

ATLANTIC HERITAGE

Newsletter of the Atlantic County Historical Society

WINTER 2021

ATLANTIC CITY AND THE DEMOCRATIZATION OF VACATION

By Mike Connor

Enabled by convenient and inexpensive railroad transportation, Atlantic City was instrumental in changing the seaside vacation from a perquisite of the wealthy to a pleasure available to all. The concept of a seaside vacation dates back at least to Roman times. From the time of the Roman Republic through the heyday of the Empire, wealthy Romans established “leisure villas” along the coast of southern Italy. Emperor Diocletian established an Adriatic seaside palace at what is now called Split in Croatia.



Left: Rendering of Diocletian's palace.

Substantial portions remain along the waterfront in Split today.

Seaside trips had a renaissance in seventeenth century Europe. Scientists of the time extolled the medicinal virtues of bathing in and drinking natural waters. For the wealthy the concept of “taking the waters” at a spa arose. This idea was extended to the seaside and seaside bathing. There is much more ocean front than there are mineral springs.

Due to the filth and poor hygiene widespread in the urban areas of the time, the claimed health benefits of “taking the waters” was not total quackery. The fun and games aspect of a seaside vacation evolved after the medicinal.

People could believe themselves to be virtuous by going to the seaside and while there justify having a good time. Reference to Atlantic City hotel advertising of the nineteenth century is full of claims of the health benefits of salt air. Many hotels advertised hot salt water piped to the guest's bathtub. Hotel advertising sought to exploit the Victorian desire to be virtuous. Once attracted there, the virtuous could also enjoy the fleshpots.

The New Jersey resorts of Long Branch and Cape May became summer refuges for the wealthy. Before the railroads, each had access by steamboat from either New York or Philadelphia. While steamboats had many issues, they were superior to available land transportation. Atlantic City owes its establishment as a resort solely to the railroad.

Jonathan Pitney's efforts resulted in the formal incorporation of Atlantic City in March of 1854. Recognizing that convenient transportation was essential, Pitney and his associates began the process of establishing railroad service to the planned resort. New Jersey granted a charter to the Camden & Atlantic Railroad on March 19, 1852, some two years before Atlantic City's actual incorporation.

The founders wisely chose Irish-American civil engineer Richard B. Osborne to both design and promote the railroad. Osborne also designed the original plans for the layout of Atlantic City.



NEWS ALERT!!

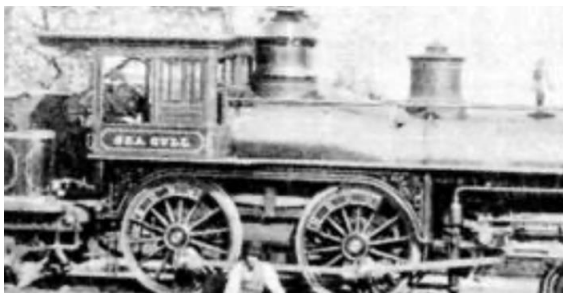
Mark your calendars! The Society will open its doors to the public on Wednesday, January 5th 2022. Regular days/hours are Wed.-Sat., 10am- 3:30pm.

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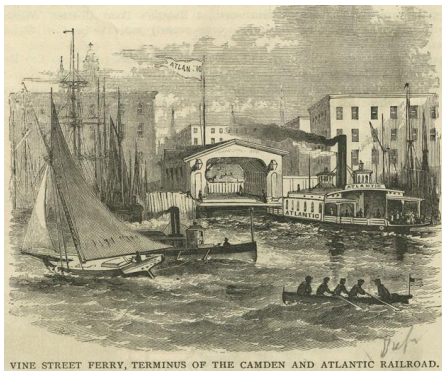
ATLANTIC CITY AND THE DEMOCRATIZATION OF VACATION...

Locomotives and rolling stock were acquired and construction began. Despite cost overruns and other problems, the inaugural run to Atlantic City occurred on July 1st, 1854. It brought 600 invited guests to the partially completed United States Hotel. Because the railroad bridge across Beach Thorofare was not completed until 1855, the passengers were ferried onto the island. There are conflicting reports as to how the journey was completed. Some accounts refer to horse drawn carriages and other accounts refer to a locomotive and railway carriages being used on the island.

