

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*

2021 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 46. Winter 2021

Two Roberts, Two Als (And A Lot Of Snow)

By Rob Ascough

It was the winter of 2010. January, maybe? These days my memory recalls only some accurate bits and pieces but since January best symbolizes the sensation of endless winter dread, I'll say it was January of 2010. Al Alven and I spent the months following the conclusion of the summer season making near-weekly pilgrimages to Wildwood from our definitely-not-Wildwood residences: Al from Philadelphia, and me from Morris County, New Jersey where I was living at the time. We'd arrive the George F. Boyer Museum at 10:00, wait for Robert Bright, Jr. (known to everyone as Bob) to show up and unlock the door, and spend the ensuing four hours flipping the pages of the Hunt's Pier binder to search for historical photographs. Meanwhile Bob entertained us with stories, some of which were actually pertinent to the subject matter we were researching.

"Definitely this one," one of us would say to the other as our eyes bounced back and forth between a few almost-identical photos of a ride, or ticket booth, or mangy-looking mascot brought to life by a minimum-wage employee surely tortured by the heat inside the costume.

"No, this is the one," the other would declare with conviction.

We'd eventually settle on an entirely different photo.

That January morning, Bob came into the room where we were working and warned of snow starting to fall. Peering out the front door facing Pacific Avenue, we were surprised – there was no word of snow in the forecast (never mind the fact we probably didn't bother looking at a weather forecast because Wildwood had one kind of weather in the winter

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Ours Alone in Wintertime

By Grace Sedotti Zambardi

Those corpulently lush Hydrangeas that plumped along Central Avenue; supermodel thin and snooty Cosmos that danced beside fence posts blown in step by the back bays breezes; classically trained container Geraniums, fawning over themselves on porches and rails thru the Crest. The island's summer splash of tropical, kaleidoscopic watercolors are gone. Even autumn's simmering, edible table of Halloween orange brights, fire and brimstone reds, squash yellows and regal eggplant purples, as vibrant and strong as the gods, have succumbed to the inevitable. The crayola crayon rainbow is back in the box. Smoke-smudged clouds blanket the beach and brown marsh grasses. The wind sculpted junipers and Japanese pines dutifully provide blots of evergreen to the ocean's imposing gray. Winter has fallen over the cay and the beauty of its simplicity is almost unsurpassed.

In Wildwood, during these longest months, there's never been much to do, but it's just as well. It's that starkness that has always made it so special. There was no marble columned department store for a Christmas extravaganza, or colonial village walk-thru with life-sized moveable figures. The mall with Santa seated on his throne was miles off shore. The town didn't have the multitudes of families that strung holiday lights across streets. No, quite the contrary. On countless blocks, from New Jersey down to Atlantic, only one or two households lived year-round. At school, the arrival of the fire truck and the cartons of plain, red corded stockings filled with oranges, apples, and candy canes but mostly peanuts, heralded Christmas vacation. To us 'local' kids, that's when the Wildwoods transformed itself into our own private winter wonderland.

There was no over thinking things, no pretenses. Friends from the classroom were dispersed to all ends of the island as if we lived on the forlorn prairie, and weren't seen again until school was back in session. The yearly evening trip downtown along garland trimmed Pacific Avenue to visit Santa in his bus parked outside the Marine Bank was magical. In the daytime we'd walk with our grandparents through the gigantic, to our baby eyes, aisles of Murphy's and Newberry's to find that gift for mom and dad. When the holiday



Grace Sedotti, 1963

When the holiday

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Two Roberts, Two Als (And A Lot Of Snow)

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months – cold). Bob began getting nervous and told us he was bailing to get home before things worsened. Understanding Al and I had traveled hours to work at the museum, he phoned Al Brannen (who probably doesn't remember this) to take over at the museum and let us work another hour or two. Which we did.

Eventually we all decided it best to call it a day. Al Brannen locked up the museum and I drove my writing partner to the bus terminal to begin his trip back to Philadelphia by way of Atlantic City. My car crunching the undriven snow of the Wildwood's sleepy streets, I inched my way towards Rio Grande Avenue but instead of turning to leave the island by way of the George Redding Bridge, kept driving into the Crest. I knew it would have been prudent to not waste any time getting home, considering a slow and messy 170-mile slog possibly lay ahead of me. I also knew it would be a rare opportunity to view the venue of my warm, sunny summers through a wildly (pun intended) different lens.

