 on construction at the park, with \$63,557.17 of that being spent during 1902 alone.<sup>57</sup> While the park still served a purpose as a means of increasing ridership on the trolley lines, PRT apparently felt that it required updating in order to keep the crowds coming. In addition, many of the new rides were common amusement devices across the country, suggesting that amusement parks had become enough of a fixture in American popular culture that the public had expectations of what an amusement park should look like.

The changes implemented by PRT resulted in a landscape which, by 1910, looked markedly different than it had its first season. The Bicycle Track and Bicycle Swing were gone by 1903, and in their place were a variety of more technologically advanced and elaborate attractions. Visitors now had two theaters to choose from, the Willowgraph and the Fairy Theater. (Fig. 3.11) Although the basic form of the Willowgraph Theater was not radically different from Trumbauer's designs, it clearly belonged to a consumer age. Admission prices were painted boldly on the exterior, with giant posters advertising the attractions inside. During the 1903 season, the Willowgraph Theater featured shows such as "The Levitation of Mahomet" and "The Mysterious Casket," the titles of which suggest a certain side-show quality. In 1906, the Willowgraph offered "an unprecedented exhibition of moving life-pictures, including an entirely new assortment of comic, magic, mystic and trick film novelties."<sup>58</sup>

---

<sup>56</sup> Cheape, 179-180.

<sup>57</sup> *Annual Reports, Union Traction Company of Philadelphia*, Philadelphia – Annual Reports of the Union Traction Co. and the Philadelphia Rapid Transit Co., 1896-1938, HSP.

<sup>58</sup> *Willow Grove Park: Ye Olde Mill – Opening Day, Saturday, May 30, 1903*, File Folder – Parks, MCHS; *Willow Grove Park – Philadelphia's Fairyland – Season 1906*, Pennsylvania – Montgomery County, HSP.





**Fig. 3.11**  
Willowgraph Theater, Willow Grove Park, as shown in a 1905 souvenir album  
Collection of the Athenaeum of Philadelphia, Philadelphia, PA



**Fig. 3.12**  
Mountain Scenic Railway, Willow Grove Park, 1910

John Gibbs Smith Photograph Collection, Print and Picture Department, Free Library of Philadelphia, Philadelphia, PA



A growing emphasis on mechanized rides was apparent during this period. A Ferris wheel was added in 1906, and a new roller coaster, the Mountain Scenic Railway (distinct from the Scenic Railway already in place), was constructed in 1905. (Fig. 3.12) Manufactured by LaMarcus A. Thompson, inventor of the first Switchback Railway, the ride took people through a “Scenic Palace,” with “dimly lighted tunnels” and “brilliantly lighted grottoes” which included “spectacular reproductions of the beautiful in art and nature.”<sup>59</sup> The Captive Flying Machine, in place by 1905, consisted of a 100’ tall tower with ten steel arms which raised and rotated, carrying passengers in airships.<sup>60</sup> (Fig. 3.13) In an effort to appeal to those who needed some justification for their fun, the Captive Flying Machine was

recommended not only for its novelty, but also for its healthfulness. Exhaustive tests have shown that the swift ride through the air results in a decided lowering of the temperature of the passengers, a fact which accounts in part for its great popularity as a hot weather diversion.<sup>61</sup>

As transportation technology changed, so too did the Captive Flying Machine; bi-planes replaced the original capsules in the 1920s, and stainless steel rockets came in after World War Two. The new popularity of the automobile – which, as will be discussed later, contributed to the demise of Willow Grove Park – was reflected in the Automobile Race Course installed in 1909.<sup>62</sup> (Fig 3.14) Patrons “raced” each other in real cars on four parallel tracks, combining “amusement with the most popular fad of modern times, namely: automobiling, with the element of danger eliminated.”<sup>63</sup>

During this period, several rides were added to Willow Grove Park which, in their

---

<sup>59</sup> Jenkins, 5; Cox, 26; *Willow Grove Park – Philadelphia’s Fairyland – Season 1908*, Manuscripts Department, LCP.

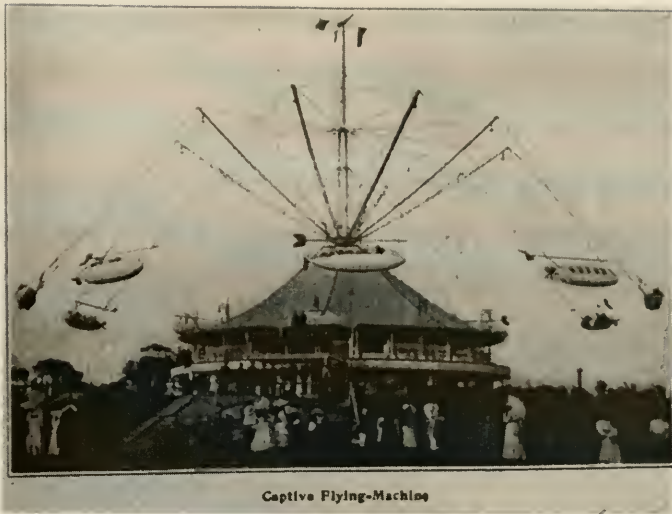
<sup>60</sup> Jenkins, 5; *Willow Grove Park – Philadelphia’s Fairyland – Season 1908*, Manuscripts Department, LCP.

<sup>61</sup> *Willow Grove Park – Philadelphia’s Fairyland – Season 1906*, Pennsylvania – Montgomery County, HSP.

<sup>62</sup> Jenkins, 5-8.

<sup>63</sup> *Willow Grove Park – Philadelphia’s Fairyland – Season 1909*, “Amusement Parks” file, Social Science and History Department, FLP.





**Fig. 3.13**  
The Captive Flying Machine, Willow Grove Park, as shown in a 1905  
souvenir album

Collection of the Athenaeum of Philadelphia, Philadelphia, PA



**Fig. 3.14**  
Automobile Race Course, Willow Grove Park, 1910

John Gibbs Smith Photograph Collection, Print and Picture Department, Free Library of  
Philadelphia, Philadelphia, PA





creation of fantastic environments, offered visitors a chance to escape the everyday. Ye Olde Mill, added in 1901, was Willow Grove's version of a common amusement device of the period, which offered visitors a boat ride through darkened waterways, with occasional glimpses of painted scenery along the journey. At a time when steam power and electricity were displacing water power, Old Mill rides tapped into visitors' nostalgic longings for the past. The popularity of such rides is perhaps due more to their providing a dark and secluded place for young couples to be together: most Old Mill rides were eventually known by the more familiar name the Tunnel of Love.<sup>64</sup> Ye Olde Mill was updated frequently, reflecting the need for amusement park proprietors constantly to offer new thrills for the public to consume. A 1903 brochure declared,

Everything is new, and a ride through the serpentine channel this year is indeed a ride through fairyland.... Bewildering it is at times, and the passenger almost believes the scenes presented before his eyes are real. Like the well-staged play, with its perfect scenery and equipment, is the ride through Ye Olde Mill.<sup>65</sup>

A trip through Ye Olde Mill in 1903 was a bizarre journey to places both familiar and exotic, picturesque and majestic, peopled with life-like wax figures. The trip began at Christ Church in Philadelphia, with a "characteristic scene" of a beggar woman and child, and proceeded to the Battle of San Juan Hill in Cuba, replete with banana trees, palm trees and Theodore Roosevelt leading the charge. A visit to the North Pole was followed by a glimpse of "University oarsmen" rowing on a moonlit Schuylkill River. At Uncle Tom's Cabin, passengers witnessed a "jolly-faced colored woman, a little black boy and a baby – a happy family altogether. Uncle Tom is playing 'de banjo.'" (Willow Grove Park, it appears, was not

---

<sup>64</sup> Al Griffin, *Step Right Up, Folks!* (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1974), 15; Gary Kyriazi, *The Great American Amusement Parks: A Pictorial History* (Secaucus, NJ: Citadel Press, 1976), 36.

<sup>65</sup> *Willow Grove Park. Ye Olde Mill – Opening Day, Saturday, May 30, 1903*, File Folder – Parks, MCHS.



immune to the racist cultural attitudes of the period.) In a curious homage to a competing resort, Ye Olde Mill included an image of Atlantic City's boardwalk on the Fourth of July, with crashing waves and thousands of tourists on the beach, giving the patron the feeling of being "on the boardwalk in a rolling chair instead of being at Willow Grove, so true is the description." Finally, the trip ended in Japan, with a "quaint, fascinating, and very picturesque" scene of a wax Mikado and his court attendants.<sup>66</sup> In 1906, Ye Olde Mill was reworked yet again, fitted with moving mechanical figures and (rather humorously) renamed Ye *New* Olde Mill.<sup>67</sup> The basic format, however remained the same, and it continued to offer patrons of Willow Grove Park – most of whom would never travel to distant lands – the opportunity to take a virtual trip around the world.

The Saint Nicholas Coal Mine ride was added in 1903, and updated to incorporate mechanical figures in 1906. (Fig. 3.15) Until the ride burned down in the 1920s,<sup>68</sup> the Coal Mine provided visitors with a roller coaster ride through "an exact and true reproduction of a coal mine."<sup>69</sup> The structure which housed the ride was designed to look like the coal breaker in St. Nicholas, Pennsylvania, and, as such, clearly announced its function to each passerby. The architecture of the Coal Mine ride differed markedly from Trumbauer's designs for the park, favoring iconic, easily readable imagery as a way to attract visitors rather than the colonial-style forms which had contributed to the park's earlier, more refined atmosphere.

Much like the nineteenth-century tours of operating coal mines at places like Mauch Chunk, Pennsylvania, the ride at Willow Grove Park took a picturesque view of the miner's life. The numerous mechanical figures included miners, with "soiled clothes, their dinner-pails

---

<sup>66</sup> *Willow Grove Park: Ye Olde Mill – Opening Day, Saturday, May 30, 1903*, File Folder – Parks, MCHS.

<sup>67</sup> *Willow Grove Park – Philadelphia's Fairyland – Season 1906*, Pennsylvania – Montgomery County, HSP.

<sup>68</sup> Jenkins, 6.

<sup>69</sup> *Willow Grove Park – Philadelphia's Fairyland – Season 1906*, Pennsylvania – Montgomery County, HSP.





**Fig. 3.15**

St. Nicholas Coal Mine ride, Willow Grove Park, 1910

John Gibbs Smith Photograph Collection, Print and Picture Department. Free Library of Philadelphia, Philadelphia, PA



in their hands and their little tin lamps on their caps,” near the entry to the shaft, as well as breaker boys, the young children who worked separating impurities from the coal, caught in the midst of a fist-fight. New in 1906 was a depiction of an explosion that had taken place at a mine in northern France in March of that year, in which 1200 men died: “Though operated mechanically, the scene is very impressive; men are blown about in every direction.”<sup>70</sup> Reenactments of disasters were common at amusement parks and at World’s Fairs during this period, providing patrons with a way to experience a “riskless risk.”<sup>71</sup> Despite the supposed realism of the experience, women entering the ride were assured that they could “wear the finest of gowns in making the descent without the least discomfort or fear of dirt.”<sup>72</sup> Though sometimes referred to as the Unique Coal Mine, this ride was hardly one of a kind; as of 1906, Coney Island offered visitors The Great Deep Rift Coal Mine, billed as “an exact reproduction of one of the famous mines of the great coal fields of Pennsylvania.”<sup>73</sup> The influence of the Switchback Railway at Mauch Chunk was apparently strong, and would continue to be for decades to come.

Willow Grove Park added another popular ride, Tours of the World, in 1906. (Fig. 3.16) Like the other attractions installed during this period of redevelopment at the park, Tours of the World was not unique to Willow Grove. Rather, it was a popular ride at parks across the country,<sup>74</sup> and its installation at Willow Grove Park reflects both the management’s desire to stay up-to-date and the growing homogenization of amusement parks during the 1910s. Tours of the World was an “illusion ride,” giving the visitors the sensation of moving through scenery

---

<sup>70</sup> *Willow Grove Park – Philadelphia’s Fairyland – Season 1906*, Pennsylvania – Montgomery County, HSP.

<sup>71</sup> Russel B. Nye, “Eight Ways of Looking at an Amusement Park,” *Journal of Popular Culture* 15, no. 1 (Summer 1981): 71-72; David Nasaw, *Going Out: The Rise and Fall of Public Amusements* (New York: BasicBooks, 1993), 74, 89.

<sup>72</sup> *Willow Grove Park – Philadelphia’s Fairyland – Season 1906*, Pennsylvania – Montgomery County, HSP.

<sup>73</sup> *Views of Coney Island* (Portland, ME: L.H. Nelson Company, 1906).

<sup>74</sup> Margaret Woodbury Strong Museum, *Step Right Up! Amusement for All: Show Business at the Turn of the Century* (Rochester, NY: Margaret Woodbury Strong Museum, 1977).







**Fig. 3.16**  
Tours of the World,  
Willow Grove Park,  
1906

John Gibbs Smith Photograph  
Collection, Print and Picture  
Department, Free Library of  
Philadelphia, Philadelphia, PA



**Fig. 3.17**  
Venice, Willow Grove  
Park, 1910

John Gibbs Smith  
Photograph Collection,  
Print and Picture  
Department, Free  
Library of Philadelphia,  
Philadelphia, PA



as they sat in Pullman observation cars. Scenes of foreign lands were projected on a screen, and a conductor announced each “stop.” The train cars moved to give the feeling of climbing a mountain or racing down steep inclines, a sensation which anticipated the “virtual” amusement rides offered today.<sup>75</sup> Like the Saint Nicholas Coal Mine ride, the architectural imagery employed at Tours of the World was intended to announce the nature of the ride housed within. The arched entry and steel and glass-filled gable roof, resembling a train shed, was as much an advertisement for the ride as was the massive sign atop the roof.

The year 1907 saw the addition of Venice, a ride which offered visitors the chance to take a gondola through canals, with scenes “which are identical with the Venice of Italy, so far as the brush and model can make them.” (Fig. 3.17) A brochure billed Willow Grove’s Venice as “the eighth wonder of the world.”<sup>76</sup> Venice was intended to provide Willow Grove patrons, for whom a trip to the park might be the only chance at travel, the opportunity to “see” Europe for themselves. A park brochure included the following quote from a visitor: “To know and appreciate the magnificence of Venice one needs only view your excellent reproduction. It’s a school that every scholar should attend – not once but often. It is the most instructive amusement place I have ever witnessed.”<sup>77</sup> Though quite possibly fabricated, this quote indicates that Willow Grove’s Venice was intended to be as good as the real thing, “instructive” as well as entertaining. And, of course, it was impressive enough to warrant taking – and paying for – more than one trip.

The design of Venice added to the eclectic landscape of the park, which was by this time characterized by iconic forms suited to an increasingly consumer culture. Willow Grove’s

---

<sup>75</sup> *Willow Grove Park – Philadelphia’s Fairyland – Season 1908*, Manuscripts Department, LCP; *Willow Grove Park – Philadelphia’s Fairyland – Season 1909*, “Amusement Parks” file, Social Science and History Department, FLP.

<sup>76</sup> *Willow Grove Park – Venice*, brochure, 1907, Pennsylvania – Montgomery County, HSP.

<sup>77</sup> *Willow Grove Park – Philadelphia’s Fairyland – Season 1908*, Manuscripts Department, LCP.



Venice was a pastiche of Mediterranean design elements, including round-arched colonnades, dominated by two massive Italianate towers flanking the entry arch. Venice stood in close proximity to the Saint Nicholas Coal Mine ride, a juxtaposition the likes of which would never be found in the real world. (Fig. 3.18)

Extensive electric lighting added to this unreal atmosphere. During the park's first season, lights were placed in the groves of trees and around the lakes. By 1908, over 30,000 lights were located around the park, "artistically placed" so they would "sparkle brilliantly in every nook and corner and outline all the buildings, while great arc lights make the lawns and avenues as bright as day."<sup>78</sup> (Fig. 3.19) Another 20,000 lights had been added by 1921.<sup>79</sup> A similar aesthetic was evident at other amusement parks. In *Amusing the Million*, John Kasson describes the elaborate lighting at Coney Island's Luna Park, illuminated by 250,000 bulbs on its opening night in 1902, as contributing to the surreal surroundings of the place:

The spectacle intensified visitors' sense of Coney as a magical realm that violated conventional rules. Luna turned night into day, a feat which symbolized its topsy-turvy order. Its buildings dramatically altered their appearance to achieve an even more festive air and invited visitors to do the same.<sup>80</sup>

The incorporation of electric lighting into Willow Grove Park, like the architecture which housed the new rides, reflected the influence of commercial design on the landscape. Electric signs and moving lights were becoming a fixture of commercial spaces in New York City at this time, attracting thousands of tourists, who came to gaze at the fantastic spectacle of color and light.<sup>81</sup> The electric lights which illuminated Willow Grove Park, then, were not only

---

<sup>78</sup> *Willow Grove Park – Philadelphia's Fairyland – Season 1908*. Manuscripts Department, LCP; *The Saturday Review – Special Willow Grove Park Number*. 1 August 1896. File Folder – Parks. MCHS.

<sup>79</sup> "Willow Grove Park – History and Description" file. Newspaper Clippings Collection, TUUA.

<sup>80</sup> Kasson, 66.

<sup>81</sup> Schlereth, 161; William Leach, *Land of Desire: Merchants, Power, and the Rise of a New American Culture* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993), 48, 340.





**Fig. 3.18**  
Bird's eye view of Willow Grove Park, showing Venice, the St. Nicholas Coal Mine and the Automobile Race Course, lined up on the Park's "Midway," c. 1910

News Photograph Collection (Suburbs), Temple University Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA



**Fig. 3.19**  
Night view of Willow Grove Park, 1907. The Bandstand is visible on the left, and the Music Pavilion is the small round structure to the right.

Society Print Collection, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA





a means of creating a fantastic atmosphere, they were a symbol of a new commercial age. By 1910, Willow Grove Park had evolved from what was essentially a pleasure garden with a few added attractions, into a popular, consumer-oriented landscape. The park had been, and would continue to be, influenced by the public's seemingly insatiable appetite for entertainment, and by the amusement industry's need to create new and enticing attractions to keep the people coming back for more.

### ***The Beginning of the End: A Changing Cultural Context and Its Impact on the Landscape of Willow Grove***

Willow Grove Park enjoyed great popularity through the 1910s and early 1920s, a period which is generally considered to be its heyday in terms of popularity and development.<sup>82</sup> According to the Philadelphia Rapid Transit Company's records, the park earned over \$133,000.00 in 1918, the first season it actually made money.<sup>83</sup> The park, then, was no longer just a means of attracting trolley riders, but had become profitable in its own right. In addition, it would appear that free band music was no longer the primary attraction; visitors were spending their money on rides and other concessions. By the late 1920s, however, the park began to feel the impact of new cultural forces and trends that would greatly affect its future success. Over the next several decades, the park continued to experience spurts of growth amidst periods of decline, but its relationship to the surrounding community had changed. By the time Willow Grove Park expired in the 1970s, the impact of urban growth and the rise of the automobile were too great for the park to overcome.

---

<sup>82</sup> The film *Life was a Lark at Willow Grove Park*, while acknowledging that park attendance was high in the 1940s and post-War years, still presents the years before World War One as the park's peak period. *Life Was a Lark at Willow Grove Park*, produced by Tim Young, Ron Kelleher and Chuck Russell, Videocassette, 1991. See also Torrence V. Jenkins, Jr., "Willow Grove Park: Gone But Not Forgotten," *Roller Coaster!* (Spring 1996): 4-9.

<sup>83</sup> *Philadelphia Rapid Transit Company: Annual Report to the Stockholders, 1918*, Annual Reports of the Union Traction Co. and the Philadelphia Rapid Transit Co., 1896-1938, HSP.



The growth of Willow Grove Park in the first two decades of the twentieth century slowed somewhat during and immediately after World War One.<sup>84</sup> A comparison of historical atlases from 1916 and 1927 shows that no major additions were made in the interim.<sup>85</sup> The Park entered a new phase in the late 1920s, however, with its lease in 1926 to Meyer Davis, an orchestra leader who had become involved in the amusement business.<sup>86</sup> Not only did the new ownership usher in a new era for the park, the transfer of control from the Philadelphia Rapid Transit Company (PRT) was indicative of the changing role of the trolley, and trolley parks, in American cities.

By the 1920s, the trolley, once a prominent means of transportation, was beginning to be obscured by the automobile. Many trolley systems were replaced by buses, and private automobiles became the preferred mode of transportation.<sup>87</sup> It was an increasingly affordable option; Ford's Model T cost \$950.00 in 1910, but plummeted to \$290.00 in 1924, bringing it within the reach of a greater number of people.<sup>88</sup> At the same time, suburbs were expanding and becoming more dependent on the automobile. As mentioned earlier, trolley lines and other kinds of mass transit played a crucial role in suburban development, a fact which ironically helped to spell their demise. Although Philadelphia invested an enormous amount on public transportation in the 1920s, constructing subways and establishing bus service, ridership increased very little. In fact, by facilitating the growth of the city outward, Philadelphia's public transit systems actually encouraged the development of the suburbs, whose inhabitants,

---

<sup>84</sup> Jenkins, 5-6.

<sup>85</sup> A. H. Mueller, *Atlas of the North Penn Section of Montgomery County, Pa.* (Philadelphia: A. H. Mueller, 1916); Frank H. M. Klinge, *Atlas of the Reading-Main Line, Volume One, Montgomery Co., Penna.* (Philadelphia: Frank H.M. Klinge, 1927).

<sup>86</sup> Jenkins, 6; Cox, 22; Newspaper Clipping, "Amusement Parks" folder, MCHS.

<sup>87</sup> William D. Middleton, *The Time of the Trolley: The Street Railway from Horsecar to Light Rail, Volume One* (San Marino, CA: Golden West Books, 1987), 154.

<sup>88</sup> John A. Jakle, "Landscapes Redesigned for the Automobile," in *The Making of the American Landscape*, ed. Michael P. Conzen (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1990), 294.



in turn, began to favor the automobile.<sup>89</sup> Finally, although PRT controlled two of the main turnpikes to the park, and thereby earned revenue from tolls as well as trolley fares, the company was required to sell their interests in the roads to the state in 1918.<sup>90</sup> In an increasingly automobile-oriented society, management of Willow Grove Park was not economically viable for PRT.

Like many transit companies in the 1920s, PRT leased Willow Grove Park to outside interests, transferring management of the park to Meyer Davis in 1926. While PRT regarded Willow Grove Park primarily as a means to attract trolley riders, and had therefore been willing to support the park for many unprofitable years, the Meyer Davis company needed the park to make money. Consequently, the company began to charge a fee for the concerts in the Bandstand, which had long been considered a staple at the park. Band music was gradually phased out altogether, and a greater emphasis was placed on the amusement rides at the park.<sup>91</sup> Meyer Davis embarked on a significant building campaign, presumably in an effort to revitalize the park and attract visitors with the latest in amusement technology. In addition, the park suffered from at least two fires in the late 1920s, one in 1927 which destroyed the Coal Mine ride, and another in 1929 which did over \$200,000 worth of damage, threatening the entire park and destroying Venice.<sup>92</sup>

By 1930, numerous changes and additions were in place, implemented under the park's new management. According to a 1930 atlas, some of the park's attractions, such as its two carousels, Tours of the World, and the Captive Flying Machine were still in place. However, there were numerous changes to the landscape as well. The Mountain Scenic Railway had been

---

<sup>89</sup> Sam Bass Warner, *The Private City: Philadelphia in Three Periods of Its Growth*. Second Edition (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991), 193.

<sup>90</sup> Cox, 23.

<sup>91</sup> Thompson, 1978, 29; Jenkins, 6.

