

ATLANTIC HERITAGE

Newsletter of the Atlantic County Historical Society

SPRING 2021

The Marlborough-Blenheim Seashore Elegance Lost

By Michael Connor



As Atlantic City prospered as a seashore resort new hotels were constructed at the beginning of the 20th Century. Among those new hotels were the Marlborough followed by the Blenheim. The White family was already established as Atlantic City hoteliers. Josiah White was the owner of the Luray Hotel. To expand his holdings, in 1900 he acquired the property of the Convent of the Sacred Heart which fronted the boardwalk between Park Place and Ohio Ave.

White was a Quaker and he retained fellow Quaker William L. Price, of Philadelphia, as the architect to design what became the Marlborough Hotel. A Queen Anne chateau style was chosen. While the hotel had substantial stone and masonry elements its primary construction material was wood with cast iron support columns. It was the last of the wooden “Great Hotels” of Atlantic City.

The Marlborough was very successful. With a view to building another hotel, Josiah White acquired the property of the Children’s Seashore House across Ohio Ave. Popular legend had it that White declined to purchase the land when first offered. Threats of a potential sale to and development by an amusement company are said to have changed his mind. Honky tonk and elegant hotels do not make good neighbors.

This site became the location of the Blenheim. William L. Price was again retained as architect, but a very different structure resulted. A number of influences caused this. In 1902 many Atlantic City hotels were burned in a great fire which also destroyed White’s own Luray Hotel. Fireproof construction became a must. Reinforced concrete was chosen as the building medium. This choice resulted from a combination of factors. In 1905 there was threat of a steel strike. Pouring of reinforced concrete would be less noisy and disturbing to the Marlborough guests

than the contemporary construction practice of riveting steel. Finally, Price demonstrated his competence with reinforced concrete in the 1903-1904 construction of Jacob Reed’s Sons’ store in Philadelphia. Pictured at left is what resulted in 1906.



If the domes in each corner remind you of another Atlantic City hotel, it is no coincidence. Price designed the domes for the 1914 additions to the Hotel Traymore.

Local legend has it and New York Times reporters have confidently

Continued on page 4

Photos from the Robert D. Warrington Collection



Bob Warrington gifts the Society from time to time with interesting original vintage photos. A resident of Maryland, Bob enjoyed summers at the Jersey Shore as a youngster with his paternal grandparents, Charles and Anna Warrington, of Somers Point, and his maternal grandparents, Dudley and Edith Phillips, of Linwood.

A small sampling of images he has donated to the Society include these three featuring Connie Mack, baseball Hall of Fame player and manager of the Philadelphia Athletics.

Top Left: Atlantic City Mayor Ruffu gives the key to the city to Connie Mack. Photo marked Atlantic Foto Service, Atlantic City. *(This image is undated but is most likely 1929. Anthony Ruffu was Mayor of Atlantic City from 1924 until his death when his automobile was hit by a train in 1930.)*

Top Right: “Connie Mack, Grand Old Man of Baseball and Manager of the Philadelphia American League Club, was vacationing at Atlantic City and volunteered to umpire a softball game. Pitching for the wounded enlisted men at the hospital is Rosario Gucciardo of Brooklyn NY, who was wounded in North Africa. New Jersey’s Atlantic City, peace-time mecca for vacationers, weekenders and beauty contests, have taken on a new bigger job - that of reconditioning and rehabilitating at the England General Hospital wounded officers and enlisted men who have returned from overseas. The recuperating men have a full recreational program and one of the favorite sports is softball played on the beach between wounded officers and wounded enlisted men.” Acme Photo Service, for release November 3, 1943.

Left: Connie Mack and wife on Atlantic City Boardwalk, 1929. International Newsreel Photo; caption: “Connie Mack and his wife enjoying morning stroll along the famous boardwalk here. The manager of the champion Athletics is taking a well-earned rest after the most strenuous campaign of his lengthy career. He arrived here immediately after the close of the World Series.” 10-21-29

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Spotlight on the Shelves

a treasure hiding in plain sight...

