

Wildwood Historical Society, Inc.



George F. Boyer Museum

609.523.0277

WildwoodHistoricalMuseum.com

3907 Pacific Avenue
Wildwood, NJ 08260

*Gathering, preserving and presenting
the Wildwoods' history*

2022 Museum Hours

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

Fridays and Saturdays 10 am - 3 pm

Sundays 12-5 pm

Hours Memorial Day - Labor Day

Mondays, Wednesdays, Thursdays,

Fridays and Saturdays 10 am - 3 pm

Sundays 12-5 pm

Closed Tuesdays

Issue 49. Summer/Fall 2022



Until recently, the house on the right stood at Atlantic and Rio Grande Avenues, making a fascinating then-and-now comparison study. Photo courtesy Sea Shell Ice Cream Parlor.

Playing the Forensic Game in the Wildwoods

by Rob Ascough, Treasurer

On the walls of Sea Shell Ice Cream are numerous photos, including a handful of The Wildwoods around the turn of the century (do I need to specify that means 1900, not 2000?) One of them depicts the iconic parlor's location at the intersection of Atlantic & Rio Grande Avenues, way before the Cape Cod-style building was likely a residence, and even way before the Cape Cod-style building existed at all. "The house across the street still stands," boasts the caption below this particular photo, in some variation of these words. And for years, one could stand (or sit) on Sea Shell's porch, look across the street, and easily spot the house in the photo. No fake news there.

Except a year or two ago (or maybe more, because these days the years tend to blur together as one), the house was demolished, not only rendering Sea Shell's photo caption inaccurate, but also reminding one of the fragilities of many things in this world we take for granted – the longer one thinks things will always remain the same, the more surprising change becomes. I'm old enough to remember the turn of the century (this time, I'm talking about 2000) when motels around the island began disappearing at an alarming rate. They all stood for so long, most looking the same throughout their lives, that I never could have envisioned a day some would be wiped from the landscape. Two decades later, I'm aware of another aspect of change – the part about memories fading. When I drive up and down Atlantic Avenue in Wildwood Crest, I find it difficult remembering what stood where. The only reason I know the location of the Satellite and Schumann's is because I recall them being on the block north of Crest Pier. These days I couldn't tell you where the Tahiti stood if you put a gun to my head; even the

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The Lore of Lifeguard Tan

by Larry Lillo, Secretary

During the late 1950s, I was a mascot at the Taylor Avenue lifeguard stand for my cousin Mickey Muratore and the Wildwood Beach Patrol.

I can remember the lifeguards and myself putting on this orange-looking liquid from a gallon jug. I was told it was called lifeguard tan. Our station was the Burk Avenue Beach tent. It was located at Ocean Avenue and Burk Avenues.

In the morning before going to the stands the guards would be swabbing themselves with the lifeguard tan. Yes, it worked. I remember at one time someone saying that there were only a few bottles of the tan left. I'm not sure if this was when I was a mascot or on the beach patrol.

Later in 1966 when I became a guard, Dutch Hoffman — the Captain of the Wildwood Beach Patrol — had passed on in between that time. The lore was always that Dutch made the lotion of baby oil and iodine and it was spoken about for years.

A friend of mine always told me he had a bottle of it at home and one day would bring it to me for the museum. Well, at the end of last summer, he comes by my store and says, "Guess what I have for you".

He gives me a bottle of lifeguard tan. I looked at it and could not believe it was in a commercial bottle with a label. I was expecting a jug with hand written lifeguard tan on it. I had never seen one like this before and did not know that it existed.

It was given to me by Bob Gavin and his wife. She said it was kept in a drawer and protected. Bob was a guard from 1957-64. He went into the army and retired from the Philly Fire Department.

I studied the bottle and it had the ingredients on the label along with Dutch Hoffman's name. The bottom of the bottle had some imprinted lettering; I'm not sure if it is a patient number or what? There is a small amount of product in the bottom that looks like the color of mud.

So, the lore of lifeguard tan is now a recorded reality. If you would like to know what the ingredients are, stop by the museum and you can read them from the bottle yourself. I have also given the Wildwood Beach Patrol a picture of it to hang in the lifeguard station at Lincoln Avenue and the Beach.



