

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*

2023 Museum Hours

May 30-September 2: Mondays-Saturdays 10 am-3 pm; Closed Sundays
September 7-October 28: Thursdays-Saturdays 10 am-3 pm

Closed for the winter from October 29 to early April 2024. Stay tuned for spring 2024 hours!

Issue 51. Summer/Fall 2023

The Summer Olympic Games

by Rob Ascough, Treasurer

Did you hear about the time I won an important game in a very competitive setting?

Every four years, the Summer Olympic Games take place, and the world rejoices. Or maybe just NBCUniversal because the event validates the existence of its Peacock streaming service for a period of about two weeks. But long-time Wildwood residents and vacationers likely remember a time when the Olympic games were an annual occurrence on the boardwalk, nestled into the corner of an L-shaped building at E. 24th Street. With poker machines, Skee-Ball lanes, and coin pushers, one glance would have fooled someone into thinking it was just like all the other arcades that dominated every block at the time. Yet something made it vastly different – Fascination.

Once a staple present at many amusement parks, the game is deceptively simple – roll a rubber ball up a slightly-inclined wooden lane and over a bump where it would bounce around until falling into one of 24 holes arranged like a bingo board (there was no middle hole—that was considered a freebie). Corresponding lights on a glass panel at the far end of the table would illuminate as the ball dropped into the holes (play fast, but gentle... remember, it's all in the flick of the wrist!) and the first player with five in a row won the game. Unless it was Cover-all, which involved lighting every light, typically while playing the role of traffic coordinator to two, three, four, or sometimes even five balls at once.

Once a staple present at many amusement parks, there are only a handful left with so-called Fascination parlours. There are likely many reasons for this, including the fact that a sizeable staff is required for one to be properly operated. No doubt amusement park owners have near-unanimously decided that the *benefits* of offering Fascination are outweighed by the *requirements* of offering Fascination.

Which is a shame, because a group of competitive players creates a frantic atmosphere that's capable of shattering one's nerves – just as you're about to sink that last ball for a red line, you know someone else on the other side of the room is going to spoil your fun with a lame diagonal. Yet you play game after game after game because you just can't

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A West Wildwood Detective Is Born

by Russ Strittmatter, WHS Board

It's August, and time for a weekend adventure in West Wildwood. I'm a single dad and my son, Michael, vacations at the old family home on Glenwood Avenue, built in 1935.

Michael and I looked forward to a bike ride around the island of West Wildwood, some back bay beach time, and a kayak trip to explore the old railroad bridges in the bay. However, Mother Nature put a damper on our best laid plans. It poured rain!

As Michael and I watched Glenwood Avenue begin to flood in West Wildwood as the municipal siren wailed, Michael said to me, "Dad, how did we wind up in West Wildwood?" I replied to Michael, "I have a great idea. Let's go

to the Wildwood Historical Society located at 3907 Pacific Ave. in Wildwood and see 'What be happening'."

As quick as a bunny, we scampered off to the George Boyer Museum. The sign on the door said, "Open Please Come in, It is Free." Wow!

As Michael and I entered, we were greeted by the amazing smile of Kathi Johnson, a docent. She greeted us by welcoming us to the Wildwood Historical Society, George Boyer Museum and asked how she could help us.

Michael said, "I am a new member of the West Wildwood Community and want to learn about this piece of heaven on earth. He said the borough logo is "Small Town Charm on the Back Bay". How did this glob of landfill transfer itself from the blunt of islander jokes to seashore chic in just over 100 years?

Kathi asked, "What street do you live on in West Wildwood? Michael replied

"Glenwood Avenue". With that, Kathi sprang into action and brought out a book on floods. Then out came books on post cards and life in West Wildwood. Look, she said, here are pictures of the family that lived in your house. They were Frank, his wife Alma, and daughter, Marian Phifer. Frank built the house by hand in 1935. After the devastation of the March 1962 Nor'easter storm, the Phifers raised their home (now your home) up 7 cinder blocks.

The Phifers were active members in the West Wildwood Volunteer Fire Company. Benjamin Phifer was Chief of the West Wildwood Police in the late 1920's. Michael exclaimed

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*Flipper's Fascination, 4104
Boardwalk (Courtesy Wildwood
Historical Society)*

The Summer Olympic Games

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stop. It's even fun when less-competitive families take their seats.

When we were young, time at Olympic (known as Olympic Casino Arcade and Olympic Fun Center over the years) came before amusement rides – armed with rolls of quarters, me and my brother would sit down with our parents to play Fascination. Back in the days when indoor smoking was not banned in the state of New Jersey, this usually meant sitting down next to an intensely focused grandma sucking down Virginia Slims. Yet the beauty of Fascination was that no matter how much our father tried to convince us there was a way to win by playing nuanced and aiming the ball, the truth was that a little kid had just as much a chance at victory as a white-haired octogenarian concentrating on the game as if her own red line victory was going to net her a retirement home in Boca.