Although our museum and library are focused on the legacy of Atlantic County in particular, it is not uncommon to discover that some of history's lines have bled into other parts of South Jersey.

A great example of this lies within the pages of the once-renowned *South Jersey Magazine*, which you may find on our shelf H-608.1. First published in the 1970s, *South Jersey Magazine* aimed to highlight a variety of both historical and present-day happenings, encompassing a myriad of subjects. Released quarterly, the magazine showcased everything South Jersey, including family genealogies, insights into cartological records, photographs from the past, and even local business ads. It's safe to say that the subject matter was so eclectic, that one would be hard-pressed to find a resident who didn't find something interesting within the pages.

By selecting one of the volumes, you're in for a peculiar experience that might go somewhat like this: Journey through the cranberry bogs of South Jersey and take note of the harvesting process that brings them to our dinner table. Next, contemplate the tragedy that was the Atlantic City train wreck in 1906 that claimed the lives of over 50 people. Turn the page to a fascinating exposé on the "Remarkable Dr. Charles Smith" and his 19th-century Fountain of Youth in Egg Harbor City, which claimed to cure all sorts of ailments. Those who are interested in Maritime tales may find delight in learning about the storied past of the South Jersey oyster industry. Perhaps you may be interested in observing century-old marketing for agricultural equipment, root beer, or the Salem centennial tea-party of 1873.

No matter what tickles your historical fancy, *South Jersey Magazine* is the perfect blend of odds-and-ends, available for your reading pleasure.

Brittani Mazzone

COVID UPDATE: The Society remains closed to the public until further notice and probably will not reopen until the summer of 2021. Appointments for research may be requested, **BY EMAIL ONLY.**

ACHSinfo@comcast.net

Arrangements will be made based on volunteer availability.

Please visit our website for additional information on a reopening date:

www.AtlanticCountyHistoricalSocietynj.org

Welcome

The Atlantic County Historical Society
is pleased to welcome and thank our
newest members:

Kenneth R Gant, *Furlong, PA*
Lynette Thompson, *Bartlesville, OK*
Brittani Mazzone, *Absecon, NJ*

Life Member

Deidre Morgan, *Mays Landing, NJ*



AS ALWAYS, THANK YOU!

Friends \$1 - \$49

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Contributors to this Issue:

Sid & Pat Parker, Mike Connor, Brittani Mazzone
Cindy Mason-Purdie & Diane Miller

*The Atlantic County Historical Society received an operating grant
from the Atlantic County Office of Cultural & Heritage Affairs.*

Marlborough-Blenheim *continued...*

asserted that Thomas Edison was somehow involved in either the design of the hotel structure or the concrete technology utilized in the construction of the Blenheim. Cement technology and concrete construction were clearly among Edison's many interests. He founded the Edison Portland Cement Company which supplied the materials used to construct Yankee Stadium. He also promoted homes and furniture built with concrete.

A scholarly architectural history compiled by George E. Thomas for the Historic American Buildings Survey commissioned by the U.S. National Park Service refutes this claim. Thomas authored an architectural history of both the Marlborough and the Blenheim which are available online and are well worth reading by anyone interested. His research clearly establishes the identity of the contractors and designers actually used in the engineering and construction. Thomas concludes that "In fact, there is no evidence that Edison was involved with the building at all."

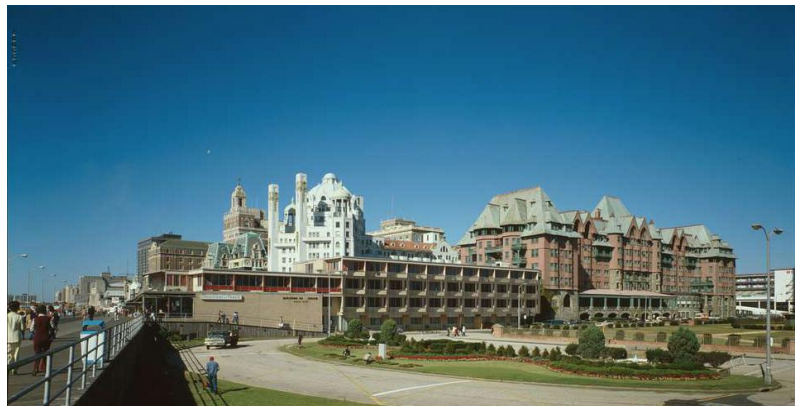
The White family operated the Marlborough and the Blenheim as a single entity. Two pedestrian bridges crossed Ohio Ave. between the hotels. Closest to the boardwalk was the "sun gallery" which allowed hotel guests to cross between the hotels and enjoy the view. Closest to Pacific Ave. was a utilitarian bridge which connected the two hotel kitchens. The European plan dining room was in the Blenheim while the American plan dining room and associated office spaces were in the Marlborough.