<sup>92</sup> Jenkins, 9; Newspaper Clipping, "Amusement Parks" folder, MCHS.



reworked and named the Alps. The Thunderbolt roller coaster, Dance Land and a fun house called Crazy Village were lined up on one of the main roads through the park, where the Willowgraph Theater, Venice and the Coal Mine ride had once stood. Other smaller attractions were tucked in amongst the existing fabric, including the Whip, Bluebeard's Palace (a haunted house) and the Caterpillar (a sort of miniature roller coaster ride).<sup>93</sup>

Not long after Meyer Davis implemented these improvements, the Depression hit. Lagging attendance due to decreases in expendable income and lack of money to invest in new rides led to the closure of hundreds of parks during the 1930s.<sup>94</sup> Willow Grove survived, but its pattern of continual change and renewal was temporarily halted. According to historic atlases, the only major changes between 1930 and 1937 were the removal of the Giant Racing Coaster, which was closed after a fatal accident in the late 1920s, and the transformation of the former site of Venice into a Motorboat Pool, which reused the "canals" of the old ride.<sup>95</sup> By the end of the decade, Ye New Olde Mill had been transformed into the Lost River ride, again utilizing existing waterways.<sup>96</sup> While the rides had changed little over the last ten years, the landscape of the park had been altered in other significant ways. A 1940 map shows that, while two trolley routes from Philadelphia still serviced the park, concessions to new modes of transportation had been made, with the addition of two parking areas for automobiles and buses.<sup>97</sup> (Fig. 3.20)

According to one source, Meyer Davis leased the park from PRT for only ten years, or until 1936;<sup>98</sup> it is possible that the company broke or did not renew its lease because of lack of

---

<sup>93</sup> Sanborn Map Company, *Willow Grove and Vicinity, Montgomery County, Pennsylvania* (New York: Sanborn Map Co., May 1930).

<sup>94</sup> Nasaw, 242.

<sup>95</sup> Thompson, 1978, 29; Franklin Survey Company, *Atlas of Montgomery County, Penna., Vol. C* (Philadelphia: Franklin Survey Company, 1937).

<sup>96</sup> Jenkins, 6.

<sup>97</sup> Willow Grove Park brochure, 1940. Hagley Museum Library and Archives. Wilmington, DE.

<sup>98</sup> "Willow Grove Park - Sale" file, Newspaper Clippings Collection, TUUA.







Fig. 3.20  
 Cartoon map of Willow Grove Park, from a 1940 promotional brochure

Collection of the Hagley Museum Library and Archives, Wilmington, DE



revenue during the Depression. Regardless, the transit company apparently regained control of the park in the late 1930s, and operated it under a subsidiary company until 1954, at which point it was sold to a group of investors for \$1,905,000.00. Although at the time the park was still attracting one million visitors each season, the transit company no longer considered it an asset, stating,

Amusement parks were once logical adjuncts of transit companies, creating a considerable volume of riding. Their ride-promotion value, however, has declined a great deal in recent years, with more and more visitors making their trips to the parks by private auto.<sup>99</sup>

Immediately after the sale of the park, newspaper articles speculated on the future use of the site, noting that the suburban acreage was far more valuable as a housing, business or retail development than as an amusement park.<sup>100</sup>

At the time, Willow Grove Park was reported to be the one of the largest amusement parks in the country, second only to Chicago's Riverview Park, with the capacity to handle 10,000 cars and 50,000 people a day.<sup>101</sup> While the park was apparently still profitable enough to warrant operation, the new owners sold thirty-five of the approximately 110 acres to the Hankin family to create the Willow Grove Shopping Center, a commercial plaza located along Moreland and Easton Roads, in the northern section of the park. After the last trolley line to the park was closed in 1958, an additional five and a half acres, which included the site of the old trolley terminal, were sold to the Hankins, to add to the Shopping Center.<sup>102</sup>

The Hankin family purchased the remainder of the park in 1959, vowing that "While we are alive we will see to it that the park is maintained as the 'playground' of Philadelphia."

---

<sup>99</sup> "Willow Grove Park – Sale" file, Newspaper Clippings Collection, TUUA.

<sup>100</sup> "Willow Grove Park – Sale" file, "Willow Grove Park – Miscellaneous, 1961 and Prior" file, Newspaper Clippings Collection, TUUA.

<sup>101</sup> "Willow Grove Park – Miscellaneous, 1961 and Prior" file, Newspaper Clippings Collection, TUUA.



The Hankins invested \$1,500,000.00 in its redevelopment, which included updating existing rides as well as adding new attractions. According to a 1959 newspaper article,

The Tunnel of Love has been refitted with a dozen new scenes, all calculated to make timid damsels seek the strong protecting arms of their escorts.... The Scenic Railway and all the old amusements remain, and several new ones have been added, the most spectacular being called the Turnpike Ride...[which consists] of narrow concrete roads about 2,000 feet long which wind in and out between guard rails. Real sports cars with gasoline motors zip along them.<sup>103</sup>

Even new attractions recalled the old. The Turnpike Ride adopted everyday transportation technology and made it fun, much like the Captive Flying Machine and the Automobile Race Course which preceded it. Similarly, a new attraction called the Mississippi Steamboat Ride included “life-size dock hands, cotton pickers and other plantation folks along the shore,” presenting a romanticized view of slavery not unlike Uncle Tom’s Cabin, one of the stops on the old Tours of the World.<sup>104</sup> As will be discussed in the history and contemporary assessment of the Wildwoods that follow, amusement parks, despite their changing nature, repeatedly recycled the same basic themes in their attractions.

Despite its similarities with previous incarnations, the character and landscape of Willow Grove Park changed a great deal in the 1950s and 1960s. While this was in part simply a continuation of the park’s historically dynamic nature, the changes during this period were also related to broader social trends, as well as the impact of Disneyland, which had opened to phenomenal success just four years prior. Before the start of the 1959 summer season, the Bandstand was demolished and the large lake filled in so as to make room for a parking lot and

---

<sup>102</sup> “Willow Grove Park, 1962 to 1972” file, “Willow Grove Penna. – Shopping Center, 1978 and Prior” file, Newspaper Clippings Collection, TUUA.

<sup>103</sup> “Willow Grove Park – Miscellaneous, 1961 and Prior” file, Newspaper Clippings Collection, TUUA.

<sup>104</sup> “Willow Grove Park – Miscellaneous, 1961 and Prior” file, Newspaper Clippings Collection, TUUA.



a 116-lane bowling alley, the largest in the world.<sup>105</sup> Both before and during the Hankins' period of ownership, free half-hour shows were instituted at the park, including rodeo performances, a monkey village and a wild animal show. The 1962 season included appearances by the "world's only high-diving zebra," "the strongest man in the world" and Charlie Bramble, an alligator wrestler.<sup>106</sup> (Fig. 3.21) In the late 1960s, the park was fenced in and an admission fee was instituted for the first time.<sup>107</sup> One source indicates that by this time "Willow Grove was starting to draw disruptive crowds. Racial tension caused several fights and stabbings. Because of this, many families stopped visiting the park."<sup>108</sup>

The impact of Disneyland on Willow Grove Park was evident as early as 1959. Indeed, shortly after purchasing the park, the Hankins, the general manager and superintendent of the park went to California to meet with representatives of Disneyland, seeking information and advice about transforming Willow Grove into a theme park.<sup>109</sup> (Fig. 3.22) Many of the rides installed for the 1959 season were touted as having been "patterned after those in Disneyland."<sup>110</sup> Apparently, Willow Grove's new owners thought the park's atmosphere would have to be altered if it was to survive.

### *The Demise of "Philadelphia's Fairyland"*

While the 1959 redevelopment did not involve "theming" Willow Grove, drastic change would come in 1972, when the Hankins leased Willow Grove Park to National Service

---

<sup>105</sup> "Willow Grove Park – History and Description" file, "Willow Grove Park, 1962 to 1972" file, Newspaper Clippings Collection, TUUA.

<sup>106</sup> "Willow Grove Park, 1962 to 1972" file, Newspaper Clippings Collection, TUUA; Max Hankin, former owner of Willow Grove Park, and John Palmieri, former superintendent of Willow Grove Park, interview by author, tape recording, Willow Grove, PA, 4 February 1999.

<sup>107</sup> Thompson, 1978, 29.

<sup>108</sup> Jenkins, 8.

<sup>109</sup> Hankin and Palmieri, interview.

<sup>110</sup> "Willow Grove Park – Miscellaneous, 1961 and Prior" file, Newspaper Clippings Collection, TUUA.







**Fig. 3.21**  
Alligator  
wrestler at  
Willow Grove  
Park, c. 1965

Collection of Max  
Hankin



**Fig. 3.22**  
Willow Grove Park management's  
trip to Disneyland, newspaper  
clipping, 1959

Collection of Max Hankin



Industries, an amusement park conglomerate that redesigned the park to look like a Wild West town.<sup>111</sup> Like Disneyland, the new management hoped to “get rid of the gaudiness of the old carnival days.” Called Six Gun Territory, the new park featured staged gunfights, bank robberies, can-can dancing and, strangely, porpoise shows. New rides were added, and old attractions were renovated to fit in with the “1880 cow-town theme.”<sup>112</sup> (Fig. 3.23) A 1974 publication which rated amusement parks across the country included a review of Six Gun Territory, giving it only one star out of four, a rating reserved for those parks which were deemed “hopeless.”<sup>113</sup>

After an inspection which found several of the rides at the park requiring \$1 million worth of repairs, the Hankin family announced the park’s closure on April 14, 1976. Many of the portable rides were sold at auction soon after, while others remained in place until September, 1980, when construction of a \$100 million shopping mall began on the site. (Fig. 3.24) By this time, the town of Willow Grove was regarded as dilapidated and in need of redevelopment, with shoppers being lured away by malls in other nearby suburbs, easily accessed by the turnpike.<sup>114</sup>

In some respects, the Willow Grove Park mall can be regarded as the latest phase in the development of the site as a recreational landscape, serving some of the same purposes as public amusements in the nineteenth century. Indeed, David Nasaw argues that “the symbol of public sociability in the late twentieth century is not the picture palace or amusement park, but the enclosed shopping mall.”<sup>115</sup> At least two malls in North America make explicit the link

---

<sup>111</sup> Jenkins, 8.

<sup>112</sup> “Willow Grove Park, 1962 to 1972” file, Newspaper Clippings Collection, TUUA.

<sup>113</sup> Griffin, ix, 145.

<sup>114</sup> Jenkins, 9; Thompson, 1978, 29; “Willow Grove Park – History and Description” file, “Willow Grove Park, 1973” file, Newspaper Clippings Collection, TUUA.

<sup>115</sup> Nasaw, 255.





**Fig. 3.23**  
The "Bank"  
at Six Gun  
Territory,  
c. 1976

Collection of  
Max Hankin



**Fig. 3.24**  
Demolition of the Alps roller  
coaster, Willow Grove Park,  
1980, in preparation for  
construction of the new  
Willow Grove Park mall.

Collection of the Old York Road  
Historical Society, Jenkintown, PA





**Fig. 3.25**  
Interior of the Willow Grove Park mall, showing carousel figures hanging over fountain, 1998

Photograph by the author





between shopping (the consumption of products) and going to an amusement park (the consumption of fun); both the Mall of America in Minneapolis and Canada's West Edmonton Mall incorporate large-scale amusement parks into their designs.<sup>116</sup> Elements at Willow Grove Park mall were intended to recall the old amusement park. Carousel animals hang from the ceiling, John Philip Sousa music plays, and the food court is called the Grove, in reference to the picnic groves at the park. (Fig. 3.25) A brochure promoting the opening of the mall in April, 1982, declared,

As the original Willow Grove Park was more than an amusement park, so the new Willow Grove Park is more than a shopping center. Both were conceived and built with a unique vision in mind – to provide a place where people could congregate, relax and totally enjoy themselves, a place that people would feel better for having visited, a place the whole family could enjoy.<sup>117</sup>

The closing of Willow Grove Park was a result of cultural forces which were too strong to overcome, including the rise of the automobile, the expansion of the suburbs and the advent of theme parks. Over the course of its life, Willow Grove Park took on a variety of forms, responding to the changing demands of the leisure-seeking public. Like other amusement parks, Willow Grove Park not only reflected but also contributed to the rise of a popular culture. In so doing, it helped to fuel the development of a culture that demanded new thrills and forms of entertainment and which, in its emphasis on consumption and newness, was partly responsible for the park's demise. Landscapes of popular recreation are inevitably ephemeral and, in fact, derive part of their significance as barometers of popular culture from their dynamic nature. While the preservation of Willow Grove Park would probably not have been

---

<sup>116</sup> Todd H. Throgmorton, *Roller Coasters: An Illustrated Guide to the Rides in the United States and Canada, with a History* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 1993), 71, 136; Margaret Crawford, "The World in a Shopping Mall," in *Variations on a Theme Park: The New American City and the End of Public Space*, ed. Michael Sorkin (New York: Hill and Wang, 1992): 3-16.



feasible, it may be possible to direct the development of other amusement parks in a way that retains their historical significance while allowing for their inevitable evolution. The following two chapters, which concern the Wildwoods on the southern Jersey shore, explore the potential role for preservation in another dynamic landscape of popular recreation.

---

117 Willow Grove Park mall, brochure, 1982. Old York Road Historical Society, Jenkintown, PA.



## Chapter Four

### *The Wildwoods: Their History, Persistence and Role as a Repository of Amusement Park Memories*

*"Out With The Old, In With The New!"<sup>1</sup>*

The establishment and growth of the Wildwoods was, and continues to be, shaped by many of the same cultural forces that influenced turn-of-the-century trolley parks like Willow Grove. A new mode of transportation – the railroad – linked the Wildwoods to the growing urban centers of Philadelphia and Camden, while increases in the amount of leisure time and disposable income created a patronage that could support this burgeoning landscape of leisure. Like Willow Grove, the Wildwoods have long attracted a largely middle- and working-class clientele and have utilized the thrills offered by mechanized rides to provide visitors with a sense of escape. However, some factors, such as the rise of the automobile, had a profoundly different effect at the Wildwoods as compared to Willow Grove, ushering in a period of growth and expansion for the seaside resorts. In addition, the amusement piers at the Wildwoods differ from trolley parks in that they are part of a seaside resort town, and have benefited from their proximity to a powerful natural attraction, the ocean.<sup>2</sup> The boardwalk and piers at the

---

<sup>1</sup> *Wildwood-by-the-Sea*, souvenir book, c. 1905, "Boardwalk" file, Boyer Museum/Wildwood Historical Society, Wildwood, NJ (hereinafter referred to as BM/WHS).

<sup>2</sup> Atlantic City has a similar relationship with the ocean, which is explored in Charles E. Funnell, *By the Beautiful Sea: The Rise and High Times of that Great American Resort, Atlantic City* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University



Wildwoods, then, share a common heritage with the trolley parks, but also are related to another kind of cultural landscape, the Jersey shore.

The Wildwoods consist of three towns which, though legally distinct from one another, are geographically and economically linked and known collectively as the Wildwoods. North Wildwood, Wildwood and Wildwood Crest occupy one of the barrier islands at the southern tip of New Jersey, in Cape May County, an area which used to be known as Five Mile Beach. The settlement of Cape May County began in the seventeenth century, at which time whaling dominated the local economy. In the eighteenth century, much of the Cape, including Five Mile Beach, was inhabited by cattle breeders.<sup>3</sup> In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, four communities were developed as resorts on the island: Anglesea (now North Wildwood), Holly Beach (which later merged with Wildwood), Wildwood, and Wildwood Crest. Boardwalks and piers soon followed, and included attractions such as dance halls and bathing pavilions, but did not incorporate mechanized rides to a significant degree until the 1910s.

As resort communities, the Wildwoods have long offered visitors services such as guest cottages, hotels and, later, motels, in addition to entertainment. While these elements constitute an integral part of the Wildwoods' historical and contemporary landscape, this study is concerned primarily with the boardwalk and amusement piers, with particular focus on that part of the boardwalk bounded by 26<sup>th</sup> Avenue on the north and Schellenger Avenue on the south, a ten-block long corridor in the town of Wildwood. Currently occupied by Mariner's Landing, Nickels' Midway, Casino Pier and Hunt's Pier, this area has exhibited a high concentration of amusements for nearly a century. (Fig. 4.1) Like any landscape of popular recreation,

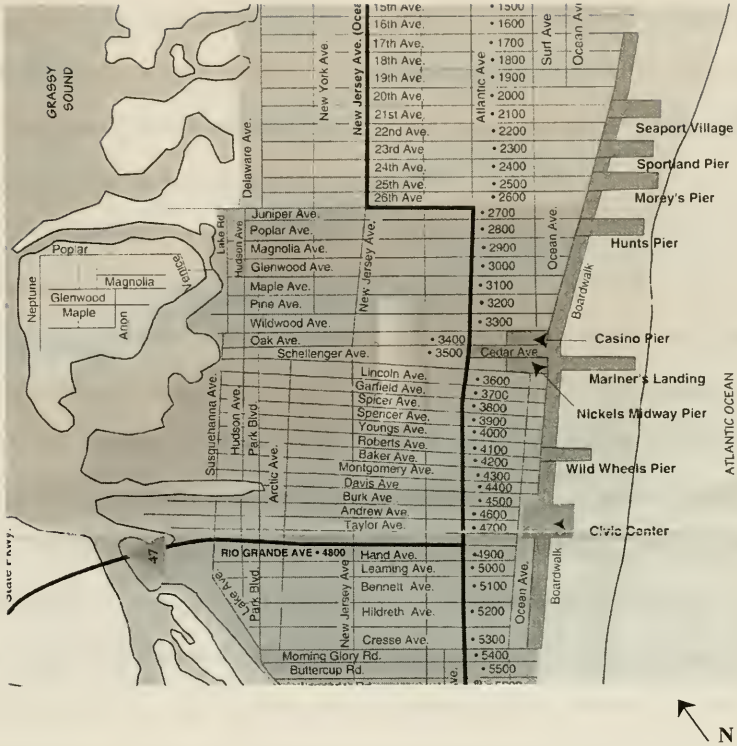
---

Press, 1983). See especially pages 127–130, which discuss the interaction of the natural attraction of the sea and the essentially urban character of the resort. As in the Wildwoods, promoters of Atlantic City utilized the ocean as a lure for visitors.

<sup>3</sup> Jeffery M. Dorwart, *Cape May County, New Jersey: The Making of an American Resort Community* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1992), 1–45.







**Fig. 4.1**  
 Partial map of the Wildwoods, New Jersey, showing boardwalk, 1998

Adapted by author from map produced by the Greater Wildwood Hotel and Motel Association



however, these amusement zones have changed significantly over the years, replacing old rides with the latest attractions and, in the case of the Wildwoods, adapting to a constantly changing natural landscape. Nevertheless, some of the most salient characteristics of the boardwalk and piers in the Wildwoods have remained constant.

### *Developing the Jersey Shore*

The history of the southern Jersey shore is characterized by aggressive investment from Philadelphia developers, who capitalized on (and promoted) the health and entertainment potential of sea-bathing. While New Yorkers frequented Long Island and, to a certain extent, northern shore destinations, resorts on the southern shore of New Jersey offered the closest beaches to Philadelphia. As early as the mid-eighteenth century, visitors came to Cape May and other southern shore destinations, but extensive development would not come until the 1800s. By the 1820s, visitors from Philadelphia, Camden and southern cities reached the Jersey shore by stagecoach or steamship.<sup>4</sup> Resorts like Cape May and Long Branch prospered during these early years – Cape May reached the peak of its popularity in the first half of the nineteenth century<sup>5</sup> – but the remainder of the shore was largely inaccessible until the coming of the railroad, which “transformed the Shore overnight.”<sup>6</sup> Indeed, one historian has said, “No other single influence, except possibly the advent of the gasoline engine and with it the automobile..., proved so catalytic a factor in the development of [New Jersey’s] four shore counties.”<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup> Harold F. Wilson. *The Jersey Shore: A Social and Economic History of the Counties of Atlantic, Cape May, Monmouth and Ocean* (New York: Lewis Historical Publishing Company, Inc., 1953), 415-419, 532-433, 470, 524-526, 533-537.

<sup>5</sup> George E. Thomas and Carl Doebley, *Cape May, Queen of the Seaside Resorts: Its History and Architecture* (Philadelphia: The Art Alliance Press, 1976), 24; Wilson, 1953, 552-553.

<sup>6</sup> Russell Roberts and Rich Youmans, *Down the Jersey Shore* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1993), 27.

<sup>7</sup> Wilson, 1953, 465.



As a direct consequence of the railroad, 1850 to 1900 was the greatest period of growth for the Jersey shore, with numerous resorts being established to serve a wide range of visitors, from the prosperous to those of more moderate means.<sup>8</sup> Less expensive than a stagecoach or a steamship, the railroad facilitated the “democratization of the shore recreation industry.”<sup>9</sup> playing a role not unlike that of the trolley in providing middle- and working-class people with a means of getting to places of recreation. By 1884, there were nine express trains from Philadelphia to the Jersey shore every week, and newspapers boasted that “Such facilities place a trip to the seaside within the reach of every class of persons.”<sup>10</sup> The railroads had an enormous impact not only on resorting in the area, but also on the year-round population. Between 1880 and 1885, the population of the four coastal counties in New Jersey grew from 55,700 to 111,000, while Atlantic City experienced a 425% increase in population between 1870 and 1880.<sup>11</sup>

Atlantic City was the first shore resort to benefit from the advent of the railroad, beginning in 1854 when the Camden & Atlantic Railroad built a line from Camden to Absecon, just west of the resort. Atlantic City was accessed by boat from the railroad terminal. By 1880, two other lines (the Philadelphia & Atlantic and the Pennsylvania Railroads) had reached the resort. Competition resulted in low fares; during this period, round trip tickets between Philadelphia and Atlantic City could regularly be purchased for a dollar and, during the peak summer months, for as low as fifty cents. Not long after the first train reached Atlantic City, railroads began to construct lines to reach the southernmost part of the Jersey shore. In 1863, the first train reached Cape May, with a connection in Millville, and the Reading Railroad

---

<sup>8</sup> Wilson, 1953, 497-498.

<sup>9</sup> Harold F. Wilson, *The Story of the Jersey Shore* (Princeton, NJ: D. Van Nostrand Company, Inc., 1964), 43.

<sup>10</sup> Wilson, 1953, 470.

<sup>11</sup> Roberts and Youmans, 40; Wilson, 1953, 466.



reached the Cape in 1894.<sup>12</sup> The railroad would play an equally important role in the establishment of the Wildwoods and in their development into a leading Jersey shore resort.

### *The Establishment of the Wildwoods: The Lure and Marketing of the Ocean*

Like other Jersey shore communities, the Wildwoods were consciously developed as resorts by outside investors, most of whom had Philadelphia connections. The Wildwoods did not have the religious origins of Ocean City, nor did they attract the well-established middle-class crowd that frequented Cape May in the early 1800s. Unlike Atlantic City, the Wildwoods did not have a reputation for being permissive in terms of allowing gambling and the consumption of liquor.<sup>13</sup> Like the other resorts, however, the Wildwoods were regarded as a seaside extension of Philadelphia, and were dependent on the railroad to solidify this connection. According to one historian, “The barrier islands were pictured by developers and visitors as a rural frontier to the expanding Philadelphia and Camden City urban industrial centers,” and, like trolley parks, offered urbanites a means of escaping the hot and dirty city.<sup>14</sup> Many trolley parks took advantage of the natural beauty of their site; the Wildwoods were organized around, and exploited, the attraction of the ocean.

Development of the Wildwoods began at the northern tip of the island, in the community of Anglesea, now known as North Wildwood. Frederick E. Swope, a Philadelphia real estate and railroad developer, established the Five Mile Beach Improvement Company in 1879 and, three years later, the Anglesea Land Company. In the meantime, John Burk and Dr. Aaron Andrew of Vineland had purchased land to the south of Anglesea and founded the Holly

---

<sup>12</sup> Wilson, 1953, 472-476; Wilson, 1964, 45-46.

<sup>13</sup> David W. Francis, Diane DeMali Francis and Robert J. Scully, Sr., *Wildwood By the Sea: The History of an American Resort* (Fairview Park, OH: Amusement Park Books, Inc., 1998), 10. See also Funnell, *By the Beautiful Sea*, Chapter Five, “Babylonian Days,” 93-118.

<sup>14</sup> Dorwart, 143.