Photo courtesy Larry Lillo

Museum Minutes

by Taylor Henry, President

Street Sign Auction Updates

Early this summer we auctioned off about 80 street signs from Pacific Avenue intersections. It was our most profitable auction yet, netting about \$14,000 for the nonprofit Wildwood Historical Society. We are incredibly grateful to the City of Wildwood Public Works department for their generosity in donating old signs to us.

For the past few years, the city has been replacing worn out old street signs with new, more visible ones and donating the old ones to us. Previously, in 2021, black-and-white street signs from streets like Hudson and Arctic brought in about \$11,000, and in 2020, signs from New Jersey and Atlantic totaled around \$12,000. Our auctions were so popular that towns like Wildwood Crest and Sea Isle City recently sold their old signs as fundraisers rather than throwing them away.

We will have another eBay auction in 2023 with streets like Susquehanna, Lake and more from the bayside. Don't miss out! Check wildwoodhistoricalmuseum.com in early April/May 2023 for dates, times and starting bids. Our auctions generally last from mid-May to mid-June, so don't forget to check our website early!

Open House Honoring Board Members

Former presidents Al Brannen, Larry Lillo, Bob Scully and Anne Vinci will be honored at a free fall open house at our museum Sunday, October 16 at 2 pm. Friends, family and fans are welcome to join in celebration while learning of the honorees' lifelong contributions to the historical society. The museum and gift shop will be open. Refreshments will be served.

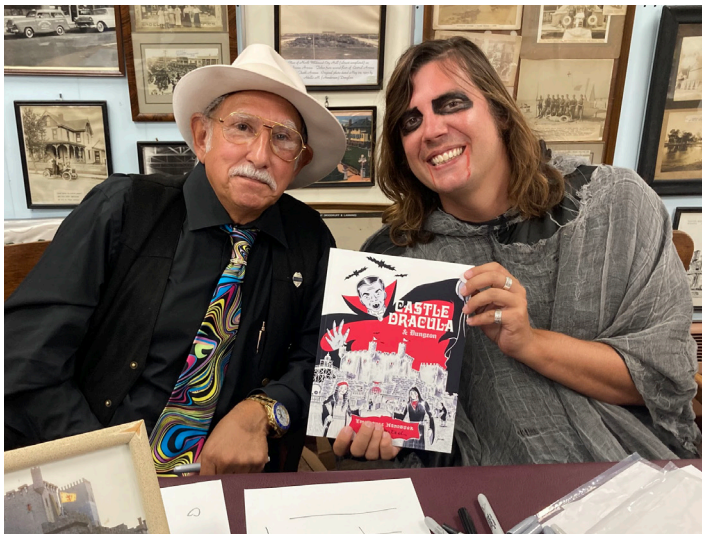
We Need Volunteers

Join the Wildwood Historical Society volunteer team and experience our museum from a new angle! We are seeking volunteers to help out on day to day projects like greeting and guiding visitors, organizing and cleaning, and more. If you have skills in organization, building care and maintenance, day-to-day cleaning, clerical work, customer service, or retail, or if you have interest in joining our digital preservation team, we want you! You choose how many hours and what hours you'd like to work; extremely flexible to schedule.

Whether you're local or seasonal, we welcome you. To inquire, call 609-523-0277, email wildwoodhistoricalsociety@hotmail.com or drop in at 3907 Pacific Ave in Wildwood. For hours, visit wildwoodhistoricalmuseum.com.

Seeking Stories from Veterans' Families

Wildwood Historical Society is looking for short biographies about the Wildwoods' veterans in all branches and in all wars. We are putting together a comprehensive collection for the museum, so if you are a veteran or you have/had a veteran in your family, please send any photos plus 1-2 paragraphs about their life to wildwoodhistoricalsociety@hotmail.com. We thank you for your help and to all veterans for their service.



