

## **Ocean City Historic District Walking Tour**

(from OC Historical Museum website; originally designed by the Historic Preservation Commission)

*“The design of Ocean City was to provide a summer home for as many Christian families as might desire to come where they would be free from the vices and temptations usually found at irreligious resorts.”*

*“After being convinced of the duty of the church to provide moral and temperance resorts along the coast for the people of the interior, my mind naturally turned to Peck’s Beach, one of the finest beaches in South Jersey which God has reserved apparently for this very purpose.”*

*“... and when it is better known no doubt the people will come in crowds to spend their summer months in this beautiful city by the sea.”*

Thus wrote S. Wesley Lake in the July 19, 1893 edition of the Ocean City Sentinel. Wesley, his brothers Ezra and James, Reverend William Burrell, and Reverend William B. Wood founded the local Camp Meeting Association on October 20, 1879.

### **1. Ocean City Tabernacle**

500 Block of Wesley - Asbury

This is the site where the founding fathers established Ocean City as a Christian seaside resort in 1879. The island’s first house of worship was a wooden structure built here in 1881 and destroyed by the 1944 hurricane. It was then rebuilt. In 1957, it was replaced by this modern brick building that still provides religious services to an interdenominational congregation during the summer months. The front addition and cross were added in 1990. Further additions and renovations were completed in ----

### **2. Memorial Park**

500 Block Wesley - Ocean

This site was originally used as a campground for all the tents which sprang up every summer during the Methodist camp meetings held from 1880 to the early 1900’s. Visitors rented tents from the Ocean City Association for 4-week periods at a cost of \$1.00 to \$5.25 per week depending on the size of the tent. When the tent dwellings became obsolete, the grounds became a War Memorial honoring those who served in WW I, WW II, Korea, and Vietnam.

### **3. The Parkside**

501 Fifth Street

This charming Second Empire Victorian seaside hotel was built in 1880, and was originally called the Piqua. Wealthier tourists stayed here, right across the street from the rest of the camp-goers who slept in tents.

### **4. The New Brighton Inn**

519 Fifth Street

This Queen Anne style Victorian was built in 1882, by one of Ocean City’s Founding

Fathers, Reverend William Burrell. At one time, it was known as the “marrying house” because of the hundreds of weddings he performed there. One story is told that the first Tabernacle meeting was held on the side lawn using a barrel as a pulpit.

### 5. Scotch Hall

435 Wesley Avenue

An example of an eclectic Colonial Revival style, this structure was built in 1881 and was the home of another one of Ocean City’s Founders, the Reverend Ezra B. Lake. Over the years, it was used by the Presbyterian Church as a manse, then as a maternity hospital and convalescent home from 1913 to the 1930’s. Later, it was used by the Army as a Coast Guard Barracks. Beginning in the 1940s, it served as a restaurant but has now reverted to private use.

### 6. Lake Memorial Park

400 Block of Wesley Avenue

This is the site of the circa 1913 Wesley Avenue School. When a new school building was constructed, the original structure was utilized as a combination Arts Center and Historical Museum. Torn down in 1988, the empty lot was transformed into a pocket park and planted with some examples of native vegetation.

### 7. Original Tabernacle Cottages

These “cottages” can be seen across the alley and behind the park at 416 and 418 Ocean Avenue. In the past, visitors who came here for Camp Meetings could rent these cottages, and others like them, which were built by the Tabernacle Association. Originally, there were 22 cottages located on the dunes near the corner of 4<sup>th</sup> St. and Atlantic Avenue. A few of these petite cottages remain along the alleys in the Historic District, although most have been altered somewhat through the years.

### 8. 300 Block of Central Avenue

This block is notable as an example of the way Ocean City looked 100 years ago, both in the architecture of the homes and the large collection of cedar, pine, and holly trees still growing in the area. In addition, some fine examples of the various types of architecture that were popular at the turn of the century can be seen here, including Late Folk Victorian, Second Empire Mansard, American Foursquare, and Colonial Revival.