Below is a picture of the sun gallery with the kitchen bridge in the background.



These two street bridges are a story in themselves. Political influence was used to obtain legislative authorization for pedestrian bridges to cross city streets. Once the structural girders were in place for the Marlborough-Blenheim the enabling legislation was repealed. No later hotels were able to take advantage of this opportunity until the advent of the casino era. The Chalfonte Haddon Hall had a service tunnel under North Carolina Ave. but it was not until Resorts International connected a pedestrian bridge to the old Chalfonte that two other hotels had a skyway. With the demolition of the Chalfonte, this bridge to nowhere is now used as public space.

You will note from the initial postcard illustration as well as the 1906 photo of the Blenheim that the Marlborough as initially constructed sat well back from the boardwalk. This is made clear from the picture below (left).



Open space with boardwalk frontage was too valuable a commodity to waste. In the 1950s a motel style beachfront wing with associated commercial space was added. The architectural atrocity above (right) resulted.

Marlborough-Blenheim

The wealth of exterior and interior detail of these two buildings is beyond the scope of this article to illustrate. Fortunately in order for Bally's to ultimately get demolition approval, they were required to provide a detailed historical documentation. The Library of Congress archive is accessible online and has preserved a wealth of photographs of these historic structures. Below are some examples of what we lost:



The public spaces of the Marlborough were famous for their hexagonal fireplaces. They really worked and were used in season. Those wooden floors creaked when you walked on them in the 1970s. **(Above-Left)** The lobby of the Blenheim was a beautiful example of the period. No effort was made to hide the reinforced concrete structural elements. Rather, they were incorporated into the design. **(Above-Middle)** The boardwalk facade of the Blenheim was uniquely beautiful. **(Above-Right)**

The economic decline of Atlantic City before casino gaming took its toll on the Marlborough-Blenheim. It continued to be operated by the founding White family but was no longer a viable business. After casino gaming was authorized the White family accepted a purchase offer from noted promoter Reese Palley and local attorney Martin Blatt. They expressed the intent to spend some \$35 million dollars in renovations and construct a casino. In a complex transaction involving sales and leases their interest was quickly assigned to Bally's who promptly sought regulatory authority to demolish both hotels and erect a version of what you see today. On October 5th, 1977, Josiah White IV announced that after a farewell gala weekend, the Marlborough-Blenheim would close its doors on October 25, 1977. The New York Times reported that Bally Manufacturing Corporation took control of the property on November 30th. The demolition authorization was pursued and promptly resulted in opposition from various preservationists.

The reality was that there was no way economically possible to bring the Marlborough up to current code requirements. A wooden structure burns and cast iron support columns melt in a hot fire. The focus of the preservationists was on the Blenheim. The Blenheim had its own structural issues. Anyone who has seen the effect of road salt on reinforced concrete roadways can understand the deterioration of the Blenheim exterior caused by a salt air environment. Over the years many coatings were applied to prevent water intrusion and architectural detail was lost as a result. Also, the Blenheim was constructed before the need for concrete expansion joints was understood. The preservationist's rear guard action was to preserve the boardwalk frontage of the Blenheim and have it incorporated into Bally's new building. Authorization was given to demolish the rear. What remained is shown in the photo below left. Ultimately the preservation battle was lost. The picture below right from the Temple University digital archive shows the Controlled Demolition Company (who previously brought down the Traymore) dynamiting the Blenheim on January 5th, 1979.



