

Towns of Point Pleasant and Point Pleasant Beach
New Jersey Coastal Heritage Trail
Intersection of State Route 88 and
County Road 549
Point Pleasant
Ocean County
New Jersey

HABS No. NJ-1012

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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

TOWNS OF POINT PLEASANT AND POINT PLEASANT BEACH

HABS No. NJ-1012

Location: New Jersey Coastal Heritage Trail, Intersection of State Route 88 and County Road 549, Point Pleasant, Ocean County, New Jersey.

Significance: Point Pleasant's strategic railroad location at the junction of the major New York and Philadelphia lines, made it the ideal location for resort development. Prior to its resort development, Point Pleasant was an established commercial community, supporting fishing, ship building and sawmill industries. Point Pleasant and Point Pleasant Beach are among the handful of places on the Jersey shore which have withstood changes in American life that have made other historic places obsolete or artificial.

History: Settlement dates back to the 1600s, spurred earlier than other shore areas by the land link inland, where the soil was fertile enough to farm and lumber provided raw material for sawmills and boat building. Shipbuilding benefitted from convenient access to waterways such as the Manasquan and Metedeconk rivers, Beaverdam Creek, Barnegat Bay, and the Atlantic Ocean.¹ Early farmhouses remain on "Captain's Row," Ocean Road, including the John Morris house, a vernacular, Georgian style house, which dates from 1768. Morris was a sea captain before turning to farming.²

Speculators began eyeing the area as early as the 1850s, with at least one unsuccessful attempt to subdivide the undeveloped beach lands into one-acre lots.³ By 1866 the Oceanfront Land Company bought a bankrupt farm along the Manasquan River. John Arnold, a local sea captain, developed another tract of land named "Arnold City," laying out an east-west street and 300 lots measuring 50' x 100', as well as the Atlantic View Cemetery for "the benefit" of his buyers.⁴ In 1878 Trenton investors, anticipating the coming of the railroad in 1881, set up a Point Pleasant Land Company, which planned Point Pleasant City and built the Resort House hotel.⁵ The company laid out streets "in a grid-like Philadelphia plan for easy sales,"⁶ with lots on both sides of the railroad tracks, reaching all the way to the Atlantic Ocean. By 1890, Edwin Salter reported that "eighteen or twenty years ago Point Pleasant was an unimproved, undeveloped tract. [It] is now seen in fine cottages, schools, churches,

¹ Marilyn Kralik, New Jersey Historic Sites Inventory (Ocean County, Vol. 4, Pt. Pleasant), 1.

² Kralik, 3.

³ Kralik, 5.

⁴ H. C. Woolman and T. F. Rose, Historical and Biographical Atlas of the New Jersey Coast (Philadelphia: Woolman and Rose, 1878; reprint, Toms River, N.J.: Ocean County Historical Society, 1985), 272.

⁵ "History of Point Pleasant Beach," Coast Magazine (December 1989), 29.

⁶ Kralik, 6.

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stores, hotels and boarding houses standing on well laid-out streets and avenues, where formerly rabbits and reptiles were wont to burrow."⁷ Point Pleasant's 4,000 to 5,000 summer visitors entertained themselves with promenades along the boardwalk and across an iron bridge "lighted with electricity." Rapidly coming to the front as one of the most progressive and deservedly popular summer resorts on the Jersey coast, Point Pleasant offered its New York and Philadelphia visitors a range of accommodations, from hotel rooms at the Resort House to summer cottages for rent each season. A trolley line between Point Pleasant and Bay Head was completed in 1894, an early sign that the two communities would become the continuous settlement that they appear as today.⁸

Amusements first appeared at Clark's Landing on the Manasquan River as early as 1879, however no trace of these remains. After 1915 amusements appeared along the boardwalk. During the Great Depression the Point Pleasant Beach, which had formed its own municipality in 1920, became insolvent and sold ocean-front land, which has since been operated as a private business. The name Jenkinson, ubiquitous on boardwalk attractions today, first appeared around 1925.⁹ Though Point Pleasant now calls itself "a full-fledged all-year round borough," rather than a summer resort, its boardwalk amusements symbolize the seasonal economy.¹⁰