Beach Improvement Company around 1880, hiring a Philadelphia contractor named William H. Bright to manage the business. The original boundaries of Holly Beach were roughly from Cedar Avenue to present-day Morning Glory Road. A ninety-acre area between Holly Beach and Anglesea was purchased by Philip and Latimer Baker from Vineland who, with their brother J. Thompson, established the Wildwood Beach Improvement Company in 1885. Originally, the brothers planned to name the resort Florida City, but opted instead to name it Wildwood, after the dense forest on the land, with its many twisted branches.<sup>15</sup> The towns of Holly Beach and Wildwood merged on January 1, 1912, adopting the name Wildwood. The Baker Brothers – sometimes referred to as the “founders of Wildwood” – also developed the southernmost of the Five Mile Beach resorts, purchasing land in Wildwood Crest in 1905.<sup>16</sup>

The growth of these four resorts was directly related to the extension of the railroad to Five Mile Beach. Anglesea, once a sleepy fishing community, was transformed into a resort town after it became more accessible to visitors. In 1883, a road was constructed to connect Anglesea with the West Jersey Railroad line, and, by the following year, the community boasted a small boardwalk, a 50-room hotel and about thirty guest cottages. The following year, Anglesea was large enough to be incorporated as a borough.<sup>17</sup> Anglesea’s developer, Frederick Swope, established the Anglesea Railroad in the mid-1880s, which connected with (and would later be absorbed by) the West Jersey Railroad. Soon after, the town included a pavilion with a bathhouse for swimmers and refreshment stands.<sup>18</sup> A railroad spur from Anglesea was constructed by 1890, heading south through Wildwood and Holly Beach. The population of Holly Beach grew from 217 to 569 between 1890 and 1900, and more than tripled

---

<sup>15</sup> Dorwart, 147-149; Francis, et al., 13; George F. Boyer, *Wildwood, Middle of the Island* (Egg Harbor City, NJ: The Laureate Press, 1976), 4.

<sup>16</sup> Dorwart, 174-176; Francis et al., 14, 37.

<sup>17</sup> Wilson, 1953, 524-425; Dorwart, 149; Francis, et al., 13.

<sup>18</sup> Francis, et al., 13-19.



between 1900 and 1910.<sup>19</sup> The growth generated by the railroad led to the incorporation of both Holly Beach and Wildwood as boroughs in the mid-1890s. As the Wildwoods extended southward, so too did the railroad, running along present-day New Jersey Avenue.<sup>20</sup> Wildwood Crest, at the southern end of the island, was accessible by train at least by 1909, and probably even earlier.<sup>21</sup> During this period, a typical round-trip ticket from Philadelphia to the Wildwoods cost one dollar, within reach of its many middle- and working-class visitors.<sup>22</sup> (Fig. 4.2)

### *The Expansion of the Resort and the Birth of the Piers, 1880s – 1910s*

From their origins in the 1880s to World War One, the towns of Five Mile Beach experienced dramatic growth, evolving into a major Jersey shore resort destination. On Memorial Day in 1894, approximately 1000 people visited the Wildwoods' beaches, while July 4, 1905 drew an estimated 10,000.<sup>23</sup> By the 1910s, the Wildwoods had a boardwalk extending approximately four miles, and numerous piers reached out toward the sea which, in addition to increasing visitors' access to the ocean, offered a variety of amusements, including bathing pavilions, skating rinks and dance halls. A 1905 parade commemorating the construction of the boardwalk in Holly Beach included floats depicting the history of North Wildwood. One float bore a banner which read "Whaling, 1689, First Enterprise on Five-Mile Beach," while another, labeled "North Wildwood in 1901" showed "a swamp inhabited by wild mules and a hunter with a border of reeds and snakes." By 1905, however, the landscape had been tamed, and

---

<sup>19</sup> Wilson. 1953. 525; Sanborn-Perris Map Co., Ltd.. *New Jersey Coast Map, 1890* (New York: Sanborn Map Co., 1890).

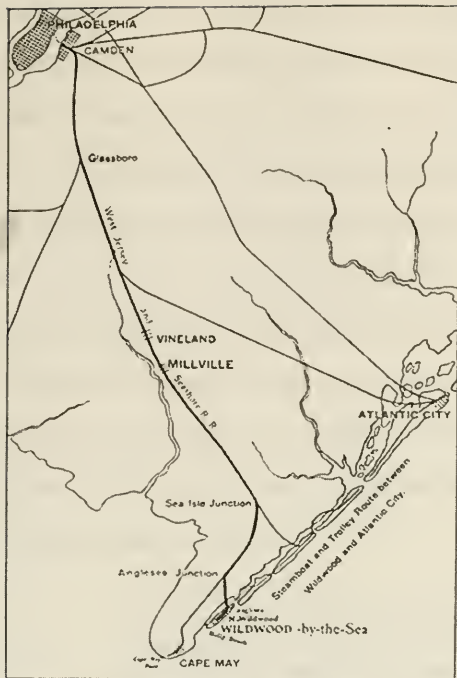
<sup>20</sup> Dorwart. 149; Wilson. 1953. 525; Boyer. 118.

<sup>21</sup> Sanborn Map Company. *Insurance Maps of the New Jersey Coast, Cape May Co. Edition, Vol. 4* (New York: Sanborn Map Co., 1909).

<sup>22</sup> Francis. et al., 37.

<sup>23</sup> Francis. et al., 33.





THE ROAD TO WILDWOOD, N. J.

**Fig. 4.2**  
Map showing railroad routes to the Wildwoods, from a 1905 promotional brochure

Collection of the Boyer Museum/Wildwood Historical Society, Wildwood, NJ



FUN ON THE BEACH.

**Fig. 4.3**  
A group of sea-bathers on the Wildwood beach, from a 1905 promotional brochure

Collection of the Boyer Museum/Wildwood Historical Society, Wildwood, NJ



North Wildwood “looked quite urban, with its villas and improvements.”<sup>24</sup> Once the Delaware Bay Short Line was established in 1912, connecting the Wildwoods to the Reading Railroad tracks to the west, access to the resorts was doubled, and a new era of expansion began.<sup>25</sup>

An examination of historical atlases reveals how the landscape of the Wildwoods was shaped by the railroad and oriented toward the ocean. As early as 1890, when the communities were still young, the few hotels and guest cottages were clustered around each town’s passenger depot and along the shoreline. Bathing pavilions had already begun to crop up near the ocean, and promotional materials emphasized the recreational and healthful aspects of the sea.<sup>26</sup>

(Fig. 4.3) A brochure from the early 1900s featured testimonials from visitors, including the following from Thomas Martindale, “a prominent Philadelphia Merchant” who, after spending a summer in Wildwood, declared,

I was sick when I came here in May, and I go away a well man. I have searched for health all along the Atlantic Coast, on the Pacific Coast, in the western mountains, in the pine forests of Maine and in foreign countries where I was a stranger to the language, and never before realized such a change for the better as I have experienced in Wildwood.<sup>27</sup>

A 1905 promotional card published by the Baker Brothers not only exalted Wildwood as a “healthful and attractive resort,” but also declared it to be “the rival of the most celebrated seaside city in the world,” probably a reference to Atlantic City to the north.<sup>28</sup> Indeed, a

---

<sup>24</sup> “Wildwood, NJ – Boardwalk” file, Newspaper Clippings Collection, Temple University Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA (hereinafter referred to as TUUA).

<sup>25</sup> “Wildwood, NJ – Boardwalk” file, Newspaper Clippings Collection, TUUA; Francis, et al., 60.

<sup>26</sup> Wilson, 1953, 525; Sanborn-Perris Map Co., Ltd., *New Jersey Coast Map, 1890* (New York: Sanborn Map Co., 1890).

<sup>27</sup> *Wildwood-by-the-Sea*, souvenir book, c. 1905, “Boardwalk” file, BM/WHs.

<sup>28</sup> Promotional card, c. 1905, “Wildwood Boardwalk, Amusement Rides” binder, BM/WHs.





Philadelphia newspaper article from 1905 asserted that the Wildwoods was second only to Atlantic City in terms of the number of visitors arriving by train.<sup>29</sup>

By this time, Atlantic City was well known for its boardwalk and amusement piers. Although there is some argument among Jersey shore resorts as to which had the first boardwalk, it is generally acknowledged that Atlantic City's was the first of any significant length, and that it defined the boardwalk form.<sup>30</sup> Constructed of planks and generally elevated above beach level, boardwalks are placed near the beach and run parallel to the ocean. In many cases, boardwalks include piers that extend out toward or into the ocean, which originally served as docking places for ships transporting visitors, but which evolved to include refreshment stands and entertainment. Boardwalks and piers provide a place for vacationers to stroll, and, in so doing, bring people closer to the ocean.

Construction of Atlantic City's boardwalk began in 1870. Although it rested on 3'-0" tall pilings in a few spots, the bulk of the 8'-0" wide walkway was laid directly on the sand. Atlantic City's boardwalk grew in length, eventually extending several miles, and by the 1890s was lined with hotels, shops, bathhouses, restaurants and even amusement rides.<sup>31</sup> Any seasonal resort that wanted to compete with Atlantic City was compelled to build a boardwalk of its own. The Wildwoods' boardwalk evolved separately and in stages among the four resorts, but the parts eventually joined to create one continuous walk running most of the length of Five Mile Beach. Because of its piecemeal evolution, the history of the boardwalk is a complicated one, made more confusing by the fact that the Wildwoods' beach grows several feet in depth every year. The natural tendency for the beach to recede was reversed by the construction of a jetty between the Wildwoods and Cape May City in the 1920s, which

---

<sup>29</sup> Francis, et al., 60.

<sup>30</sup> Wilson, 1964, 63-65; Roberts and Youmans, 95-97.

<sup>31</sup> Wilson, 1953, 545-546.



effectively traps sand at Five Mile Beach.<sup>32</sup> The situation persists today; a 1991 study found that the beach had grown as much as 40'-0" in depth every year since 1978.<sup>33</sup> In order to maintain proximity to the ocean, then, the boardwalk has been moved farther east on several occasions, with entirely new town blocks being created in the process.<sup>34</sup> This boardwalk migration – and town expansion – perfectly exemplifies the dynamic, constantly evolving nature of the Wildwoods.

Early boardwalks – essentially portable plank walkways that were taken in during the winter – were built in Anglesea, Holly Beach and Wildwood in the 1880s and 1890s. The first relatively permanent boardwalk was laid in 1900 and ran roughly from Cedar to 26<sup>th</sup> Avenues, along Atlantic Avenue which, at the time, represented the high-water mark of the ocean.<sup>35</sup> The boardwalk was moved to the east several times over the course of the next couple of decades, with some sections being moved first and other sections catching up later.<sup>36</sup> At least as early as 1905, however, the boardwalk was essentially continuous among the resorts, and was approximately four miles long.<sup>37</sup> A 1909 atlas shows a boardwalk that runs much of the length of Five Mile Beach, with the southern part of the walk laid roughly in the location of Atlantic Avenue. Near the border of Holly Beach and Wildwood, in the vicinity of Schellenger and Cedar Avenues, the boardwalk shifted slightly to the east, running along present-day Ocean Avenue.<sup>38</sup> By the late 1920s, the eastward migration of the boardwalk had pretty well ceased and, though the boardwalk continued farther south than it does presently and the distance

---

<sup>32</sup> Francis, et al., 92; Roberts and Youmans, 271; John T. Cunningham, *The New Jersey Shore* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1958), 180.

<sup>33</sup> Francis, et al., 195.

<sup>34</sup> Francis, et al., 3.

<sup>35</sup> Barbara St. Clair, "The Boardwalk's 'Practical' Origins." Clipping, BM/WHS; Roberts and Youmans, 114; Boyer, 160-161.

<sup>36</sup> Barbara St. Clair, "As Wildwood Matured, So Did the Boardwalk." Clipping, BM/WHS.

<sup>37</sup> "Wildwood, NJ – Boardwalk" file, Newspaper Clippings Collection, TUUA.

<sup>38</sup> Sanborn Map Company, *Insurance Maps of the New Jersey Coast, Cape May Co. Edition, Vol. 4* (New York: Sanborn Map Co., 1909).



between it and the water has grown, the basic configuration of the boardwalk was much as it is today.<sup>39</sup> (Fig. 4.4)

The Wildwoods' piers and pavilions evolved alongside the boardwalk. The earliest piers emphasized recreation associated with the ocean, offering sea-bathers dressing rooms and saltwater baths, as well as entertainment such as music and dancing. Mechanized amusement rides did not figure into the piers' attractions on any significant scale until the 1910s, although carousels were a fixture by the turn of the century.<sup>40</sup> The potential for amusement development was apparently evident to some, however. Around 1905, John Lake Young, who operated Young's amusement pier in Atlantic City, attempted to purchase Wildwood's Casino Pier, and the H.J. Heinz Company – also a fixture along the Atlantic City boardwalk – likewise expressed interest in investing in a pier in the Wildwoods. Even entrepreneurs from Coney Island, the amusement industry leader, considered acquiring a pier in the Wildwoods.<sup>41</sup> Although nothing came of these schemes, they are indicative of the perceived potential of the Wildwoods as a resort destination, and also of the Wildwoods' place within a larger historical context of amusement park development in general.

Some of the most important piers in the Wildwoods' history were first established in the 1880s and 1890s, and continue to leave a mark on the landscape. The Excursion Pavilion and Pier (the present-day site of Nickels Midway Pier) traces its origins to 1888, when an open-air pavilion was built directly on the sand at the foot of Cedar Avenue. Visitors found refreshments, music, dancing and dressing rooms at the Pavilion, which in 1890 was purchased by Gilbert Blaker, who built a pier extending out into the ocean and expanded the attractions

---

<sup>39</sup> For a more complete account of the evolution of the Wildwood boardwalk, see Francis, et al., *Wildwood by the Sea*.

<sup>40</sup> Francis, et al., 26; Sanborn Map Company, *Insurance Maps of the New Jersey Coast, Cape May Co. Edition, Vol. 4* (New York: Sanborn Map Co., 1909).

<sup>41</sup> Francis, et al., 41.





**Fig. 4.4**

Map showing the Wildwoods boardwalk, as it appeared in a 1921 atlas. Although the boardwalk has since been reconstructed several times, its basic configuration has remained much the same.

Sanborn Map Company, *Insurance Maps of the New Jersey Coast, Cape May Co. Edition, Vol. 4, 1909, revised 1921, pl. 30*





offered, adding, among other things, a carousel in 1892.<sup>42</sup> (Fig. 4.5) Vaudeville was a staple by 1900, and an auditorium known as Blaker's Theater was added in 1904, which hosted performances by stock theater companies. Blaker also offered sideshow-type attractions such as an enormous stuffed whale and a giant fish, available for viewing.<sup>43</sup> According to historic atlases, by 1909 Blaker's attractions no longer extended out into the ocean, having become land-locked with the expansion of the beach and the movement of the boardwalk to the east.<sup>44</sup>

In the spring of 1897, construction began on the Casino Pier, located just north of Blaker's, between Oak and Cedar Avenues and eventually occupying land on either side of the boardwalk. (Fig. 4.6) The Casino offered much the same kind of entertainment as Blaker's, and the two piers competed fiercely for summer tourists.<sup>45</sup> A historical atlas from 1909 indicates that, like Blaker's, the Casino had not yet introduced many mechanized rides. There were baths and a carousel located on the west side of the boardwalk, and a skating rink, bowling alley, pool room and another carousel on the pier extending out towards the ocean.<sup>46</sup> Visitors were treated to an eclectic mix of entertainment at the Casino, ranging from opera to a levitation act performed by a woman from Coney Island.<sup>47</sup> Moving picture theaters were also located nearby, creating a particularly dense concentration of public amusements, a pattern which persists today.<sup>48</sup> (Fig. 4.7) Though now relegated to the land-side of the boardwalk, there is still an amusement area called Casino Pier near the site of the original.

---

<sup>42</sup> Barbara St. Clair, "Before There was a Boardwalk, Piers Added to Resort's Popularity." Clipping, BM/WHS; Boyer, 60; Francis, et al., 17, 26.

<sup>43</sup> Francis, et al., 26-28, 45.

<sup>44</sup> Sanborn Map Company, *Insurance Maps of the New Jersey Coast, Cape May Co. Edition, Vol. 4* (New York: Sanborn Map Co., 1909).

<sup>45</sup> Francis, et al., 28-30.

<sup>46</sup> Sanborn Map Company, *Insurance Maps of the New Jersey Coast, Cape May Co. Edition, Vol. 4* (New York: Sanborn Map Co., 1909).

<sup>47</sup> Francis, et al., 44.

<sup>48</sup> Sanborn Map Company, *Insurance Maps of the New Jersey Coast, Cape May Co. Edition, Vol. 4* (New York: Sanborn Map Co., 1909).





**Fig. 4.5**  
Blaker's Pavilion, Wildwood, c. 1900

Reprinted from David W. Francis, Diane DeMali Francis and Robert J. Scully, Sr., *Wildwood By the Sea: The History of an American Resort*



**Fig. 4.6**  
The Casino Pier, Wildwood, 1907

Collection of the Boyer Museum/Wildwood Historical Society, Wildwood, NJ





**Fig. 4.7**  
Hunt's Comique theater, located near the Casino Pier, Wildwood, 1911

Collection of the Cape May County Historical and Genealogical Society, Cape May Courthouse, NJ



**Fig. 4.8**  
Night view of the Ocean Pier, Wildwood, c. 1910

Collection of the Boyer Museum/Wildwood Historical Society, Wildwood, NJ



Ocean Pier, located at the foot of Polar and Juniper Avenues, has been described as “elaborate, ostentatious and without rival” among the Wildwoods’ piers.<sup>49</sup> Developed by two Camden manufacturers, Herman Buckborn and Charles A. Reynolds, at a cost of \$150,000.00, construction began in 1904 and was complete in time for the 1905 season. The Pier was designed by Charles Brooke, a Philadelphia architect who was familiar with the amusement industry, having already designed a pavilion in Atlantic City.<sup>50</sup> By this time, Atlantic City had several amusement piers, including one owned by George Tilyou from Coney Island, which he named Steeplechase Pier, after his highly successful Steeplechase Park at Coney.<sup>51</sup>

Ocean Pier represented a new era of pier and pavilion design in the Wildwoods. Blaker’s Pavilion was little more than an oversized gazebo, with three sides open to the elements. The Casino was similarly primitive, with wide porches surrounding the simple frame structure, accented by rustic porch railings. Ocean Pier, on the other hand, was far more elaborate. (Fig. 4.8) The pier included a theater building, bathhouses, a carousel and at the end nearest the ocean, a pagoda. The main building was located on the boardwalk, and housed bowling alleys, a pool room, shuffle board, a shooting gallery and “every up-to-date device for the amusement of the general public” on the first floor, while a ball room and basketball court occupied the second floor. Two turrets dominated its profile, while a band of round-arched windows added to the primary facade’s classical formalism.

Ocean Pier was by no means austere, however. A thousand feet long, painted white with “cream ivory trimmings and the roofs in peacock green colorings,” the pier was “illuminated at night by thousands of bright and colored incandescent lamps,” creating a festive and exotic atmosphere similar to that at Coney Island, Willow Grove Park and many other

---

<sup>49</sup> Barbara St. Clair. “Boardwalk Provided Identity for Resort.” Clipping. BM/WHS.

<sup>50</sup> Francis, et al., 38-42; Sandra L. Tatman and Roger W. Moss, *Biographical Dictionary of Philadelphia Architects, 1700-1930* (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1985), 110-111.





parks of the period.<sup>52</sup> (Fig. 4.9) In addition, Ocean Pier frankly advertised its offerings to the public, announcing its eight bowling alleys, carousel and game room in gigantic lettering. In many respects, then, Ocean Pier was more akin to pavilions in Atlantic City than to its predecessors in the Wildwoods. (Fig. 4.10) Likewise, its spectacularly grand imagery was not unlike the structures at World's Fairs or those built at Willow Grove Park during this period, which aimed to create an exotic atmosphere and utilized a commercial architectural vocabulary.

Ocean Pier was leased to new managers in 1906 and expanded to include a roller skating rink and moving picture theater, and offered low-end entertainment such as Mrs. Doherty's Troupe of Snow White Poodles, a singing dog and magic shows.<sup>53</sup> The pier was reconfigured yet again in the 1910s, when the boardwalk was moved east and essentially bisected the pier. The theater building was suddenly on the land-side of the boardwalk, and the main pavilion was moved in order to retain its placement on the ocean-side of the pier.<sup>54</sup>

Blaker's, the Casino and Ocean Piers comprised the primary areas of recreation and amusement in the Wildwoods in the early 1900s. Other piers were constructed, but none rivaled these three in terms of popularity or range of amusements offered. The Wildwood Crest Pier opened in the southernmost resort in 1906 and, like the other piers, offered bowling, roller skating, bathhouses and a theater. It never managed to compete with its rivals to the north, however, and eventually focused on providing activities primarily for local residents. The Atlantic Pier in Holly Beach was built between 1909 and 1910 and offered bathhouses and refreshments, but was razed in 1934.<sup>55</sup> Visitors were apparently more drawn to the

---

<sup>51</sup> Francis, et al., 9.

<sup>52</sup> "Contract to Erect the New Ocean Pier Superstructure Awarded to Contractors Brannan & Goslin," Clipping, BM/WHS.

<sup>53</sup> Francis, et al., 42-43.

<sup>54</sup> "Boardwalk - Piers" file, BM/WHS.

<sup>55</sup> Francis, et al., 46-47, 114.





**Fig. 4.9**  
The Ocean Pier, Wildwood, c. 1910

Reprinted from David W. Francis, Diane DeMali Francis and Robert J. Scully, Sr., *Wildwood By the Sea: The History of an American Resort*



**Fig. 4.10**  
Wildwood's Ocean Pier greatly resembled Atlantic City's Steeplechase Pier, shown here c. 1900

Reprinted from Charles E. Funnell, *By the Beautiful Sea: The Rise and High Times of That Great American Resort, Atlantic City*



concentration of amusements at Blaker's, the Casino and Ocean Piers, and, consequently, these three piers were the most successful and the most persistent throughout the Wildwoods' history. The remainder of this chapter will be concerned primarily with the evolution of these piers, and their relationship to the surrounding landscape of the Wildwoods.

### *The Creation of a Landscape of Mechanized Fun, 1920s-1930s*

By the 1910s the Wildwoods had secured their place as a major resort destination in Cape May County. The year 1912 saw the merger of the towns of Holly Beach and Wildwood, the construction of an automobile bridge between the island and the mainland and, as mentioned previously, the arrival of the Delaware Bay Short Line Railroad.<sup>56</sup> In 1913 approximately 6,800 people came to the Wildwoods by train every Sunday.<sup>57</sup> Development seems to have slowed somewhat during World War One, when lumber shortages halted improvements at the piers and increases in the cost of railroad excursion tickets slowed visitorship.<sup>58</sup> The post-War period represented great growth for the Wildwoods and other Jersey shore resorts, however. The construction of a bridge spanning the Delaware River and linking Camden and Philadelphia increased access to and development at the shore.<sup>59</sup> The value of construction in the Wildwoods in 1919 totaled \$146,000.00, while the figure reached \$1 million in 1922.<sup>60</sup> Although historian John T. Cunningham argues that Cape May County's boom in the early 1920s was followed by a crash around 1926, the Wildwoods do not seem to have suffered much at the end of the decade.<sup>61</sup> Indeed, a 1928 newspaper article declared that season to be the Wildwoods' most successful to date, with fifty-nine organized excursions by

---

<sup>56</sup> Cunningham, 118.

<sup>57</sup> Boyer, 220.

<sup>58</sup> Francis, et al., 70.

<sup>59</sup> Cunningham, 118-119.

<sup>60</sup> Francis, et al., 74.