A personal note to end this article. On Saturdays in the 1970s my son and I would patronize another missing Atlantic City institution - Angelo's Barber Shop. After our haircuts we would get lunch at the Edwardian Room of the Marlborough which continued to be an elegant venue. We both enjoyed the still grand interior details of the Marlborough's public space. I told him to remember what he was seeing because it would soon be gone. We both still fondly remember this piece of old Atlantic City.

Looking Back through the Files.....

Transcribed by Diane J. Miller

A Doughty Tragedy Daniel Doughty 1789-1838

Editor's Note: In an 1837 letter, Emma Doughty wrote a newsy letter to family back home in "Absecon" describing her family's migration west, "We have had a tedious journey and tiresome it is true but see how many dangers the Lord has brought us through and not an accident has happened of any account." (See Atlantic Heritage, Winter 2020.) This luck was not to last. Just a year later, the following letter was written by Samuel Doughty, Emma and Daniel's oldest son, from Olive Branch, Ohio to his uncle, Enoch Doughty in Absecon.

The letter is housed in Manuscript Box 29 which contains both the original letter (folder 5c) and its transcription (folder 40). This copy was taken from the transcription.

Warning: its content is graphic.

Olive Branch April 29 1838

Dear uncle I now sit down to write to you to Let you know something about the accident which has happened, the steam boat Moselle the one that father went in was blown up on wensday last 8 killed the captain engineerers and pilot with many others father was standing near the captain when the explosion took place and was blown about 30 feet amongst a shour of wood brickbats and pieces of the wreck he was found between two rafts I saw the man this morning who first found him he says he ran down from the shore as soon as possible and he ["father" typed above] was the first person he saw that had any appearance of life he was between the rafts struggling to keep above the water with wood and pieces of the wreck all over and around him he pulled him up as far as he could and called for assistance they got him out and carried him up to the house and asked him his name he tried 3 or 4 times to speak but could not at last the man put his finger in his mouth and puled out about half a jilⁱⁱⁱ of cloted blood and gave him some liquor which revived him so that he told his name and mrs shanon heard it although she said she did not know him he was so bruised and covered with blood dirt and ashes She told mr shanon about his situation and he done all he could for him that night and he came up in his carriage next morning after mother She went down to cincinnati and found a most dreadful spectable although he had been washed off yet he was so bruised and mangled he did not look like himself I could not leave home that day and you may know that I did not rest til i went I went down next day and I never was so shocked at the sight of anything before his face was all scared and bruised the back part of his head was cut conciderably he had a gash between the sholders there is more danger of his arm and the wound in the back of the hips than anything else i see he is afraid of mortification taking place in the arm more than any thing else yet he tries to not frighten us but his looks betray him I left him ["Father" typed above] this morning he said he felt a little better but I thought it was to encourage me I could not tel any difference in him of any consequenceⁱⁱⁱ I thought you would like to hear from him I told uncle Nathaniel that he had gone on the river yet little did I expect to have such news as this to send next^{iv} I think it is hardly worth while to say anything about the wreck I expect you wil have the news in your papers before you recieve this scrawl how many lives were lost no person can tel as no man living knows how many was on board it is supposed there was at least 150 persons lost there was 17 buried yesterday at one time there was 1 man found this morning and they are constantly fishing for the drowned one man was blown on to the top of an old house about 300 yards from the place where she bursted and broke the roof in so that the captain fel under the bow of a new steam boat he had to be cut out about the same distance off I must conclude as it is growing pretty near night please to write and let us know how you all are give my best respects to all enquiring friends I remain yours respectfully

Samuel Doughty

address: Withamsville O

May 1 25 [postage]

