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"Faded Resorts: Asbury Park and Sewaren" The City as Living History Museum

Joanne De Amicis Bulla

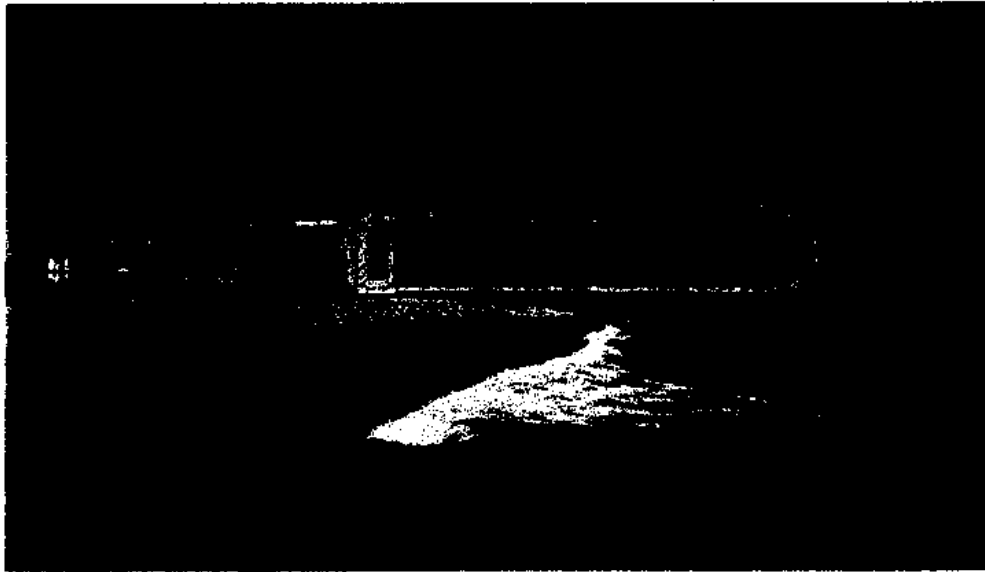
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**“Faded Resorts:
Asbury Park and Sewaren”
The City as Living History Museum**

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**Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the Master's Degree in Museum Professions
Seton Hall University
December 1999**

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After completing this project my only hope is to one day have the joy of seeing both Sewaren and Asbury Park revitalized in the historically sensitive manner befitting their former glory.

Preface

This subject of faded seaside resorts holds great appeal for me. The beach and ocean have attracted me since my earliest memories. Asbury Park was a place I first became acquainted with in the late nineteen sixties, ironically, when it was on the decline. It was a place removed from the ordinary by virtue of the amusements, the boardwalk and, to the adolescent mind, the magnificent and fanciful architecture. It offered a special escape with other teenagers on a Saturday in the summer to somewhere outside the world we normally inhabited, and yet, not far away. "The shore" possessed its own activities, food and acceptable clothing. Visits after college were not so frequent and though the decline was noticeable, it did not seem to be much different than the changes in other tourist destinations, like New York City. Years passed before a ride to Asbury Park to take a walk along the boardwalk revealed such drastic changes as the closing of the Casino building, demise of the amusements and an impression that the beachfront had been abandoned. In talking to friends and acquaintances I discovered common feelings of loss and fear that the beauty of Asbury Park would disappear forever. More than anything, they shared a desire to save the remnants of the past.

Sewaren is a small part of Woodbridge Township about a forty-five minute drive north from Asbury Park. Most people would not consider it part of the Jersey shore now, but that was not the case in the late eighteen nineties.

Discovery of the history of Sewaren and the splendor of the homes along Cliff Road came about in the nineteen eighties when I became interested in the history of the Township. That interest inspired me to help found one of the historic associations and eventually became the Township historian. The first reaction of people upon hearing about Boynton Beach is disbelief followed by questions relating to its past. It is a wonderful feeling to share its history with each new inquisitor. Seeing the development of the

RiverWalk and the new marina is assuring because progress is being made in preserving this beautiful area.

I have always enjoyed visits to living history sites. I believe I retained much more information from such visits than from any reading or lectures on the same subjects. The jump to viewing the city, itself, as the museum or living history site, is not a large one for me. I see visits to all historic towns in this light. Having worked in real estate for some time has only made me more aware of the history we are exposed to on certain streets and in some whole towns. Broadway in New York City, Bourbon Street in New Orleans, the cities of Charleston and Savannah in the southern United States and Venice in Italy are just a few examples of this.

Preservation, on the scale of buildings and houses, often requires finding a new, suitable use for the structure on the inside so that the beauty of the place and the streetscape remains. Redevelopment of Sewaren and Asbury Park, with the admonition to preserve the architecture, promises the hope of saving two towns which are living history sites. What could be more rewarding to the museum professional? This development calls for the most creative utilization of all the skills for preservation, collection management, and educational ideas available. Being involved with such a project would be, to me, a very rewarding challenge.

1. In the Beginning

“ I will take the farmlands, but not these swamps and sand dunes- not at any price! Be reasonable, gentlemen, what will those islands ever be good for- sea gull nests?” So said Thomas Budd in 1695, protesting a requirement that forced him to buy beachfront land at four cents an acre before he could buy the more desirable farmland on the mainland for ten times that amount. But his protestations were to no avail and he became the owner of “swamps and sand dunes.”¹

This attitude toward land along the shore of New Jersey was shared by nearly everyone for a long time. Having a domicile in this area was considered about as appealing as taking up residence in Alaska or any other locale that was wilderness in this era. Gradually this view changed as some adventurous types discovered that there were many enjoyable features of shore living. As more and more people made this discovery, towns along the shore were established and grew by leaps and bounds. The history of their development and growth is as varied and diverse as the towns themselves. Some were developed by visionaries as utopian communities. Others were created by followers of a specific religious group. Some seemed to spring up nearly overnight while others took years to attract a sizable population. Some, like Asbury Park, were built by a strong, driven figure like James Bradley who marched around with a two-foot ruler plotting and planning how to make his town rise from the briers and swamps.²

The shore towns grew and flourished. Populations rose year round and exploded in the warmer months. Roads and railroads, steamships and trolleys brought thousands to enjoy the special pleasures associated with the beach, the ocean and the boardwalks. Land values soared, making Mr. Budd's protestations quaintly laughable.

¹Russell Roberts and Rich Youmans. Down the Jersey Shore (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1993) 3.

²Roberts and Youmans 6.

White sand, bright sun, bathing suits and tee-shirts, bare feet, sausage sandwiches, French fries and cotton candy are some of the images that come to mind when someone mentions, "the shore." Add to those some amusement rides like the Ferris wheel, carousel, tilt-a-whirl and roller coaster and those two words, the shore, become capitalized in the mind of the listener. In New Jersey, these two words are synonymous with fun and a more relaxed pace than that to which we are accustomed in our everyday lives. The peaceful calm and serenity of the land that touches the Atlantic Ocean attracts day visitors and vacationers as well as year-round residents and retirees who wish to live away from the seemingly more frenetic lifestyle of the rest of the state. Although minutes from all the major highways, shopping malls and business areas, this beachfront seems to be isolated, different. The land and houses there are so highly valued that prices and sizes can not be compared with any other part of the state.

The New Jersey shore is a one hundred twenty-seven mile strip of land. This strip has gone from being totally unwanted land, considered to be worthless because it could not produce any decent farm crops, to an area that has drawn millions of people from all over the world to its many attractions. Some towns along the shore just offer beautiful beaches and the chance to relax away from the pressures of the work-a-day world. Other towns are known for their amusement parks with dare-devil rides, fortune tellers and concession stands spewing enticing aromas that remain so indelibly in the memory that smelling them again can instantly bring back thoughts of other visits to that same wondrous place.

But as the years passed some of those flourishing shore areas started to lose their sparkle. Their popularity was diminished, their land values fell and the architectural monuments to their greatness became faded and dingy.

What happened? How is it that these towns came from nothing, became wildly popular attractions and then seemed to lose their appeal? What can be done to preserve their memories, their architectural heritage and their stories? Is it possible that a museum,

historical society or related institution can play a part in this preservation? If so, how? What things can they do? These are the questions that will be explored as we examine the stories of two of these resort towns, Asbury Park in the central shore area, and Sewaren, one of the northernmost towns of the Jersey shore.

At first glance, this may not seem to be a matter of concern for the museum professional. Why would the study of a city's growth, development and decline interest those who care for, display and educate with collections of artifacts? Why would it not? Can anyone who is involved with museum studies deny that the cities of Venice or Rome or Paris are not important to the studies of their art? Is it not true that learning about the development of the city, its architecture, attractions, economic status, population and every other aspect of its uniqueness is part of learning about the art and artifacts produced there? Would we look at the paintings of Venetian artists and neglect the architecture of Venice because it does not fit inside a building? Naturally, the answer is that we would not. We realize that the city itself is a museum. The design of the buildings, the layout of the city, the type of landscaping used are all artifacts of the people who lived there at the time of the locale's development. Today, we can tour historic homes and see recreations of life as it was lived by the original inhabitants. Those sites have collections of artifacts that are displayed in the rooms where they were once used. Some of the artifacts are used in demonstrations for visitors so that, for example, they can see a horseshoe made in an old smith shop or watch glass being blown using original tools. Even traditional museums have more interactive displays where visitors can touch objects or try their hands at an activity from a former time. Museums often have displays where the artifacts are shown in an environment similar to the original as opposed to being viewed in cases. Finally, practically, financially and realistically speaking, it is not always feasible to have a place designated for use specifically as a museum. This fact should not exclude the artifacts and history of the place from being viewed or from being used for the purpose of education. Just as museums today are finding that they must add a touch of entertainment to their

traditional roles in order to compete for the ever-important visitor numbers and money, ingenuity has to be used in decisions about what constitutes a museum. In some locales it may very well be that the town itself is the museum. Cape May, at the southern tip of New Jersey, is easily accepted in this light by virtue of the predominantly Victorian architecture for which the city is known. I believe Sewaren and Asbury Park fit in this category and, as prime examples of faded seaside resorts of the New Jersey shore, they lend themselves to a study of the city as museum. This paper will examine the history of and need for preservation in Sewaren and Asbury Park and consider ideas which could preserve two unique remnants of New Jersey history.

Early on, when the idea of traveling to the New Jersey shore for vacation was beginning to catch on, some of the locations along the shore started to take on special status even among the other shore towns. These places had something unique to offer. People worked purposely to insure that everything necessary for making a resort popular was present in their locale. The founders of the early favorites in resorts at the Jersey shore planned and provided for easy transportation, plenty of lodging, restaurants, activities, boats, dances, early amusement rides and a safe, family-friendly environment.

Sewaren, one of the ten towns in Woodbridge Township, was one of these towns. Even though today almost no one would think to mention Sewaren when asked to name a town on the Jersey shore, in its prime it would have made any list of the best resorts in the state. Its location on the Arthur Kill, right at the edge of Raritan Bay, hardly qualifies as the shore of today. However, in the late nineteenth century, this was considered the beginning of the shore.

Sewaren was one of the favorite resorts of the rich and famous. Many of the visitors who came to stay at its hotels or who built large, rambling summer homes across from its beach were the elite of New York's financial district.³ Day visitors might not have

³Ruth Wolk. The History of Woodbridge, New Jersey (Woodbridge, 1970) 56.

had the money that their wealthy counterparts had but they had the desire for enjoying the same amusements. The rich had their yachts out on the bay and the middle class rented rowboats for their sailing pleasure. Those who were more affluent could afford to eat in the restaurant that employed the best chefs from New York. Those who had less could enjoy the fresh fish they had just caught or could bring a picnic lunch and spread it out on the tables provided in the grove near the beach. Fancy hotels or large houses met the lodging needs of the prosperous. Guest houses did the same for everyone else. There was something for everyone and many people enjoyed themselves so much they would not consider going elsewhere or missing the summer season in Sewaren.

Asbury Park is more solidly located in what is considered today's shore than Sewaren is but it shares many of the same elements in the story of its beginnings. It, too, was the product of special planning in order to make it attractive to resort visitors. Asbury Park was more the achievement of one man while Sewaren was created by a handful of people. James Bradley used his wealth, creativity, vision and self-discipline to literally carve a town out of the wilderness. He incorporated the most modern ideas in his city planning. The layout of the entire area was planned before he allowed any structures to be built. Bradley designed public sections around the three lakes that are within the city limits. He wanted a particular character for his city and, in order to achieve that, he donated land to various civic and religious groups. He even decided how wide the streets should be and how they should flare out to be even wider where they met the ocean so that the breezes coming off the sea would be funneled through the streets and their benefits could be enjoyed by more people.