The first run with paying passengers occurred on July 4th, 1854. Supposedly 3000 passengers came to the newly founded Atlantic City. A resort began.



Above are photographs of some of the Camden & Atlantic's early locomotives. The above left photograph of the aptly named "Seagull" locomotive is the best quality that could be found. A better photo of an early locomotive is the "John Lucas" above right.



The first Philadelphia railroad bridge crossing the Delaware was constructed by the Pennsylvania Railroad in the early 1880's. Until then, passengers took one of the ferries (such as the Vine Street ferry pictured at left) to Cooper's Ferry in Camden to access the Camden & Atlantic terminus.

Early passengers would arrive in Atlantic City after a four hour jolting journey on unsprung wooden coaches covered in ash and smelling of smoke. As technology progressed the journey was less than two hours on far safer and more comfortable steel carriages. Ultimately, the "Atlantic City Flyer" made the trip in 44 minutes at over 70 mph.

The wealthy and upper classes did not welcome their perceived social inferiors to the seaside with a chorus of "Kumbaya." Railroads were lobbied to end the cheap excursion fares which brought the lower classes to the shore. Regulation of clothing and bathing attire was attempted. Hoteliers sought to convey the image of exclusivity by advertising hotel rates "upon application." Since Sunday was the main day for cheap excursions, an ordinance was enacted prohibiting the sale of alcoholic beverages on that day. The excursionists were not deterred because the prohibition was almost universally ignored and not enforced. Translating the Gullah song, all with money in their pocket were welcome to "Come By Here."

Transportation, accommodation, amusements and amenities at various price points became available. The wealthy and upper classes always had money for leisure activities and at times defined themselves by those activities. Post Civil War industrialization and economic growth brought discretionary income to the middle class. Businessmen, merchants and professionals now had the economic ability to spend money on vacations. The working class earned sufficient resources to treat themselves to a Sunday excursion to the shore.

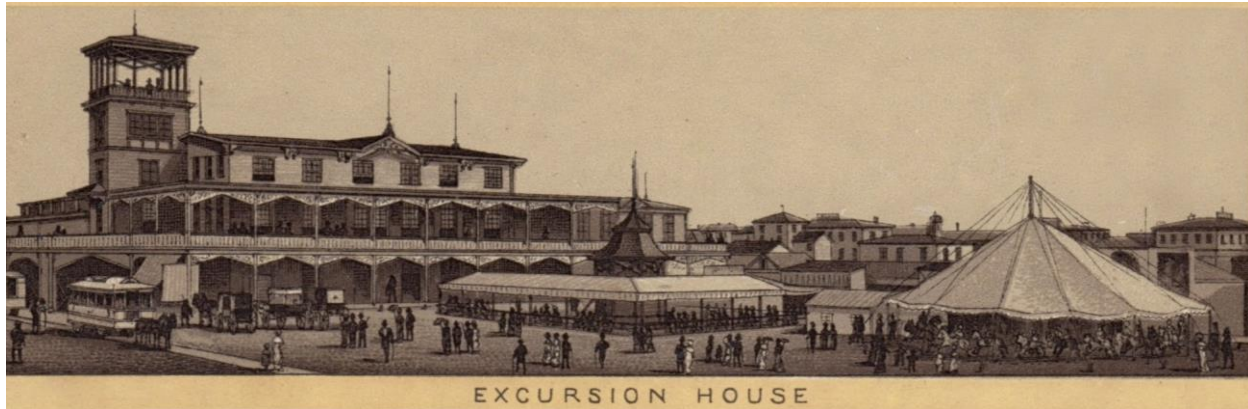
Railroad competition to Atlantic City began with a narrow gauge railway in July of 1877. This was soon converted to standard gauge and ultimately acquired by the Reading Company. The Pennsylvania Railroad acquired the Camden & Atlantic. The railroads competed on both amenities and price. The Reading touted its use of cleaner burning anthracite coal allowing the arrival of cleaner passengers. Despite the short journey, those with ample funds could book passage in a class of service featuring parlor cars, club cars and smoking cars. Those with a dollar to spend could book a Sunday excursion fare on a bare bones carriage. While waiting

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for their train home, excursionists could enjoy a 5 cent pint at Schaufler's Hotel which was popular with both tourists and locals. Conductors were said to make a last boarding call in the hotel's beer garden.