Mr

Enoch Doughty

Absecon

New Jersey

Continued on page 7

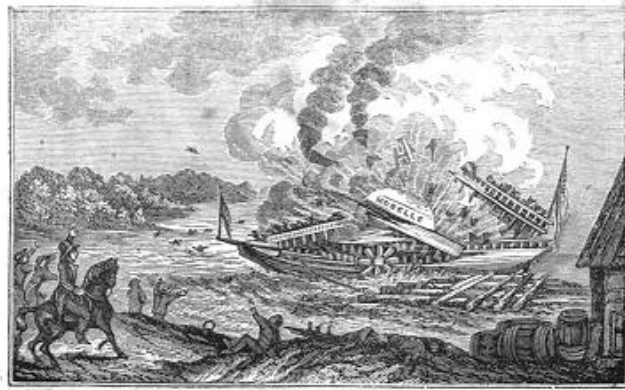
Looking Back through the Files..... *continued.*

ⁱ According to Wikipedia, Olive Branch is an unincorporated community in Clermont County, Ohio. It was not officially platted. A post office called Olive Branch was established in 1845, and remained in operation until 1922.

ⁱⁱ The gill (pronounced like the girl's name *Jill*) is equal to a quarter of a [pint](#). It is no longer in common use, except in regard to the volume of alcoholic spirits measures; www.en.wikipedia.org

ⁱⁱⁱ "Poor Daniel lived just one week, and Emma Doughty was left a widow in a strange land with seven children to care for. Only Samuel was old enough to help and he tried hard." Sarah W. R. Ewing, "The Daniel Doughty Family in Ohio", *The Doughty Tree*, Vol. 13, No. 3, p. 27 from the ACHS collection.

^{iv} It appears that the authors of *Along Absecon Creek* considered Daniel Doughty to be "the chosen son" of his father, Abner. Also, Daniel gave the ground for the present Absecon Methodist Church; Sarah W. R. Ewing and Robert McMullin, *Along Absecon Creek*, 1965, p. 52



Explosion of the Moselle.

Sidebar

"Often it takes tragedy to set about change. The disaster of the steamboat Moselle in 1838 was the final blow that led to the first federal regulations on the industry. During the steamboat era, Cincinnati was a major river city and one of the leading steamboat builders. The Moselle was constructed at the Fulton shipyards just east of Downtown, and was completed March 31, 1838, less than a month before its violent end. In its brief career, the Moselle had a reputation as the fastest steamboat on the Ohio River, making record-setting runs to Portsmouth, Ohio, and St. Louis. About 5 o'clock on April 25, 1838, the Moselle left Cincinnati's Public Landing headed for Louisville and St. Louis, first stopping upriver at Fulton to pick up two families. Capt. Isaac Perrin, the boat's owner and skipper, kept the four boilers filled with steam while the passengers boarded so he could make the fastest possible takeoff and sail past the Cincinnati riverfront amid cheers from people watching on shore. His recklessness proved catastrophic. The Cincinnati Whig newspaper reported, 'At the very moment her wheels made the first evolution, her boilers burst with a most awful and astounding noise, equal to the most violent clap of thunder. The explosion was destructive and heart rending in the extreme. ... Heads, limbs, bodies and blood were seen flying through the air in every direction, attended by the most horrid shrieks and groans from the wounded and the dying.'.....Of the estimated 250 aboard, about 150 died.

The Moselle tragedy spurred some action. The Cincinnati Gazette declared, 'For this sad result we, in part, take blame. We plead guilty, in common with other presses, to having praised the speed and power of the boat — a circumstance which doubtless contributed to inflate the ambition of its captain and owners, to excel others in rapidity.' Henceforth, they would praise a boat for its comfort and convenience, not its speed.

Congress passed the 1838 Act requiring inspection of steamboat boilers 'to provide better security of the lives of the passengers.' Though there was little means of enforcement, this was the first federal regulation of private industry for safety reasons and set the precedent for consumer protection laws." Jeff Sues, *Cincinnati Enquirer*, 14 March 2018, accessed on Cincinnati.com, 16 Dec. 2020.

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Where Atlantic County History Comes to Life



Our Mission:

- To collect and preserve historical materials exemplifying the events, places, and lifestyles of the people of Atlantic County and southern New Jersey.
- To encourage the study of history and genealogy.
- To provide historical and genealogical information to our membership and the general public.