All of the special attention that James Bradley paid to the details of planning and building Asbury Park as well as to the rules that would govern those who lived or stayed there was richly rewarded by the level of popularity that the resort achieved. Visitors from all parts of New Jersey and Philadelphia crowded his boardwalk and filled the hotels. They flocked to the beaches, arriving, at first, in the horse-drawn carriages that Bradley

provided to take them from the nearest train station in Long Branch. They enjoyed the modern facilities that he incorporated in his plans. Asbury Park was the first seaside resort on the American continent to adopt a sanitary sewer system. Its water was provided by artesian wells from the very beginning of the city. It had electric light service as early as 1885 and an opera house in 1882.⁴ Asbury Park started as a beautiful Victorian seaside resort with every amenity that the people of the day could imagine. It is no wonder that it became such a popular vacation spot.

As time passed, Asbury Park lost most of its Victorian look, except for the original residential sections. It continued, and, in fact, became even more popular, as a favorite resort as it took on the more glitzy honky-tonk aura that most often comes to mind when Asbury Park is remembered by anyone who frequented it anytime from the late nineteenth twenties to the nineteen seventies.

If these two places were so carefully planned and both of them became so wildly popular, how is it that they lost their favored status? Both have changed drastically since their heyday. How did that happen? The answers to those questions will be revealed as we examine the histories of these two faded resorts.

⁴Florence Moss, "A Brief History of Asbury Park," 1991, <http://asburypark.net/info/history.html>.

2. History

The histories of these two resorts demonstrate the diversity in the ways seaside towns developed in New Jersey. They also show which elements were important factors in the creation of premier resorts as opposed to places that never achieved such distinction.

Sewaren is one of the ten towns that make up Woodbridge Township, the oldest original township in the state of New Jersey. Each of the ten towns, while being a part of the larger township community, maintains its own character. Sewaren has always had a connection to the water, being located on the Arthur Kill, also known as the Staten Island Sound. It did not serve as a resort when it started. That title came along much later in the Township's long history and was lost much sooner than many would have liked.

Although the Township's first settlers arrived about 1664, it was not chartered by King Charles II of England until June 1, 1669, when the settlement could show they had the forty families required by the Proprietors, Lord John Berkley and Sir Philip Carteret. The Proprietors wanted to be sure that the Township would be able to generate enough of an income to be able to pay an adequate portion to them.⁵ The Township grew because it had a number of factors which favored development in the 1600's. It profited then, as it does today, from its location. It was on the travel route from Philadelphia and the southern towns to New York. Today, Woodbridge touts its location as the "Crossroads of New Jersey" because of all the major roadways that pass through it.

Sewaren is one of the towns in the Township which are touched by the Arthur Kill. In the earliest accounts of Woodbridge Sewaren is not mentioned except as an area near something more important that the author wants to relate, as a point to pass through on the way to somewhere else or as part of the description of a boundary line along the water. In all of these instances it has no name. In Joseph Dally's book, Woodbridge and Vicinity, which covers Township history until around 1800 there is no mention of the

⁵Joseph Dally, Woodbridge and Vicinity (Woodbridge, 1873) 23-24.

town. However, shortly after that book was written in 1873, all that lack of attention began to change. In the late nineteenth century local developers began advertising the advantages of the beach front in Woodbridge to the affluent citizens of New York, appealing especially to the wealthy brokers of Wall Street.

In 1877 Casimer Whitman Boynton, who was engaged in the manufacture of brick, sewer pipe and kindred goods, owned a large tract of land bordering the Arthur Kill. The sloping shore created an ideal bathing beach. People were willing to come from considerable distances to enjoy the fresh air and invigorating water. Boynton built bath houses along the shore, as well as a restaurant, a jetty, dance pavilion and picnic groves and provided more than one hundred rowboats for hire to fishermen, vacationers and young men who wished to entertain their favorite girls. All of this was established right near the beach so that the day trippers could enjoy a full day at the shore. Sewaren was known by a number of titles in its past, among them, the earliest, Pierce's Landing, and later, Woodbridge Beach and Boynton Beach after Casimer Boynton. This is the name that was used most frequently in its heyday as a summer resort because of the size of Mr. Boynton's resort.

Mr. John Taylor Johnson was a very prosperous gentleman who contributed generously to various arts projects. Among his many other endeavors Mr. Johnson was involved with forming New York City's Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Law School of New York University. In the 1880's he bought all of the available property along the shore in Woodbridge and in 1887 built the Sewaren House on part of it.⁶ This was one of those immense Victorian hotels with wide porches running along the front of the building, facing the water, on two levels. Adjacent to the hotel was Acker's Grove and Boat House where Mr. Henry Acker rented boats and allowed the premises to be engaged for Sunday school picnics and private parties.

⁶Pauline O'Connor, ed. Pamphlet, Sewaren in the Arthur Kill Sound (undated) 3-4.

Just as in Asbury Park and most of the other towns along the New Jersey shore, the development of better modes of transportation and easier access were necessary elements in the growth of the popularity of Sewaren as a resort. Since Mr. Johnson was the president of the Central Railroad of New Jersey, he made sure that rail service was brought into the area. In 1892, Casimer Boynton arranged for excursions to Boynton Beach on the steamboat, "Pauline," every Tuesday and Saturday from Bayonne and Elizabethport.⁷ From that point in time, steamboats and excursion craft regularly stopped at the dock near Boynton Beach unloading visitors who wished to spend a day or the entire summer. While the Jersey Central Railroad accommodated excursion parties from New York, the beach could also be reached by the Pennsylvania Railroad which stopped in Woodbridge proper. Along with Mr. Robert DeForest and Henry Maurer, in 1895 Casimer Boynton built a trolley line which ran from Rahway to the beach.

At the turn of the century, Boynton Beach was one of the most popular resorts along the Middlesex County coast. Visitors arrived daily by train, trolley, carriage, bicycle and ferry to swim, fish or sail. Wall Street power brokers and celebrated stage stars built enormous homes with spacious front lawns along fashionable Cliff Road opposite the beach. Thomas Edison relaxed here as did President Grover Cleveland, who was thrilled to have caught twenty fish in one outing at Boynton Beach.⁸ The Sewaren Land and Water Club held formal dances, charity events, yacht races and "functions for ladies" as one resort booklet of the day noted. Indeed, that same publication, issued by the owners of Boynton Beach described it as, "An ideal resort for Sunday School excursions, society conventions and private parties." It went on to make it very clear that the beach, like that at Asbury Park, was, "conducted on temperance principles" and that "all disorderly and demoralizing elements were kept at a distance." It is said that power boats were

⁷Wolk 57.

⁸Dorothy Ludewig, Timely Told Tales of Woodbridge Township (Plainfield: Boise Printing Company, 1970) 116-117.

maintained at the beach for the quick trip across to Staten Island for those who might wish to imbibe so that the evils of alcohol could be avoided at the resort. This way, if any visitors to Boynton Beach really wanted to drink alcoholic beverages, they could make the short trip across the river to any tavern in Staten Island and do so. Thus, the various forms of misbehavior that were often associated with people who used alcohol would not be a problem for Boynton Beach, it would happen in Staten Island which, apparently, was not quite so fussy about its reputation. In fact, in 1907, Robert De Forest, the owner of the Sewaren House, appeared before the township committee seeking a liquor license for the hotel. Casimer Boynton protested vigorously against a "saloon license," as he referred to it, since he felt, "a saloon in Sewaren would be demoralizing."⁹ The committee agreed with Mr. Boynton and denied Mr. De Forest's request.

By the end of World War I, the waterfront along Boynton Beach was losing some of its dazzle as a playground for the rich and famous, but it was still a very popular summer attraction with its beach houses, dance pavilions, merry-go-round and row boats for hire. At that time Acker's boathouse had over one hundred row boats available and people would have to sign up early in order to insure that they could get one.¹⁰ It had preserved its dedication as a family resort with areas for games, ice cream stands and a curving bamboo slide for children of all ages to enjoy. The dance pavilion was a favored attraction for young people from all over the area. Orchestras were hired for Saturday nights. The restaurant next to the pavilion was a source of great pride to the area as some of the best chefs and waiters from New York City were employed there. Every August Boynton Beach even held an annual Salt Water Day, an age old New Jersey shore tradition wherein people gather at a beach area for games, picnics, fireworks and a celebration of all the joys of shore life. This always brought huge crowds to town.

⁹Wolk 75.

¹⁰Wolk 79.

Times change. On May 30, 1917 the dance hall, pavilion and restaurant burned in an apparently accidental fire.¹¹ New structures would be costly, especially since they would have to provide more updated facilities than the older buildings. The proliferation of the automobile made it easier for people to travel greater distances for their day trips and vacations. That, coupled with the lure of large purchase prices from industries which needed waterfront locations, persuaded the owners of Boynton Beach that it was easier and more profitable not to rebuild.

The Sewaren Hotel was operated until about 1914 and was demolished about a decade later. The area known as Boynton Beach was sold to Shell Oil Company in 1927 even though other parts of the beach area were still in use to the 1940's.¹²

Only the great houses have been left as testament to the former glory that belonged to Sewaren. There are still several grand houses remaining in parts of Sewaren from this era. The finest, along Cliff Road, which was the most favored location directly across from the beach, represent the styles of the late Victorian epoch. Some are in the Queen Anne style with gables, tall chimneys, turrets and wrap around porches. Some have fanciful arches over wide driveways or decorative wooden elements added to their porches. Others are in the Shingle style, a close relative to the Queen Anne, found more often in resort settings like Sewaren because they are designed to blend with nature. They are designed to do this by having a more open floor plan, large verandas or open porches often wrapped around two sides of the house, a many-windowed facade to create a light, airy and more spacious feeling inside the home and they have less architectural detail so they do not stand out so drastically against their environment as their "royal" cousins. The majority of the old resort homes in Sewaren are of the Shingle type. They appear to be more massive than the Queen Anne style homes. Their asymmetrical facades make them look like they

¹¹Wolk 57.

¹²O'Connor 2.

have no real design but just room after room as if they were meant to accommodate great numbers of people. Although they are basically more simple in ornamentation, they sometimes incorporate Queen Anne style towers or Palladian windows and classical porch columns borrowed from the Colonial Revival style.¹³ As is found in other Victorian districts, some of the homes display elements from all three styles. Cliff Road is also the site of the most pretentious of the resort homes in Sewaren. Each of the original owners tried in some way to make their house stand out from the others or look more prestigious than their neighbors. A couple were built in a Tudor cottage style with leaded windows and surrounded with lush and beautiful gardens. Some had stone or concrete gate posts marking the entrance to their property. Still others had walkways running along the road made of huge granite slabs and bordered with colorful flowers and impressive landscaping.

During the 1930's and 40's Sewaren was still a popular spot among the local population for fishing and swimming. People continued to keep small boats in the river or in little private marinas so that they could go fishing in their free time. Youngsters would go down to the beach for a quick swim in the heat of the summer. Although Sewaren no longer held its premier place as a resort, it still offered a clean beach and water for the local populace to enjoy.

In the 1950's and 1960's, that also faded. The water was no longer as clean as it had been as pollution from the oil refineries and other waterside businesses left its destructive results. Swimming was no longer considered a safe activity as people feared becoming ill from whatever pollutants might be in the water. Fishing fell under the same onus. The beach was slowly lost to erosion. Even the sidewalks on the water side of Cliff Road seemed to be sliding into the water as the banks beneath them wore away. Since no one had any profitable reason to maintain the bulkheads between the old beach and the land behind them, they crumbled.

¹³O'Connor 4.

Although the residents who lived on Cliff Road frequently raised the issue of needed maintenance, for years, nothing was done. The cost involved and the resulting benefit to a seemingly small segment of the population put any waterfront project at the bottom of the list of municipal priorities.¹⁴ This was the state of affairs in Sewaren until the mid 1990's when land use issues became more important in the minds of the people and, therefore, in the minds of their elected officials. Property along the water took on an entirely new significance and land, previously ignored because it had fallen into disrepair, was considered ripe for resurrection. State and federal agencies made available grants and necessary expertise to local governments who wished to rehabilitate waterfront property. The Township of Woodbridge took advantage of these offers and constructed new bulkheads along the shore as well as a small boat launch ramp, mini park and brick-paved walkway along the bank of the river complete with reproduction Victorian gas lamps. Finally, recreation and the Sewaren waterfront are once again being linked in the people's minds.

Let us now move south along the Jersey shore and look at the history of our second site. The beginning of Asbury Park is closely associated with its neighboring community, Ocean Grove. It is the story of one man and his vision of a perfect city. James A. Bradley built Asbury Park from a wilderness and was involved with its continued development for fifty years.