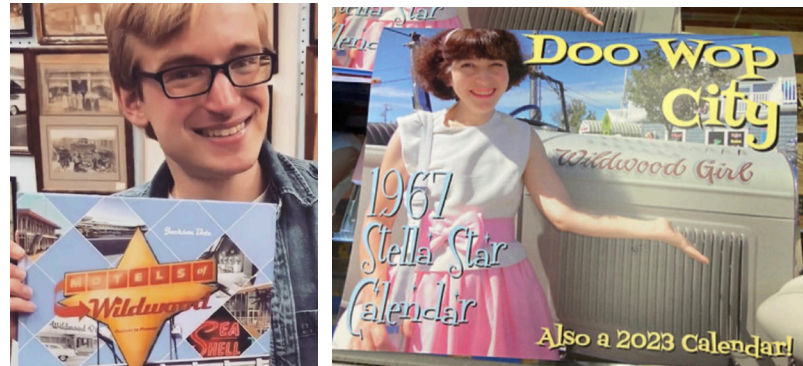
Mike Jasorka signed copies of his book *Castle Dracula Employee Handbook Illustrated* at the museum on August 13. Buy a copy in our online gift shop!

New Products

All of these new products are available in our gift shop at 3907 Pacific Ave, Wildwood NJ during our hours of operation. They can be purchased online and shipped anytime of year at wildwoodhistoricalmuseum.com/shop.

Castle Dracula Employee Handbook: Illustrated

Hundreds of visitors passed through the museum August 13 for the Castle Dracula Reunion and Celebration! Mike Jasorka signed about 70 copies of his new *Castle Dracula Employee Handbook: Illustrated* (\$25.) Angelo Nickels, founder of Nickel's Midway Pier who built Castle Dracula, also signed autographs and recounted stories of the castle. Michael Yannette provided a 20th Anniversary Castle Dracula backdrop and sold dark ride prints (now available in our gift shop!) Keith Shepherd brought his artwork and a real griffin from the castle. Jim Pauley brought a link from the drawbridge chain. Mr. Nickels autographed both artifacts. Al Brannen brought a Dracula figure from the Shamrock Cafe and Kirk Hastings brought a replica of the yellow and red flags that adorned the castle. Thank you to everyone who made this event a success.



Motels of Wildwood: Postwar to Present Release Party a Success

Thanks to everyone who supported Jackson Betz's April 30 book release party for his new definitive release *Motels of Wildwood: Postwar to Present!* Betz is a board member with the historical society and we are proud of his comprehensive work. The book's cover price is \$25. We quickly sold out of our first 70 autographed copies and had to order more! Get yours today.

Architectural Coloring Book

Preserving the Wildwoods: A Community Alliance' new *Historic Architectural Styles of the Wildwoods* coloring book for all ages is available for just \$5. Featuring sketches of Victorian, Craftsman, Spanish Mission and more styles throughout the Wildwoods. Proceeds are shared with the historical society. Your purchase benefits two nonprofits!

Doo Wop City Calendar

This 2023 calendar is also a 1967 calendar! Full of photos and stories of Wildwoods landmarks featuring midcentury model Stella Star. Makes a great gift! The collectible 2022/1966 calendar is also available. \$15.

Local Historical Fiction by Laura Quinn

A limited number of signed paperbacks of this new novel are now available for purchase at our gift shop and on our website. Best described as "Titanic meets Boardwalk Empire," *Thicker Than Water* is the first novel in a historical fiction trilogy set in Wildwood and Cape May, at the onset of World War One.

Readers are also treated to such endearing Gilded Age Philadelphia locales as Shibe Park, Boathouse Row, Reading Terminal Market, the Bellevue-Stratford hotel, and John Wanamaker's. Grab your copy today! \$20.99.

Stay in Touch All Year Long!

There are so many more announcements and thank yous that we couldn't fit here. Follow us on [facebook.com/wwhistoricalsociety](https://www.facebook.com/wwhistoricalsociety), [instagram.com/wildwoodhistoricalsociety](https://www.instagram.com/wildwoodhistoricalsociety) and twitter.com/wwhistoricalsoc for updates on donations, events, gift shop additions and more. Subscribe to our free monthly e-newsletter at <https://pst.cr/eGw5r>. Thank you to all our generous supporters and followers.

Playing the Forensic Game in the Wildwoods

by Rob Ascough, Treasurer

(continued from page 1)

location of the Memory Motel escapes my memory.