### \* 400 Block of 5th Street

Simon Wesley Lake’s home, just north of the Tabernacle, looks much as it did in 1880. Mr. Lake was another one of the Founders of Ocean City.

### 9. Fourth St. and Atlantic Ave.

The 4th Street Life Saving Station, built in 1885, is the only one of the three stations built in Ocean City that is still standing. In the winter months, the stations were manned by a captain and crew of six men who could handle life boats in rough surf in order to save the lives of those whose ships were wrecked off our coast. In the summer, the men mostly saved drowning bathers at the beach. The structure was originally surrounded by sand dunes.

### 10. 420 Ocean Avenue

This Folk Victorian was built in 1895 by Captain Mackay Corson (of the 4th Street Lifesaving Station). The house stayed in the Corson family until the late 1930's. Al and Lavinia Senior of Senior Studios then owned it from 1939 to 1972. Al Senior took most of the many historic photos of Ocean City we have today over the years.

### 11. The Gingerbread House

604 Sixth Street

This gem was built by a ship's carpenter in the Philadelphia area and brought to Ocean City by boat, where the sections were then bolted together. It was used during the early Camp Meetings at the Tabernacle in the 1880's. The front porch of this unique structure is graced by intricate "lacework" gingerbread and the remainder of the house is covered with board and batten vertical siding.

### 12. 705 Central Avenue

This Folk Victorian home was built in 1891 for John Voss and his wife, Elizabeth, daughter of Parker Miller, the first permanent resident of the island. The Millers settled in Ocean City in the 1850's. Parker was hired as an agent for marine insurance companies to protect their interests in abandoned ships wrecked off our coast. He also raised cattle and farmed the land near his home, which stood on what is today Asbury Avenue.

### 13. 800 Block of Wesley Avenue

This block features some of the best-preserved examples of the large guesthouses built on the island at the turn of the century to accommodate summer visitors. Vacationers arrived by train and ferry and could then travel the length of the island by trolley, which ran along Wesley Avenue at that time.

## POINTS OF INTEREST BEYOND THE HISTORIC DISTRICT

### Music Pier (Moorlyn Terrace & Boardwalk)

This Spanish Revival building was constructed in 1928-29 after the "Fire of 1927" destroyed much of the boardwalk. It has served as the social, cultural, and recreational center for the city since that time.

### City Hall (9th Street & Asbury Avenue)

Built in 1914, it originally housed the police department, complete with eight jail cells, and the fire department. It still is used today as our city administration building and is listed on the **National Register of Historic Places**.

### Train Station (10th Street & Haven Avenue)

In 1889, the South Jersey Railroad built a direct line from Tuckahoe to Ocean City, NJ. The Station was constructed in 1900 and it continued to serve as a Train Station until 1981, when rail travel to the island was discontinued. At present, it is used as the OC Transportation Center (bus depot) and is listed on the **National Register of Historic**

## **Places.**

### *Sindia* (17th Street & Boardwalk)

The *Sindia*, a four-masted, 329 ft. steel Bark, en route from Kobe, Japan to New York City, was stranded on the Ocean City beach during a storm on December 15, 1901. She lies broadside to the boardwalk, with her bow pointing south. Carrying a cargo of porcelain, fine china, bamboo matting, camphor oil, manganese ore, and wax, the ship broke in half and flooded on the third day. Consequently, the cargo was lost but there was no loss of life due to the efforts of the Ocean City 4th Street Life Saving Station, under the command of Captain J.M. Corson. Many interesting artifacts from the wreck and a video of the *Sindia* story can be seen at the Ocean City Historical Museum (17th Street and Simpson Avenue in the Community Center).

### Bayside Center (520 Bay Avenue)

This property is one of the only remaining grand Bayfront Estates. The Diesel\* family once owned it as a summer home. The building and grounds provide public access to the Ocean City Bayfront and the site is frequently utilized for historical, environmental, and recreational purposes. \*(rumored to be relatives of Rudolf Diesel, inventor of the internal combustion engine)

<http://inventors.about.com/library/inventors/bldiesel.htm>