Ocean Grove, founded in 1869, was the first Methodist camp meeting town on the Jersey Shore. It was designed to be a contrast to what was seen by the devout founders as the "debauchery" of the premier resort town, Atlantic City. Ocean Grove, and its many imitators, among them, Belmar, Atlantic Highlands, Avon-By-The-Sea, Cape May Point and Seaside Park, were places where "Christians could take their children to spend the

¹⁴unknown author, <http://www.woodbridgenj.com/news/sew.html>. 2.

summer,"¹⁵ and not be faced with obstacles to living according to their religious convictions. Ocean Grove is the only camp meeting town along the shore that is still in existence.

In 1870 James Bradley was feeling run down and sickly. One afternoon in New York City he ran into a friend, David Brown, who was the treasurer of the Ocean Grove Association. Upon asking Mr. Brown how the fledgling town was getting on, Mr. Bradley was invited to buy a lot because those who put their names down early would get first choice. Mr. Bradley bought the first two lots sold in Ocean Grove for eighty-five dollars apiece. In an effort to regain his failing health and to inspect his new property he went to Ocean Grove a few days later. He stayed in a tent with his manservant, John Baker who termed the region, "a wilderness."¹⁶ Finding the trip so beneficial to his health, and thoroughly enjoying the "wilderness," Mr. Bradley spent some time exploring the region near the town. One day he came upon Sunset Lake, just north of Ocean Grove. Anxious that the land not become the property of people who might not be sympathetic to the way of life in Ocean Grove, he bought five hundred acres himself, at a cost of ninety thousand dollars. This was considered an enormous sum at that time for a waste of sand dunes and briers. Bradley planned to develop the property into a resort community. Being a Catholic who became a Methodist he named the community for Bishop Francis Asbury, the first Methodist bishop ordained in America. Bradley was heavily involved with the development of Asbury Park from 1871 until his death in 1921. Before any structure was built Bradley planned the layout himself. He set aside park lands and waterfront areas. Bradley wanted Asbury Park to be a model of modern urban planning and the town's design reflects many of the beliefs prevalent at the time. Streets were made extra wide so that sea air could circulate and dispel "unhealthy miasmatic vapors."¹⁷ The ends of the

¹⁵Roberts and Youmans 7.

¹⁶Roberts and Youmans 22.

¹⁷R. Roberts, The Town That Bradley Built (New Brunswick: Rutgers Press, 1989) 15.

streets nearest the ocean were made even wider so they could serve as funnels which would pull the sea air into them. Because Asbury Park was next to Ocean Grove and Bradley adhered to their religious views, the sale of alcoholic beverages was banned within the city limits.

Bradley took full advantage of the natural assets found within the tract. The land around the three lakes in the city was set apart to be public areas. He donated land for use by civic and religious groups to encourage the special character he envisioned for the town. The commercial parts of Main Street and Cookman Avenue were all well planned before allowing their development. The result of his planning and attention to detail gives Asbury Park a distinct and unique appearance, somewhat more like a mini-Paris, rather than the usual randomly developed American town.¹⁸

When Bradley started developing the city the railroad did not stop in Asbury Park so he provided horse-drawn coaches to pick up vacationers at the train depot in Long Branch which was just to the north. In 1885, a trolley system was built which was the second electric system in the country. Its route ran from the train station through the shopping district and beachfront, residential area and back to the train station.

Asbury Park built its first boardwalk from 1875 to 1880. Originally it was portable so that it could be picked up and stored for the winter. Boardwalks were developed after hotel and guest house owners at the shore tried to come up with a way to keep the sand out of their establishments by having guests walk on the planks instead of directly on the sand. Bradley also built a fishing pier and enlarged the boardwalk. He liked to place old boats and other discarded objects on the beach so that children could play on them. Other amusements were added to the beach area in the 1890's including the Steeplechase ride, a merry-go-round and Ferris wheel. The Ferris wheel was built in 1888 by the Bethlehem Steel Corporation for the man who built and operated the Palace Amusements in Asbury

¹⁸Moss 2.

Park for many years, Ernest Schnitzler. The wheel was sold in 1938 to Central Amusement Corporation who rebuilt the cages on it twice, when rust took its toll, during their ownership.¹⁹

Just like Sewaren, only on a much larger scale, Asbury Park grew quickly in the 1890's. By that time, Asbury Park had more than two hundred hotels and guest houses and over eight hundred private residences. James Bradley sold the beachfront and boardwalk to the city in 1903 and the city began to construct buildings that could be used for tourist entertainments in the area. A fishing pier was built extending five hundred feet into the surf. It would be crowded throughout the summer with strolling visitors who could enjoy the evening concerts which were frequently performed. Other activities were promoted that were designed to extend the tourist season like the "Baby Parade" which was started in 1903 and became a yearly pageant for toddlers in September. People came by the thousands for the event and would, of course, spend money on lodging, food and souvenirs.

In 1906 Asbury Park doubled its size by adding part of Neptune Township. The city had always been intended to be a year-round community, and so, as much attention was paid to the development of its commercial center as to the beachfront. Banks, stores, a post office and Steinbach's Department store, which was built in 1906 and became one of the leading retailers in the shore area, were added to the downtown section.

After a devastating fire in 1917 and much damage from a winter storm in 1923, Asbury Park recovered with a building boom which included the Berkley-Carteret Hotel, Convention Hall and the Casino. The latter two were designed by the same architects who designed New York's Grand Central Station, Warren and Wetmore. Convention Hall, which was first proposed in 1916 and finally built in 1928, hosted many world-famous

¹⁹Edward Lange, Letter dated June 14, 1979. Asbury Park Papers, Monmouth Historical Association, Freehold.

entertainers, trade shows and concerts over the years. The Casino is noted for the round structure attached to it that housed the carousel.²⁰ The carousel, with animals carved by Frank Carretta, was built by the Philadelphia Toboggan Company in 1932.²¹ Convention Hall's auditorium hosted a wide variety of events from trade shows, conventions and entertainment, in its early days, to rock concerts in the nineteen sixties when it was the only venue on the north Jersey shore that would allow groups like The Rolling Stones, Jefferson Airplane and The Dave Clark Five to perform, despite the huge crowds they would attract.²²

This favorite seashore resort had something for everyone, again, like Sewaren, but on a grander scale. Pavilions along the water held fresh and salt-water pools and dance halls which featured the "Big Bands" of the nineteen thirties. Swan boats and paddle boats could be enjoyed on the lakes while there was miniature golf to be played at spots along Ocean Avenue. All of this lasted well into the nineteen sixties when the changes in shopping districts and infrastructure started to take their toll on the resort's popularity. Even the Asbury Park that is featured in the songs and videos of Bruce Springsteen, Southside Johnny and other now-famous musicians who often performed at the Stone Pony in Asbury is based on their remembrances of a resort that was already fading when they first encountered it. In the early nineteen seventies, the city that Springsteen most often performed in was drastically different than the one that inspired his references to the Jersey shore in his music.

James Bradley influenced every part of Asbury Park's development from its founding until his death in 1921. He would actually carry a ruler around with him as he walked through the town in its early years so that he could work out plans on the spot.

²⁰Moss 3.

²¹Staff writer, "End of Era." *Asbury Park Press*. January 23, 1985, C2.

²²Robert Santelli, *Guide To the Jersey Shore* (Old Saybrook: The Globe Pequot Press, 1998) 35.

Some of the residents felt that his firm control and refusal to allow change held the town back for a couple of decades. Bradley, on the other hand, was not always pleased, in his later years, with the way the town had progressed. He would use his own newspaper, "The Asbury Park Chronicle," to write editorials critical of anything he had seen in the city that displeased him. Bradley was many things- a fierce temperance supporter and moralist, visionary, idealist, romantic and, at times, a dictator. Many of the first people who came to Asbury believed in his utopian visions and wanted to live and work in the city he designed.²³ Others eventually found his regulations, including rules governing the style of bathing attire allowed on his beach, to be overly restrictive. In his later years he moved to another town he founded, Bradley Beach, and often bemoaned ever having started Asbury Park because he did not like the way it was developing. He once said, "I would have been much happier in my old age if I had never heard of the place."²⁴

Asbury Park's fall from prominence is fraught with irony. Constant attention to detail, rigid, personal control over the city and consistent efforts to attract visitors were the hallmarks of Bradley's reign. The irony is that the decline of Asbury Park in the late 1960's was blamed on neglect and mismanagement as well as the competition for tourist dollars from other places.

²³ June Methot, Up and Down the Beach. (Navisink: Whip Publishers, 1988) 97.

²⁴John T. Cunningham, The New Jersey Shore (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1958) 56.

3. The Decline

What happened? How is it that Asbury Park and Sewaren came from nothing and became wildly popular attractions, only to vanish once again into obscurity? How could any town which had such favored status as a resort that people came from neighboring states to visit it, have fallen to the low points that Asbury Park and Sewaren did? These were not just places which happened to border the Atlantic Ocean. It was not merely because of their location that they enjoyed the reputation they had as premier vacation destinations. Both of these towns reached the height of their appeal because people worked at making them attractive, accessible and successful as family resorts.

There are many similarities in the demise of these two resorts, just as there are similarities in their rise to the premier stature among shore towns that they achieved. Both towns had powerful, wealthy men who took the initial steps to bring them to the prominence they enjoyed from the late nineteenth century to well into the twentieth century. James Bradley, the founder of the city, made sure that the railroad and trolley lines were brought into Asbury Park so that people could, by the standards of the day, travel there in relative ease. Casimer Boynton, Robert De Forest and Henry Mauer did the same thing in Sewaren. At the time, the convenience of mass transportation played an extremely important role because the only other option for vacationing individuals would be travel by horse-drawn conveyances. This ease of transportation gave both sites a large boost over other possible seaside locations because no one wanted to have to make their way for long distances over bumpy and dusty roads at the best speed their horses could muster when they could relax on the quicker and cleaner train, trolley or steamboat. Indeed, the transportation became part of the vacation. However, as the automobile started to become more commonly available, and roads began to be improved so as to accommodate them, people became much more mobile. They no longer had to rely on the timetables of steamship lines or railroads. Vacationers could go wherever they wanted,

whenever they wanted. People started to take road trips as vacations. They could go to places that were not served by the railroad if they so desired. The previously favored resorts no longer had an edge on any other location as far as easy access was concerned. The automobile allowed people to travel to one place, stay for the night, and then move on to a more distant destination. Vacationers could consider locations much further south than Asbury Park, never mind Sewaren.

Changes in forms of transportation accounted for some of the fall from prominence for these two resorts, but there was much more. Another ingredient in the mix of circumstances that led to their decline had to do with the middle class. After the end of World War I, the middle class in America started to have more leisure time as well as more discretionary income. Asbury Park and Sewaren were among those locales that became well known and popular during the end of the last century. Their popularity was primarily centered among the upper classes, people of means who could spend the entire summer at a vacation site. Both Sewaren and Asbury Park attracted wealthy families who built summer homes along the shore. The father, being the wage earner, would usually spend the weekdays in New York or Philadelphia, engaged in business. The rest of the family and their servants would live in the summer residence and be joined there by the "head of the house" on the weekends and holidays. The evidence of the large fortunes at the command of such people is easily seen in the size and styles of the vacation "cottages" they built. The homes boasted numerous bedrooms, huge open porches, servants' quarters, music rooms and conservatories. The exterior features of columns, stained glass windows, broad verandas and large luscious lawns and gardens also added to the luxurious surroundings. The owners of the resorts in Sewaren catered to the families who stayed there for the season.²⁵ The day trippers or people who could only stay for shorter periods of time could enjoy some of the amenities that existed for the summer residents

²⁵Casimer Boynton, Boynton Beach. undated pamphlet 2.

but they did not stay long enough to be included in others. The dance pavilion in Sewaren had events which were open to everyone, but the resort also had the Sewaren Land and Water Club where formal dances, charity events, yacht races and "functions for ladies" occurred.²⁶ The folks who lived in Sewaren for the entire season attended most of those functions as opposed to visitors only staying for a week or so. As the middle class became better able to afford vacations and personal transportation and had more time to spend away from where they earned their living, their numbers increased at the summer resorts. Businesses started to cater to their needs as well as to their wealthier neighbors. In Sewaren, Acker's boat house provided over a hundred row boats for rent so that those who were staying for a day or so could enjoy the water activities formerly restricted to those who could afford to own their own vessels.²⁷ Just as the middle class was becoming more mobile, so too, were their upper class counterparts. As the typical working class family found that they were able to go to the Jersey shore for a vacation, the upper crust discovered that they could travel further for relaxation as well. Some went to places like Newport, Rhode Island. Others spread their wings even more and visited Europe. Travel was faster and time was more plentiful.