To attract the wealthy and the aspirational middle class, luxury hotels were built and advertised their amenities. At a lower price point what Atlantic City natives used to call "side avenue hotels" as well as rooming houses were built to cater to the less affluent. The railroads created "excursion houses" which made food, drink, amusements and comfort facilities available to their passengers. Local businesses were not pleased with this competition. Below is a picture of an excursion house depicted in an 1885 publication.



The Boardwalk was a great social leveler. Initially constructed in 1870 to keep the sand out of hotels and railroad cars, it became a major attraction in its own right. Persons of all classes dressed in their best could stroll, people watch, and enjoy the ocean front. To extend its usability into the evening, in 1883 electric lighting was installed for the length of the boardwalk. The boardwalk crowds attracted other businesses and amusements.

For example, the first of the ocean front piers was constructed in 1880. Its early demise did not discourage the construction of others, some of which remain today. The piers were open to all and allowed the mingling of all socio-economic classes. While some of the snooty may have avoided them, a lot of visitors had a very good time on the amusement piers.

Through both design and happenstance, the founders of Atlantic City created a resort that provided food, lodging and entertainment across the economic spectrum.

Need to Contact Us?

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www.AtlanticCountyHistoricalSocietynj.org

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*The Atlantic County Historical Society received an operating grant
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Looking Back through the Files.....

Transcribed by Diane J. Miller

Memorable Mutiny Aboard the Somers

By
Alfred M. Heston
[1854-1937]

Editor's Note: The following is the story of an 1842 alleged mutiny aboard a Navy training ship on its maiden voyage where three suspects were hung without trial. It is widely believed that this ended the practice of training naval officers aboard ship and led to the establishment of the U.S. Naval Academy at Annapolis, MD. To make things even more interesting, an officer onboard was related to Herman Melville, who was undoubtedly inspired by the incident to write the book, "Billy Budd".

Information in brackets was added by the editor, and its original length was shortened for space considerations. Heston's full account can be found in Collection Box 3A, folder 16, Marie Ann Somers Collection.

New Jersey is proud of her naval history and the more so because during the world war [WW I] no less than fifteen war vessels bore the names of Jerseymen, including the "Stockton," the "Bainbridge," the "Lawrence" and the "Somers," the last named being commissioned June 23, 1920.

At a much earlier date, however, there was another war vessel, named in honor of the hero from Somers Point [Lt. Richard Somers]. Connected with this earlier "Somers" is a story of mutiny of which few people have any knowledge.....

In the early forties [1840s] the country was horrified by the news of a mutiny on board the ship-of-war "Somers", with the view of converting her into a pirate vessel. Many people were excited to admiration of the terrible energy with which the commander of the "Somers" suppressed the mutiny by hanging three of the ringleaders on the spot, without trial, and bringing home twelve others in arms.....A son of a Cabinet Minister, (Spencer) and himself an officer, was at the head of the mutiny.

The "Somers" brought the first news of the mutiny when she arrived off New York, first taking on what was called an "air of mystery" which lent a terrific force to what leaked out in a few days. She remained outside two days, interdicting all communication with the shore. It was an unprecedented event in our navy.....

The ringleader (Spencer) was the son of the Secretary of the Navy.¹ Two of his associates were named Cromwell and Small. Commander Mackenzie, who ordered the execution, was subjected to a Court of Inquiry, at which it was shown that Spencer was double-ironed, handcuffed, bagged (tied up in a bag) under a tropical sun and drenched with squalls of rain. A boy of nineteen, he was watched by Lieutenant Gansevoort, armed to the teeth, for a sound or motion, which was to be the forfeit of his life. This continued for six days and nights.....Gansevoort needed relief; he could not stand his arduous duties during the whole of that time.

The relief came in the person of one who showed that he had a stomach for the business—Wales, the informer, who, finding himself elevated to the rank of sentinel over a United States officer, improved upon the lessons which his superiors had taught him, and stood ready, with cocked revolver in hand, to shoot, not only the prisoners (for by this time there were three).....but also to shoot any of the crew that should make a suspicious sign.....