<sup>61</sup> Cunningham, 118-119.



companies, fraternal groups and labor unions, reflecting a working-class visitor demography.<sup>62</sup> The Depression slowed growth at the shore resorts, just as it represented a period of decline for public amusements in general; Willow Grove Park experienced very little development in the 1930s. Those who could afford to get away to the shore at all did not take long vacations, but, rather, came on weekend excursions.<sup>63</sup> While the Depression spelled the end of many public amusements, including hundreds of amusement parks, the Wildwoods managed to emerge from this period of stagnancy relatively unscathed. A historical atlas from 1937 indicates that the Wildwoods' year-round population of 8,117 grew to 65,000 during the summer months.<sup>64</sup>

In part, the Wildwoods' ability to weather economic peaks and valleys was related to its ability to accommodate the automobile, which by the 1930s had overtaken the railroad as the primary means of transportation to the shore. The impact of the automobile was first felt at the Jersey shore in the 1920s, a period when automobile ownership skyrocketed across the country and extended beyond even the middle class.<sup>65</sup> 14,000 people came to the shore by train the last weekend of July in 1928, while 25,000 cars brought 100,000 visitors. That Labor Day, 37,000 came by train, as compared to 175,000 who arrived by car.<sup>66</sup> Road construction and improvements in New Jersey in the 1920s encouraged the use of the automobile, a trend that, ultimately, had as great an impact on the shore as had the railroad in the previous century. Unlike trolley parks like Willow Grove, which were dependent on public transit, Wildwood could adjust to a culture increasingly oriented toward the automobile, as will be discussed in greater detail later.

---

<sup>62</sup> "Wildwood, NJ – Boardwalk" file, Newspaper Clippings Collection. TUUA: Francis, et al., 94.

<sup>63</sup> Dorwart, 217.

<sup>64</sup> Sanborn Map Company, *Insurance Maps of the New Jersey Coast, Cape May Co. Edition, Vol. 4* (New York: Sanborn Map Co., 1909, revised 1937).

<sup>65</sup> Wilson, 1953, 466; Warren James Belasco, *Americans on the Road: From Autocamp to Motel, 1910-1945* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1979), 106.

<sup>66</sup> Francis, et al., 98.





The fluctuations in the Wildwoods' economy and growth throughout this period are reflected in the development at the boardwalk and the piers, which became larger and were increasingly characterized by commercial, mechanized amusements. A number of large-scale civic improvements were implemented in the late 1920s. A \$500,000.00 Convention Hall, intended to make the Wildwoods competitive with Atlantic City and Asbury Park, was built at the boardwalk, near the foot of Spencer and Youngs Avenues, between 1926 and 1927. The boardwalk itself was moved and rebuilt, in sections, over the course of 1925 to 1928. An elaborate lighting system was incorporated into its design, creating a spectacular nighttime landscape which added to the festivity of the piers.<sup>67</sup>

The boardwalk was lined with a wide range of attractions by this time, and had begun to take on the feeling of a carnival. A 1928 newspaper article referred to auctions, tent shows, pawnbrokers and phrenologists, while another from that year cites "numerous protests about a show being operated on the Boardwalk with a barker and circus side-show literature on display." The Mayor closed down the concession until "they had done away with the undesirable signs, the barking and some of the exhibits."<sup>68</sup> Similar concerns about respectability were evident in the 1930s. In 1936, the town of Wildwood banned "beer, fortune tellers and freak shows along the walk" and, two years later, North Wildwood prohibited "barkers, loud speakers, penny games, gypsies, fortune telling and mind reading."<sup>69</sup> With the growth in the popularity of the resort, apparently, came some boardwalk activities that were feared to contribute to a less than respectable atmosphere. Just as Willow Grove had tried to project a refined image, some were anxious that the Wildwoods not become another Coney Island.

---

<sup>67</sup> "Wildwood, NJ – Boardwalk" file, Newspaper Clippings Collection, TUUA: Francis, et al., 95.

<sup>68</sup> "Wildwood, NJ – Boardwalk" file, Newspaper Clippings Collection, TUUA.

<sup>69</sup> Francis, et al., 111.



The amusement piers in the Wildwoods began to embrace mechanized amusement devices during this period. Ocean Pier was the first to add a roller coaster, the Yankee Dip, though it operated only for the 1916 season. The city, again in an effort to maintain decorum, made a number of demands regarding the coaster. City officials insisted that it close by 11:30 at night, and raised the license fee for the ride, effectively shutting it down.<sup>70</sup> But other coasters – and additional rides – were soon to follow. In 1918, Edward Rhoads of Philadelphia purchased the block occupied in part by Blaker’s Theater, at the boardwalk between Cedar and Schellenger Avenues, and developed the balance of it into The Amusement Center. A new carousel was installed that first season and, in December of 1918, Rhoads hired roller coaster designer John Miller to create two coaster rides. The Jack Rabbit and Ye Old Mill opened for the 1919 season and, unlike the ill-fated Yankee Dip, lasted for decades. The Jack Rabbit, a classic wooden roller coaster design, was not dismantled until 1984.<sup>71</sup> In addition to being the first significant mechanized rides at the Wildwoods, it should be noted that these rides, or ones similar to them, were found at amusement parks across the country. Residents of Philadelphia, then, might well have gone on the Old Mill rides at both the Wildwoods and Willow Grove Park. As discussed in Chapter Two, amusement parks were remarkably similar, copying one another and, importantly, trying to keep up with the expectations of their visitors.

Though originally constructed on a pier on the east side of the boardwalk, the Jack Rabbit and Ye Old Mill found themselves on the west side of the walk after the boardwalk was moved in 1920-1921.<sup>72</sup> A historical atlas from 1923 shows that the rides at The Amusement Center were packed into a relatively small area. The Old Mill and the Jack Rabbit were nestled

---

<sup>70</sup> Francis, et al., 48.

<sup>71</sup> Francis, et al., 90-91, 213; Todd H. Throgmorton, *Roller Coasters of America* (Osceola, WI: Motorola International Publishers, 1994), 93.

<sup>72</sup> Francis, et al., 76.



up against one another, and vied for space with the carousel and the Cuddle Up.<sup>73</sup> (Figs. 4.11 and 4.12) The entrance to The Amusement Center was designed to get the attention of passersby and, like the Ocean Pier pavilion, incorporated turrets and electric lights into its design. The profile of the roller coaster against the sky created an iconic symbol, signifying thrills and adventure with its undulating tracks and latticework structure.<sup>74</sup> (Figs. 4.13 and 4.14)

The Amusement Center was sold in 1926 and again in 1928, to the Cedar-Schellenger Corporation, which renamed it Playland. In 1931 the company built another pier on the site, at least the third since Blaker's first one in the 1890s. The Marine Pier included a Ferris wheel, miniature golf, a caterpillar ride and a miniature railroad, which ran beneath the structure of the pier. Playland was revamped in the 1930s; among the new additions was the Mystery Castle, which was tucked in below the Jack Rabbit roller coaster. At both The Amusement Center and Marine Pier, then, rides were densely packed, in some cases creating multiple layers of attractions.<sup>75</sup> As will be discussed in Chapter Five, the density of rides, a pattern which was established at The Amusement Center in the 1920s, remains an important characteristic of the piers today.

The Ocean Pier also reinvented itself several times in the 1920s and 1930s, constantly upgrading in order to retain its position as "queen of the Wildwood piers."<sup>76</sup> The pier was sold to the Wildwood Pier and Realty Company for \$350,000.00 around 1921, and the new owners made over \$50,000.00 of improvements shortly thereafter. A Ferris wheel was added, a new

---

<sup>73</sup> Sanborn Map Company. *Insurance Maps of the New Jersey Coast, Cape May Co. Edition, Vol. 4* (New York: Sanborn Map Co., 1909, revised 1923).

<sup>74</sup> For a discussion of the symbolism of roller coasters, see J. Meredith Neil, "The Roller Coaster: Architectural Symbol and Sign." *Journal of Popular Culture* 15, no. 1 (Summer 1981): 108-115.

<sup>75</sup> Francis, et al., 92, 119-120.

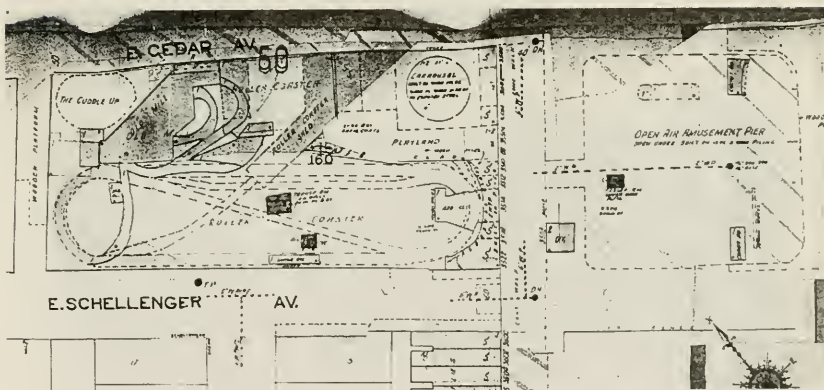
<sup>76</sup> Francis, et al., 85.





**Fig. 4.11**  
 Entrance to the Jack Rabbit and Old Mill ride at The Amusement Center,  
 Wildwood, 1924

Collection of the Boyer Museum/Wildwood Historical Society, Wildwood, NJ



**Fig. 4.12**  
 Map showing the configuration of the rides at The Amusement Center,  
 Wildwood, 1921

Sanborn Map Company, *Insurance Maps of the New Jersey Coast, Cape May Co. Edition, Vol. 4*,  
 1909, revised, 1921, pl. 109







**Fig. 4.13**  
The Amusement Center, Wildwood, c. 1945

Collection of the Boyer Museum/Wildwood Historical Society, Wildwood, NJ



**Fig. 4.14**  
Posing on the Wildwood beach, with the Jack Rabbit roller coaster in the background, 1927

Collection of the Cape May County Historical and Genealogical Society, Cape May Courthouse, NJ



pavilion was built and a 37'-0" x 80'-0" electric sign was installed, intended to lure visitors inside. When the boardwalk was widened in 1925, the pier was renovated and renamed Funchase, reflecting its emphasis on leisure for the sake of leisure, and representing a shift from the resort's early days, when the main draw was the healthful benefits of sea-bathing.<sup>77</sup> The main pavilion was significantly altered at this time. (Fig. 4.15) Exotic domed minarets sat atop the original turrets, while a whole new entrance was built onto the existing facade. A columned portico, topped with a balustrade dotted with urns, marked the front entry, while striped roofs recalled circus tents. The result was an eclectic mix of Georgian Revival, Moorish exotic and carnivalesque, appropriate to the increasingly spectacular atmosphere of the Wildwoods' boardwalk and reflective of amusement park architecture in general.

Ocean Pier was sold again in 1935, to William C. Hunt, who renamed it Hunt's Ocean Pier and, once again, renovated. (Fig. 4.16) Freshly painted signs announced "Hunt's *New Ocean Pier*" and its forty attractions, which promised "Laughs! Fun! Roars! Thrills! and Chills!" Hunt hired a manager with experience at George Tilyou's Steeplechase Pier in Atlantic City, and "rapidly transformed [it] into a first-class amusement pier,"<sup>78</sup> one that emphasized mechanical amusement rides. New attractions in the 1930s included the Kelly Slide, in which visitors slid down to a bowl at the bottom of a slope; a Roulette Wheel, which spun patrons around, and threw them together; the Barrel, which challenged people to walk through a rotating cylinder without falling down; and a Haunted House, which featured a vibrating floor. A miniature railroad, Tunnel of Love, Ferris wheel, roller coaster and Bumper Cars were also available.<sup>79</sup> Like the amusement parks it mimicked (Coney Island and Willow

---

<sup>77</sup> "Boardwalk – Piers" file, BM/WHS.

<sup>78</sup> Francis, et al., 115.

<sup>79</sup> *Hunt's Ocean Pier Keeps Summer Vacationists Smiling Rain or Shine*, promotional brochure, 1937, "Boardwalk" file, BM/WHS; Francis, et al., 115-118.





**Fig. 4.15**  
The Ocean Pier, Wildwood, after its remodeling and transformation into "Funchase," c. 1925

Reprinted from David W. Francis, Diane DeMali Francis and Robert J. Scully, Sr.,  
*Wildwood By the Sea: The History of an American Resort*



**Fig. 4.16**  
Hunt's Ocean Pier, Wildwood, c. 1936

Reprinted from David W. Francis, Diane DeMali Francis and Robert J. Scully, Sr.,  
*Wildwood By the Sea: The History of an American Resort*



Grove Park offered many of the same attractions),<sup>80</sup> Funchase celebrated frivolity and encouraged consumerism.

Other piers came and went in the period between the Wars, including the short-lived Luff's Excursion Pier, built around 1919 by the Luff family, who had previous experience at Palisades Amusement Park, across from Manhattan in New Jersey. When it first opened, Luff's Pier only offered one mechanized ride, the Whip, and could not compete with the bigger, more established piers to the north.<sup>81</sup> It was razed when the boardwalk was rebuilt in 1925.<sup>82</sup> The Atlantic Pier met a similar fate, and was demolished in 1934, while the Crest Pier hung on at least through the 1930s, appearing on an atlas from 1937.<sup>83</sup> A new pavilion, Sportland, was developed by William Lipkin of Philadelphia in the late 1920s, and designed by the architectural firm Magaziner, Eberhard and Harris, with Art Deco detailing, including a frieze with a fanciful wave design.<sup>84</sup> Located at the boardwalk between 23<sup>rd</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> Avenues in North Wildwood, Sportland eventually was expanded into Sportland Pier. At the time of its opening on June 30, 1928, it included retail stores, a giant seawater pool, ball courts, running tracks and bathhouses. Sportland would not be developed into a center for mechanized amusement rides until the 1930s and 1940s. While lagging behind some of the other piers in this respect, Sportland was very forward-thinking in its incorporation of a 1000-car parking lot into its scheme.<sup>85</sup>

Indeed, by the late 1920s the automobile's importance was already becoming apparent. "Touring" – taking short, excursion rides in private automobiles – became a popular American

---

<sup>80</sup> Sanborn Map Company, *Willow Grove and Vicinity, Montgomery County, Pennsylvania* (New York: Sanborn Map Co., May 1930); Willow Grove Park brochure, 1940. Hagley Museum Library and Archives, Wilmington, DE.

<sup>81</sup> Francis, et al., 83-85.

<sup>82</sup> "Wildwood, NJ – Boardwalk" file, Newspaper Clippings Collection, TUUA.

<sup>83</sup> Francis, et al., 114; Sanborn Map Company, *Insurance Maps of the New Jersey Coast, Cape May Co. Edition, Vol. 4* (New York: Sanborn Map Co., 1909, revised 1937).

<sup>84</sup> Magaziner, Eberhard and Harris, architectural drawings. "Recreation Center, Wildwood," 28 February 1928. The Athenaeum of Philadelphia, Philadelphia, PA.





activity in the 1920s, spawning tourist camps and hotels across the country. Promoted as less expensive than rail travel, driving was also regarded as more democratic, being unrestrained by schedules and emphasizing the freedom of the individual. The price of cars plummeted in the 1920s, resulting in a dramatic increase in ownership.<sup>86</sup> As of 1917, there were 4.6 million cars registered in the United States, while in 1926, 19.2 million cars were on the road.<sup>87</sup> Automobiles – and the roads on which they traveled – were seen as a means of recreation in themselves.<sup>88</sup> The novelty of the automobile was also part of its appeal, and the ride in the car was at least as fun as the destination: “...the automobile acquired the same connotations of escapism as the amusement park.... Speeding in a car, as on an amusement ride, was said to strike a primordial cord.”<sup>89</sup>

Automobile touring was a popular activity in the Mid-Atlantic states, with many residents of Philadelphia, New York City and the interior of New Jersey travelling to the Jersey shore by car. Although more people arrived at the shore via train than by car in the 1920s, the ratio would soon be reversed.<sup>90</sup> As early as 1925, publications of the Keystone Automobile Club, which was based in Philadelphia, included directions to the Wildwoods among their proposed tour routes, reflecting the new role of the automobile in getting to the shore.<sup>91</sup> (Fig. 4.17) By the 1930s, 85% of visitors to New Jersey’s shore came by automobile.<sup>92</sup> The merger of the Pennsylvania and Reading Railroads in 1933 reflected the relative lack of riders on the

---

<sup>85</sup> Francis, et al., 87-88, 114, 133.

<sup>86</sup> Belasco, 19-20; John A. Jakle, “Landscapes Redesigned for the Automobile.” in *The Making of the American Landscape*, ed. Michael P. Conzen (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1990), 294.

<sup>87</sup> Belasco, 106.

<sup>88</sup> Jakle, 299.

<sup>89</sup> Peter J. Ling, *America and the Automobile: Technology, Reform and Social Change* (New York: Manchester University Press, 1990), 121.

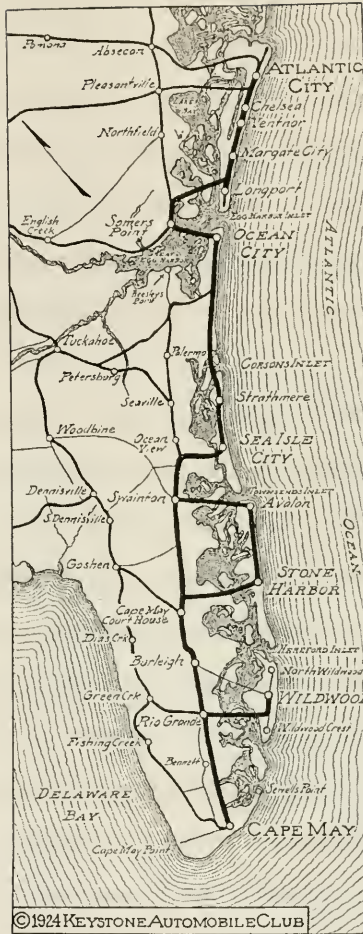
<sup>90</sup> Wilson, 1953, 823-825.

<sup>91</sup> Keystone Automobile Club, *Eastern Tours* (Philadelphia, PA: Keystone Automobile Club, 1925), Keystone Automobile Club/American Automobile Association Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>92</sup> Francis, et al., 105.



Route 32



**Fig. 4.17**

Map showing automobile routes to the Jersey shore, including the Wildwoods, as shown in a 1925 publication of the Keystone Automobile Club

Collection of the Keystone Automobile Club/American Automobile Association. Philadelphia, PA



trains; there simply was not enough demand to warrant two railroads. The two companies consolidated their services into the Pennsylvania-Reading Seashore Line and, after removing duplicate rails, operated only one line to the Wildwoods.<sup>93</sup> Dramatic decreases in ridership led to the Pennsylvania-Reading Seashore Line's threatening to close the line between Philadelphia and Wildwood in the 1940s.<sup>94</sup> The spur to Wildwood Crest was abandoned in 1958, and the railroad attempted to shut down the lines on several occasions in the 1960s, a request which was repeatedly denied by the Public Utility Commission. Finally, train service to the Wildwoods ended in 1973.<sup>95</sup>

Improvements to existing roads, and construction of new thoroughfares, both reflected and encouraged the rise of the automobile. A massive road-building campaign was undertaken in Cape May County between 1900 and 1915, and the New Jersey State Highway system was established in the first decade of the twentieth century.<sup>96</sup> Philadelphia and Camden gained increased automobile access to Cape May and Atlantic Counties with the repaving of the White Horse Pike, completed in 1922, and improvements to the Black Horse Pike in the 1930s.<sup>97</sup> The landscape of the Wildwoods began to reflect the prominence of the automobile fairly early on. The dramatic expansion of the amusement piers in the 1920s and 1930s was a response to the demands of a growing tourist population, which was in turn the direct consequence of the increased accessibility of the Jersey shore. Related to this expansion was a dramatic increase in the number of accommodations for visitors. A 1937 atlas shows hotels throughout the resorts,

---

<sup>93</sup> Wilson, 1953, 851.

<sup>94</sup> Dorwart, 233.

<sup>95</sup> Francis, et al., 167, 184, 200.

<sup>96</sup> Dorwart, 177-178.

<sup>97</sup> Wilson, 1953, 837-838; Wilson, 1964, 94-95.



especially in the towns of Wildwood and North Wildwood. Like the Sportland amusement center, many had begun to include parking lots for the use of their patrons.<sup>98</sup>

*The Era of the Automobile, 1940s – 1960s: The Present-Day Landscape is Solidified*

The period during and after World War Two represented an economic boom for the Wildwoods, and was marked by large numbers of visitors and extensive development. During World War Two, Wildwood courted servicemen from the nearby naval air station at Cape May. According to historian Jeffery Dorwart, “While Ocean City restricted shirtless bathing for men, banned liquor, and frowned upon noisy amusements, Wildwood became a wide-open resort.” Consequently, the resort’s movie theaters, musical venues and amusement piers were packed with visitors during and after the War.<sup>99</sup> Tourists spent \$400 million at the Jersey shore in 1946, a figure which rose to \$1.7 billion in 1956. A newspaper article from 1958 declared 1957 to have been the Wildwoods’ biggest season ever, and noted that 1958 looked as promising. Another article estimated that as many as 250,000 to 300,000 people, mostly from Philadelphia, flocked to the resort on a typical summer weekend.<sup>100</sup>

The construction of the Garden State Parkway, which reached Cape May City in 1955, greatly increased the accessibility of the south Jersey shore from points north, most notably New York City, but also New England and even Canada.<sup>101</sup> Despite the Wildwood Mayor’s insistence in 1958 that the resort catered “to the working man and his wife,”<sup>102</sup> by the mid-1960s the Wildwoods’ reputation was rambunctious compared to some other New Jersey shore

---

<sup>98</sup> Sanborn Map Company, *Insurance Maps of the New Jersey Coast, Cape May Co. Edition, Vol. 4* (New York: Sanborn Map Co., 1909, revised 1937).

<sup>99</sup> Dorwart, 231.

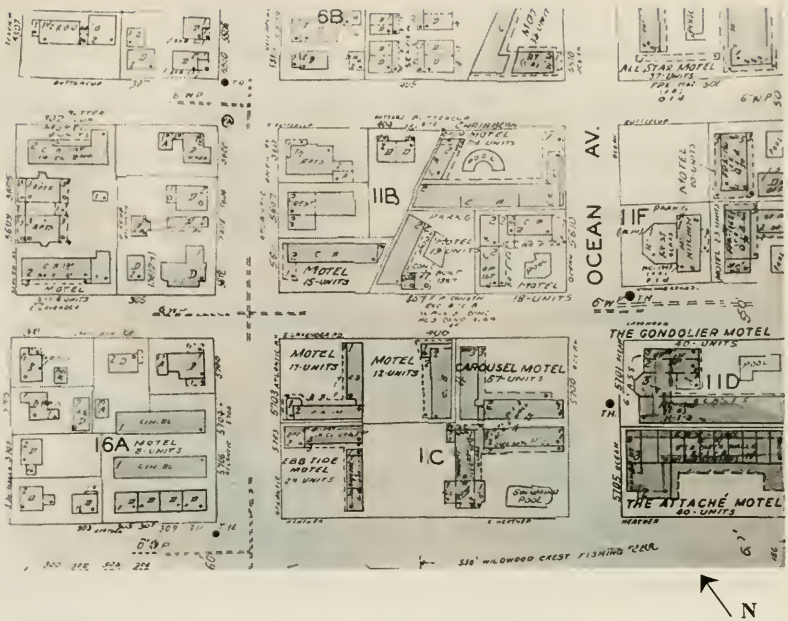
<sup>100</sup> “Wildwood, NJ – History” file, “Wildwood, NJ – Boardwalk” file, Newspaper Clippings Collection, TUUA; Francis et al., 140.

<sup>101</sup> “Wildwood, NJ – Visitors” file, Newspaper Clippings Collection, TUUA; Dorwart, 235; Francis et al., 166; Wilson, 1964, 96-97.

<sup>102</sup> “Wildwood, NJ – Boardwalk” file, Newspaper Clippings Collection, TUUA.







**Fig. 4.18**  
Map showing motel development in Wildwood Crest, 1958

Sanborn Map Company. *Insurance Maps of the New Jersey Coast, Cape May Co. Edition, Vol. 4.* 1909, revised 1958, pl. 32



towns, which were considered “intimate, quiet, ‘family-type’ towns.”<sup>103</sup> The resort experienced significant development at the boardwalk and piers and elsewhere in town. The Wildwoods’ numerous nightclubs earned it the nickname “Little Las Vegas,” while scores of motels cropped up, reflecting not only the popularity of the resort, but also the role that the automobile played in getting the people there.<sup>104</sup> (Fig. 4.18) The Wildwoods thrived in the era of the automobile, and its landscape reflected it.