Other towns and villages along the New Jersey coast became more popular as they became easier to reach. Some, like Atlantic City, did not have the more strict moral or religious restrictions that were ingrained in Asbury Park, and, to a lesser extent, in Sewaren. This more relaxed policy toward what activities would be tolerated attracted people who, while not raucous by today's standards, would not be willing to abide by the iron rule of a James Bradley or the "temperance principles" under which activities in Sewaren had to be conducted.²⁸

²⁶Boynton. 3

²⁷Wolk 57.

²⁸Boynton 2.

As a result of these changes in mobility and class status, both of these resorts lost some of their premier ranking. People found they had more choices and they took advantage of that fact. As time went on they fell further down the list of "must visit" vacation places.

Sewaren is directly across the Arthur Kill from Staten Island, New York and a short distance by boat from the New York harbor. These are two vital facts that are important even until today. Although the waterfront area was still popular as a summer resort after World War I, it had started to lose some of its sparkle. The dance pavilion, beach cabanas, merry-go-round and bamboo slide still entertained lots of families, but there were new developments that would curtail some of the regular resort activities. Boynton Beach, closed in 1914 as its owners found it more difficult to maintain the income level they desired while they paid for the constant costs of upkeep on the various buildings and resort accessories required to keep the facility running. The numbers of visitors needed to sustain their business at a healthy level were just not there. On May 30, 1917, the dance hall, pavilion and restaurant burned.²⁹ The money needed to rebuild was too great for the owners to risk without adequate assurances of a good return on it. They would have to start from scratch and build new, more modern and updated facilities in the hope that the vacationers would come back in sufficient numbers to make the investment worthwhile. At the same time, they could see that the area termed "Jersey shore" had moved much further south. The beaches from Sandy Hook to Cape May were not only easy enough for day trippers to reach, but were bigger, less crowded and more removed from the rush and crush of the more northern section of the coast that Sewaren occupied.

The waterway that Sewaren bordered was becoming more crowded with commercial shipping as barges and steamships made their way to the Port of New York. Businesses which needed a waterway connection for the purpose of shipping their

²⁹Wolk 56.

products to market as inexpensively as possible were starting to look for locations outside of the City of New York, but within an easy commuting distance. One of these industries, the manufacturing of petroleum products, looked at sites in New Jersey and liked what they saw. Shell Oil finally made an offer for the Boynton Beach property in 1927, thus ending any thoughts that the resort would ever rebuild.³⁰

The Sewaren Hotel had closed its doors in 1913 due to the decrease in visitors and was demolished about a decade later. Acker's boathouse and picnic grove was located next to the hotel. The boathouse could continue for much longer than the hotel and beach resort because members of the local population still used their boats for fishing or day trips as did vacationers who still came to the area. The boathouse burned in 1924 and was rebuilt the next year. Acker continued to operate even after Boynton Beach went out of existence but that site, also, finally gave way to the oil industry.

With the decline in vacationers which resulted in the close of facilities and sales of property for industrial uses, the owners of the large houses along Cliff Road overlooking the beach found themselves with homes that no longer had the prestige they originally enjoyed. Who wanted to tell their wealthy friends that they had a summer residence across the street from a commercial dock where oil tankers loaded and unloaded their products? Without all of the fancier facilities like the restaurant and the hotel there was not much to attract the families who built the homes in the first place. They had nothing with which to dazzle their friends or to keep themselves amused for the entire summer. The houses were sold and eventually many would be broken up into smaller apartments so that the new owners could afford to maintain them. Most of the fancy gardens would vanish since the year round residents who gradually came to live there had neither the time nor the money to keep them in good shape. They certainly did not have the full time staffs of servants that the previous owners had. Great lawns were reduced in size as lots were subdivided and

³⁰Wolk 57.

newer, less extravagant houses were constructed. The former seaside resort which had been the summer playground of wealthy families from New York became an area ringed with oil tanks, docks for large tankers and oil refineries. The grand large houses were now occupied as single family dwellings of the upper middle class or divided into small rental units for oil industry workers and for families who could not afford to purchase a home of their own. The sparkle was gone from the seaside jewel of the northern New Jersey coast.

Asbury Park's slide into oblivion occurred over a much longer span of time. Not unlike Sewaren, Asbury Park benefited from its location. It occupied a place at the beginning of a series of towns along the coast that catered to summer visitors. Vacationers could stay in any of these towns and participate in the activities available in the others. Asbury Park still had a large, clean beach and wonderful amusement houses, rides and restaurants even after it was not the destination of choice for spending an entire vacation. Families would travel there for a weekend or, as travel became even easier, for a day or evening of fun. The resort remained popular well into the nineteen sixties for day trippers, teen-age couples and families looking to have a good time on an affordable budget.

Perhaps because Asbury Park had so much to offer and continued to enjoy some degree of popularity, the changes were much more subtle than they were in Sewaren. Also, Asbury Park had become established by then as a year-round community and so the effects of the changes in the American lifestyle on the life of the town were not so readily noticeable. Eventually, though, businesses that catered to vacationers found it more difficult to survive. Near the end of the nineteen sixties the decline became more evident. Some downtown businesses closed. Neglect and mismanagement by local officials was manifested in the way public buildings often looked in need of upkeep. Streets were not kept as clean as they once had been and visitors felt less safe than in the past as more "questionable characters" roamed the boardwalk.³¹ In addition to the increased mobility

³¹Santelli 34.

initially provided by the proliferation of the automobile, better roads and greater prosperity provided the opportunity for vacations further from home. Air travel came within the means of the average citizen. These developments led to families being able to travel to Disneyland for vacation instead of having to consider only sites accessible by car. The dawning of the age of the one-stop shopping center, including movie theaters, which would eventually progress to the age of the mall, contributed to the decline of the commercial shopping district. Some storefronts remained empty for long periods of time as space was no longer at a premium.³²

Other circumstances often referred to as contributing factors in the degeneration of Asbury Park include the racial unrest of the nineteen sixties. Racial tension built up throughout the United States as civil rights activists gained more attention and received more support for their demands for racial equality. Asbury Park had always been, as had all of the affluent playgrounds of the country, primarily a white dominated area. Black servants may have attended to the needs of the visitors to these resorts but they were not able to profit as the white-owned businesses did. Indeed, the numbers of blacks working in resort towns was seen by some as "an evil" which was to be decried.³³ In 1893 an article in the "Philadelphia Inquirer" noted that the problem of being overrun by members of the "dark skinned race" was solved by the founder of Asbury Park, James Bradley, by restricting blacks to certain defined areas.³⁴ Blacks had always lived in the city and had increased in number as white property owners, wary of the neglect and resultant decline, left and sold houses for lower than the previous market prices. But the majority of the black population still found themselves living in separate neighborhoods in Asbury Park when the civil rights movement started to gain momentum. Several homes on a street

³²Moss 4.

³³ Charles E. Funnell, By the Beautiful Sea, The Rise and Times of That Great American Resort, Atlantic City (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1975) 29.

³⁴Funnell 30.

would be sold to black families and that street would then be seen as a "black" area.³⁵

They might not have been restricted by law to those areas but practically speaking it would have been nearly impossible for a single black family to purchase and move into a home in the all-white neighborhoods without facing serious threats to their safety. The tensions of that time brought riots and destruction to many towns and cities. Asbury Park had its share of both. Businesses had their windows broken and their merchandise looted during the hot summer of 1970 when tempers flared. These tensions also helped to keep the potential resort visitors away so the economy suffered more.

In the nineteen sixties and seventies, both state and federal policies emphasized tearing down buildings and constructing new development projects, keeping different housing types isolated from each other so the townhouse dweller and the single family homeowner may have lived in the same town but not on the same street. New road construction further dissected neighborhoods with new major highways. Asbury Park saw all of these developments. Lax code enforcement there allowed absentee landlords to chop up the stately, old homes into cheap rooming houses and apartments. The rate of owner occupied housing dropped to thirty percent.³⁶ Having a population made up primarily of renters is a sure-fire method of destruction for a locale. Renters do not have the investment in a town that is necessary to provide an impetus to make decisions and changes that might cost money, but will be in the best interest of the town's future. Renters are not property tax payers and can vote for improved government services without any worry about taxes going up as a result of their vote. Property owners who can not meet their taxes often abandon properties that can not provide adequate rents. This happened in Asbury Park.

³⁵Funnell 31.

³⁶Ellen Bradfield, "Can Asbury Park Be Saved", *Compass* 21 (Summer 1995): 21-27.

In the middle nineteen seventies there was a move to break up the large, impersonal institutions that took care of people who could not care for themselves because of mental or emotional problems. Many former patients were released from the institutions to find their own housing or would be placed in smaller group homes or individual apartments. There was, initially, money available from the government to help subsidize the rents for these facilities. Asbury Park found itself flooded with special needs people as social service agencies, seeking inexpensive available apartments, dumped many formerly institutionalized individuals into the city. Absentee property owners saw an opportunity to fill their housing units with guaranteed renters. Other property owners sold their holdings to nonprofit organizations who were offering various social services. In 1995 thirty-one percent of all city property in Asbury Park was tax exempt and another twenty-four percent were in arrears.³⁷ Eventually, all of this took its toll on the city. The government subsidies dried up, the lack of paid taxes prevented the provision of needed government services and the general seedy appearance of the city kept people from feeling safe visiting even if they did not mind the run down conditions of the area. Add to all of this the fact that many of the elected officials were more interested in what they could take out of the town than in doing anything that would raise its image.

Asbury Park's history of the last twenty-five years contains stories of corruption, conflicts of interest and neglect. In 1995 Mayor Patricia Candiano blamed the decline of the city on benign neglect and a lack of accountability. "Where was everyone for the last twenty years? Were they all asleep? There was no taskmaster to keep everyone in place so they kept taking and taking and taking until there was nothing left to take."³⁸ Each time one of these problem periods ends, the city regroups its forces and promises to finally make its comeback only to be hit with another problem. In May of 1999 the grand jury

³⁷Bradfield 27.

³⁸Bradfield 21.

was convened again. This time the reason was to complete the county's nearly two-year probe into corruption in Asbury Park by specifically focusing on operations at Convention Hall and in a city housing rehabilitation program. The city was accused of favoritism over who would be allowed to operate concessions at the reopened Hall and other irregularities related to its administration. In November of 1999, conflict of interest charges involving two members of the city council, and left unresolved from the previous year, were again in the papers. This time, the concern was over allowing the failed beachfront redeveloper, Joseph Carabetta, to sell his rights to that redevelopment to a company of his choice. The two Council members have been shown to have business dealings or connections to Carabetta. The opposition questioned whether their votes to transfer the redevelopment rights to Westminster Realty Corporation were in the best interest of the city, especially without written guarantees to protect the city if Westminster does not perform or meet deadlines.³⁹ The issues continue and are often so convoluted that one almost requires a diagram in order to follow who is connected to whom and how they are involved with whatever is the current redevelopment plan.

The involvement of Joseph Carabetta in the economic problems of Asbury Park has been long and tedious. In 1986 Carabetta, along with the two Vaccaro brothers who had successfully refurbished the Berkeley-Carteret Hotel in 1985, received approval by the city of Asbury Park for a five hundred million dollar beachfront redevelopment project. The construction was scheduled to begin in 1987 and was expected to take fifteen years to complete. Ocean Avenue, the road which runs parallel to the beach, was supposed to be closed to vehicular traffic. Convention Hall was going to be upgraded and connected via a walkway to the Berkeley-Carteret. Between Third and Fourth Avenues the plan called for the construction of a high-rise building with twenty-four hundred residential units. As you

³⁹Nancy Shields, "Rival Builders About to Settle." Asbury Park Press 2 Dec. 1999<
Asbury Park Press Coastal Monmouth Bureau.
<http://asburypark.net/news/1999/11/conflict.html> 20.

walk along the boardwalk today that partially completed component of the project can be seen looking like the skeletal remains of a vanished civilization. The viewer might wonder why such an enormous structure was never completed. The reasons are simple and complicated. The simple part is that the developers did not act fast enough to take advantage of the mid to late 1980's economic circumstances that created a building boom. Then, in late 1987, a disgruntled worker burned down sixteen nearly completed townhouses and the resulting investigation brought to light internal problems between Carabetta and the Vaccaro brothers.⁴⁰

In 1990, the city tried to change its plans for the redevelopment of the waterfront based on the changes in the housing market. Instead of concentrating on building condominiums, the city opted to focus on entertainment. Carabetta formed a new partnership named Ocean Mile Development and proposed a three hundred fifty million dollar project that would be completed within five years. Three entertainment pavilions would be constructed on the boardwalk between the Casino and Convention Hall. The plan also included a twelve hundred seat arena, at least three corporate pavilions along Wesley Lake which is opposite the ocean and beach, restaurants, shops and a new hotel. Negotiations were begun with Ringling Brothers and Barnum and Bailey Combined Shows for a forty-four million dollar Cosmic Journey space age pavilion, with the Jackson Family for a fifty-one million dollar pavilion which would have both a recording and television studio in it and with the Cousteau Society for a forty-three million dollar marine science pavilion.⁴¹ There were stories of other famous investors who were supposed to be involved in various aspects of the venture. Hopes were very high that the city would finally be revitalized but, once again, that was not going to happen. After Carabetta put sixty million dollars into the project, the economy collapsed and he was forced to declare

⁴⁰Shields 21.