As I got older, I didn't frequent Wildwood's bars and clubs – on a Friday or Saturday night, I'd be at Fascination at Olympic for its late-night special, typically something like five bucks for an hour of play. It was a cheaper and much more pleasurable way to wind down at the end of a day in the Wildwoods. When I got word of Olympic closing down and getting auctioned piecemeal one weekend late in the season, I was delighted to have been there the night before and having won the final game of Fascination ever played there. If I were to ever have something carved in stone to memorialize my time in this world, I would want it to mention having won the last Fascination game at Olympic.

It's been years since that L-shaped building at E. 24th Street and Boardwalk has been home to a Fascination parlour – like most structures in Wildwood, it has been unceremoniously reinvented throughout the years with less-prestigious businesses – so I never pass without thinking of decades of memories created there. In those years, I have learned a little about the history of the arcade, such as the origins of its curious name being rooted in the Fascination game having relocated from the long-gone Olympic (amusement) Park in Irvington, New Jersey. This knowledge, of course, being the benefit of volunteering at a thriving museum where memorabilia and conversations are equal parts in uncovering the treasures of the past.

If only I could further spread news of noteworthy games having been played there. After all, you may have heard I won an important game in that very competitive setting.

Wildwood Historical Society celebrates 60th anniversary: It was 1963, sixty years ago this year, when our founder George F. Boyer's interest in local history inspired him to establish the Wildwood Historical Society in a small room at the then-new city hall on New Jersey Avenue. During the next decade and a half, Boyer wrote down the stories of the island's original and founding residents, many of whom were elderly.

Fun events coming up: The Wildwood Historical Society is planning some fun events, including a paranormal event and a movie night co-hosted with our neighbors, Old Movies By The Sea! The details were still being worked out at the time of publication, so please check wildwoodhistoricalmuseum.com and our social media periodically for the details as they're available.

Late 50s at the Baker Avenue Beach

by Vicki Weatherby Bundschu, Volunteer

I often spent my days with my Dad who worked nights while Mom worked days. Dad had a Geiger counter and we loved to go to the beach and search for whatever we could find. A couple of great spots were under the ticket booths at Fun Pier and Marine Pier finding coins that people would drop and they fell through the cracks in the boardwalk. But one particularly fond memory and I do not know how it started was that my Dad would give me two fifty cent pieces, put me up on his shoulders and I would put the two coins on the concrete support beam under the boardwalk at Baker Avenue. Hundreds of people would pass through headed to the beach all summer and walk right under my coins. Labor Day weekend would go back and retrieve my two coins. I guess the reason my Dad, Bill Weatherby, did that was create a memory. It worked.

Dad and my Grandpop, Paul Herfert both worked on the boardwalk in the winter replacing the boards. Tearing up the worn boards and replacing with new ones. My grandparents lived next to us on West Montgomery Avenue so they were a big part of my life. Gram pop and Dad would often ask me if I wanted to go to the beach and look for pennies. At seven years old that sounded like a great idea. Dad would drive Grampop and me to the beach and park at Baker Ave and I'd run like crazy and look for money. *Except*, one time I happened to see Grampop dropping the pennies that I thought I was lucky enough to find. I didn't say a word just then, but my feelings were hurt and I held it in.

A few days later Grampop and Dad asked me if I wanted to go to the beach and look for pennies. I told them "no, but I'd go and look for dimes." I don't know why I didn't say quarters. Gram mom said, "Paul, she's onto you." It's still a happy memory.

My husband and I often walk the boards in the summer when we visit and I never walk by Roberts Ave where I believe a picture I have of my Grandpop was taken. He's holding a saw and ready to replace a piece of wood. There's a bike on the side of the building which I believe was The Neptune Gift Shop. I often wonder if it was his bike as I know he never had a car. I was very happy the day I found a picture of him in one of the photo books at WHS. I think the album is titled Maintenance Buildings and there's a perfect clear black and white shot of several city workers standing in front of a City of Wildwood Truck. Grandpop is wearing a work apron and looks very happy to have his picture taken. I also found a picture of my Dad, another clear 8 x 10 black and white photo in the Otten's Harbor photo album. He worked at the Ice Plant in the five hundred block of West Montgomery Ave. It's a picture of him standing by a piece of equipment. I'd recognize that hat anywhere.



Courtesy Wildwood Historical Society

New Additions to Our Gift Shop and Online Store

It's never too early to start shopping for the holidays or birthday presents for the Wildwood fanatics in your life! Shop in person at 3907 Pacific Ave in Wildwood or online at wildwoodhistoricalmuseum.com/shop.

Wildwood Historical Society 60th Anniversary T-Shirt

The George F Boyer museum is celebrating its 60th anniversary in 2023. Get one of these limited editions T-shirts before they are sold out. Very limited quantity. Unisex. Two sided. All sizes in stock at the time of this writing. \$25.

Castle Dracula merchandise

We have two different t-shirts featuring the castle, one black (\$30) and one heather gray (\$25). We also have Castle Dracula postcards for \$2, posters for \$15 (two for \$20 in the gift shop only), and desk topper

signs (see below). Check our website for new arrivals including Dracula glassware and home decor.