The boardwalk and the amusement piers continued to evolve in the post-War period, although their basic function and configuration remained remarkably the same. The Marine Pier and Playland continued to add new attractions, with over twenty rides and two miniature golf courses in the 1950s. The pier was expanded in the 1960s to make room for a Haunted House and the Wild Mouse, an early and popular type of steel roller coaster (which still operates today, though in a different location). (Fig. 4.19) Playland and Marine Pier, then, continued to be densely packed with amusement rides and attractions. The Casino arcade, just north of Playland, underwent major renovations in 1949, installing a number of mechanized rides, as well as the Florida Seminole Indian Village, which featured wrestling alligators.<sup>105</sup> Like countless attractions at World’s Fairs and amusement parks before it, the Indian Village offered visitors a taste of the “exotic.”

The most dramatic transformation occurred on the site of Hunt’s Ocean Pier, which was destroyed by fire the night of December 24, 1943, taking with it a dozen businesses and several apartments.<sup>106</sup> The site sat empty until 1956, when Hunt’s Pier was constructed, and quickly resumed its position as leader of the Wildwoods’ piers. Children’s rides, a new wooden roller

---

<sup>103</sup> Cunningham, 111.

<sup>104</sup> Francis, et al., 136, 161.

<sup>105</sup> Francis, et al., 159, 180.

<sup>106</sup> Francis, et al., 136; Dorwart, 226; Roberts and Youmans, 115.





**Fig. 4.19**  
Marine Pier,  
Wildwood,  
1960s

Reprinted from  
David W. Francis,  
Diane DeMali  
Francis and Robert  
J. Scully, Sr.,  
*Wildwood By the  
Sea: The History of  
an American Resort*



**Fig. 4.20**  
Jungleland at  
Hunt's Pier,  
Wildwood,  
c. 1960

Reprinted from  
David W. Francis,  
Diane DeMali  
Francis and Robert J.  
Scully, Sr.,  
*Wildwood By the  
Sea. The History of  
an American Resort*



coaster called the Flyer and a variety of other attractions were installed in time for its opening season. The pier was expanded in 1958 and again in 1959, when Jungleland was added. Jungleland consisted of fourteen passenger boats that carried visitors through a series of animated scenes depicting Africa.<sup>107</sup> (Fig. 4.20) Though in some ways the ride reflected the impact of Disneyland, which specialized in rides with “exotic” themes, Jungleland also can be regarded as an extension of a long-standing amusement park feature, recalling rides like Venice at Willow Grove Park, which offered visitors the chance to visit a “virtual” Italy. In addition, like many of the rides at turn-of-the-century amusement parks such as Willow Grove, or the “anthropological villages” found on World’s Fair midways, Jungleland utilized iconic architectural forms to convey its purpose. “Primitive” huts, with carved figures and exterior finishes resembling animal prints, gave visitors a taste of what awaited them inside.

In 1960 Hunt’s Pier was expanded yet again, this time to make room for the Golden Nugget Mine Ride, an early example of a steel roller coaster, augmented with extensive audio and visual effects to give the feeling of being in “a three-story replica of a gold mine.”<sup>108</sup> The Golden Nugget Mine Ride still operates, and is one in a long line of roller coaster rides that mimic the experience of being in a mine, stretching back to the Saint Nicholas Coal Mine at Willow Grove and even further, to the roller coaster’s origins in Mauch Chunk, Pennsylvania. Indeed, a magazine for roller coaster enthusiasts has referred to the Golden Nugget Mine Train as “the closest thing to the bygone Scenic Railways of the turn of the century.”<sup>109</sup>

Massive motel development accompanied the construction at the Wildwoods’ amusement piers in the 1950s and 1960s, and still leaves its mark on the landscape. With the influx of visitors drawn to the ocean and boardwalk, turn-of-the-century hotels and boarding

---

<sup>107</sup> Francis, et al., 155-158; “Boardwalk – Piers” file, BM/WHS.

<sup>108</sup> Francis, et al., 176; “Wildwood, NJ – Piers” file, Newspaper Clippings Collection, TUUA.

<sup>109</sup> Torrence V. Jenkins, “Lost Coasters of Wildwood, New Jersey,” clipping, BM/WHS.





houses were quickly replaced by motels that offered modern conveniences like air conditioning and television. The resort's first motels were built in the towns of North Wildwood and Wildwood, and later, after the relaxation of zoning regulations in the mid-1950s, Wildwood Crest. Over \$8 million was spent on the construction of new motels between 1955 and 1958, and over 2500 units were added between 1958 and 1963. Six hundred motels were in place by 1972.<sup>110</sup>

Though motels first began to appear on the American landscape in the 1920s and 1930s, it wasn't until the 1950s that they became commonplace and attention was given to their design. Early motels often utilized imagery that created associations for the visitor, either familiar or strange, but always meant to be enticing. Motels executed in a colonial style or made to look like log cabins recalled the American past, while other establishments chose the lure of the exotic and tropical.<sup>111</sup> By employing nostalgic or exotic motifs, motels attempted to offer visitors a sense of escape from time and place not unlike that offered by the thrills of amusement rides. Motel names like the Tahiti, the Royal Hawaiian, the Waikiki and the Caribbean referenced tropical locales that many of the tourists in the Wildwoods would never visit. Motels such as the Satellite and the Astronaut conveyed the optimism and pride of the period with their futuristic themes.<sup>112</sup> (Figs. 4.21 and 4.22)

A typical motel was one- to two-stories tall, and formed a courtyard surrounding a pool, which was easily visible from a passing car. Low curbs facilitated a quick and easy entry, and large numbers of parking spaces – either right out front or, sometimes, underneath a motel built on pilings – were provided for patrons. Large and elaborate signs, lit up at night, attracted

---

<sup>110</sup> Francis, et al., 143, 198; "Wildwood, NJ – Visitors" file and "Wildwood, NJ – Boardwalk" file, Newspaper Clippings Collection. TUUA.

<sup>111</sup> Belasco, 171; Beecher, 117.

<sup>112</sup> Mid-Atlantic Center for the Arts, Doo Wop Tour of the Wildwoods, 8 November 1998.





**Fig. 4.21**  
The Caribbean motel, 5600 Ocean Avenue, Wildwood Crest, 1998

Photograph by the author



**Fig. 4.22**  
The Tahiti motel, 7411 Atlantic Avenue, Wildwod Crest, 1998

Photograph by the author





**Fig. 4.23**  
The Stardust motel, 3900 Ocean Avenue, Wildwood, 1998

Photograph by the author



attention and helped to distinguish each motel from the next one on the strip.<sup>113</sup> (Fig. 4.23)

Motels were part of a general transformation of the American landscape as it was adapted to the automobile. Pedestrian-scaled main streets were replaced by commercial strips that utilized massive signs and iconic imagery to catch the eye of passing drivers. Architectural expressions such as ice cream stands housed in gigantic ice cream cones, and outsized neon signs pointing travelers to food and gas exemplified mid-twentieth century “roadside architecture.”<sup>114</sup>

These forms had counterparts in the early twentieth century, however. As discussed in Chapter Three, commercial structures along the Midway at the 1915 World’s Fair in San Francisco utilized iconographic imagery as a means of conveying their function to visitors. These buildings anticipated the attention-grabbing architecture of the mid-twentieth century, which saw a “nationwide exploitation of Midway ‘signature architecture’ in which form quite literally followed function.”<sup>115</sup> The Wildwoods began to exhibit a commercialized architectural vocabulary as early as 1905, with the construction of the Ocean Pier. The rides at Willow Grove Park in the 1910s utilized iconic forms to advertise their function, including the train shed structure that housed Tours of the World and the St. Nicholas Coal Mine breaker. During the same period, the Wildwoods’ boardwalk included numerous structures whose forms were intended to attract attention and encourage consumption. A lemonade stand took the form of a giant lemon, the Abbott Boardwalk Cow dispensed cold milk from its udders and the Vineland Grape Juice Pavilion incorporated a 12’-0” tall metal juice bottle into its design.<sup>116</sup>

---

<sup>113</sup> Mary Anne Beecher, “The Motel in Builder’s Literature and Architectural Publications,” in *Roadside America: The Automobile in Design and Culture*, ed. Jan Jennings (Ames, IA: Iowa State University Press, 1990): 115-124; Cunningham, 135.

<sup>114</sup> For information on the transformation of America’s main streets, see Chester Liebs, *Main Street to Miracle Mile: American Roadside Architecture* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1985), 39-73. This source also includes information on specific types of roadside buildings, including motels.

<sup>115</sup> Barbara Rubin. “Aesthetic Ideology and Urban Design.” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*. 69, no. 3 (September 1979): 353.

<sup>116</sup> Francis, et al., 52.





Just as these early-twentieth century examples represented a commercialized architecture of their period, the 1950s Wildwoods' motels typified mid-century roadside architectural form. It is perhaps not surprising, then, that the motels and piers utilized some of the same exotic motifs. Jungleland did not look all that different from the Tahiti motel, with its steep-roofed huts and palm trees. (Fig. 4.22) Likewise, the main pavilion at the Ocean Pier after its 1920s renovations presented an eclectic assortment of architectural motifs that, in their strange juxtaposition, create the same sense of incongruity as does the Singapore motel, which takes the form of a Chinese pagoda standing on the Wildwoods shore.

By the mid-1960s, the landscape of the Wildwoods had been reshaped, but the new developments all related to the old. The boardwalk still ran along the shore, though the ocean was growing farther away with the constant expansion of the beach. The three principal amusement centers remained in place, albeit transformed to meet the demands of contemporary audiences. Even the Wildwoods' motels, the appearance of which was very modern, had their roots, in part, in the architecture and imagery of the piers. Despite the changes wrought by the constant need to update and modernize, the landscape of the Wildwoods retained a sense of continuity with the past.

### *Stagnation and Redevelopment*

After the 1950s boom, the popularity of the Wildwoods began to decline in the 1960s and 1970s. The resort had earned a reputation for being rowdy and unsafe, keeping some visitors, particularly families, away. An increase in the number of visitors from Montreal, where the Wildwoods were known as "the small Florida," helped keep the resorts afloat in the early 1970s, but gas shortages and unfavorable exchange rates caused the Canadians' numbers



to dwindle by the end of the decade.<sup>117</sup> Development continued at the piers, where visitor expectations and safety standards created a constant need for updating, but slowed markedly elsewhere.

Today, the Wildwoods boardwalk is approximately two and a half miles long, running most of the length of North Wildwood and Wildwood, though not extending to Wildwood Crest at the southern end of the island. The section of the boardwalk which has historically been the locus of activity is still a primary focus of the resort. The Casino Pier, now land-locked, still bears the name of the original pier which was built at that site in the 1890s. The site originally occupied by Blaker's Pavilion, and eventually developed into Playland and Marine Pier, was divided between two owners when the Cedar-Schellenger Corporation sold in 1976. The portion occupied by Playland, west of the boardwalk, was purchased by the Nickels family and is now known as Nickels' Midway Pier. The eastern portion of the property, Marine Pier, was purchased by the Morey family, who renamed it Mariner's Landing.<sup>118</sup> Finally, the original site of Ocean Pier, later known as Hunt's Pier, was closed down in the 1980s and lingered in a state of disrepair. It reopened as Atlantic Pier in 1995, and was reborn the following season as Dinosaur Beach Adventure Theme Park, with many of its rides redesigned to incorporate prehistoric motifs, reflecting the industry's growing emphasis on theme parks.<sup>119</sup>

Despite the landscape's continuing evolution, the Wildwoods maintain a tangible connection with their history. The boardwalk and amusement piers, though altered, are a material reminder of what used to be a common Jersey shore resort landscape. In addition, the survival of this landscape has facilitated the survival of another significant though less tangible aspect of the Wildwoods, its continuity of use as a landscape of popular recreation. The

---

<sup>117</sup> Francis, et al., 171, 191; "Wildwood, NJ – Visitors" file. Newspaper Clippings Collection. TUUA.

<sup>118</sup> Barbara St. Clair, "Moreys Expand Amusement Piers with Water Parks, Thrilling Rides." clipping, "Wildwood Boardwalk. Amusement Rides" binder, BM/WHS.



landscape of the Wildwoods also speaks to the history of American amusement parks in general. The development of the Wildwoods has been shaped by the same cultural forces that influenced turn-of-the-century trolley parks, and the Wildwoods' amusement piers continue to offer visitors a similar sense of escape and adventure. The following chapter will critically examine the Wildwoods' present-day landscape and its relationship to the past in an effort to assess its overall integrity. Significant historical characteristics, both tangible and intangible, will be identified so that they may be retained even as the evolution of the Wildwoods continues. Finally, consideration will be given to the issues surrounding the preservation of a landscape which is characterized by, and, in fact, obtains some of its meaning from, constant change.



## Chapter Five

### *Preserving the Ephemeral: The Wildwoods as a Dynamic Cultural Landscape*

*One of the greatest difficulties in any landscape-management program is the application of a preservation philosophy to the dynamic quality inherent in historic landscapes – a resource in which change, function, and use are as significant as design and material. ...a landscape must be managed as a process, and not an object.<sup>1</sup>*

Although greatly changed since their inception at the turn of the century, the boardwalk and amusement piers in the Wildwoods continue to serve their historical function as a site of popular recreation. As a product of the interaction between the built and the natural environments, the Wildwoods' boardwalk and piers constitute a cultural landscape with features, both tangible and intangible, that reflect its historical evolution. As discussed in Chapter Four, the Wildwoods landscape was once a common one along the Jersey shore and, to the extent that it still retains historical authenticity, can provide a tangible link with this regional form. In addition, because American amusement parks, whether located at the sea or at the end of a trolley line, displayed such remarkable similarities, the Wildwoods can serve as a reminder of this manifestation of American popular culture in general.

---

<sup>1</sup> Nora J. Mitchell and Robert R. Page, "Managing the Past for the Future: The Stewardship of America's Landscape Legacy," *Historic Preservation Forum*, 7, no. 3 (May/June 1993): 49.





In recent years, the historic preservation field has come to recognize the inherently dynamic nature of cultural landscapes, whether designed or vernacular, and the need to accommodate change in the management of these historic resources. The category of “cultural landscape” was first officially recognized by the National Park Service in 1988, and there is a growing interest in the identification and management of such sites on both the national and international level.<sup>2</sup> The particular issues surrounding the preservation of dynamic properties, however, call into question some previously accepted axioms of the field. Traditional approaches to preservation have favored treating properties as isolated monuments with a fixed period of significance, and have concentrated on preserving the physical fabric of a site rather than on perpetuating its historical function.<sup>3</sup> Some preservationists have begun to argue, however, that cultural landscapes constitute “a resource in which change, function, and use are as significant as design and material.”<sup>4</sup> Similarly, recognizing that cultural landscapes represent a continuum incorporating the past, present and future use of a site can be at odds with traditional interpretations of a site’s “period of significance,” which assumes a fixed beginning and end.<sup>5</sup> Consequently, these resources demand a different management approach, one which accommodates the maintenance of material integrity while also allowing for physical change.

In their article, “Managing the Past for the Future: The Stewardship of America’s Landscape Legacy,” Nora Mitchell and Robert Page, though primarily concerned with

---

<sup>2</sup> Mitchell and Page, 47. The InterAmerican Symposium on Authenticity in the Conservation and Management of Cultural Heritage, sponsored by the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) and held in San Antonio, Texas in March, 1996 addressed the issue of managing cultural landscapes. See, for example, position papers written by the ICOMOS United States Committee, *Evaluating Authenticity: Reflections Based on the United States Experience* and by the ICOMOS Canada Committee, *Authenticity in Canadian Conservation Practice*.

<sup>3</sup> Melody Webb, “Cultural Landscapes in the National Park Service,” *The Public Historian*, 9, no. 2 (Spring 1987): 84.

<sup>4</sup> Mitchell and Page, 49.

<sup>5</sup> United States Department of the Interior, *National Register Bulletin 16A: How to Complete the National Register Registration Form* (Washington, DC: United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1991), 43.



vernacular landscapes with significant biological resources, argue that

When the use of the landscape is one of the primary reasons for its significance, management must attempt to achieve a balance between providing for the perpetuation of the land use and retaining the tangible evidence that is representative of its history. Physical change may be essential to the continuation of the land use.<sup>6</sup>

The landscape of the Wildwoods derives its cultural significance in part from its historically continuous use as a site of popular leisure. Like other landscapes of recreation, such as Willow Grove Park, the Wildwoods have long been characterized by change, and have been continuously reinvented in order to fulfill their function as a place of excitement and escape. The inherently ephemeral nature of this landscape, then, is part of what makes it significant; the continuation of this landscape into the future requires an approach to preservation which accommodates for continued change.

The development of a comprehensive preservation policy for a cultural landscape requires a strong and specific understanding of the site's historical development and an identification of the landscape's character-defining features.<sup>7</sup> Building on the history detailed in Chapter Four, this chapter will enumerate those features of the Wildwoods' boardwalk and amusement piers that contribute significantly to the character of the landscape and evaluate the degree to which these elements have maintained their authenticity. Consideration will then be given to the feasibility of incorporating these characteristics into the existing preservation framework of the Wildwoods. By identifying the site's historically significant features and the current context for preservation, it is hoped that this study can serve as a basis for a more complete preservation program, so that the Wildwoods' heritage may persist into the future.

---

<sup>6</sup> Mitchell and Page, 53.



## *Assessing Authenticity in a Landscape of Change*

The United States Department of the Interior defines integrity as “the ability of a property to convey its significance,” and includes seven aspects of integrity for consideration: location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling and association.<sup>8</sup> In the United States, the terms “integrity” and “authenticity” are generally used interchangeably, while some international preservation professionals make a distinction in terminology.<sup>9</sup> At the InterAmerican Symposium on Authenticity in the Conservation and Management of the Cultural Heritage, held in San Antonio, Texas in March 1996, members of the National Committees of the Americas of the International Council on Monuments and Sites wrote the following:

We recognize that in certain types of heritage sites, such as cultural landscapes, the conservation of overall character and traditions, such as patterns, forms and spiritual value, may be more important than the conservation of the physical features of the site, and as such, may take precedence. Therefore, authenticity is a concept much larger than material integrity and the two concepts must not be assumed to be equivalent or consubstantial.<sup>10</sup>

In cases where material integrity is compromised, then, the overall authenticity of a site can still be present if the site’s essential physical formation, function and historical identity remain. Similarly, the retention of the general character of a cultural landscape may take precedence over individual components of that landscape. Mitchell and Page argue that, since the

---

<sup>7</sup> Mitchell and Page, 46-47.

<sup>8</sup> United States Department of the Interior, *National Register Bulletin 15: How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation* (Washington, DC: United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1991), 44.

<sup>9</sup> International Council on Monuments and Sites, United States Committee, *Evaluating Authenticity: Reflections Based on the United States Experience*, InterAmerican Symposium on Authenticity in the Conservation and Management of the Cultural Heritage, conference held in San Antonio, TX, March, 1996 ([www.icomos.org](http://www.icomos.org); February, 1999).

<sup>10</sup> International Council on Monuments and Sites, National Committees of the Americas, *The Declaration of San Antonio*, InterAmerican Symposium on Authenticity in the Conservation and Management of the Cultural Heritage, conference held in San Antonio, TX, March, 1996 ([www.icomos.org](http://www.icomos.org); February, 1999).



preservation of cultural landscapes should allow for continued change, “individual features become less important than the overall structure and character of the landscape.”<sup>11</sup>

### *Character-Defining Features of the Wildwoods’ Landscape: Identification and Assessment of Authenticity*

#### *Configuration of the Boardwalk and Its Relationship to the Ocean*

The Wildwoods’ boardwalk and amusement piers are defined by a mix of tangible and intangible features which, in combination, give the site its historical character and provide a sense of continuity with the past. In turn, the retention of these characteristics can contribute to the perpetuation of the historic character of the landscape in the future. The most persistent characteristic of the Wildwoods’ landscape is the ocean, which provided the impetus for the resort’s establishment as a sea-bathing destination. As discussed in the previous chapter, early development at the resorts clustered between the railroad tracks and the beach. Within a few years of their establishment, each of the Five Mile Beach resorts had rudimentary boardwalks, pavilions and piers, all designed to get people closer to the water. The integral place of the ocean in the resort is also evidenced by the fact that, as the beach expanded and the waterline moved east, the town followed, creating whole new blocks in order to retain some proximity to the water. The extensive amusement piers which developed in the early twentieth century have continued to benefit from the presence of the ocean. Even during periods of decline at the piers, the ocean has remained a strong draw and, quite possibly, is one of the primary factors in the resort’s ability to endure where other amusement parks have failed.

The expansion of the beach and subsequent migration of the boardwalk and piers results in a landscape that, in some respects, is compromised in terms of integrity. The present-

---

<sup>11</sup> Mitchell and Page, 54.





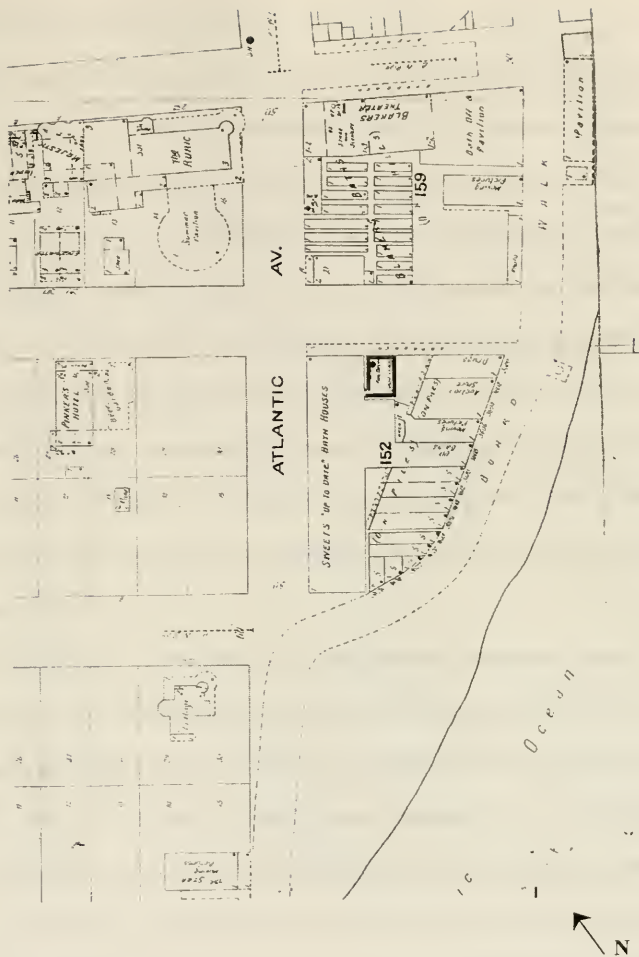
day location of the boardwalk is several hundred feet east of its original location, and the boardwalk and piers retain none of their original material, having been rebuilt on a regular basis. In addition, the expansion of the beach has had an impact on the proximity of the piers to the ocean. While the resort's earliest piers extended over the beach and into the water, today all of the piers are several hundred feet from the waterline. The State of New Jersey has passed regulations that, in an effort to prevent erosion, limit new construction on beaches. While existing boardwalks and piers can be reconstructed, new piers and extensions to existing piers cannot be built.<sup>12</sup> For the Wildwoods, which have a rare example of a beach that grows rather than erodes, proximity of the piers to the ocean will be difficult to maintain unless special arrangements are made with the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection.

Nevertheless, it can be argued that the basic form of the boardwalk has changed little since its inception, snaking along the eastern edge of the town. An historical atlas shows that even by 1909 the boardwalk already resembled its present configuration, running along the beach with a slight turn to the east near Cedar and Schellenger Avenues. (Fig. 5.1) Since the late 1920s, the boardwalk has remained in roughly the same spot and, while the piers no longer reach the water, the ocean still provides an important backdrop for the piers. Despite some loss of physical integrity, then, the boardwalk and piers have maintained their authenticity in terms of their essential form, function and relationship with the Wildwoods' most consistent feature, the ocean.