Following the hanging—the three men having hung until they ceased to give signs of life—the crew were piped down to dinner, to hear a speech from the commander, and to celebrate divine service, of which the commander gives this account in his official report:

"The crew were now piped down from witnessing punishment.....I gave the order: 'Stand by to give three hearty cheers for the flag of our country.' Never were three heartier cheers given.....I felt that I was once more completely commander of the vessel which had been entrusted to me; equal to do with her whatever the honor of my country might require....."

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

Mackenzie then gave an impressive account of the religious service which was performed, the punctuality and devotion with which it was attended, and the appropriate prayer—that of thanks to God for deliverance from a great danger.

The widow of Cromwell, to whom he had sent a last dying message that he was innocent, undertook to have Mackenzie prosecuted before the civil tribunals for the murder of her husband. She made three attempts, but all in vain. One judge, to whom an application for a warrant was made, declined to grant it, on the ground that he was too much occupied with other matters to attend to that case.....A commissioner of the United States, appointed to issue warrants in all criminal cases, refused because, as he alleged, he had no authority to act in a military case. The attempt was then made in the United States District Court, New York, to get the grand jury to find an indictment, but the Court instructed the jury that it was not competent for a civil tribunal to interfere with matters which were pending before a naval tribunal.....Here, then, was the reason why Mackenzie was run so precipitately before the court-martial. It was to shelter him by an acquittal there.....

He was acquitted; but in the lowest form of acquittal known to court-martial proceedings. “Not proven,” was the equivocal mode of saying ‘not guilty;’ three members of the court were in favor of conviction of murder.....

The twelve mutineers in irons aboard the Somers—other than the three who were hanged—were subsequently put on trial through one of their number, Thomas Sedgwick. Commander Mackenzie was sent for to appear against him, but was not present. The prisoners were released and the court dissolved, which was a confession of the innocence of Spencer, Small and Cromwell.

A few years after (1849) the day when Spencer and his companions dangled from the yard-arm of the Somers, that vessel, unseen by human eye, foundered with all on board, and the waves, closed forever over the deck which had been the scene of the tragic occurrence that at one time deeply agitated this country.ⁱⁱ It is said that every member of the court-martial that exculpated Commander Mackenzie met with a violent end. One of his sons died a maniac, after having been placed on the retired list; another was killed in action by Formosan savages.

Following is a succinct account of the mutiny on board the Somers, taken from Thomas H. Benton’sⁱⁱⁱ “Thirty Years in the U.S. Senate”:

As a result of a mutiny on board the man-of-war “Somers” in November, 1848^{iv}, three men, accused of being ringleaders, were hanged.

The Somers was in command of Alexander Slidell Mackenzie, with a crew of 120, of whom 96 were apprentice boys under age.

The Somers had crossed the Atlantic and was returning by way of the West Indies, when a mutiny was reported by a purser’s steward named Wales. Though doubted at first, it was later believed true, due to the watchfulness of Lieutenant Gansevoort.

Midshipman Spencer was first arrested, and later Samuel Cromwell, boatswain’s mate, and a seaman, Elisha Small, were put in irons.

The falling of a masthead, planned in advance and intended to create confusion, was proof of the conspiracy.

The three, Spencer, Cromwell and Small, were doomed to death without proper trial and hanged from the ship’s yard-arm.....

.....The idea was to roam the seas as a pirate ship.....

The commander treated the information given him at first as a joke on the informant, but after some thought and further information every little thing Spencer did and said seemed to point to his guilt. When Spencer was called by the Commander and accused of saying certain things, he answered, “I may have told him so, sir, but it was in a joke.” The Commander said, “This, sir, in joking on a forbidden subject—this joke may cost you your life.”

.....The evidence in the case was laid before the Navy Department, after the ship came into port.

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Looking Back through the Files.....continued

This report says:

“A mutiny suppressed by Commander of ship with terrible energy: three ringleaders hanged on the spot, without trial. Brought home twelve others in irons and restrained the rest by the undaunted front which the officers assumed, and the complete readiness in which they held themselves to face a revolt.”