⁴¹Shields 21.

bankruptcy. In 1992, the city declared that the redevelopment company was in default since it had no evidence of financing for any of the projects and had not paid the city one million dollars in lost ratables. The litigation between Asbury Park and Carabetta that started at that time has still not been completely resolved.

Because of the financial shambles that Asbury Park has been in for so many years, it seems to attract even more problems. In 1997 a real estate scam was uncovered that hurt many small investors and, once again, dashed the hopes for revitalization that had been raised. For a few months, residential properties started to become very hot commodities in Asbury Park. Homeowners who had been having trouble finding interested buyers before suddenly had offers to buy their houses. The houses would then be sold within weeks for much more money. This turned out to be a scam. This particular scheme had people signing for mortgages on residential properties that they were not going to end up owning. People who wanted to earn some money were recruited to sign the paperwork for mortgages and told that they would not be responsible for making the payments since the houses were going to be put back on the market and sold for much higher prices within a couple of weeks. The original mortgages would be paid off with the money from the new purchasers. Of course, there were problems with the plan. The first problem was that the figures being used to appraise the houses for the second, higher prices were false, the houses could never command those prices in the real market. They were manufactured by accomplices of the perpetrators who were involved with the lender. The lack of demand for properties in Asbury Park would show what the real prices should have been. The second problem developed when people who signed for the original mortgages never made any payments since all they did was allow the use of their names on the contracts. Eventually, the entire plan fell apart. People who had lent their names to the scheme found themselves involved in legal proceedings. The people who first sold the homes found themselves without the properties or the money they had been promised. The second

buyers found themselves owing much more money on properties that could never really appraise for the amount owed. The courts would be sorting out the details for months.

Asbury Park managed to grow with the times and economy from a Victorian, tightly managed summer resort town, to a well-preserved artifact of a Pre-Depression slice of Americana, keeping its special character even into the nineteen seventies. The city started as the project of one man with a vision. James Bradley literally built the town from nothing. He made all the decisions about how it would look, what would be in it and how the people who lived there would conduct themselves. Unfortunately, things are much more complicated now that the city is trying to pull itself out of the long fall it has taken. There are many more people who have to agree on the decisions being made and that is a very large complication. Many of the people who want to see the redevelopment come from places other than Asbury Park. Some of these people remember Asbury Park from their own past and want to see that period restored, while long-time residents see that the decline started even before then and feel that too much has been lost to ever be recaptured. Even the state of New Jersey wants to help with the redevelopment. Some people fear that the money from the state or from some developers will come with strings attached that will diminish their ability to make their own choices for their city.⁴² Some people want to tear down the last remnants of the past because they say they are too far gone to be saved and the land could be put to better use if something else were constructed on it. Still others want to see the old structures rehabilitated and believe that doing that will help to bring back the prosperity that once existed. Cultural tastes are also part of the picture as Asbury Park has seen an increase in Haitian and Mexican immigrants added to the large numbers of African Americans already living there.⁴³

⁴²Bradfield 25.

⁴³Werner Baumgartner, Personal Interview. 14 October 1999.

The decisions about how to rehabilitate Asbury Park have been made and changed and made again as times and the economy changed. Each time it seemed that the redevelopment would finally happen, something occurred to dash the hopes that were raised. Each time that the plans have been stopped and left uncompleted, more of the architectural remnants of the past became a little more fragile, a little closer to being lost forever.

4. Attempts at Reviving the Glory

Over the years both Sewaren and Asbury Park have been the focus of attempts to bring back some semblance of their former glory. These efforts may have been made by different groups or individuals, with or without local government support, but always with the thought that what was once valued and important could be so again.

In the case of Sewaren, once so much of the beachfront had been sold to the oil companies for industrial use, the local residents realized that things were changed in a way that could not be undone. They knew that the days of big hotels and guest houses, dance pavilions and huge numbers of visitors from near and far were over. They had seen the Sewaren House demolished and the wealthy summer residents from New York stop coming. What they hoped for was a continuation in the use of the remaining waterfront for the enjoyment of the local population. If they could keep a small rowboat tied to a dock or bring their fishing boat from home on a trailer and spend the day on the quiet Arthur Kill catching fish or taking an occasional dip, they would have been happy. While some mourned the loss of the dances and the trolleys packed with day trippers, others were content to have the whole place to themselves. No longer would they have to wait on line to rent a rowboat or swim with a crowd. This contentment lasted for many years. The talk about "fixing up the waterfront in Sewaren" started when the beach erosion had made noticeable changes in the area and the pollution started to take its toll on the quality of the water to such an extent that the mention of possibly eating fish caught there brought peals of laughter and even falling accidentally into the water was considered dangerous to one's health. The long-term residents of the Sewaren section of the Township would bring the issue up each time a new administration took office and sometimes would be promised

that the problems would be addressed. Each time, for one reason or another, the promises were never kept.⁴⁴

Some of the residents who lived in the older homes or who had lived in Sewaren all of their lives started the Sewaren Historical Society with the idea that they could help to promote and preserve the history of the area and maybe revive interest in it as well. This group was in existence until the nineteen eighties when it eventually folded due to a lack in membership and the fact that the remaining few members were mostly elderly. They gave over the funds remaining in their treasury to a newly formed historical organization that was interested in the township as a whole, rather than just one section. Establishing a museum, one important goal of the new society, gave impetus to the turn over of funds. The new historical group organized a couple of walking tours of the old homes and gardens along Cliff Road. In the mid-nineteen eighties they produced, with the aid of the county heritage association, a pamphlet which told the history of the beachfront and could serve as a self-guided walking tour of Sewaren's waterfront.⁴⁵ During a meeting of the state historical league in 1987, the attendees were taken by bus to see what had been Boynton Beach. All of these activities were favorably received by those who attended. The pamphlet is still available through the Woodbridge Chamber of Commerce which distributes it to anyone interested in the history of the Township. None of this, however, produced enough publicity or raised enough awareness of the problems in Sewaren to get any help for the waterfront. Most of the time, if someone was told that it had once been among the premier resorts of the New Jersey shore, they would express surprise and then dismay over what it had become, but that was the extent of their interest. Very few people knew, or cared, about this section of the Township or the esteem it had once commanded. Public officials reacted in much the same way.

⁴⁴O'Connor 5.

⁴⁵O'Connor 5.

More recently, in 1996, things started to change as far as the fortunes of Sewaren were concerned. A new administration had won election in 1992 and took a very different view of the Township and how to get things accomplished. Prior to this time, officials in the Township tended to view everything in a very narrow manner. If the things needed to be done, the Township would have to do them and if the Township could not afford something, then it was not done. The new mayor and his administration took full advantage of the Township's position as the fifth largest municipality in the state. Grants from various state and federal agencies were sought to help the Township pay for needed improvements that were beyond the capability of local funds.⁴⁶ In October of that year the Sewaren RiverWalk was unveiled as the first part of a revitalization effort. The project included bulkheading along the water, construction of a pedestrian walkway, new Victorian-looking light fixtures, black metal railings and decorative brick paving along the side of Cliff Road nearest to the water. The administration of Mayor James McGreevey had gotten a million dollar federal grant through a program designed to create new construction jobs.⁴⁷ At the dedication ceremonies plans were unveiled for the next phase of the project. Residents of the older section of Sewaren rejoiced. Finally, their pleas had been heard and the waterfront was on its way to being revitalized. A small park area was created on a bulkhead overlooking the water and a new boat launch was placed next to it. All of this happened none too soon as the roadbed of Cliff Road itself was in danger of erosion from the years of neglect of the beachfront. The second phase would include the development of an adjacent peninsula of land that sticks out into the Arthur Kill. The Township hoped to make a park there with picnic areas, nature trails and views of the water. This was expected to take some time since soil tests had shown contamination on the property.

⁴⁶Timothy Dacey, Personal interview. 12 July 1999.

⁴⁷Richard Lee, Sewaren Riverwalk Dedication pamphlet, October 26, 1996.

Three years passed and, once again, the residents were starting to wonder if they had seen the last of the hoped for revitalization. The RiverWalk has been very popular, drawing visitors from other parts of the Township as well as from neighboring communities. The Township promotes it by having small band concerts in the summer and memorial services at the water's edge on Veteran's Day and at other times during the year. The peninsula's development, however, had not been started. Finally, in November of 1999, the Township made an announcement that the project would go forth.⁴⁸ The problems with pollution were beyond the Township's ability to clean up with the grant money they had gotten for the park. To remedy the situation, the Township will transfer the thirty-nine acre property to Middlesex County. The County, with its greater economic resources, will finance the cost of developing the site into a park as well as pay Woodbridge for its past expenses. The Township will transfer a two million dollar Green Acres grant to the County that it received for the site and will assist in seeking state funding for soil remediation. The end result will produce a recreation area with nature trails, a nature pavilion, waterfront walkway and a woodland section to allow for a small natural wildlife preserve.⁴⁹ Since the County has more experience in this type of clean-up and development, as well as greater resources, the Township's transfer of the land is viewed as being the most beneficial solution. The Township will have the benefit of the park without having to pay for its maintenance.

Asbury Park has had many more changes and redevelopment efforts in its history than Sewaren. Asbury actually underwent its first revitalization in the early nineteen hundreds when James Bradley first sold his beachfront property to the city. Using that land, the city improved the boardwalk, built wood piling jetties and the first arcade along the boardwalk. Another redevelopment period started after Bradley's death in 1921 when

⁴⁸Richard Lee, Woodbridge Works (Fall 1999): 4.

⁴⁹Lee 4.

his real estate holdings hit the market and were developed. It was at this time Convention Hall and the Casino were built.⁵⁰

The choice to pursue the state money that was attached to providing housing for the special needs population in the seventies turned out to actually hurry the decline, as opposed to bringing in more revenue for the benefit of the city.

The first real attempts at revitalization came when Joseph Carabetta sought the city's approval for his redevelopment plan with the Vaccaro brothers. Although that plan did not work out, the city has not stopped trying to find a way to come back.

The latest turn of events centers around who will be allowed to take over the failed redevelopment project from Joseph Carabetta. The decision to give that distinction to Westminster Reality Corporation over The Applied Companies of Hoboken, a consortium which includes Trenton developers Ronald and Geoffrey Berman, who have completed historic renovations of retail and office buildings in New Brunswick and Trenton, was challenged in court by some members of the city Council.⁵¹ Rather than allow that to be settled in a court battle which could take years, the judge brought all the parties in to negotiate. He said that, while the economy is good, and there is enough beachfront to share, he did not want to waste time in litigation.⁵² After only two days both developers involved agreed to work together on a commercial and residential plan proposed by Westminster Reality Corporation. This agreement moves the entire process along quickly and also addresses the concern that has been voiced about the wisdom of entrusting the entire beachfront to a single builder again.⁵³ The next step will be for the co-developers to negotiate with the city on what is to be built, time lines for payment of Carabetta's eight

⁵⁰Cunningham 57-58.

⁵¹Baumgartner, Personal interview.

⁵²Shields 20.

⁵³Shields 21.

million dollar tax debt, as well as performance guarantees and other protections for the city.⁵⁴

This latest plan for revitalization, which the developers agreed to work on, named, "Asbury Park Renaissance," calls for large, year-round entertainment and educational pavilions on the boardwalk. It also includes other commercial and residential buildings. Since this is very similar to a proposal that Carabetta put forth in 1991, the city has indicated that they want to bring in planners to update the proposal as well as give residents and businesses a chance to make their preferences known.⁵⁵

If this approach to redevelopment works, the forty-five acres of beachfront property will be well on the way to starting a new life. The city will still have to find the means to revitalize both its downtown business district and its residential areas. However, the redevelopment of the waterfront and the subsequent influx of tourists should give a tremendous boost to the economy of the city and make it more attractive to new businesses and residents. The historic preservation background of the Bermans is a great asset to the plan because it is precisely that historic element that has stayed with the city throughout all of its various revisions and is the one element that would be most notable in its absence.⁵⁶ Preservation of the historic element is most important for the city in its role as living museum. This latest plan is viewed with the most optimism by officials and preservationists alike because it addresses the hopes of all of them. They want to see Asbury Park reclaim its place as an important part of the New Jersey shore while revitalizing the architectural artifacts of its glorious past.