To love the Wildwoods is to love their imperfections – the cracked asphalt parking lots, the rusting metal railings of the motels, and the chipped paint that property owners justify can be ignored just one more year before it starts raising eyebrows. Yet under a blanket of glistening, sparkling white, all imperfections were erased by way of Mother Nature's magic wand. The spectacle of winter snow transformed my summer playground into an alternate universe – an unspoiled version of itself.

Against better judgement I rolled down my window and was both startled and soothed by the silence broken only by the dim grumble of my tires up and down each virgin street. Snowflakes joined together atop the thatched roofs of the Waikiki Inn's tiki huts and the craggy surfaces of the lava rocks, juxtaposing polar precipitation with South Pacific swelter. The sharp angles and edges of the Cape Cod Inn's golf course were rendered soft and gentle by the growing drifts. It was unreasonable to expect an armada at the Armada, a crusade at the Crusader, or an adventure at the Adventurer. The notion of going on safari at the American Safari was downright ludicrous.

By the time I finally made it off the island, my car struggled mightily with the snow turning to slush and ice on the untreated roadways. The typically-quick commute from exit 4B (as it was known at the time and will always be known to some) to exit 25 took nearly an hour and a half. I'd occasionally glance over to the right, but instead of seeing Stone Harbor, Avalon, and Sea Isle City on the horizon, all I glimpsed was an ominous wall of gray and white. I wondered if Bob Bright and Al Brannen were appreciating the

moment in Wildwood as I had; I wondered if Al Alven was making any kind of positive progress on his way home.

The snow relented by the time I'd reached Ocean City, so I exited the Parkway and meandered my way to the boardwalk. To my delight Mack & Manco's (another one of those as it was known at the time things) was open for business. The only time I can remember when the employees outnumbered the customers, I sat at the counter and savored a few saucy slices while the storm's last punch was reduced to flakes scattering in the skies above the beach.

The drive from the museum to my driveway in Butler, New Jersey ended up taking six hours because of my detour, but to this day it remains six of my favorite hours. Indeed, these days my memory recalls only some accurate bits and pieces, but the important ones remain as pure as fresh snow.

Covid Protocols

Learn about the steps we are taking to ensure another safe season in 2021 by reading our COVID protocols online at www.wildwoodhistoricalmuseum.com/post/wildwood-historical-society-coronavirus-protocols-may-2020

Our ongoing **Buy A Brick Program** provides an opportunity to have a brick engraved in honor of a loved one and/ or to commemorate fond Wildwoods memories. Visitors can view your etched message at the Museum entrance.

- 4" X 8" Bricks may contain three lines with a maximum of 18 characters per line for \$100.00.
- 8" x 8" Bricks may contain six lines with a maximum of 18 characters per line for \$250.00.

Paver order forms and instructions are available at wildwoodhistoricalmuseum.com/events

Thank you to our latest donors!

Seaside Heights HS	Dot Spot West Wildwood items
Nora Banghol	Castaways Motel post-cards
Edward Beck	<i>The Blue Clowns</i> DVD, 2 reels of film and poster
Christopher Tirri	Surfside Pier original artwork
Gary Dunlap	Crest Realty Co. 1930 framed stock certificate
Bill Kemp	1886 New Jersey Atlas
Joseph Catrambone	Photos from 1947 and 1948, including storm and building of Rio Grande Bridge
Robert Baker & Steve Uchniat	2 Ring Binder of WW2 and Koren War/Vietnam veterans
Joseph Russo, Jr.	WHS 1949 senior class photo and Alan Hawes oil painting from Russo's Bar
Jim Jacoby	Civic Club Season's Greetings sign

More donors: <https://www.wildwoodhistoricalmuseum.com/post/thank-you-to-our-2020-donors>



Ours Alone in Wintertime

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movies came to town we headed to Hunt's theatres. What a thrill it was, in the back seat, staring into the damp, ocean-scented darkness of Atlantic Avenue. The car bumping under the blinking yellow lights, until we stopped in front of what was, for a fleeting period in time, the golden grandness of the art deco façade. It was like going to the moon.

At home, big brothers went under the crawl space and up in the attic to bring out the dusty, half-collapsed box that held the aluminum, shiny white Christmas tree. Later, we would go for a ride all around the Crest and sometimes North Wildwood, wow! to see the beautiful, twinkling decorations, with each cottage and bungalow out sparkling the other. On Christmas Eve, we tried desperately to stay awake to attend midnight mass at St Ann's church. Finally, Christmas morning didn't flood the living room with an avalanche of unnecessary and easily forgotten gifts and boxes, but Santa somehow always brought exactly what we wanted. In our minds, these young winters passed with the slow sweetness of thick maple syrup. Time, on the other hand, mischievously moved us along and with each Christmas gone we got a little older.