---

<sup>12</sup> New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection, *Coastal Permit Program Rules*, New Jersey Administrative Code 7:7, amended through December 7, 1998.





**Fig. 5.1**  
Map showing the Wildwood boardwalk, near Blaker's Pavilion, 1909

Sanborn Map Company. *Insurance Maps of the New Jersey Coast, Cape May Co. Edition, Vol. 4.*, 1909, revised. 1921, pl. 44



### *Density of Activity on the Boardwalk*

The boardwalk and piers have also maintained continuity with the past in terms of their patterns of density. The area of the boardwalk bounded by 26<sup>th</sup> Avenue on the north and Schellenger Avenue on the south, has consistently represented a high concentration of activity. As detailed in Chapter Four, the Wildwoods' earliest piers were established within this area. The sites of Blaker's Pavilion and the Casino Pier, on the boardwalk near Cedar and Schellenger Avenues, evolved into the Amusement Center and Marine Pier, and now accommodates Nickels' Midway, Casino Pier and Mariner's Landing. The site of the former Ocean Pier, perhaps the most elaborate and extensive of the Wildwoods' piers, is now, after many incarnations, occupied by Hunt's Pier. These amusement areas still represent some of the highest concentrations of activity on the boardwalk, and therefore provide a tangible reminder of the boardwalk's history.

Not every pier that ever existed along the Wildwoods' boardwalk remains in place, and new piers have been built within the last several years. The appearance of the landscape, then, has changed significantly. While the continued evolution of the boardwalk has the potential to threaten the authenticity of the landscape, growth and expansion do not automatically compromise integrity. In fact, in a landscape that is characterized by change, growth and expansion could actually contribute to the perpetuation of the landscape's character.<sup>13</sup> The addition of new piers, and closure of existing ones, is a long-standing pattern in the Wildwoods, driven largely by economics. The Wildwoods' success has always been dependent upon their ability to provide new attractions. To limit expansion or new development could hinder the

---

<sup>13</sup> International Council on Monuments and Sites. National Committees of the Americas. *The Declaration of San Antonio*. InterAmerican Symposium on Authenticity in the Conservation and Management of the Cultural Heritage, conference held in San Antonio, TX, March, 1996 ([www.icomos.org](http://www.icomos.org); February, 1999).



resort's ability to attract visitors and, hence, threaten the preservation of its historical use and function.

### *Configuration and Character of the Rides and Attractions*

Because of the constant need to update the attractions at the piers, very few rides of any historical significance remain in place, though a complete inventory was not attempted as part of this study. The Jack Rabbit roller coaster, which was installed at the Amusement Center in 1916, was dismantled in 1984, due to the rising costs of maintenance and its lack of popularity among visitors seeking new thrills.<sup>14</sup> Four years later, the Flyer, a wooden roller coaster that was erected on Hunt's Pier in 1956, was removed for similar reasons.<sup>15</sup> Other rides have met the same fate over the years, though their removal attracted less attention. One notable exception is the Golden Nugget Mine Ride, an early example of a steel roller coaster, which has operated on Hunt's Pier since 1960.<sup>16</sup>

The extent to which the preservation of individual historical rides is crucial to the preservation of the Wildwoods' overall landscape is debatable. There is a growing recognition that cultural landscape preservation involves more than the preservation of individual parts that make up the whole; in fact, sometimes individual components may lack integrity without detracting from the authenticity of the landscape in general.<sup>17</sup> In the case of the Wildwoods, the preservation of large numbers of historical rides is probably unrealistic, not only because of the need to satisfy visitors' demands for new attractions, but also because of safety standards. It

---

<sup>14</sup> "Roller Coasting to Its Final Stop," *The Press*, 18 September 1984, Clipping, "Boardwalk Amusements and Amusement Rides" file, Boyer Museum/Wildwood Historical Society, Wildwood, NJ (hereinafter referred to as BM/WHS).

<sup>15</sup> Torrence V. Jenkins, "Lost Coasters of Wildwood, New Jersey," clipping, BM/WHS.

<sup>16</sup> David W. Francis, Diane DeMali Francis and Robert J. Scully, Sr., *Wildwood By the Sea: The History of an American Resort* (Fairview Park, OH: Amusement Park Books, Inc., 1998), 176.





is possible that certain particularly significant rides could be preserved, while attractions around them were allowed to change. Such an approach would satisfy visitors' desire for new excitement, while also retaining some tangible remnants of the past.

In many respects, however, it is the overall experience of the piers that is significant rather than the existence of particular rides. In their current configuration, the piers exhibit a high degree of density which contributes strongly to their character. (Fig. 5.2) In part, this density is driven by the physical constraints of piers, which are by nature long and narrow, and the desire to offer as many attractions as possible. This density was not apparent in the earliest days of the piers, when they were focused on sea-bathing, dancing and theatrical offerings. Once the piers gave themselves over to mechanized attractions, however, they became increasingly crowded, a feeling which was enhanced by the presence of large numbers of people. As discussed in Chapter Four, shortly after the opening of The Amusement Center near the old Blaker's Pavilion in 1918, the rides were closely packed into a relatively small area of ground. (Fig. 4.12) This pattern became more established with the addition of new rides in the coming years. The density of the current piers serves to preserve this aspect of the piers' atmosphere.

While such high density may be peculiar to amusement piers, there are many aspects of the Wildwoods' piers that are common to amusement parks in general. As discussed in Chapter Two, by the early twentieth century amusement parks had come to share many characteristics. The fantastic atmosphere of turn-of-the-century parks was created in part by elaborate and extensive lighting. The Wildwoods likewise utilized this nascent technology, with incandescent

---

<sup>17</sup> See, for example, International Council on Monuments and Sites, Canada Committee, *Authenticity in Canadian Conservation Practice*, InterAmerican Symposium on Authenticity in the Conservation and Management of the Cultural Heritage, conference held in San Antonio, TX, March, 1996 ([www.icomos.org](http://www.icomos.org); February, 1999).





**Fig. 5.2**  
Aerial view of Mariner's Landing, Wildwood, 1998

Photograph by the author



**Fig. 5.3**  
Aerial view of Mariner's Landing, Wildwood, at night, c. 1998

Reprinted from David W. Francis, Diane DeMali Francis and Robert J. Scully, Sr., *Wildwood By the Sea: The History of an American Resort*



bulbs illuminating the structures at Ocean Pier for its 1906 opening.<sup>18</sup> Today, lights are still an integral part of the Wildwoods' landscape, both on and off the boardwalk. Brightly colored lights outline the rides on the piers, while neon signs advertise the motels. (Fig. 5.3)

Likewise, the character and function of specific rides provide a link to the Wildwoods' past as well as to the history of amusement parks in general. Certain rides, like carousels, Ferris wheels and roller coasters, were such standard features at parks that they became icons of amusement. Although the majority of the historic rides at the Wildwoods have been lost, modern examples of archetypal rides remain in place. Contemporary visitors to the resorts, then, experience some of the same physical sensations as those who frequented the Wildwoods and other amusement parks, in the early twentieth century. In addition, the skyline created by these rides recalls earlier incarnations of the Wildwoods' piers. (Figs. 5.4 and 4.14) The large Ferris wheel currently in place on Mariner's Landing is visible from the Garden State Parkway, serving as a sort of roadside symbol writ large, drawing travelers to the piers. A Ferris wheel has been in place in that general vicinity since at least 1931, when the Marine Pier (now Mariner's Landing) was built near the former site of Blaker's Pavilion.<sup>19</sup>

In addition to their archetypal forms, amusement rides have exhibited the same basic functions and themes since their inception. Amusement devices are designed to create a sense of danger and fun, and often provide a temporary escape from the everyday world. To this end, there are certain themes which recur with great regularity at amusement parks. One of Willow Grove Park's most popular rides in the 1910s was Venice, a recreation of a canal with scenery depicting the city's bridges, palazzi and churches. Italy is a persistent theme at parks, suggesting romance and adventure; a carousel at Mariner's Landing in the Wildwoods utilizes

---

<sup>18</sup> "Contract to Erect the New Ocean Pier Superstructure Awarded to Contractors Brennan & Goslin," clipping, BM/WHS.

<sup>19</sup> Francis, et al., 92, 119-120.





**Fig. 5.4**  
Mariner's Landing, Wildwood, as seen from the beach, with the Ferris wheel  
creating a skyline, 1998

Photograph by the author





the same types of scenery in its design, with pictures of gondolas navigating their way through the city's waterways. (Figs. 5.5 and 5.6) As discussed in Chapter Two, the first roller coasters were inspired by a mining railroad at Mauch Chunk, Pennsylvania. Many early coasters, like the St. Nicholas Coal Mine at Willow Grove Park, overtly referenced the theme of mining in their design. The age-old theme is still evident at the Wildwoods, in the Golden Nugget Mine Train and the Volcano, a virtual trip through a mine, both at Hunt's Pier. (Figs. 5.7 and 5.8) Despite their constantly being upgraded, then, amusement park rides not only retain their archetypal forms and general functions, but even recycle some specific and familiar motifs.

### *Continuity of Visitor Demographics*

From their early days as a seaside resort, the Wildwoods have long attracted visitors primarily from the urban centers of Camden and, especially, Philadelphia. As discussed in Chapter Four, railroad lines to Five Mile Beach, which for many years provided the most viable means of transportation, were laid from Philadelphia and Camden. As early as the 1890s, the Wildwoods were considered tawdry in comparison to more established resorts like Cape May, probably because they attracted a more consistently working-class clientele.<sup>20</sup> Indeed, hotels in the 1890s were frequently advertised as being "moderately" priced, suggesting that the Wildwoods' visitors had a budget to watch.<sup>21</sup> Like other amusement parks, labor unions and fraternal organizations sponsored outings to the Wildwoods in the 1920s, further supporting the argument that the resorts were primarily a retreat for the middle and working classes.<sup>22</sup>

This pattern persists today. A newspaper article from 1975 declared Wildwood to be "almost exclusively the summertime possession of Philadelphia's rowhouse crowd," while a

---

<sup>20</sup> Francis, et al., 36.

<sup>21</sup> Francis, et al., 22.

<sup>22</sup> Francis, et al., 94.





**Fig. 5.5**  
Venetian carousel, Mariner's Landing, Wildwood, 1998

Photograph by the author



**Fig. 5.6**  
Detail of Venetian carousel, Mariner's Landing, Wildwood, 1998

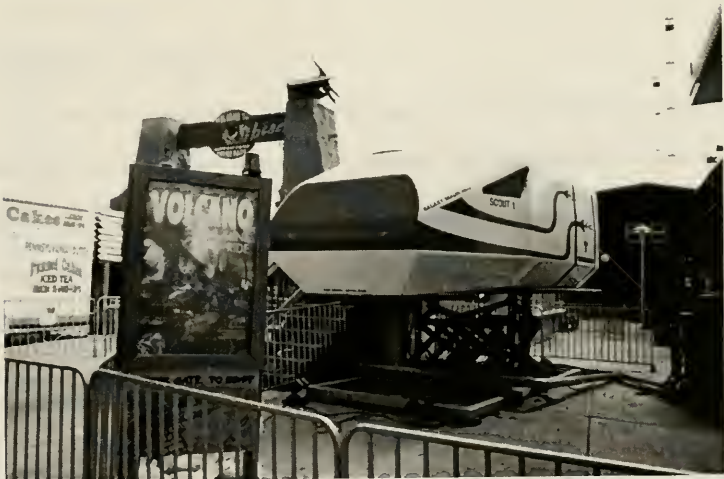
Photograph by the author





**Fig. 5.7**  
The Golden Nugget Mine Ride. Hunt's Pier, Wildwood, c. 1960

Reprinted from David W. Francis, Diane DeMali Francis and Robert J. Scully, Sr.,  
*Wildwood By the Sea: The History of an American Resort*



**Fig. 5.8**  
The Volcano, a virtual amusement ride, Hunt's Pier, Wildwood, 1998

Photograph by the author



1980 article in *Philadelphia Magazine* referred to the Wildwoods as “merely a seashore extension” of Philadelphia’s working-class neighborhoods.<sup>23</sup> A survey conducted by the Greater Wildwood Tourism Authority in 1994 found that the majority of Wildwood visitors were white, middle-class families from Pennsylvania and New Jersey. A 1996 survey found that Philadelphia supplied the largest numbers of visitors to the Wildwoods.<sup>24</sup>

Just as the physical remnants of the Wildwoods’ history contribute to maintaining a sense of continuity with the past, so too does the demographic makeup of the resort’s visitors. Like other amusement parks from the turn of the century, the Wildwoods attracted a largely middle- and working-class crowd. Indeed, that is one of the principal characteristics that distinguished the new public amusements from their predecessors. The Wildwoods have maintained this demographic profile and, while future development of the resorts may aim to attract a wealthier clientele, some attempt might be made to do so in a manner which does not exclude the resort’s traditional visitors.

### *The Overall Wildwoods Experience*

For ease of discussion, the character-defining features of the Wildwoods’ boardwalk and piers have been enumerated individually. However, it is the interaction of these features that produces the essential experience of the Wildwoods. A preservation program for the Wildwoods should consider the landscape’s components not for their individual significance, but because of the part they play in creating the whole. The configuration of the boardwalk and its relationship to the ocean, the density patterns on the boardwalk, the arrangement and

---

<sup>23</sup> “Wildwood, NJ – Visitors” file, Newspaper Clippings Collection. Temple University Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA; Mike Mallowe, “That’s Why They Call it Wildwood.” *Philadelphia Magazine*. 71 no. 8 (August 1980): 112.

<sup>24</sup> Greater Wildwood Tourism Improvement and Development Authority, Wildwood, NJ, Summary of Results, New Jersey Beach Travel Survey, August 1996 and Summary of Results, Wildwood Survey. July 1994.





character of the attractions on the piers and the long-standing identification of the resort with middle- and working-class Philadelphians all work together to create the cultural landscape of the Wildwoods. The survival of the essential characteristics of this landscape speaks not only to the history of the Wildwoods, but also to the history of American amusement parks in general.

### ***Current Approaches to Preservation in the Wildwoods: Integrating the Boardwalk and Piers***

Currently, there are a variety of preservation endeavors in the town of Wildwood, none of which focuses specifically on the preservation of the resort's amusement landscape. These efforts have been motivated both by a concern for the retention of historic fabric and also by a desire to revitalize the resort, which, as discussed in Chapter Four, experienced a period of economic decline in the 1960s, '70s and '80s. Interest in the built environment of the Wildwoods – particularly that which is representative of the resort's 1950s heritage – is evident among local residents and business owners as well as outside professionals. Recent studies led by Steven Izenour of Venturi, Scott Brown & Associates, under the auspices of the University of Pennsylvania and Yale University architecture schools and Kent State University preservation program, have garnered national media attention, which has characterized the Wildwoods as a “virtual Pompeii of the school of design known as ‘doo-wop’ (or, sometimes, ‘populuxe’) architecture.”<sup>25</sup> One recent article referred to the Wildwoods as “the raucous, working-class cousins” of Cape May City, six miles to the south, which made a comeback

---

<sup>25</sup> Joe Sharkey, “Real Beach Kitsch, Not the Fake Stuff.” *The New York Times*, 2 March 1997. For additional media coverage, see also Joe Sharkey, “Quaint or Kitschy: Two Sides of the Jersey Shore: Cape May’s Victorian Mansions, the Wildwoods’ Flashy Motels.” *The New York Times*, 19 July 1998; Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown and Steven Izenour, “Our Best Main Streets.” *Travel and Leisure* (April 1998): 105-107; Martha T. Moore, “Resort is Reworking Run-down into Retro.” *USA Today*, 1 June 1998; Leslie Kaufman, “Our New Theme Song,” *Newsweek*, 22 June 1998: 46-47; and Julie Caniglia, “Mining Wildwood’s Pleasures.” *Metropolis* 17, no. 10 (July 1998): 35, 39-40.



through the preservation (and marketing) of much of its turn-of-the-century building stock.<sup>26</sup> While the two resorts are contrasted by the press as “antidotes for one another,” they are discussed on equal terms, suggesting that some, at least, believe the Wildwoods are to “doo wop” flamboyance what Cape May is to Victorian-era charm.<sup>27</sup>

A thorough understanding of the cultural landscape of the Wildwoods, however, requires consideration not only of the 1950s motels, but also of the role of the boardwalk and piers in defining the resort’s character. These features of the Wildwoods are historically significant in their own right and, in addition, deserve recognition for the role they played in the resort’s mid-century development. The motels which proliferated during this period are directly related to the boardwalk, which drew the visitors who populated the motels. In addition, the motels utilize an architectural vocabulary that, as discussed previously, reflected a new form of popular culture that grew in part out of early twentieth-century public amusements. The analysis of existing preservation movements in the Wildwoods which follows will explore the potential for integrating the boardwalk and piers into a preservation program for the resort.

The Wildwoods exhibit a mix of traditional and more innovative approaches to preserving and interpreting history. The National Trust for Historic Preservation runs a Main Street program in the town of Wildwood. Focused on the commercial strip along Pacific Avenue, the Main Street program is concerned with reinvigorating the historic business district of the town through a coordinated effort to increase marketing and encourage the restoration and reuse of existing buildings.<sup>28</sup> Several historic districts were established in the town of Wildwood in 1996, the result of a mandate in the 1994 New Jersey Master Plan that required all

---

<sup>26</sup> Caniglia, 40.

<sup>27</sup> Sharkey, 1998. It should be remembered, however, that the quaint inns and bed and breakfasts that characterize Cape May are possibly more of a draw for tourists than the motels of the Wildwoods.

<sup>28</sup> Ellen Collins, Executive Director, Doo Wop Preservation League, telephone conversation with author, 9 March 1999. For more on the National Trust’s Main Street program, see William J. Murtagh, *Keeping Time: The History and Theory of Preservation in America*, Revised Edition (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1997), 113-114.



municipalities in the state to create Historic Preservation Commissions in order to evaluate their historic resources. (Fig. 5.9) The Holly Beach District includes the section of Pacific Avenue from Maple to Spencer Avenues, an area of early historical development which was transformed into a pedestrian mall in the 1970s, and consists of largely vacant commercial structures today. Other districts are more focused on residential areas of the town, and are categorized as of primary or secondary importance, depending on the concentration of structures dating from 1880 to 1930 which are determined to be architecturally significant. Owners of buildings within the districts who are undertaking any work requiring a building permit must seek the approval of the Wildwood Historic Preservation Commission. Although some consideration was given to the boardwalk when Wildwood was creating its historic districts, ultimately it was decided that the boardwalk and piers, since they retain such little original fabric, would not be included in the district boundaries.<sup>29</sup>

The Main Street program and Wildwood Historic Preservation Commission are concerned primarily with building stock from the late 1800s through the first decades of the twentieth century. Interest in the resort's mid-twentieth century heritage led to the establishment of the Doo Wop Preservation League, an organization whose mission is "to foster awareness, appreciation, and education of the popular culture and imagery of the 1950s and 1960s in an effort to promote preservation in the Wildwoods, New Jersey and throughout the United States."<sup>30</sup> In the early 1990s, the Mid-Atlantic Center for the Arts, which is based in Cape May City, recognized the wealth of 1950s and '60s architecture in the Wildwoods and began to offer "Doo Wop Trolley Tours" of the resort, emphasizing the resort's motels, which, as explored in Chapter Four, exhibit classic elements of roadside architectural form. Although

---

<sup>29</sup> William Kemp, Chair, Wildwood Historic Preservation Commission, telephone conversation with author, 18 March 1999; Wildwood Historic Preservation Commission, Wildwood, NJ, Informational Packet, May 1998.

<sup>30</sup> Doo Wop Preservation League, Wildwood, NJ, Brochure and organizational materials.



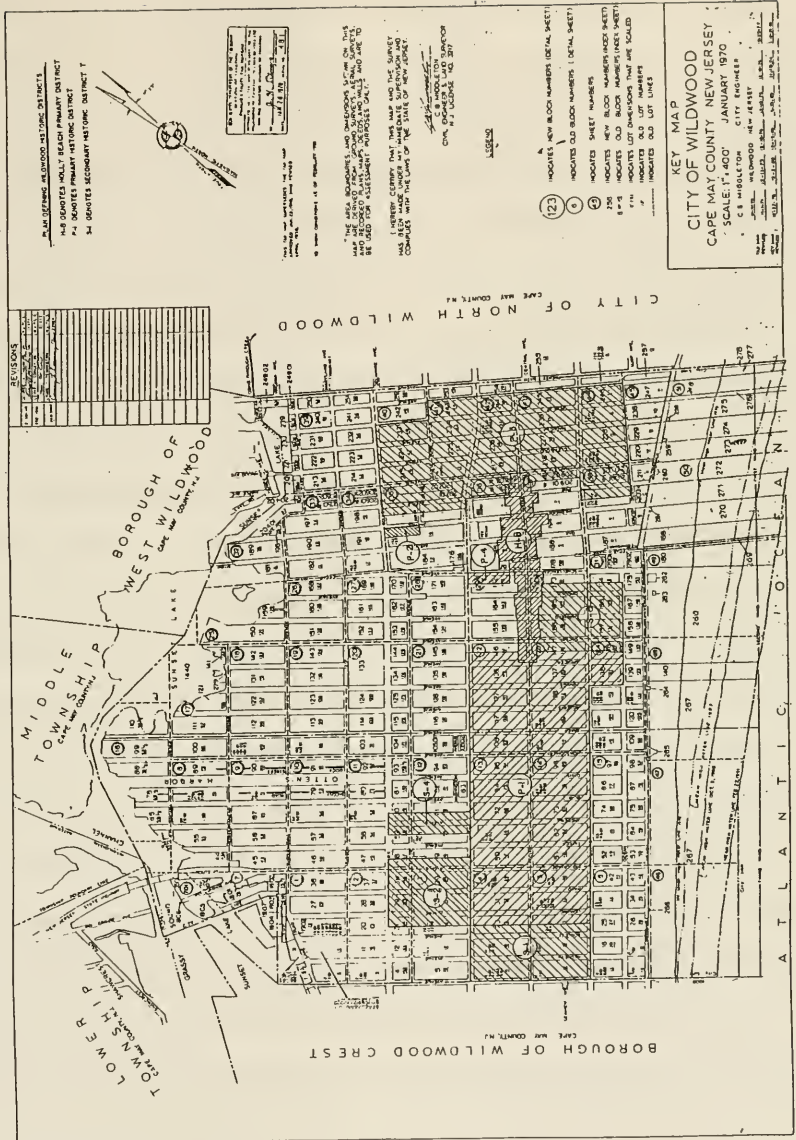


Fig. 5.9  
Map of Wildwood historic districts

Courtesy of the Wildwood Historic Preservation Commission





the tours only lasted for two summer seasons, enthusiasm persisted and was further boosted when the Society for Commercial Archaeology held a three-day conference in the Wildwoods in September, 1997. *The Wildwood Motel Guide*, published for the conference by Steven Izenour and Daniel Vieyra, featured photographs and information regarding ninety hotels and motels in the resort, and asserted, "Collectively, these wonderfully idiosyncratic structures, which represent the nation's best preserved examples of '50s architecture, have the potential to come to the fore as an attraction in their own right as the resort again begins to reinvent itself."<sup>31</sup> The Doo Wop Preservation League has recently assembled a Board of Directors and hired an Executive Director, and is in the process of obtaining non-profit status.<sup>32</sup>

Although focused primarily on the preservation of 1950s roadside architecture, the Doo Wop Preservation League could be expanded to include an interest in the preservation of the boardwalk landscape. Indeed, the organization actively supported the Spring 1999 study conducted by the University of Pennsylvania's architecture program, which focused on the design and revitalization of the boardwalk. Ellen Collins, the Executive Director of the Doo Wop Preservation League, has noted the boardwalk's contributions to the resort's character, including the iconic quality of certain rides like Ferris wheels and roller coasters. In addition, board members have a vested interest in the perpetuation of the boardwalk. The Morey Organization owns three piers in the Wildwoods (including Mariner's Landing, located near the former site of Blaker's Pavilion) and is well-represented on the Board of Directors of the Doo Wop Preservation League: Jack Morey, Vice President of The Morey Organization, is the President of the Board, and Clark Doran, Director of Planning and Development at The Morey

---

<sup>31</sup> Doo Wop Preservation League, Wildwood, NJ, Brochure and organizational materials.