⁵⁴Shields 21.

⁵⁵Shields 20.

⁵⁶Baumgartner, Personal interview.

5. What Role Can A Museum Play?

Having examined the history of Sewaren and Asbury Park, no one can deny their places in the story of the development of the New Jersey shore. Since they possess such history, both in story and architectural artifacts, they are storehouses of interesting and educational information. How does the museum professional or historic association preserve and share the treasures located in these two localities?

Initially, the fact that neither place currently has a museum or is likely to have one in the near future may seem to put an end to our discussion. There is no sense in pursuing the subject if no structure is going to be designated for museum use. This ignores what already exists. Both towns have historians and historical societies which seek to perform the tasks usually thought of as belonging to a museum. They want to preserve artifacts and share information about the past with other people, both scholars and more casual visitors. There is no reason why the museum has to have a central structure in order to do those jobs. Actually, some museums are already expanding beyond the traditional idea of occupying just one site. The Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, for example, has one site for its permanent collection and another, which is closer to the downtown district, where it can stage additional exhibits.⁵⁷ Asbury Park and Sewaren can utilize the structures they have as their "museums."

Sewaren has a small local library which started out being independent, joined the public library system of Woodbridge Township and finally became independent again when the larger system closed some of its smaller branches.⁵⁸ This building could be used as the central point for any visitor's tour of the town. Brochures and other printed information could be distributed from this point. Small exhibits and special displays could

⁵⁷Carri Ann Wantuchowitz, Personal interview. Telephone interview. 20 March 1999.

⁵⁸Dacey, Personal interview.

be staged here or in the Barron Arts Center which is a cultural center for the Township in Woodbridge proper and only a short ride from the Sewaren waterfront. Self-guided walking tours of the Cliff Road area would work very well during much of the year. All of the old Victorian houses are visible from the road and the marina park provides a waterfront seating area overlooking the river and the former beachfront. Open house tours have been arranged in the past. Such tours are sometimes difficult to stage as the home owners can have reservations about allowing groups of strangers into their homes. The historian arranging the tour has to take into account the need to have docents stationed in every location or moving along with the tour group to each site depending on the way the tour will be conducted. Which rooms are opened or off limits for visitors, who will give the talk about each home, how the tour will progress from one site to another, who will answer questions, how much interaction there will be between the home owner and visitors, schedules and signage are all part of a successful tour. The more professionally the tour is handled, the more assured the owners will be and the more likely they will participate again in the future.

Special events can be staged in Sewaren which will also highlight its past glory as a resort. Salt Water Days can be held much as they were in the past. The beach can not be used for swimming but boats can be utilized to take visitors out for short rides along the river. Band concerts can be arranged as well as performances by strolling singers, jugglers and the like. Games and face painting can be set up for children's enjoyment. Once the new park is developed on the peninsula there will be additional opportunities to share information about Sewaren's origins. A planned visitors' center will provide space for a photo display of the houses and amusements as they appeared in their heyday.⁵⁹ The nature trails and walking paths will allow visitors to view the river and beachfront much as it was at the turn of the century. The wildlife preserve will, hopefully, lure species of birds

⁵⁹Dacey, Personal interview.

that were familiar sights to the summer residents who sat on their wide verandas back in the years before the oil refineries arrived.

An important element in the mission of modern museums is the interaction that the institution has with schools. Programs and projects can be developed wherein the students can explore the past by reading accounts of activities during the Boynton Beach era. A wonderful method of teaching involves having the students become a character from a particular time and writing or telling their personal story. Students can be given copies of original letters or accounts from people who visited the beach resort to use as resource material.⁶⁰ Visits and walking tours can reinforce the lessons learned in the classroom. Older students can examine the types of architecture more closely and do comparisons between modern housing and the rambling homes along Cliff Road.

All of these activities and displays have to be planned and carried out with professionalism in order to be most successful. Knowledge of the past, organizational skill and the ability to apply modern educational methods will all be required to bring this plan to reality. There is plenty of opportunity to challenge the skills of a museum professional.

Asbury Park has more sites that could be utilized in a "city as museum" scheme. Convention Hall, the Casino, the Berkley Carteret Hotel as well as the public library are just some suggestions for sites where information, displays of photos and memorabilia could be available. Because this city is larger and, once redevelopment is on the way to accomplishment, more likely to attract bigger numbers of visitors, more frequent activities can be planned. The current plan for redevelopment is taking the history of the city into account. This will favor the preservation of many of the most famous sites. Some structures may not be saved, but the most memorable elements may be salvaged.

⁶⁰Judy P. Hohmann, "Documents, the Power of Primary Source Materials in the Classroom". *History News* September/October 1993 14.

The effort to save "Tillie," the smiling face that decorates the sides of the Palace Amusements building is one endeavor uniting the historic society with other diverse groups, including the Bruce Springsteen Fan Club.⁶¹ Joseph Carabetta owns the building and has indicated it will be demolished because of its unsafe condition and his decision not to make the required repairs. The non-profit organization, "Save Tillie, Inc." is seeking to convince the city to work with them on saving the structure. If the Palace is demolished, they have a plan to remove a section of wall with one of the images from the building so that it can be displayed elsewhere.⁶² This is an example of the type of creative thinking which will allow the city to be revitalized while still maintaining its historic component.

In the future more collaborations will be necessary in order to showcase the city's artifacts most successfully. The historic society already has plans to work in that direction. Though the city, surprisingly, has not had such an organization until this one started three years ago, they have made great strides in the attempt to save the architectural artifacts of their history. The association sees the need to work with owners of the older homes, business owners in the downtown section and the developers to create the new city while holding on to the past. They have partnered with the Chamber of Commerce to promote tours of historic homes and churches, using these as opportunities to increase public awareness and to capitalize on the name recognition of Asbury Park.⁶³ They work with the Homeowners Association on tours and meet with them to keep the lines of communication open so issues of concern regarding preservation restrictions and owners' rights can be mitigated. The city is trying to find a location for the storage of the archives which had been placed in a dank basement by Carabetta for the last ten years. Once a site is found, the historic society will help by doing an inventory and creating exhibits of the

⁶¹"Demise of Palace Amusements Could Be Imminent".
<http://asburypark.net/news/1999/09/palace.html>. 23 September 1999 1.

⁶²<http://asburypark.net/news/1999/09/palace.html>. 2.

⁶³Baumgartner, Personal interview.

nineteen hundreds. The primary aim in museum education is to bring together people and objects.⁶⁵ In the case of Asbury Park, what better way than to have visitors walk through the artifacts themselves? Entering the Casino from the boardwalk is a wonderful way to experience all the sensory stimuli which confronted a vacationer in nineteen thirty-two. The change in temperature and light from the boardwalk to the interior, the smells from concession stands, the glitter of posters and the sounds of other people all contribute to placing the visitor back in time. Just as historic house tours create the environment of the past, tours of the city can do the same thing.

Signage is another important element in any museum exhibit and it should be included in the museum of Asbury Park. Consistently designed signs could be posted near any of the historically important sites giving enough information for the casual tourist's use. Not everyone who visits will want to take a tour. Signs would provide data and facts and be available if someone's interest is piqued on a certain place or ignored if there is no appeal. Signs would also allow the display of pictures of the location both in its heyday and its low point so comparisons could be made after revitalization. They are also a quiet way of pulling the casual visitor in and moving them up to a higher level of interest.

The great appeal of Asbury Park is not really its Victorian beginnings. This part of its history is visible now only in the large homes near the water. The real gift of this resort is that it shows a pre-Depression slice of American which has not survived in most of the rest of the country. We have many revolutionary and Victorian places to visit but few from this era. Here is a huge living museum with an infrastructure built primarily in the nineteen twenties and thirties.⁶⁶ People can walk or ride through it and visualize this time period as they can in few other places. Asbury Park's capitalizing on this fact can only help attract attention and visitors to the city.

⁶⁵Patterson Williams, "Object Oriented Learning in Art Museums," Museum Education Roundtable Reports Vol.7 No. 2: 12.

⁶⁶Baumgartner, Personal interview.

The glitzy, honky-tonk atmosphere of the amusement area is also reminiscent of the past. Plans currently call for the return and rehabilitation of both the carousel and the Ferris Wheel. Although the Palace may not survive, similar rides could be constructed near the beach to add to the flavor of the past delights which originally attracted so many vacationers. Such a venture would require some partnership between business, local government and non-profit groups since capital, space, promotion and oversight are all needed to make it successfully fit into the picture of Asbury Park. What a terrific way of initiating children into learning about the past if an amusement area could be established utilizing the original rides and newer complimentary ones. Again, signs and pictures could demonstrate how they are continuing a long tradition just by having fun.

Even in the changes that have happened over the past thirty years there is subject matter for our city museum. The population of Asbury Park now includes people from Haiti and Mexico who do not always understand or agree with the new preservation ordinance which prohibits certain exterior changes to older buildings. They prefer livelier pastel colors for their homes, as they are used to in their homelands. Rather than seeing this as a problem, the "curators" of Asbury Park, the historical society and preservationists, can work together with these new residents to showcase the diversity of the city. Exhibits and displays of the various cultures which share the community can foster more understanding and acceptance among all the contributors. Such collaboration will make reaching compromises about property use and development easier in the future all the while providing opportunities for education.

Just as most museums today have programs to work in conjunction with the schools in the area, so too, Asbury Park should do the same. This is an area where the historical society would like to get involved.⁶⁷ Providing pre-visit materials for teachers to use before touring the city's artifacts is one way for the society to do this. The museum

⁶⁷Baumgartner, Personal interview.

educator realizes that the best way to promote learning during a trip to the museum is to prepare the students for what they will see, have a well planned visit and give them materials to use as a follow-up to their visit.⁶⁸ Historic information, facts about a particular building or person and related materials could be distributed by the society to interested teachers. They can also create learning tools which are fun and informative. A scavenger hunt where children record finding architectural elements they can see on the buildings they visit is one way to do this. Creating their own drawings of the sites is another. These are both good lessons because they force them to look more closely and actually see the structure, not just glance at it. Older students can report on what they can learn about the past by looking at the remaining structures. Landscapes become, in effect, a kind of document, a cultural autobiography of the people who have carved them onto the face of the earth.⁶⁹ Students who examine the landscape of Asbury Park can come to many conclusions about the people who built the city and discussing their conclusions can be the introduction to more serious study. In all of these plans, the involvement of the students is key to making the city museum more relevant to them and that leads to greater understanding of the subject.

The suggestions given for community, school, business, non-profit and governmental involvement in the redevelopment plans for the city of Asbury Park all center on agreement of seeing the city as a large living museum. I believe this is really the way everyone who has indicated a desire to preserve the artifacts of its past see Asbury Park, whether or not they realize it.

⁶⁸Hohmann 15.

⁶⁹Steven Lobar and W. David Kingery, History From Things (New York: Garland Publishing, 1990) 116.

6. Conclusion and Exhibition Ideas

The idea of thinking about an entire town or city as a living museum may seem somewhat different, but, I believe I have demonstrated how some places fit the description. We may visit museums in Rome and Florence but, the truth of the matter is the entire city is also a museum with exhibits of art and architecture everywhere we look. I believe the museum professional can work in such a setting just as well as in a more conventional environment. The space may be larger and the problems effecting the exhibits may be different, but, the result is essentially the same. The city is a collection of artifacts. The average pedestrian can be seen as a visitor as well as the tourist who comes especially to experience the architecture and scenery. This museum has just as much need of conservation professionals and educators as any other museum. The local government may take on the roles of registrar and security, but this, too, is merely a needed expansion because of the size of the living exhibit.

In the cases of Sewaren and Asbury Park, the preservation of their historical elements can only benefit from viewing the city in this manner. If the owners and developers of properties can be convinced of the economic advantages associated with preservation, they will be supporters. Preservation promoters have pointed to the success of cities like Cape May, New Jersey to help make the association of tourist dollars with well preserved properties. Tourism is often the largest industry in the older community and if preservation can be seen as an aid to attracting visitors, then historic structures have a means of being saved. Coming up with new, successful methods of reuse for older buildings is a way of preserving them and often saves money in the long run, especially when the costs of demolition and removal are factored into the mix.