On lazy, bright, windless afternoons, we'd ride our bikes up to our lonesome, sandy stretch of boardwalk. The boys, long legs holding their bikes steady against the ramp's railing, trying to look impressive. The girls, in new winter coats and always hatless, so as not to mess up their hair, trying to seem unimpressed. There were the trips to the skate rink in Stone Harbor; bowling games and Christmas dances; angst and pity parties at McDonald's. All of this and more was ours alone at wintertime. Not for the summer tourists or day trippers or the city relatives, who'd always ask "what's to do here year round?" We'd always answer, "Oh, nothing much."



Museum Updates

By Taylor Henry, president

Welcome 2021 Board of Trustees

We are pleased to welcome back the members of our 2020 board of trustees, with two additional members for 2021! *Jackson Betz*, a recent University of Pennsylvania School of Architecture graduate, has been volunteering with us since he was 11 years old! He has done phenomenal work documenting our midcentury motels and vintage signage, and we are grateful for his contributions to our newsletter, social media and research requests.

Al Alven, founder of the Wildwood 365 blog, makes his return and we couldn't be happier! Al was responsible for establishing our social media presence, which has grown to over 15,000 followers across platforms. It's thanks to him we have been able to reach new audiences and ultimately grow our memberships. We look forward to growing even further with our new team!

Revamped Remote Research

Can't visit the Wildwood Historical Society? Let our volunteers search our records for you! Research includes all general research questions about a property, a person, a family, a business, an event, a boardwalk amusement, etc.

Our volunteer research team is now taking research requests remotely! Kathi, Jackson, and the rest of the researchers are accepting your questions and photo requests online at wildwoodhistoricalmuseum.com/research. Just follow the directions on screen, make the donation and sit back as we send you back in time to the happiest of memories.

Nearly \$12k raised in 2020 Street Sign Auction

The pandemic has been devastating for nonprofit museums everywhere, and we too have seen a reduction in visitors in 2020. It's thanks to our supporters for buying from our online store, renewing their memberships and participating in our fundraisers that we were able to keep our doors open this year. And an *especially big thank you* to the City of Wildwood Public Works department for donating the old signs to us as they replaced them this year.

We are pleased to announce that this event helped us raise almost \$12,000! Again, we can't thank our supporters enough. We hope to have similar street sign auctions in the future, since there are certain streets in Wildwood that have not yet gotten new signs (such as Arctic Ave and streets west of Park). Keep following us on social media and at wildwoodhistoricalmuseum.com to stay in the know.

New in our recently expanded gift shop!

Genuine Wildwood Boardwalk with Custom Text
\$30.00

A new take on the classic piece of Wildwood boardwalk, just in time for Valentine's Day! Fill out the text box on our website with exactly what you'd like laser-engraved onto your custom piece of Genuine Wildwood Boardwalk.

Wildwood Sun by the Sea greeting cards
\$15.00 per dozen

Original watercolors by The Sun's publisher and editor, Dorothy Kulisek, recreated on beautiful greeting



cards! Crafted with love. Every day is a holiday!

Authentic Frog bog boardwalk game wooden token
\$1.99

Real vintage unique wooden nickel from the beloved critter creek/Frog Bog game on North Wildwood boardwalk NJ!

Shop these items and many more at our museum when we reopen Easter Weekend, or at wildwoodhistoricalmuseum.com/shop! Now it's easier to shop with us online, as you can view categories such as Books & Films, Vintage & Memorabilia, Postcards & Greetings, Holiday, and Genuine Wildwood Boardwalk products!

Then and Now



Laura's Fudge at Wildwood and Ocean Avenues in 1960, a few years after it opened



Laura's Fudge in November 2019, still selling delicious treats!

Email wildwoodhistoricalsociety@hotmail.com to buy a vintage photo of your favorite Wildwood spot for just \$10!

Follow us on social media!



The Wildwood Historical Society, Inc. received an operating support grant administered by the Cape May County Culture & Heritage Commission, from funds granted by the New Jersey Historical Commission.

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Newsletter
 Jackson Betz

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

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!

Other ways you can donate!



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

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