<sup>32</sup> Collins, telephone conversation.



Organization, is a Board member.<sup>33</sup> The Morey Organization has already exhibited an interest in the history of the piers, as will be discussed shortly.

The integral role of the boardwalk and piers in the development of the Wildwoods' landscape is one argument for their inclusion in a preservation plan for the resort. In addition, it should be remembered that the 1950s and '60s motels are the product of a popular culture which traces its origins to turn-of-the-century public amusements like that which was found along the Wildwoods' boardwalk. Early amusement parks utilized fantastic and exotic symbolism as a means of creating an environment that was conducive to escape. As discussed in Chapter Four, it is significant that many of the Wildwoods' motels utilized the same architectural vocabulary as was evident at the piers, including tropical and futuristic motifs. It is also interesting to note that the High School Design Competition sponsored by the South Jersey American Institute of Architects and hosted by the Doo Wop Preservation League in 1998 identified four characteristic themes or styles in Wildwood architecture: Tomorrowland, Adventureland, Fantasyland and Frontierland.<sup>34</sup> In naming design categories after the "lands" created at Disneyland, the competition organizers made an explicit link between Disney iconography and 1950s design in general. Disneyland is, in part, an extension of the World's Fairs and amusement parks that preceded it. Any connection between 1950s popular architecture and Disney, then, also suggests a relationship between the turn-of-the-century popular architecture of amusement parks and mid-twentieth century roadside design.

---

<sup>33</sup> Doo Wop Preservation League, Wildwood, NJ, Brochure and organizational materials; Collins, telephone conversation; Jack Morey, Vice President, The Morey Organization, interview by author, tape recording, Wildwood, NJ, 26 February 1999.

<sup>34</sup> Doo Wop Preservation League, Wildwood, NJ, Brochure and organizational materials.



### *Challenges to Preservation in the Wildwoods*

The ephemeral nature of the Wildwoods is a challenging context in which to attempt preservation. The Wildwoods' landscape derives its significance from its historical function as a site of popular recreational activity. As the histories of both Willow Grove Park and the Wildwoods demonstrate, such landscapes are in a perennial state of adaptation, responding to the demands of an audience always looking for new sources of excitement. It is neither feasible nor desirable, then, to halt the Wildwoods' development in an effort to fend off change. To do so would likely impede the resort's ability to attract visitors, thereby threatening the perpetuation of its historical use. In addition, much of the meaning of the Wildwoods' landscape would be lost if its constant evolution ceased, since the purpose of amusement parks like the Wildwoods is to offer fleeting thrills and temporary escape. The Wildwoods' historical authenticity, then, is dependent less on the retention of physical fabric than on the preservation of its essential character, as manifested in the persistence of its basic physical configuration and the perpetuation of its historical function.

Other challenges arise from the fact that the boardwalk and amusement piers in the Wildwoods are owned and operated by private businesses, whose main motivation is profit. Any attempt to preserve the Wildwoods' landscape would have to be accepted by and implemented with the cooperation of local businesses. The result is a situation which demands that preservation be profitable and that it give the public what it wants; for example, amusement pier owners are not likely to spend large sums to maintain the safety of historic rides if they are not popular enough to produce revenue. As mentioned earlier, Wildwood's Jack Rabbit roller coaster, a classic wooden roller coaster design, was dismantled in 1984 because maintenance costs outstripped profits. The Golden Nugget Mine Ride at Hunt's Pier is unlikely to be



maintained unless it remains popular, even though it is historically significant as an example of an early steel roller coaster and in its recollection of earlier mine-themed rides.

It is possible, of course, to market amusement park history to the public, to make visitors want to ride an old roller coaster because of the nostalgic feelings the experience provides. Seabreeze Park, located just north of Rochester, New York and Kennywood Park, near Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, both include still-operative Jack Rabbit roller coasters much like the one dismantled at the Wildwoods.<sup>35</sup> Kennywood, which is listed on the National Register of Historic Places, maintains many of its early twentieth-century rides amidst newer additions, in an effort to tap into visitors' twin desires for something old and something new.<sup>36</sup> Likewise, tourists in the Wildwoods are drawn to the resort both for its newness and for its familiarity. Of the Wildwoods visitors surveyed in a 1994 study, only 13% were visiting the resort for the first time, while 46% had been coming to the Wildwoods for over ten years. 87% indicated that their familiarity with the resort was an important or very important factor in their decision to vacation there.<sup>37</sup> Similarly, a 1997 marketing study found that Cape May County is perceived as familiar and predictable among its visitors, who come to the Shore in part because of family tradition.<sup>38</sup> Nonetheless, Jack Morey of The Morey Organization estimates that, to remain economically viable, 75% of a pier's attractions must be new each season (although certain icons, like roller coasters, Ferris wheels and carousels, must always be in place).<sup>39</sup>

Visitors, then, desire a mix of familiarity and new experiences. The historical continuity of the Wildwoods' landscape can be exploited so as to provide both. David

---

<sup>35</sup> Todd H. Throgmorton, *Roller Coasters of America* (Osceola, WI: Motorola International Publishers, 1994), 45.

<sup>36</sup> Peter Passell, "Where the Thrills of Old Keep Coming Round," *New York Times Magazine*, 23 July 1995;

National Register of Historic Places Inventory – Nomination Form, Kennywood Park, West Mifflin, PA, 1983.

<sup>37</sup> Greater Wildwood Tourism Improvement and Development Authority, Wildwood, NJ, Summary of Results, New Jersey Beach Travel Survey, July 1994, 6, 11.

<sup>38</sup> Cape May County 2020 Steering Committee, *Consumer Research Debrief and Brand Positioning Report*, 20 October, 1997.

<sup>39</sup> Morey, interview.





Lowenthal, in *The Past is a Foreign Country*, a reflection on the meaning of history and its associated artifacts, looks to stories of time travel for clues as to the role of the past in the present. He argues that, in seeking out the past – a place so removed from everyday life as to be a “foreign country” – time-travelers seek something both exotic and familiar, exciting as well as comfortable.<sup>40</sup> Tourists to historic sites and landscapes, inasmuch as they seek insight into the past, also hope to find things both familiar (and therefore understandable), as well as foreign (and therefore enlightening). In addition, Lowenthal notes the potential for history to provide both a legitimization of contemporary life and a sense of escape from the everyday: “Besides enhancing an acceptable present, the past offers alternatives to an unacceptable present.”<sup>41</sup>

The Morey Organization, which owns three piers at the Wildwoods, is actively trying to utilize the past as a means of reinvigorating the Wildwoods in the present. In 1996, The Morey Organization installed the Great White, a new wooden roller coaster intended to provide an experience similar to coasters from the 1920s, at the Wild Wheels Pier.<sup>42</sup> (Fig. 5.10) More recently, The Morey Organization has begun to “theme” their piers according to different time periods. The Wild Wheels Pier, so named because of its giant Ferris wheel, is being revamped to convey a 1950s atmosphere, with brightly colored neon and rides that recall the architecture of the resort. The “Doo Wopper” roller coaster is a small coaster with brightly-colored, tail-finned cars and signage meant to replicate a drive-through fast food joint. (Fig. 5.11) Mariner’s Landing, located near the former site of Blaker’s Pavilion, is being designed to resemble a turn-of-the-century amusement pier, with all-white light bulbs, and an old-fashioned

---

<sup>40</sup> David Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985). 21-24.

<sup>41</sup> Lowenthal, 49.

<sup>42</sup> Francis, et al., 222.





**Fig. 5.10**  
The Great White roller coaster at the Wild Wheels Pier, Wildwood, 1998

Photograph by the author



**Fig. 5.11**  
The Doo Wopper roller coaster at the Wild Wheels Pier, Wildwood, 1998

Photograph by the author



(but new) Venetian carousel. Less developed is the Morey Organization's Pier at 25<sup>th</sup> Avenue in North Wildwood, which is slated for a carnival theme.<sup>43</sup>

Although these efforts indicate a genuine interest in referencing the history of the Wildwoods' amusement landscape, they do not constitute historic preservation in any traditional sense. Instead of preserving historic fabric or even reconstructing vanished – but once extant – structures, The Morey Organization is creating new landscapes that do not recall any specific past. While these historically-inspired, nostalgic designs are not preservation in and of themselves, they may enhance the character of the boardwalk and, by attracting visitors, aid in the perpetuation of the landscape's historic function. In addition, emblems such as “old-fashioned” wooden roller coasters, carousels and 1950s automobile imagery create a landscape which, in its nostalgic appeal, offers visitors an opportunity to escape the everyday in favor of something more exotic – in this case, the past. In so doing, they contribute not only to the perpetuation of the piers' function as a landscape of amusement, but also to the preservation of the historic role of amusement parks as a means of escaping the routine of everyday life.

Nostalgia carries risks as well as opportunities, however. Recent media attention has praised the genuineness of the Wildwoods, celebrating it as “New Jersey's most exuberantly déclassé boardwalk resort” and “the anti-Dinsey.”<sup>44</sup> Indeed, it is so “real” that Disney representatives visited the Wildwoods' boardwalk in order to conduct research before designing a boardwalk-themed Disney motel.<sup>45</sup> If the design of the piers becomes too self-conscious, however, natural evolution could be stifled and the dynamic nature of the landscape, essential to its meaning, could be lost. The Wildwoods' boardwalk and piers, while relating to the past, serve a contemporary social purpose by providing a place for people to fulfill their perpetual

---

<sup>43</sup> Morey, interview.

<sup>44</sup> Sharkey, 1997.

<sup>45</sup> Kaufman, 47.



desire to play. The Wildwoods' landscape would lose its integrity as a still-viable landscape if allowed to become a stage set.

In addition, if the atmosphere at the boardwalk and piers becomes too contrived or self-referential, and if the resort's tourist marketing places too much emphasis on relics of 1950s "kitsch," the town runs the risk of losing its link with middle- and working-class Philadelphians, who have long claimed the Wildwoods as their traditional summer resort. Media coverage within the past two years has optimistically suggested that the Wildwoods could be the 1950s version of Miami Beach, which was revitalized in the 1970s and 1980s through the preservation of its 1930s Art Deco district.<sup>46</sup> However, gentrification of the Wildwoods could exclude the resort's traditional demographic niche, and, by removing one of the resort's character-defining features, alter the landscape's connection with its past.

### *Maintaining Continuity Amidst Change*

The cultural landscape of the boardwalk and amusement piers at the Wildwoods is one characterized by perpetual change and evolution. Consequently, little of its original physical fabric remains. However, the features which have historically contributed to the Wildwoods' landscape – the formation of the boardwalk and piers, the density patterns on the boardwalk, the configuration of the rides and the continuity of the Wildwoods' visitor demographic – persist, and contribute to the retention of the resort's essential form, character and function. Despite the loss of material integrity, then, the Wildwoods boardwalk and piers have maintained a significant degree of historical authenticity. The continued preservation of the landscape can

---

<sup>46</sup> Caniglia, 40. Miami's one-square mile Art Deco district was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1979, and includes over 300 buildings, both residential and commercial, many of which are hotels. James R. Curtis, "Art Deco Architecture in Miami Beach," in *Fast Food, Stock Cars, and Rock 'n' Roll: Place and Space in American Pop Culture*, ed. George O. Cooney (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1995), 189-193.





provide a link to the history of the Wildwoods, and to the history of amusement parks in general.

Given the ephemeral nature of the Wildwoods landscape and the need for preservation to be profitable in the market-driven context of the resort, the preservation of the boardwalk's character faces significant challenges. However, the resort's amusement landscape could be integrated into existing preservation endeavors in the Wildwoods. While traditional approaches like the Main Street Program and historic districts may not have the flexibility required to accommodate the changes inherent to the boardwalk and piers, the Doo Wop Preservation League could begin to integrate this aspect of the resort's history into its mission. Because the Board includes preservationists, architects and leaders in the local amusement industry, the Doo Wop Preservation League has the potential to implement preservation programs that are both historically sound and economically viable.

To begin, an assessment of the historical significance of the existing rides and attractions would inform a better understanding of the degree to which material integrity is present at the piers. This inventory could then be used to help plan for the future development of the resort, which could include the retention of certain historically significant rides amidst modern additions. Other amusement parks which have successfully integrated old and new attractions, such as Kennywood Park near Pittsburgh, could be consulted and used as a model for development at the Wildwoods. Efforts to reference the history of the piers, such as those of The Morey Organization, should be encouraged, although their limitations in terms of true preservation and their potential for creating an overly "themed" atmosphere must be kept in mind. In addition, business leaders and developers should be educated about the historically-significant features of the resort's amusement landscape – both tangible and intangible – to



insure that future development does not hinder their preservation and, therefore, endanger the retention of the resort's overall character and authenticity.

While the exact configuration and material properties of the Wildwoods' amusement landscape have changed over the years, the public's desire for recreation has remained constant. The function of the boardwalk and piers at the Wildwoods has been essentially the same since their origins at the turn of the century: to provide visitors – especially middle- and working-class visitors – with a way to escape the routine. Although amusement parks like the Wildwoods are by nature ephemeral, they are in some respects self-preserving, utilizing the same archetypal forms and themes, and serving the same purpose for generations of visitors. The fact that this landscape has endured for nearly a century is indicative of its cultural significance. As has been the case historically, the landscape must continue to evolve in order to convey a sense of historical continuity, which “implies a living past bound up with the present, not one exotically different or obsolete.”<sup>47</sup> With a balance between preservation and change, the dynamic nature of the Wildwoods' landscape, and that of amusement parks in general, will be honored and perpetuated into the future.

---

<sup>47</sup> Lowenthal, 62.



## Chapter Six

### *Conclusions*

*Simply because cultures are peculiar, their landscapes are peculiar too. And, of course, because cultures change through time, their landscapes also change. Those landscapes become in effect a kind of document, a kind of cultural autobiography that humans have carved and continue to carve into the surface of the earth.<sup>1</sup>*

At their inception, amusement parks represented a new form of popular culture, one focused on leisure and consumption and which crossed lines of gender, ethnicity and class. Present-day amusement parks continue to serve their historical function of providing visitors with opportunities for excitement and escape from the everyday. While the basic need for recreation and amusement has remained constant, however, the methods of meeting that need have changed. Amusement parks, then, have necessarily had to adapt their physical forms in order to retain their social function and purpose.

Willow Grove Park, located at the end of a trolley line, and the Wildwoods, developed as a seaside resort accessible by railroad, both served patrons primarily from the urban center of Philadelphia. Their histories not only inform a greater understanding of larger issues in American social history, but also exemplify the dynamic nature of landscapes of leisure. The site of Willow Grove Park evolved from a mineral springs resort to a trolley park which, when established in 1896, emphasized the natural features of the landscape to a greater degree than

---

<sup>1</sup> Peirce F. Lewis, "Common Landscapes as Historic Documents," in *History from Things: Essays on Material Culture*, ed. Steven Lubar and W. David Kingery (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1993), 116.



technological attractions. In the early twentieth century, with the public increasingly interested in, and willing to pay for, mechanized amusement rides, Willow Grove Park was transformed yet again. The landscape began to reflect not only the growing significance of mechanized entertainment, but also the increasingly commercialized nature of the larger culture. Structures were designed not to edify the masses, but to grab their attention and to fulfill their desire for pure, unadulterated fun. Willow Grove Park continued to adapt to the changing demands of the public, but ultimately gave in to societal forces that were too powerful to overcome, such as the rise of the automobile and suburbanization, and closed for good in 1976.

Likewise, the history of the Wildwoods is one of constant change and adaptation. Originally a resort which was focused on the healthful benefits of the ocean, the Wildwoods eventually developed into one of the most highly-concentrated amusement landscapes on the Jersey shore. The boardwalk and piers were well-established by the 1910s, at which time they began to incorporate mechanized rides as well as public amusement venues such as vaudeville theaters and movie houses. Unlike Willow Grove, the development of the Wildwoods was not hindered by the automobile. Rather, the resort benefited from the democratization of private transportation, with thousands of visitors swarming to the shore in the 1950s and early '60s, during which time the resort experienced enormous growth both on and off the boardwalk. Motels sprang up to serve visitors drawn to the amusements and the beach and utilized a commercial architectural vocabulary which, though adapted to mid-twentieth century automobile culture, recalled the fantastic forms found at World's Fairs and amusement parks half a decade before.

Today, the Wildwoods still constitute a dynamic cultural landscape, changing every season in order to provide visitors with the desired mix of familiarity and novelty. While the boardwalk has lost most of its material integrity, however, it has retained its historical





authenticity in its essential form, identity and, perhaps most importantly, the continuity of its function. Consideration of how to maintain this landscape into the future demonstrates how the preservation of cultural landscapes can differ significantly from traditional approaches to historic preservation. When dealing with landscapes that derive meaning from their ephemeral nature, the perpetuation of their historic function can be of equal or greater importance than the preservation of their physical fabric. The interaction of both tangible and intangible elements, such as those identified at the Wildwoods, contribute to the overall character of the landscape, and must not be obliterated if that character is to be maintained, even as the landscape continues to evolve. This study has detailed the history of the Wildwoods' evolution and relationship to other amusement parks, identified the boardwalk's historically significant features, and discussed both the challenges and opportunities related to the survival of this landscape. In so doing, it may contribute to the development of a long-range preservation plan for the resort, thereby honoring its own unique history as well as that of other, long-gone amusement parks.

The recognition of the Wildwoods as a historically and culturally significant landscape has greater implications, however. The Wildwoods have been and remain a product not of a cultural elite but, rather, of a popular culture. The boardwalk and piers at the Wildwoods do not encompass values which are universally-accepted as culturally significant, such as work, as reflected in landscapes of agriculture or industry; religion, as manifested in places of spiritual worship; or aesthetic beauty, as is recognized by the preservation of professionally-designed landscapes. Rather, the Wildwoods landscape speaks primarily of the middle- and working-class pursuit of leisure, which, though less celebrated, conveys an equally important aspect of American culture. Indeed, Peirce Lewis argues that all landscapes are significant and can offer a deeper understanding of the culture, and argues for the importance of

everything from city skylines to farmers' silos, from golf courses to garbage dumps, from ski slopes to manure piles,



from millionaires' mansions to the tract houses of Levittown, from famous historical landmarks to flashing electric signs that boast the creation of the 20 billionth hamburger.... Such common workaday landscape has...a great deal to say about the United States as a country and Americans as a people.<sup>2</sup>

The preservation of the Wildwoods' boardwalk and piers, then, would affirm not only the cultural significance of the Wildwoods but, by extension, the importance of other sites associated with popular American culture.

---

<sup>2</sup> Peirce F. Lewis, "Axioms for Reading the Landscape: Some Guides to the American Scene," in *The Interpretation of Ordinary Landscapes: Geographical Essays*, ed. D. W. Meinig (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 11-12.



## *Bibliography*

### *Repositories and Collections*

The Athenaeum of Philadelphia, Philadelphia, PA. Architectural Drawings Collection.

Boyer Museum/Wildwood Historical Society, Wildwood, NJ.

Cape May County Historical and Genealogical Society, Cape May Courthouse, NJ. Newspaper Clippings Collection. Photograph Collection.

Free Library of Philadelphia, Philadelphia, PA. Map Collection. Print and Picture Department. Social Science and History Department - Vertical Files.

Hagley Museum Library and Archives, Wilmington, DE. Manuscripts Collection - Philadelphia Suburban Transportation Company Records.

Max Hankin Collection. Horsham, PA.

Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA. Keeney Collection. Pennsylvania - Montgomery County. Philadelphia - Annual Reports of the Union Traction Company and the Philadelphia Rapid Transit Company, 1896-1938. Society Print Collection.

Keystone Automobile Club/American Automobile Association Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

Library Company of Philadelphia, Philadelphia, PA. Manuscripts Department. Print Department.

Montgomery County Historical Society, Norristown, PA. Scrapbooks. Vertical Files.

Old York Road Historical Society, Jenkintown, PA. Willow Grove Park Files. Photograph Collection.

Temple University Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA. Newspaper Clippings Collection. News Photograph Collection (Suburbs). Young Women's Christian Association - Germantown Collection.



## *Interviews*

Collins, Ellen, Executive Director, Doo Wop Preservation League. Telephone conversation with author, 9 March 1999.

Kemp, William, Chair, Wildwood Historic Preservation Commission. Telephone conversation with author, 18 March 1999.

Hankin, Max, former owner, Willow Grove Park, and John Palmieri, former superintendent, Willow Grove Park. Interview by author. Tape recording. Willow Grove, PA, 4 February 1999.

Morey, Jack, Vice President, The Morey Organization. Interview by author. Tape recording. Wildwood, NJ, 26 February 1999.

## *Maps*

Franklin Survey Company. *Atlas of Montgomery County, Penna., Vol. C.* Philadelphia: Franklin Survey Company, 1937.

Klinge, Frank H. M. *Atlas of the Reading-Main Line, Volume One, Montgomery Co., Penna.* Philadelphia: Frank H. M. Klinge, 1927.

Mueller, A. H. & Co. *Atlas of Cheltenham, Abington and Springfield Townships and Vicinity, Montgomery Co., Penna.* Philadelphia: A. H. Mueller & Co., 1897.

Mueller, A. H. *Atlas of the North Penn Section of Montgomery County, Pa.* Philadelphia: A. H. Mueller, 1916.

Sanborn Map Company. *Insurance Maps of the New Jersey Coast, Cape May Co. Edition, Vol. 4.* New York: Sanborn Map Co., 1909.

Sanborn Map Company. *Insurance Maps of the New Jersey Coast, Cape May Co. Edition, Vol. 4.* New York: Sanborn Map Co., 1909, revised 1921.

Sanborn Map Company. *Insurance Maps of the New Jersey Coast, Cape May Co. Edition, Vol. 4.* New York: Sanborn Map Co., 1909, revised 1923.

Sanborn Map Company. *Insurance Maps of the New Jersey Coast, Cape May Co. Edition, Vol. 4.* New York: Sanborn Map Co., 1909, revised 1937.

Sanborn Map Company. *Insurance Maps of the New Jersey Coast, Cape May Co. Edition, Vol. 4.* New York: Sanborn Map Co., 1909, revised 1958.

Sanborn Map Company. *Willow Grove and Adjacent Parts of Upper Moreland and Abington Townships, Montgomery County, Pennsylvania.* New York: Sanborn Map Co., May 1930 revised 1942.





Sanborn Map Company. *Willow Grove and Vicinity, Montgomery County, Pennsylvania*. New York: Sanborn Map Co., May 1930.

Sanborn-Perris Map Co., Ltd. *New Jersey Coast Map, 1890*. New York: Sanborn Map Co., 1890.

### ***Published Sources***

Abrams, Robert L. "The Story of Rapid Transit: Philadelphia." *The National Railway Historical Society Bulletin* 26, no. 1 (First Quarter, 1961): 4-24.

Adams, Judith A. *The American Amusement Park Industry: A History of Technology and Thrills*. Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1991.

Alexander, Max. "A Walking Tour of Coney Island." *Columbia Art Review* (Winter 1985): 17-19.

Amusement Park Books, Inc. *Euclid Beach Park is Closed for the Season*. Mentor, OH: Amusement Park Books, Inc., 1977.

Amusement Park Books, Inc. *Euclid Beach Park: A Second Look*. Fairview Park, OH: Amusement Park Books, Inc., 1979.

Anderson, Norman D. *Ferris Wheels: An Illustrated History*. Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1992.

Bailey, Shirley R. and Jim Parkhurst. *Early South Jersey Amusement Parks*. Millville, NJ: South Jersey Publishing Co., 1979.

Baxter, Sylvester. "The Trolley in Rural Parts." *Harper's Monthly*, 97 (June 1898): 60-69.

Beecher, Mary Anne. "The Motel in Builder's Literature and Architectural Publications." In *Roadside America: The Automobile in Design and Culture*, edited by Jan Jennings, 115-124. Ames, IA: Iowa State University Press, 1990.