It's little reminders that help with these sorts of things, and for them I am grateful. A drive around the island or a walk along the boardwalk is sometimes like an archaeological dig or game involving forensic evidence. Sometimes there's a building with the faint outline of an old sign – something retail store aficionados call a labelscar – because the new tenant was too stretched or harried to break out a gallon of paint for a truly fresh start. A look down at the wooden boards of one of Morey's amusement piers likewise results in the same type of find, such as the outline of an amusement ride removed years ago. On the boardwalk about halfway between Mariner's and Surfside Pier is a building with a steel structure rising into the air from the top of the façade. At one point it held the sign for the Wildwood Casino – I don't believe I ever set foot in it, but seeing that rusty remnant reminds me of the arcade claiming itself to be Home of the Big Winner. With hyperbole like that, it's amazing the family never succumbed to the temptation.

When one pulls into Urie's parking lot, there is a road that continues past the complex, abruptly ending at the water. To the casual observer this stretch of ancient asphalt makes no sense, until one looks across the water to see another road, also terminating suddenly. The missing piece between the two roads was the bridge that once brought traffic onto the island, before the construction of the George Redding Bridge that's served The Wildwoods since 1950. (If one wants to better visualize what's going on here, a quick look at Google Maps illustrates the original Rio Grande Avenue alignment and the way the George Redding Bridge was constructed to the north, likely to avoid forcing residents from their homes and perhaps to allow the original structure to remain functional during construction of the replacement.) This is the sort of thing that makes exploring the island so gratifying – without working too hard, sometimes it's easy to piece together little bits that allow the discovery of something much larger.

Of course, a trail of historical breadcrumbs is not always left behind for explorers to savor. A few miles north stands a series of bridges on Route 147, colloquially known as the North Wildwood Bridge. As a child I remember crabbing in the inlets from our rented boat, staring in awe at the large structure rising into the sky with the assistance of even-larger cranes. In a place like The Wildwoods, it was both jarring and impressive to see new infra-

structure. Unfortunately, unlike other bridge replacement projects that leave behind remnants like approaches repurposed as fishing piers, there appears little to suggest something else once stood in its place. To many traveling to the island these days, the current bridge structure has always been there, because no evidence exists to support alternative thinking (at this point I invite our North Wildwood experts to prove me wrong.)

Lucky for people like me, I know where to find the evidence I seek; a place in which I can play my own forensic game in The Wildwoods. While much of the island's history has been abandoned both physically and emotionally, the George F. Boyer Museum provides a fascinating experience to all seeking a glimpse into the past. The Keystone Kops no longer patrol the boardwalk, Castle Dracula no longer looms about Schellenger, and the Thunderbird Inn no longer soars above Surf Avenue, but genuine artifacts representing their histories can be found within our walls, along with enough photos and documentation to make any fact-finding project possible. With so many memories on display, who needs to remember?



The same house from page 1 is shown from the porch of the Sea Shell Motel in 2019. Recently the house was demolished, making photos a rarity. Courtesy Taylor Henry

The Surfside Restaurant: A Preservation Success Story

by Jackson Betz, Board Member

One of the Wildwoods' most uplifting tales of preservation belongs to the John family, whose Surfside Restaurant was one of the Wildwoods' most familiar sights at Buttercup and Ocean Avenues.

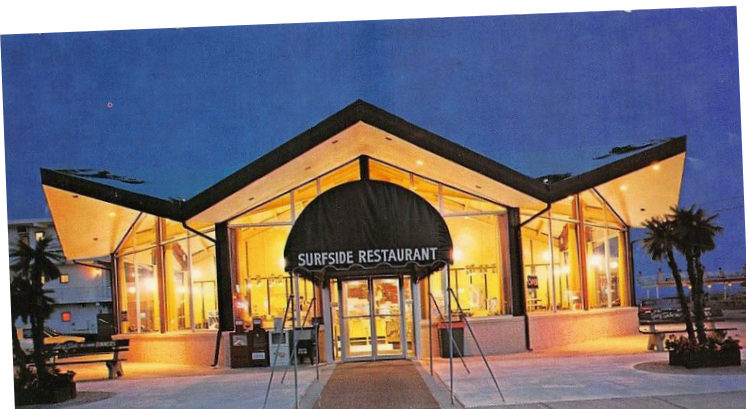
Tomi John and his family emigrated to the United States from Macedonia, Greece on July 4, 1940. Tomi John was a child then, but his family made a beeline for the Wildwoods. By the 1950s, Tomi John discovered that Wildwood offered a lucrative opportunity to get into the restaurant business. His son, Michael John, says, "I believe he sold pretzels on the boardwalk for a year. Then he got Tomi John's, which was a 52-seat restaurant. That was a 24-hour place, for several hours during the summer. Back then Wildwood was very busy during the summer." Tomi John's occupied the retail space at Wildwood's flashy Shore Theater and drew a sizeable business. In 1962, he decided to expand. Michael John: "He got together with a group of people he knew from Tomi John's – some people owned land, a couple lawyers, a couple judges – they put a group together and they built that on that piece of property." The Surfside Restaurant opened on July 4, 1963 and its angular roofline, roof spotlights, and large plate-glass windows created a sen-