Fishing has been a more constant Point Pleasant industry, dating back to the seventeenth century. Recreational angling was popular after the 1880s, commercial pound fishing was well established by the 1920s, and by the 1950s shellfish became prominent. Much of the area's industry developed along the Manasquan, the site of the Manasquan River-Bay Head canal, after 1924. The canal, still in use today, "provides a waterway for pleasure boats and is the northern most leg of the Inland Waterway which traverses the Atlantic Coast all the way to Florida."¹¹ As a result of the early maritime industry, a life-saving station was established where the Colonial Revival Coast Guard station stands today on Inlet Avenue. Marinas now occupy Point Pleasant waterways and the boatyards of the Johnson and Carver families remain, their stories long acknowledged as rich material for history not yet written.¹²

⁷ Edwin Salter, A History of Monmouth and Ocean Counties (Bayonne, N.J.: E. Gardner & Son, 1890; reprint, Ocean County N.J.: Ocean County Historical Society, n.d.), 288.

⁸ William Fischer, Biographical Cyclopaedia of Ocean County (Philadelphia: A.D. Smith and Co., 1899. Fischer), 237-8.

⁹ Kralik, 9.

¹⁰ "Ocean County Yearbook," 145.

¹¹ "Ocean County Yearbook," 45.

¹² Kralik, 12.

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Today, the community's commercial fishing fleet, one of three in the state, supports its claim as "the seafood capital of New Jersey."¹³

Among buildings left from this era are several blocks of nearly identical, two-and-a-half-story, Murphy houses, which line Boston Avenue near the beach.¹⁴ The Beacon, by the beach, is the only remaining of the once-abundant hotels.¹⁵ The railroad station, where in 1915 sixty-two trains a day stopped, is gone, replaced by a strictly utilitarian structure; New Jersey transit still runs dozens of trains through here each day. Gone also is the Pine Bluff Inn, a popular dancing spot on the Manasquan River with rooms for 175 guests, a garage, and "cooling breezes which sweep over the river."¹⁶

The shared commercial district of Point Pleasant and Point Pleasant Beach remains viable. A classic Woolworth's is extant, complete with wood floors, an old red sign with gold letters, and that distinctive five-and-dime smell. The elaborate 1901 Tudor-style Point Pleasant Hardware Company, designed by New York architect Gifford Slocum,¹⁷ as well as the 1872 Stick Style Harvey Memorial Methodist Church on Arnold Avenue, remain in use. Also architecturally prominent is the 1925 Ocean Road School, adorned with terra cotta moldings at its roofline with the geometric forms now associated with Art Deco. A variety of architectural types are found in Point Pleasant beach houses including, Carpenter Gothic, Shingle Style, Queen Anne, Colonial Revival, Spanish Revival. In Point Pleasant, "harmonious suburban enclaves" have survived along River Road and Richmond and Lincoln avenues, not necessarily spectacular buildings individually but contributors to the quality of life.¹⁸ Trains from New York still call here with vacationers; fish and seafood are caught in the harbors; boats are built on the shores; and sand need not be trucked in to keep the beach open. "It was favored by geography, economy, and settlement history," sums up one report on these towns.¹⁹

¹³ Robert Santelli, The Jersey Shore: A Travel and Pleasure Guide (Charlotte, N.C.: Fast & McMillan Publishers, 1986), 87.

¹⁴ Kralik, 7.

¹⁵ Kralik, 7.

¹⁶ "The Pine Bluff Inn on the Manasquan," brochure, (Collection of the Ocean County Historical Society, Toms River, N.J., n.d.)

¹⁷ "Landmark," photo and outline, Asbury Park Press, (Collection of the Ocean County Historical Society, Toms River, N.J., n.d., ca. 1980)

¹⁸ Kralik, 17.

¹⁹ Kralik, 1.

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