If I had the opportunity to do an exhibit about Sewaren and Asbury Park, I think it would have to encompass more than just display cases and photos. The abundance of material and information could make such an undertaking unmanageable and lead to losing

the potential audience in the sheer volume. I envision using different methods so the combination would create interest and appeal to the different ways we all process information and learn.

Naturally, photos need to be included. Using enlargements of some scenes or people at strategic locations throughout the exhibit would break up the boredom which can come from viewing picture after picture of the same kinds of material. Including stations at which the visitor can hear remembrances recorded by people who lived or worked in the resorts or vacationed there would add to the experience by making it audible as well as visual.

My exhibit would have an area where reproductions of brochures from both Asbury Park and Sewaren could be picked up and read by the potential "vacationer" of the era. Letterhead from the businesses, bills from hotels, guest houses and restaurants would add to the atmosphere and give visitors factual information in a very concrete manner. Discovering the prices of meals in nineteen twenty by consulting a menu is much more memorable than having someone tell you the price. A room set up where children could role play by dressing in appropriate accessories and pretending to be a person from the past would also be part of the exhibit for the same reason as the inclusion of the reproduction paper items. Making knowledge available in tactile and concrete manners helps make it more memorable.

Having the possibility to take a walking tour of the most prominent areas in each town could be done by use of a computer generated stroll. Video presentations can add to the experience by virtue of the sights and sounds they will contain. Even the smells of the beach, popcorn and cotton candy can be included if we want to create a realistic environment.

One element I would include in this imaginary exhibit would be a video recreation entitled, "A Day in the Life of a Jersey Shore Resort." This presentation would show the buildings and houses and businesses of the resorts today and trace their history through

stories about them and the people who built and used them. It would be a journey through the towns done in one day with the hour given periodically throughout the tape. As the viewer progresses through the town visiting the inhabitants of today with the camera, they would hear the accounts of how these buildings were used originally or whose story is connected to them. They would also see how a town builds on its past by keeping a structure while changing how it is used. Meeting the present day citizens in the video gives visitors a way to identify with them. It helps to show these resorts of the past are alive and well today even if they have changed their focus and lost their original purpose. If such a presentation is done well, it can demonstrate how Sewaren and Asbury Park truly are living history museums.

Both Sewaren and Asbury Park have gone through difficult times in the past. They are both in the process of being redeveloped. The history of each has been sighted as an important element which should be preserved in some manner. I am looking forward to the time when a visit to these previously faded resorts includes a celebration of their former glory.

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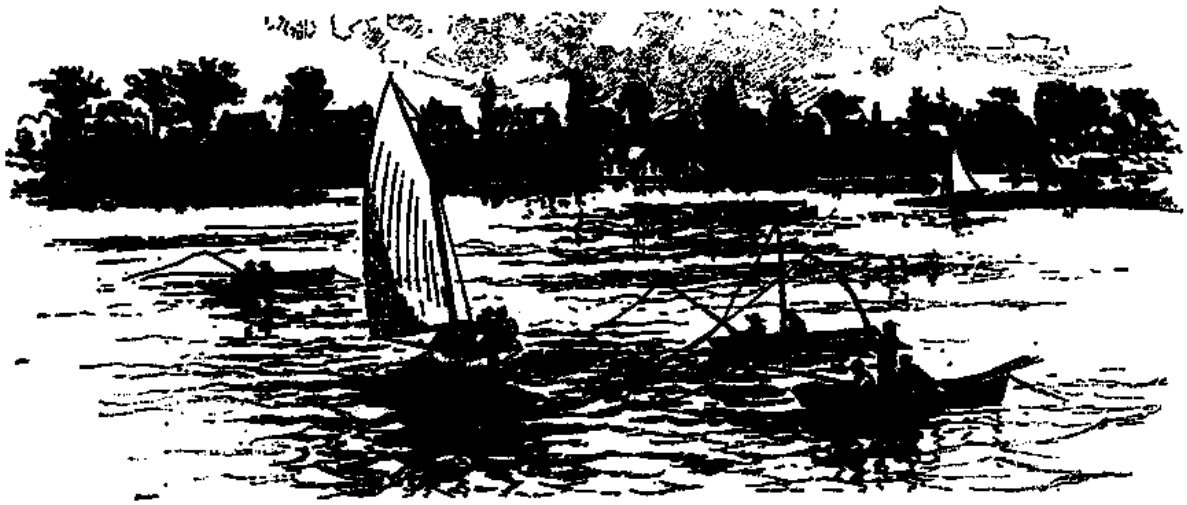
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**Photographs of
Sewaren and Asbury Park**



Fishing off the shores of Boynton Beach around 1900. View is looking toward the homes on Cliff Road.



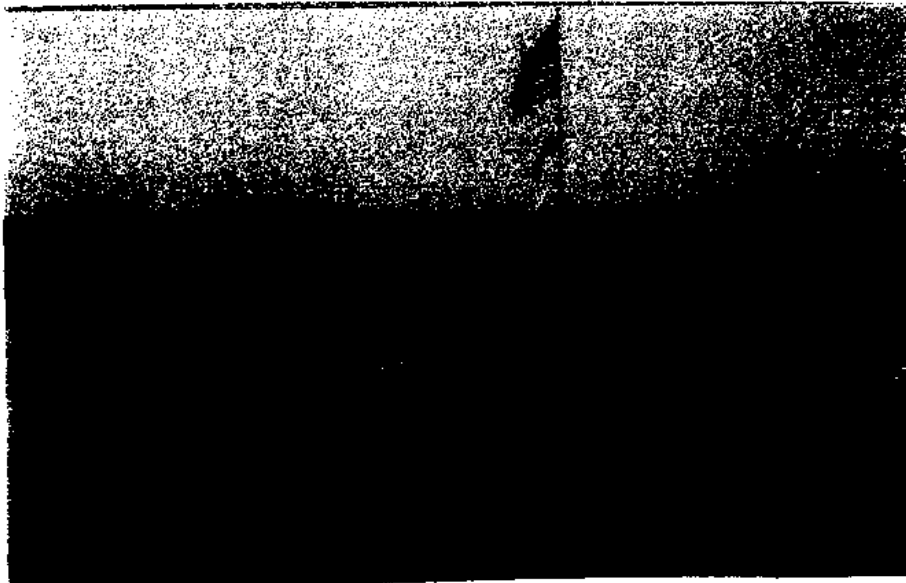
Courtesy of Mrs. Barbara Beecher

The hotel at Boynton Beach (Sewaren) around the end of the 1890's. Guests could relax on the verandas overlooking the Staten Island Sound



Three of the original homes on Cliff Road in Sewaren are still impressive at the end of the twentieth century.



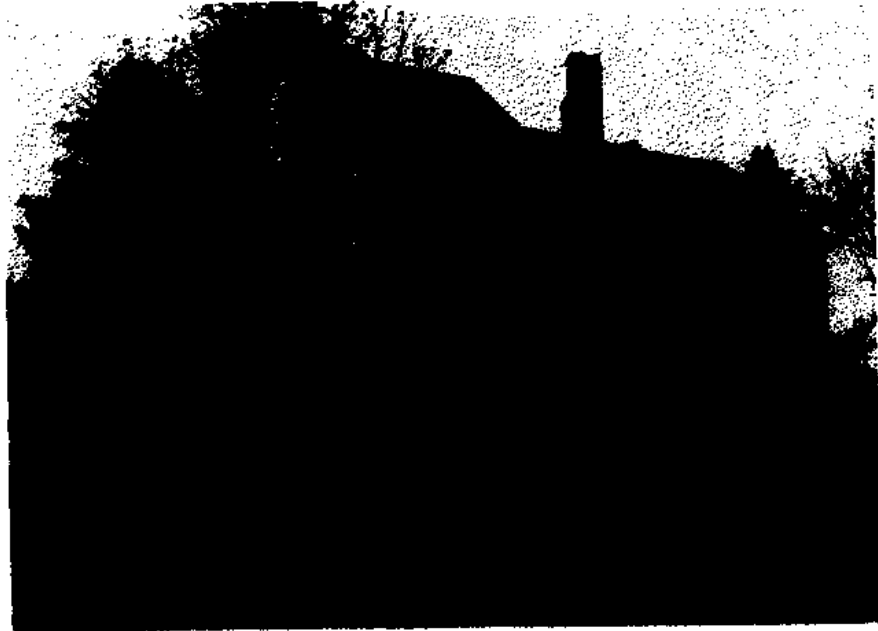


**Section of the RiverWalk along
Cliff Road which overlooks the
water in Sewaren**





Houses along Cliff Road facing
the water in Sewaren





The Asbury Park boardwalk
circa 1900



(Photo courtesy of S. Hurley)

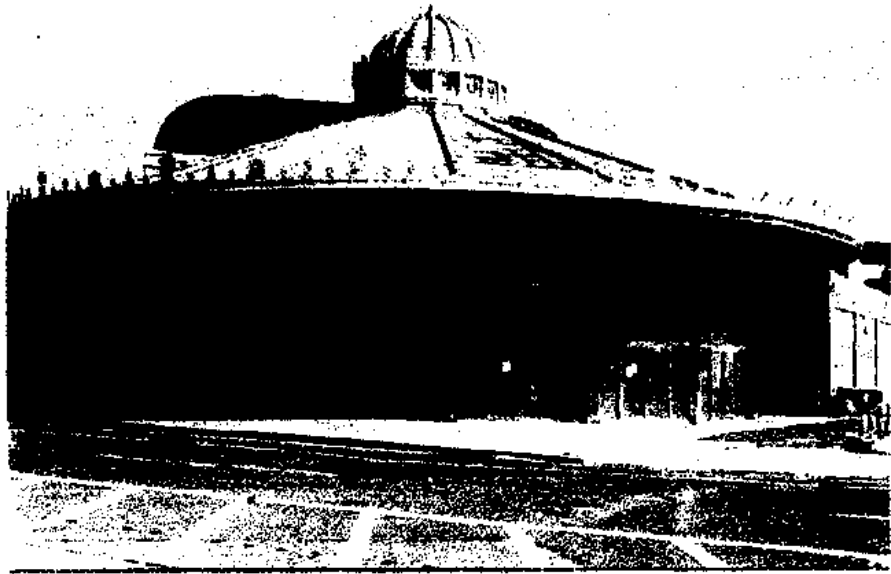
Woman bather at the Jersey shore
in the late 1920's

Would Mr. Bradley have approved of her attire?

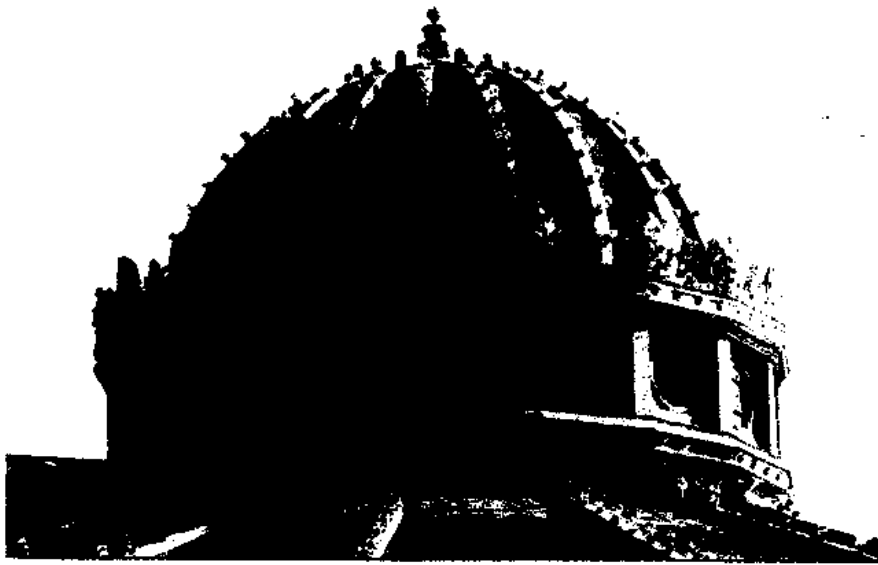


(Photo courtesy of S. Hurley)