sation.

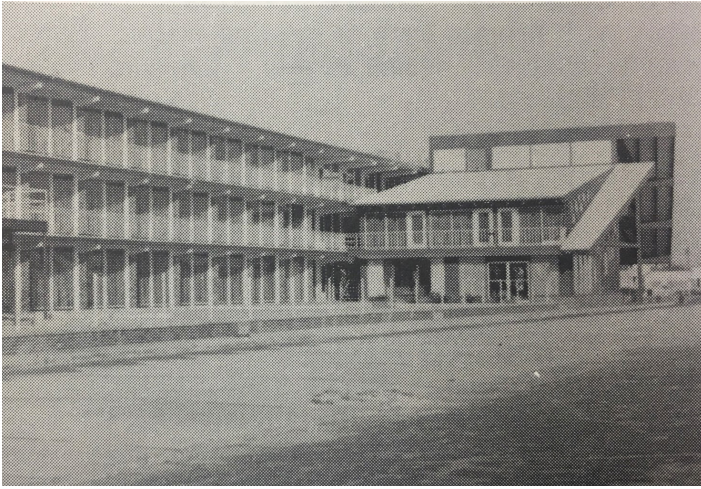
On July 4, 1994 (a date that carries a persistent significance in the John family), Tomi John suffered a fatal heart attack. Michael John kept running the restaurant for the time being. "Then it just got too big, and my heart wasn't in it." He sold the restaurant eight years later, and the buyer planned to tear the historic building down to add to the Water's Edge Motel next door. Morey's Piers owner Jack Morey, who had become an advocate of Doo Wop architecture, negotiated with the buyer to allow the Doo Wop Preservation League to take the time necessary to fundraise the money necessary to dismantle, rather than demolish, the Surfside, so that it could be later reassembled as a visitors' center. When the fundraising effort began, Wildwoods residents and Doo Wop buffs were on board. "By that point, enough of the more progressive folks were engaged and we were able to approach Tom Byrne, whose father left a large sum of money to the city," says Morey. "They put a very good chunk of change into it."

The move took place on October 15, 2002, and the Surfside was dismantled quickly. "It was coming down and it was sort of moveable," says Morey. "It was also one of the more well-known buildings. And it was steel; if it was wood, we wouldn't have been able to do that." After much discussion about what to do with the building, the Doo Wop Preservation League installed the Surfside in downtown Wildwood's Fox Park, where it serves as a visitors' center, Doo Wop Experience and band shell. The preservation of the Surfside is a prime example of the impact that concerned citizens can have on the welfare of historic architecture, and its success is to the credit of the Wildwoods.

Today, Michael John is still flipping burgers and serving delighted guests at the Surfside West (formerly Crestwood) Diner at New Jersey and Cresse Avenues.



Then and Now



The Admiral Motel at Rambler and Ocean Avenues in Wildwood Crest opened in 1963 and is shown here four years later.



Today renamed the Oceanview, the motel sits in relatively original condition, awaiting a renovation..

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

Membership

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

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

Other ways you can donate!



Subscribe to our free monthly E-newsletter too! Visit wildwoodhistoricalmuseum.com

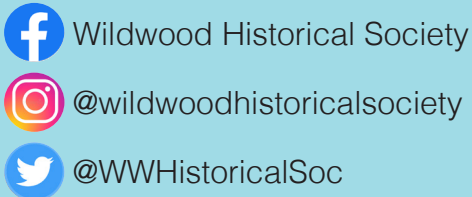
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