ⁱ Other sources state that Philip Spencer was the son of U.S. Secretary of War, John Canfield Spencer, including: Cronin, Steven, *The Press of Atlantic City, “Cursed Namesake,”* Section B, p. B1, date unknown.

ⁱⁱ Ibid, p. B2 gives a different date and account: “The 102-foot brig finally met her end in December 1846 when she was caught in a gale while on blockade patrol off Vera Cruz during the Mexican War. Thirty-two of the ship’s 76-man crew drowned.”

ⁱⁱⁱ Thomas Hart Benton, 1782-1858, was a U.S. Senator from Missouri; en.wikipedia.org

^{iv} Signage in the ACHS museum gives a different year: “The Somers.....sailed from New York in Sept. 1842.....On Nov. 26, while near St. Thomas, three sailors were arrested for inciting mutiny. Following an investigation, the three men were found guilty and hanged at sea on Dec. 1.



Left: Footstool: This footstool is displayed in the ACHS museum. A descriptive note states, “The seascape on this footstool was painted by a descendant of Lord Baltimore. It is a copy in oil of the famous Currier and Ives 1842 print..... Note bodies of two mutineers hanging from the starboard end of the lower mizzen yardarm. Another body, not visible at the port end of this yardarm, is that of Midshipman Spencer.”

Above: Painting of the ship Somers: This painting, which hangs in the ACHS auditorium, is signed, Elaine S. Gustafson, 1990.



Spotlight on the Shelves

a treasure hiding in plain sight...

U.S.S. Somers DD-381

The fifth in the series of ships named after Lieut. Richard Somers, the DD-381 was built in 1935 by Federal Shipbuilding & Dry Dock Company, and launched from Kearny, New Jersey on March 13, 1937. During the ship’s inauguration in Brooklyn, N.Y., descendants Marie and Suzanne Somers christened the ship with a ceremonial champagne bottle, which you may see in-person on the third floor of our building.

In our library, we possess two volumes of *The Somers Journal* (S-1269) presented by Charles M. Wells, which contain a detailed account of the destroyer including its specifications, dedications, crew lists, personal accounts, and more. According to Wells, the compilation of these works was inspired by the first reunion of 47 crew members and their wives in 1974. The author himself gives us a glimpse into the process which brought this collection to life, describing the fabrication of these volumes as “time-consuming” and of “frustrating efforts”.

Dedicated to the legacy of the U.S.S. *Somers*, Wells diligently recounts the events of the ship during its service in World War II, when it notably encountered a number of German blockade runners and a disguised American merchantmen. Although only active for eight years, the U.S.S. *Somers* earned ten battle stars for operations during WWII, including the Invasion of Normandy and Invasion of Southern France.

In the words of Charles M. Wells, “Our former ship, like others of her class are gone – Ghosts in that long grey line of a once powerful fleet that sails no more.”



By Brittani Mazzone

EVENTS AND HAPPENINGS



HOLIDAY SWEET SALE!

Monday, December 20th
3:00pm – 6:00pm

@ACHS
907 Shore Road
Somers Point
(Masks Required)



RISLEY HOMESTEAD

8 Virginia Avenue
(near 400 block of Shore Rd
Northfield, NJ



The [Risley Homestead](#) is one of two 18th century houses in Atlantic County individually listed on the National Register of Historic Places and was home to many generations of Risley oystermen. The ACHS received the Homestead and its furnishings by bequest from Virginia Risley Stout in 1989. The Homestead is open for individual and small group guided tours. Contact ACHS for details.



MEMBER NEWS

Welcome

New Members

Joy Tucci, *Galloway, NJ*
Carol Martin, *Egg Harbor Township, NJ*
David Simpson, *Atlantic City, NJ*

New Life Members

Jeffrey and Debra MacNeill,
Somers Point., NJ
Kathleen Quinn, *Ocean City, NJ*
Bobby Thompson, *Bartlesville, OK*



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SPONSOR \$250 - \$1000

Thomas Kinsella

~In Memoriam~

*The Atlantic County Historical Society
honors the passing of members:
Derien Andes, Marjorie Garwood,
Robert Warner & Joseph Walsh*

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SOCIETY

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.