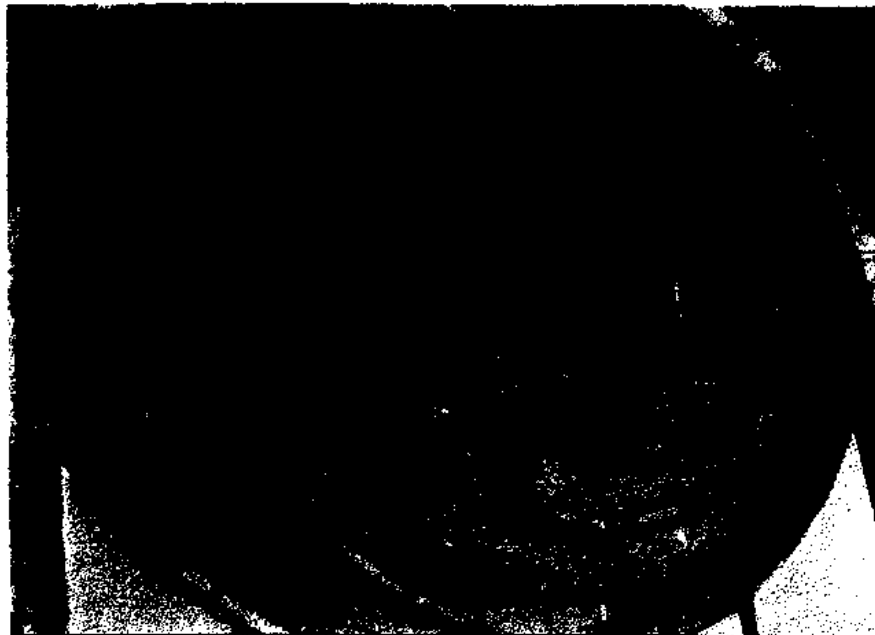
Couple on the boardwalk in Asbury Park
late 1920's



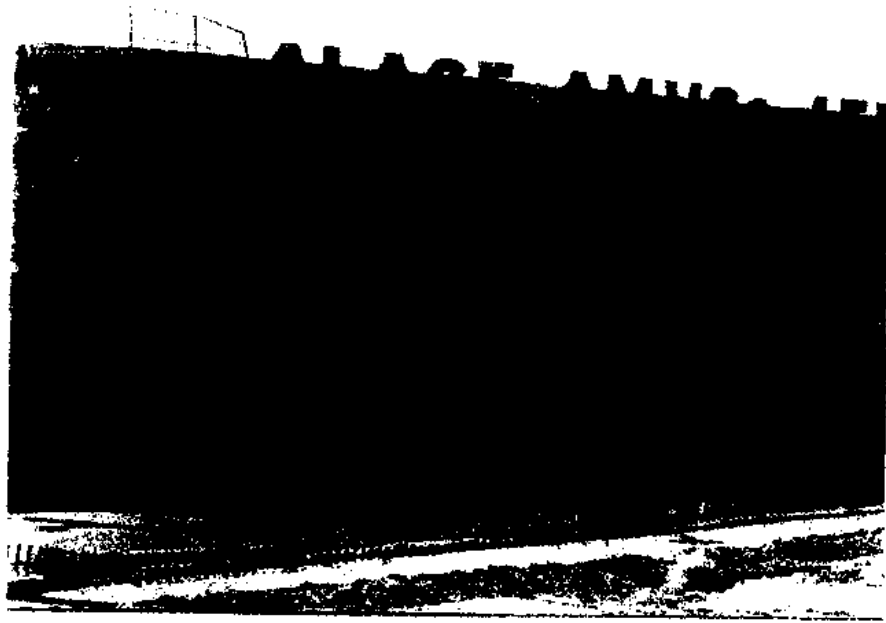
The building which housed the carousel in Asbury Park



Beautiful architectural detail from the same building

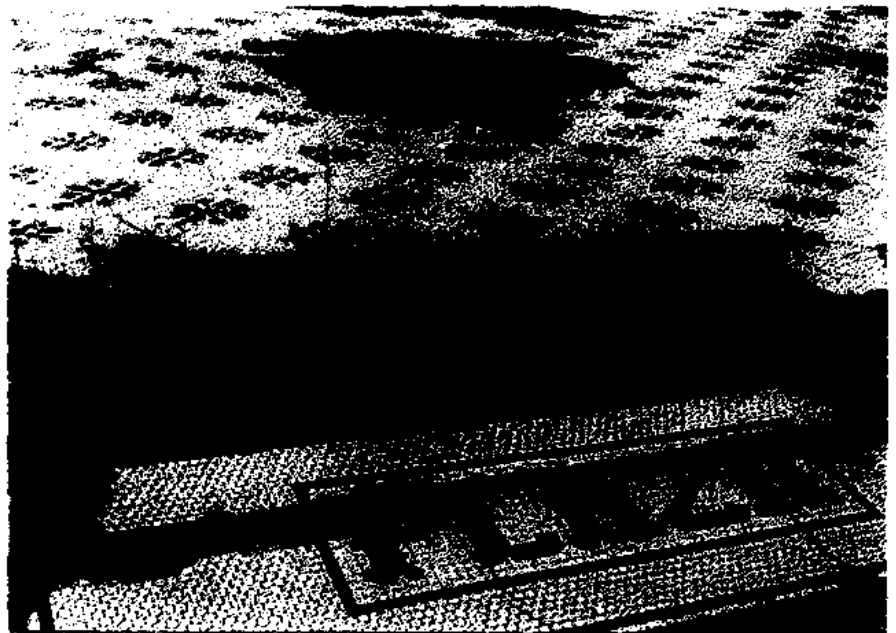


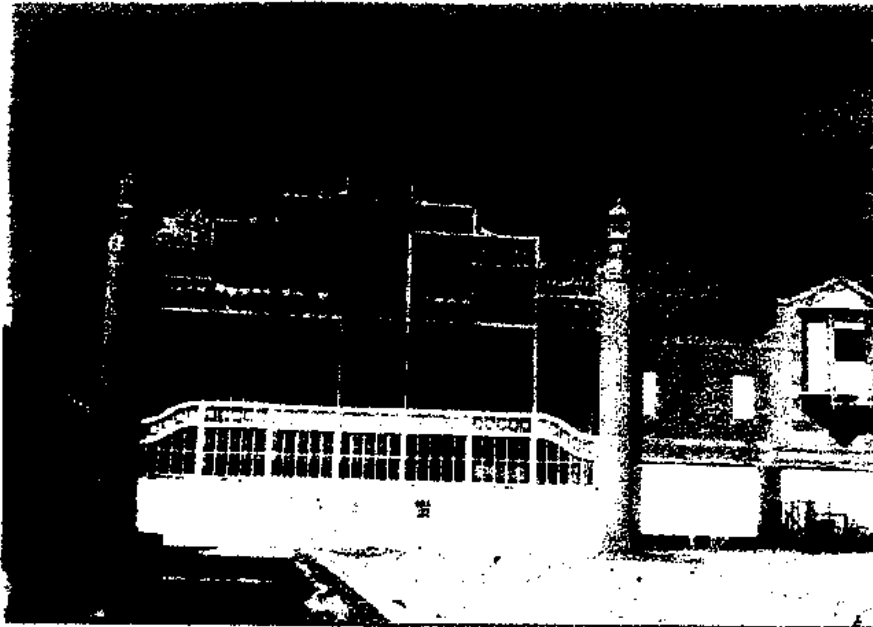
Swirling sculptural m detail from window



Less famous views of the Palace show the toll taken by time, the elements and neglect.

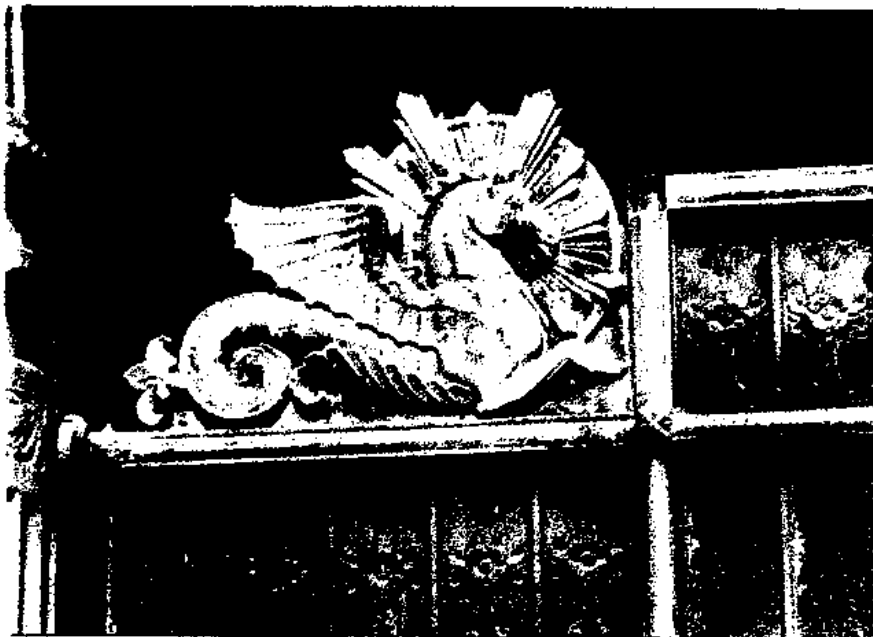
All that remains of the Plaza is the floor



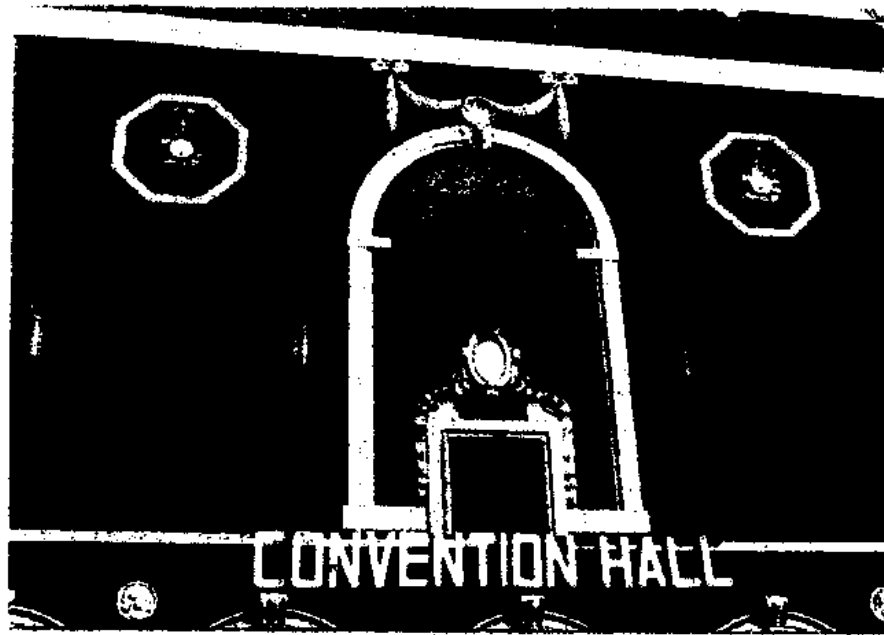


The Casino in the late 1990's

The view is right through the roof of the crumbling Casino



Architectural detail from the Casino shows the sea motif which is so prevalent in buildings along the Asbury Park boardwalk.



The renovated exterior of Convention Hall demonstrates how the beauty of the past can be reawakened.

Convention Hall has been used for recent concerts as well as for rehearsals for the latest Springsteen tour.



materials. In its most enterprising attempt thus far, the association contributed to the application by the city to be considered for a "Save America's Treasures" grant. This program, which is under the guidance of the National Trust for Historic Preservation, is predicated on the belief that America's story is revealed in the objects and places which surround us. Some sites which received funding include the Angel Island Immigration Station near San Francisco, the city of New Orleans for buildings and structures in the lower St. Charles corridor of the city and historic religious properties in Boston through a preservation group which has helped thirty-five sites up to this point.⁶⁴ Although they were declined, Asbury Park was named as a "Save America's Treasures" site which will give it better standing in future grant bids. It gives the city the status of being a site of importance to American history.

Collaboration is especially important in a city the size of Asbury Park which has so many historic sites as it does. Plans do not now include a single museum location, though the city historian, Werner Baumgartner, would like to see one. It is more likely that Asbury Park's museum will be the city itself. Baumgartner is already planning for this and sees the advantages it offers. He will be working with all the parties in the redevelopment effort to include the historic element in all their undertakings.

Specific ideas for this living museum should include, as in the case of Sewaren, self-guided tours. In addition to providing tourist information at the various sites previously mentioned, an audio tour could be made available. Using taped versions of the history would let visitors drive through sections of the city while hearing about the artifacts they are passing. It would give information in a more "user friendly" fashion since so many of the architectural sites are best viewed while walking along the boardwalk. The listener could be presented with questions concerning what they are seeing or with the suggestion to picture themselves in the same surroundings back in the early part of the

⁶⁴Save America's Treasures, <http://www.saveameericatreasures.org>.