2024 Calendars!

The Doo Wop City 2024 calendar is also a 1968 calendar! Full of photos and stories of Wildwoods landmarks featuring mid century-modern Stella Star. \$15.

In addition, We are producing a Wildwood Historical Society 2024 calendar that will feature historical and vintage photos of the Wildwoods. Check the website for details. \$20.

Down the Shore: Stories From My Summers in Wildwood by Charles Wiedenmann

You'll be transported to a bygone era that captures the essence of Wildwood in the 70s, immersing you in the sights, sounds, and emotions of a time when life was lived with unbridled passion. Whether you experienced it firsthand or simply wish you had, prepare to be swept away on a nostalgic journey that will make you long for the days when the spirit of wildwood was at its peak. \$19.99

100th Anniversary Marbles Tournament book

A new 2023 booklet that commemorates the 100th anniversary of Wildwood's oldest event, the National Marbles Tournament. For a limited time! "The First Nationwide Game Contest for Kids: How the National Marbles Tournament Got Started" By Stan Flewelling. \$9.99

Desk Toppers, Fridge Magnets and Tree Ornaments

Artist Keith Shepherd handcrafted replicas of iconic signs like Exit 4A and Exit 6, Castle Dracula, Hunt's Pier and the Wildwood "W". Magnets start at \$20, ornaments at \$27 and desk toppers from \$25-\$47.

Mike Jasorka's books are back in stock!

The bestselling comic-style books Castle Dracula Employee Handbook (\$25), Wildwood Days of Doo Wop (\$25), and Mr. Fascination (\$20) are back in stock!

All of these items and more are available for purchase in the museum gift shop at 3907 Pacific Ave in Wildwood or online at wildwoodhistoricalmuseum.com/shop.



A West Wildwood Detective Is Born

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"Wow"! He wanted to know more about the Phifers. Kathi told him he came to the right place. Alma, Frank Phifer's wife's maiden name was Alma Hug. She grew up with one adopted sister and 2 brothers at 722 Maple Avenue, one block from your house, Michael, on Glenwood Ave. Kathi showed Michael pictures from West Wildwood taken in the 1920's, 1930's, and 1940's about life on the 700 block of Maple Ave.

Michael immediately pulled out his phone and snapped photos of these photos. Michael said, "I can't wait to retrace some of these photos so I can put myself in a space occupied by people 80 years ago. I can become a detective!

Kathi told Michael, "Your investigation will reveal that the famous Morey family had roots at 730 Maple Ave. and that homeowner, Harry Morey, landed in Normandy, France on D-Day on June 6, 1944. Finally, Kathi said, "Michael, you will be captivated by the true love story between Harry and Marian Morey. You can read their love letters written during World War II. The letters are 80 years old, but their love for each other is timeless."

So a boring rainy day was transformed into a detective adventure about West Wildwood simply by visiting the Wildwood Historical Society.

Don't wait for a rainy day to discover this jewel located at 3907 Pacific Ave, Wildwood. Bring your curiosity. You won't be disappointed.

Thanks to Tony Deutsch and team:

After the Great Power Outage of July 2023, our security camera system was fried. Many thanks to the crew at Tony Deutsch Technology for promptly replacing the whole system for us! If you need quality security cameras, learn more at <https://tonydeutsch.com>

Buy-a-Brick Campaign completed:

After several years and hundreds of bricks, we are both excited and saddened to announce the end of the highly successful Buy-A-Brick Campaign. We have reached capacity and no longer have space in our museum walkway for additional bricks. We are grateful for the program's impact on the growth of the Wildwood Historical Society, allowing us to expand our museum and our offerings. Thank you to everyone who purchased a brick over the two decades the program existed. Bricks can be visited 24/7/365.

Then and Now



Abbott Dairy, at Spicer and Railroad Aves (now New Jersey Ave), was once at the industrial center of Holly Beach. The electrical plant is directly across the street. Through a series of mergers Abbott was bought out by Lehigh Valley Farms, which operated at the spot until this year. The distribution hub shut down in June and the historic property — with original 1800s brick structure — was listed for sale.

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

Our Team

Taylor Henry, *President*
Chris Pohle, *Vice President*
Rob Ascough, *Treasurer*
Larry Lillo, *Secretary*

Board Members: John Serpico;
Russ Strittmatter; Joe Dillon; Lydia McGinty; Bob Scully, *emeritus*; Al Brannen, *emeritus*

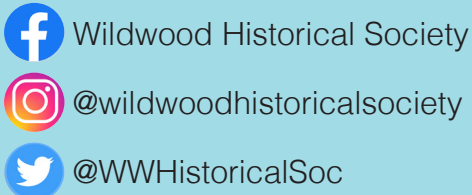
Newsletter: Jackson Betz

Managers: Kathi Johnson; Julia Ittah

Volunteers: Jim Adair; Al Alven;
Vicki Bundschu; Anne Vinci; Lew Vinci; Aubrey Hughes.

Your name could be here! Stop in to the museum to become a volunteer.

Follow us on social media!



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