Belasco, Warren James. *Americans on the Road: From Autocamp to Motel, 1910-1945*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1979.

Bender, Thomas. *Toward an Urban Vision: Ideas and Institutions in Nineteenth-Century America*. Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 1975.

Boyer, George F. *Wildwood, Middle of the Island*. Egg Harbor City, NJ: The Laureate Press, 1976.

Boyer, M. Christine. *The City of Collective Memory: Its Historical Imagery and Architectural Entertainments*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1994.



- Braithwaite, David. *Fairground Architecture: The World of Amusement Parks, Carnivals and Fairs*. New York: Frederick A. Prager, Publishers, 1968.
- Bright, Randy. *Disneyland: Inside Story*. New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1987.
- Browne, Ray B. "Popular Culture: New Notes Toward a Definition." In *The Popular Culture Reader*, edited by Christopher D. Geist and Jack Nachbar, 13-20. Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1983.
- Brownlee, David B. *Building the City Beautiful: The Benjamin Franklin Parkway and the Philadelphia Museum of Art*. Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1989.
- Bush, Lee O. and Richard F. Hershey. *Conneaut Lake Park: The First 100 Years*. Fairview Park, OH: Amusement Park Books, Inc., 1992.
- Caniglia, Julie. "Mining Wildwood's Pleasures." *Metropolis* 17, no. 10 (July 1998): 35, 39-40.
- Cape May County 2020 Steering Committee. *Consumer Research Debrief and Brand Positioning Report*. 20 October, 1997.
- Cheape, Charles W. *Moving the Masses: Urban Public Transit in New York, Boston and Philadelphia, 1880-1912*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980.
- Cleary, Calista K. "From 'Beach Front Palaces' to Preservation Dilemmas: The History and Historic Preservation of the Two Defining Structures of Asbury Park's Shorefront Landscape." Master's thesis, University of Pennsylvania, 1996.
- Contosta, David R. *Suburb in the City: Chestnut Hill, Philadelphia, 1850-1990*. Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 1992.
- Couvares, Francis G. "The Triumph of Commerce: Class Culture and Mass Culture in Pittsburgh." In *Working-Class America: Essays on Labor, Community and American Society*, edited by Michael H. Frisch and Daniel J. Walkowitz, 123-152. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1983.
- Cox, Harold E. "Rise and Decline of Willow Grove Park: Paper Read Before the Old York Road Historical Society, March 19, 1963." *Old York Road Historical Society Bulletin*, 25 (1964): 18-30.
- Crawford, Margaret. "The World in a Shopping Mall." In *Variations on a Theme Park: The New American City and the End of Public Space*, edited by Michael Sorkin, 3-30. New York: Hill and Wang, 1992.
- Cunningham, John T. *The New Jersey Shore*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1958.



- Curtis, James R. "Art Deco Architecture in Miami Beach." In *Fast Food, Stock Cars, and Rock 'n' Roll: Place and Space in American Pop Culture*, edited by George O. Cooney, 189-203. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1995.
- Darr, Jennifer. "High Tack." *Philadelphia City Paper*, 28 May - 4 June, 1998.
- Dictionary of American Biography*, Vol. VI. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1931.
- Dictionary of American Biography*, Vol. XX. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1936.
- Dinger, Charlotte. *Art of the Carousel*. Green Village, NJ: Carousel Art, Inc., 1983.
- Doo Wop Preservation League, Wildwood, NJ. Brochure and organizational materials.
- Dorwart, Jeffery M. *Cape May County, New Jersey: The Making of an American Resort Community*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1992.
- Drew, Bettina. *Crossing the Expendable Landscape*. St. Paul, MN: Graywolf Press, 1998.
- Dunlop, Beth. *Building a Dream: The Art of Disney Architecture*. New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1996.
- Flint, Richard W. "Meet Me in Dreamland: The Early Development of Amusement Parks in America." *Nineteenth Century* 8, nos. 1-2 (1982): 97-107.
- Francis, David W., Diane DeMali Francis and Robert J. Scully, Sr. *Wildwood By the Sea: The History of an American Resort*. Fairview Park, OH: Amusement Park Books, Inc., 1998.
- Fried, Frederick. "E. Joy Morris and the Evolution of the Philadelphia Toboggan Company." *Merry-Go-Roundup* 6, no. 1 (Spring 1989): 7-19.
- Fried, Frederick. "Last Ride for Carousel Figures?" *Historic Preservation* 29, no. 3 (July - September 1977): 22-27.
- Funnell, Charles E. *By the Beautiful Sea: The Rise and High Times of that Great American Resort, Atlantic City*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1983.
- Garginlo, Vince. *Palisades Amusement Park: A Century of Fond Memories*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1995.
- Goddard, Stephen B. *Getting There: The Epic Struggle Between Road and Rail in the American Century*. New York: Basic Books, 1994.
- Greater Wildwood Tourism Improvement and Development Authority, Wildwood, NJ. Summary of Results, New Jersey Beach Travel Survey, August 1996. Summary of Results, Wildwood Survey, July 1994.



- Griffin, Al. *Step Right Up, Folks!* Chicago: Henry Regnery Company. 1974.
- Hall, Millicent. "Theme Parks: Around the World in 80 Minutes." *Landscape* 21, no. 1 (Autumn 1976): 3-8.
- Hall, Millicent. "The Park at the End of the Trolley." *Landscape* 22, no. 1 (Autumn 1977): 11-18.
- Hershberg, Theodore, Harold E. Cox, Dale B. Light, Jr., and Richard R. Greenfield. "The 'Journey-to-Work': An Empirical Investigation of Work, Residence and Transportation, Philadelphia, 1850 and 1880." In *Philadelphia: Work, Space, Family, and Group Experience in the Nineteenth Century*, edited by Theodore Hershberg, 128-173. New York: Oxford University Press, 1981.
- Huxtable, Ada Louise. *The Unreal America: Architecture and Illusion*. New York: The New Press, 1997.
- International Council on Monuments and Sites, Canada Committee. *Authenticity in Canadian Conservation Practice*, InterAmerican Symposium on Authenticity in the Conservation and Management of the Cultural Heritage, conference held in San Antonio, TX, March, 1996. [www.icomos.org](http://www.icomos.org): February, 1999.
- International Council on Monuments and Sites, National Committees of the Americas. *The Declaration of San Antonio*, InterAmerican Symposium on Authenticity in the Conservation and Management of the Cultural Heritage, conference held in San Antonio, TX, March, 1996. [www.icomos.org](http://www.icomos.org): February, 1999.
- International Council on Monuments and Sites, United States Committee. *Evaluating Authenticity: Reflections Based on the United States Experience*, InterAmerican Symposium on Authenticity in the Conservation and Management of the Cultural Heritage, conference held in San Antonio, TX, March, 1996. [www.icomos.org](http://www.icomos.org): February, 1999.
- Jackson, Joseph. "Vauxhall Garden." *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 57 (1933): 289-298.
- Jakle, John A. "Landscapes Redesigned for the Automobile." In *The Making of the American Landscape*, edited by Michael P. Conzen, 293-310. Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1990.
- Jenkins, Torrence V., Jr. "Willow Grove Park: Gone But Not Forgotten." *Roller Coaster!* (Spring 1996): 4-9.
- Kasson, John F. *Amusing the Million: Coney Island at the Turn of the Century*. New York: Hill & Wang, 1978.
- Kaufman, Leslie. "Our New Theme Song." *Newsweek*, 22 June 1998: 46-47.





- King, Margaret J. "The New American Muse: Notes on the Amusement/Theme Park." *Journal of Popular Culture* 15, no. 1 (Summer 1981): 56-62.
- Klein, Esther M. *Fairmount Park: A History and a Guidebook*. Bryn Mawr, PA: Harcum Junior College Press, 1974.
- Kowall, Linda. "The Merry-Go-Round Kings." *Pennsylvania Heritage*, 14, no. 2 (Spring 1988): 24-33.
- Kyriazi, Gary. *The Great American Amusement Parks: A Pictorial History*. Secaucus, NJ: Citadel Press, 1976.
- Lawlor, Mark R. *Brandywine Springs Amusement Park: Echoes of the Past, 1886-1923*, Second Edition. Wilmington, DE: M&M Publishing, 1996.
- Leach, William. *Land of Desire: Merchants, Power, and the Rise of a New American Culture*. New York: Vintage Books, 1993.
- Levine, Lawrence W. *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988.
- Lewis, Peirce F. "Axioms for Reading the Landscape: Some Guides to the American Scene." In *The Interpretation of Ordinary Landscapes: Geographical Essays*, edited by D. W. Meinig, 11-32. New York: Oxford University Press, 1979.
- Lewis, Peirce F. "Common Landscapes as Historic Documents." In *History from Things: Essays on Material Culture*, edited by Steven Lubar and W. David Kingery, 115-139. Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1993.
- Liebs, Chester. *Main Street to Miracle Mile: American Roadside Architecture*. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1985.
- Life Was a Lark at Willow Grove Park*. Produced by Tim Young, Ron Kelleher and Chuck Russell. Videocassette. 1991.
- Ling, Peter J. *America and the Automobile: Technology, Reform and Social Change*. New York: Manchester University Press, 1990.
- Lipsitz, George. *Time Passages: Collective Memory and American Popular Culture*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990.
- Longstreth, Richard. "When the Present Becomes the Past." In *Past Meets Future: Saving America's Historic Environments*, edited by Antoinette J. Lee, 213-225. Washington, DC: The Preservation Press, 1992.
- Lowenthal, David. *The Past is a Foreign Country*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985.



- Mallowe, Mike. "That's Why They Call it Wildwood." *Philadelphia Magazine*, 71 no. 8 (August 1980): 106-113, 204-213.
- Mangels, William F. *The Outdoor Amusement Industry*. New York: Vantage Press, 1952.
- Mannix, Don. *Step Right Up!* New York: Harper & Brothers, 1950.
- Margaret Woodbury Strong Museum. *Step Right Up! Amusement for All: Show Business at the Turn of the Century*. Rochester, NY: Margaret Woodbury Strong Museum, 1977.
- Margolies, John. "Once Upon a Time in the Adirondacks: When Theme Parks Ruled the Roadside." *Adirondack Life* 29, no. 3 (May/June 1998): 50-57.
- Marling, Karal Ann. *The Colossus of Roads: Myth and Symbol Along the American Highway*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984.
- Marling, Karal Ann. "Disneyland, 1955: Just Take the Santa Ana Freeway to the American Dream." *American Art* 5, nos. 1-2 (Winter/Spring 1991): 168-207.
- Marling, Karal Ann. *Designing Disney's Theme Parks: The Architecture of Reassurance*. Montreal: Canadian Centre for Architecture, 1997.
- McCormick, Nancy D. and John S. McCormick. *Saltair*. Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1985.
- McCullough, Edo. *World's Fair Midways: An Affectionate Account of American Amusement Areas from the Crystal Palace to the Crystal Ball*. New York: Exposition Press, 1966.
- McMahon, William. "Historic South Jersey Towns." *Atlantic City Press*, 7 June 1959, 10.
- Middleton, William D. *The Time of the Trolley: The Street Railway from Horsecar to Light Rail, Volume One*. San Marino, CA: Golden West Books, 1987.
- Minter, Nancy L. "Shopping for the Fun of It." *Urban Land* 50, no. 1 (January 1991): 38.
- Mitchell, Nora J. and Robert R. Page. "Managing the Past for the Future: The Stewardship of America's Landscape Legacy." *Historic Preservation Forum*, 7, no. 3 (May/June 1993): 46-61.
- Moore, Martha T. "Resort is Reworking Run-down into Retro." *USA Today*, 1 June 1998.
- Murtagh, William J. *Keeping Time: The History and Theory of Preservation in America*, Revised Edition. New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1997.
- Nasaw, David. *Going Out: The Rise and Fall of Public Amusements*. New York: BasicBooks, 1993.



- National Register of Historic Places Inventory – Nomination Form. Glen Echo Amusement Park, Glen Echo, MD. 1981.
- National Register of Historic Places Inventory – Nomination Form. Kennywood Park, West Mifflin, PA. 1983.
- National Register of Historic Places Inventory – Nomination Form. “Leap-the-Dips” Roller Coaster, Altoona, PA. 1995.
- National Register of Historic Places Inventory – Nomination Form. Playland Amusement Park, Rye, NY. 1979.
- Navarra, Tova. *The New Jersey Shore: A Vanishing Splendor*. Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Presses, Inc., 1985.
- Neil, J. Meredith. “The Roller Coaster: Architectural Symbol and Sign.” *Journal of Popular Culture* 15, no. 1 (Summer 1981): 108-115.
- New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection. *Coastal Permit Program Rules*. New Jersey Administrative Code 7:7. Amended through December 7, 1998.
- Nye, Russel B. “Eight Ways of Looking at an Amusement Park.” *Journal of Popular Culture* 15, no. 1 (Summer 1981): 63-75.
- Passell, Peter. “Where the Thrills of Old Keep Coming Round.” *New York Times Magazine*, 23 July 1995.
- Pastier, John. “The Architecture of Escapism: Disney World and Las Vegas.” *AIA Journal* 67, no. 14 (December 1978): 26-37.
- Peiss, Kathy. *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in New York City, 1880-1920*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986.
- Pilat, Oliver and Jo Ranson. *Sodom by the Sea: An Affectionate History of Coney Island*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, Doran & Company, Inc., 1941.
- Platt, Frederick. “Horace Trumbauer’s Later Works in Glenside.” *Old York Road Historical Society Bulletin*, 40 (1980): 3-11.
- Platt, Frederick. “Horace Trumbauer in Hatboro and the Morelands.” *Old York Road Historical Society Bulletin*, 42 (1982): 23-28.
- Platt, Frederick. “Horace Trumbauer in Abington.” *Old York Road Historical Society Bulletin*, 43 (1983): 49-61.
- Project on Disney. *Inside the Mouse: Work and Play at Disney World*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995.



- Roberts, Russell and Rich Youmans. *Down the Jersey Shore*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1993.
- Rubin, Barbara. "Aesthetic Ideology and Urban Design." *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 69, no. 3 (September 1979): 339-361.
- Rydell, Robert W. *All the World's a Fair: Visions of Empire at American International Expositions, 1876-1916*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984.
- Scharf, J. Thomas and Thompson Westcott. *History of Philadelphia, 1609-1884*, Vol. II. Philadelphia: L.H. Everts & Co., 1884.
- Schlereth, Thomas J. *Victorian America: Transformations in Everyday Life, 1876-1915*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1991.
- Sears, John F. *Sacred Places: American Tourist Attractions in the Nineteenth Century*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1989.
- Sharkey, Joe. "Real Beach Kitsch, Not the Fake Stuff." *The New York Times*, 2 March 1997.
- Sharkey, Joe. "Quaint or Kitschy; Two Sides of the Jersey Shore: Cape May's Victorian Mansions, the Wildwoods' Flashy Motels." *The New York Times*, 19 July 1998.
- Shelton, F. H. "Springs and Spas of Old-Time Philadelphians." *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 47 (1923): 196-237.
- Siegel, Alan A. *Smile: A Picture History of Olympic Park, 1887-1965*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1983.
- Snyder, Theresa R. "Better than Fair: Ephemera and the Centennial Exhibition of 1876." *Popular Culture in Libraries* 4, no. 1 (1996): 21-62.
- Tatman, Sandra L. and Roger W. Moss. *Biographical Dictionary of Philadelphia Architects, 1700-1930*. Boston: G.K. Hall, 1985.
- Thomas, George E. and Carl Doebley. *Cape May, Queen of the Seaside Resorts: Its History and Architecture*. Philadelphia: The Art Alliance Press, 1976.
- Thompson, Ray. "Willow Grove: The Disneyland of the Early 1900s." *Pennsylvania Illustrated* 3, no. 1 (October 1978): 27-29.
- Thompson, Ray. *Willow Grove Park: A Look Back in Time to Another Era of Entertainment*. Southampton, PA: Cassidy Printing, Inc., 1977.
- Throgmorton, Todd H. *Roller Coasters of America*. Osceola, WI: Motorola International Publishers, 1994.





- Throgmorton, Todd H. *Roller Coasters: An Illustrated Guide to the Rides in the United States and Canada, with a History*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 1993.
- United States Department of the Interior. *National Register Bulletin 15: How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation*. Washington, DC: United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1991.
- United States Department of the Interior. *National Register Bulletin 16A: How to Complete the National Register Registration Form*. Washington, DC: United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1991.
- Venturi, Robert, Denise Scott Brown and Steven Izenour. *Learning from Las Vegas*, Revised Edition. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1991.
- Venturi, Robert, Denise Scott Brown and Steven Izenour. "Our Best Main Streets." *Travel and Leisure* (April 1998): 105-107.
- Views of Coney Island*. Portland, ME: L.H. Nelson Company, 1906.
- Warner, Sam Bass. *The Private City: Philadelphia in Three Periods of Its Growth*, Second Edition. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991.
- Watson, Bruce. "Three's a Crowd, They Say, But Not at Coney Island!" *Smithsonian*, 27, no. 9 (December 1996): 100-109.
- Webb, Melody. "Cultural Landscapes in the National Park Service." *The Public Historian*, 9, no. 2 (Spring 1987): 77-89.
- Weedon, Geoff and Richard Ward. *Fairground Art: The Art Forms of Traveling Fairs, Carousels and Carnival Midways*. New York: Abbeville Press, 1981.
- Wildwood Historic Preservation Commission, Wildwood, NJ. Informational Packet. May 1998.
- Wiley, Day Allen. "The Trolley Park." *Cosmopolitan* 33 (July 1902): 265-272.
- Williams, Frederick P. "Willow Grove Park Concerts, 1896-1925." *Chestnut Hill Local News*. 8 August 1982.
- Wilson, Harold F. *The Jersey Shore: A Social and Economic History of the Counties of Atlantic, Cape May, Monmouth and Ocean*. New York: Lewis Historical Publishing Company, Inc., 1953.
- Wilson, Harold F. *The Story of the Jersey Shore*. Princeton, NJ: D. Van Nostrand Company, Inc., 1964.
- Wilson, Richard Guy. "From Informality to Pomposity: The Resort Casino in the Later 19<sup>th</sup> Century." *Nineteenth Century* 8, nos. 1-2 (1982): 109-116.



## *Index*

### **A**

Atlantic City, NJ, 86-87, 91, 92, 104  
amusement piers, 94, 99  
boardwalk, 61, 92, 94, 99, 100  
Steeplechase Pier, 109

automobiles  
rise of, 32-33, 58, 68-70, 82  
recreational use, 111-112

### **B**

boardwalk, definition, 92

### **C**

Chestnut Hill Park, Philadelphia, PA, 8, 47

Coney Island, NY, 8, 11, 13, 15, 25, 27-29, 43, 49, 63, 94, 96, 99, 109  
Dreamland Park, 27  
Luna Park, 27, 66  
Sea Lion Park, 27, 43  
Steeplechase Park, 27, 99

Cape May, NJ, 85-87, 92, 115, 140  
preservation of, 144-145

cultural landscape, definition, 1-2

### **D**

Disneyland, 4, 32-34, 74-75, 77, 119, 149

Doo Wop Preservation League,  
Wildwood, NJ, 146, 148-149, 156

### **E**

electricity  
at amusement parks, 6, 27, 31

### **I**

Izenour, Steven, 144, 148

### **K**

Kennywood Park, near Pittsburgh, PA,  
151, 156

### **M**

Mauch Chunk, PA, 24-25, 61, 119, 140

The Morey Organization, Wildwood, NJ,  
148-149, 151-152, 154, 156

motels, design of, 120-121

### **N**

New Jersey Shore  
automobiles, 85, 102, 103, 112, 114,  
115, 117  
development of, 85-87  
railroad, 85-87



## P

Philadelphia Rapid Transit Company  
(PRT), 40, 56, 68-71

pleasure gardens, 16

popular culture  
definition, 2  
early 19<sup>th</sup> century, 7  
late 19<sup>th</sup>/early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, 6-8

public amusements, 6-12, 15  
demographics of patrons, 11-13, 15

## R

race  
and amusement parks, 34  
and amusement park games, 13  
and Willow Grove Park, 47, 61, 75

## S

Seabreeze Park, Rochester, NY, 29, 151

Six Gun Territory, 77

## T

theme parks, 4, 33-34, 75, 77, 80, 125

trolley parks, 15, 29-32, 40-41, 46, 82-83,  
87, 103, 126

Trumbauer, Horace, 41, 49-54, 56, 61

## U

Union Traction Company (UTC), 39, 40,  
41, 50, 56

urban park movement, 16-17

## V

Venturi, Scott Brown and Associates, 144

## W

The Wildwoods

amusement devices

Doo Wopper roller coaster, 152  
Golden Nugget Mine ride, 119,  
135, 140, 150

Great White roller coaster, 152

Jack Rabbit roller coaster, 105,  
106, 135, 150-151

Jungleland, 119, 124

Yankee Dip, 105

Ye Old Mill, 105

amusement piers

The Amusement Center, 105-106,  
134-136

Atlantic Pier, 100, 111

Blaker's Pier, 96, 99-100, 102,

105, 106, 125, 134, 136, 138,  
148, 152

Casino Pier, 94, 96, 125, 134

Funchase, 109, 111

Hunt's Ocean Pier, 109, 117

Luff's Pier, 111

Marine Pier, 106, 117, 125, 134,  
138

Mariner's Landing, 83, 125, 134,  
138, 148, 152

Nickels' Midway Pier, 83, 94,  
125, 134

Ocean Pier, 99-100, 102, 105-106,  
109, 123-125, 134, 138

Playland, 106, 117, 125

Anglesea, establishment of, 83, 87, 88,  
93

Baker Brothers, 88, 91

beach, expansion of, 92-93, 131-132

electric lighting, 106, 136

historic districts, 145-146, 155-156



The Wildwoods, continued

Holly Beach, establishment of, 83, 87-89

Main Street program, 145-146, 156  
motels, 117, 119-120, 123-124, 138, 145-149

1950s architecture, 120, 124, 145-149  
railroad, 82, 87-89, 91, 102-103, 114  
visitor demographics, 103, 140-143  
Wildwood, establishment of, 83, 88-89

Wildwood Crest, establishment of, 83, 88-89

Willow Grove Mineral Springs, 37-39

Willow Grove Park

amusement devices

Captive Flying Machine, 58, 70, 74

Mountain Scenic Railway, 58, 70

St. Nicholas Coal Mine, 61, 65-66

Tours of the World, 63, 65, 70, 74

Venice, 65-66, 70-71

Willowgraph Theater, 56, 71

Ye Olde Mill, 60-61, 71

buildings

Bandstand, 49, 50, 53, 70, 74

Casino, 49, 50, 53

Ladies' Clubhouse, 49, 50

Lodge, 49, 50

Music Pavilion, 43, 49, 50, 53

concerts, 44-46, 70

electric fountain, 43, 44, 50

electric lighting, 66

Hankin family, 73-75, 77

visitor demographics, 47-48

Willow Grove Park mall, 37, 53, 77, 80

Willow Grove Shopping Center, 73

Woodside Park, Philadelphia, PA, 8

World's Fairs, 17-18, 48

architecture at, 53-54, 100, 119, 123

Buffalo (1901), 23, 48

Chicago (1893), 19, 21, 23, 43, 50, 54

Philadelphia (1876), 17-18

San Francisco (1915), 54, 123





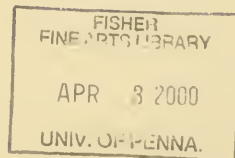
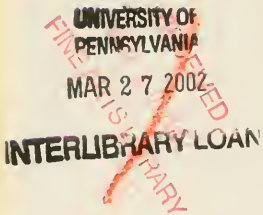


Anne & Jerome Fisher

FINE ARTS LIBRARY

University of Pennsylvania

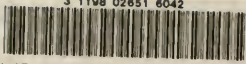
Please return this book as soon as you have finished with it. It must be returned by the latest date stamped below.





N/1198/02651/6042X

3 1198 02651 6042



N/1198/02651/6042X