

Walking Tour Of Historic Downtown Ocean City, Maryland



Aerial of Ocean City, looking north - Courtesy of Eric Doerzbach



Joyce Davis Harrison, former resident of The Tarry-A-While, circa 1933.

Our Story

As you relax on our beaches, enjoy our famous blue crabs or take advantage of the multitude of vacation activities our family resort offers to you, include time to learn about the unique role Ocean City, Maryland has played in our nation's history. Our barrier island is 10 miles of land shaped by the wrath of Mother Nature, combined with the hard work of dedicated citizens.

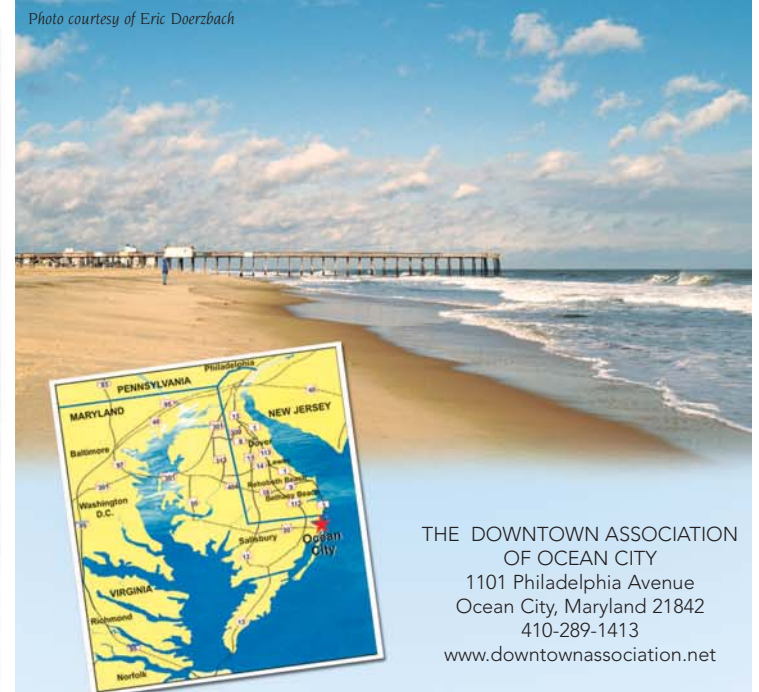
Founded in 1875, Ocean City began as a small fishing village. Most commercial fishing was from boats in the Sinepuxent Bay but a few brave souls risked launching through the shore break to fish in the Atlantic Ocean. To earn extra money, the wives of the fishermen would rent out rooms until later years when hotels were built.

On August 23, 1933, a violent hurricane hit the resort, cutting an inlet linking the ocean with the bay, thus creating offshore fishing. Sport fishing became such a popular attraction that by 1939, Ocean City was known as the "White Marlin Capital of the World."

Another devastating storm swept through town on March 5, 1962. The rebuilding of destroyed property blossomed into continuing community growth. Today, organizations such as the Downtown Association of Ocean City and the Ocean City Development Corporation are working to preserve history while striving for the positive revitalization of the Downtown Area.

For a more information on the history of our coastal town, please spend time at Ocean City Life-Saving Station Museum.

Enjoy your tour of Downtown Ocean City, Maryland!



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Courtesy of The Ocean City Life-Saving Station Museum, George and Suzanne Hurley Collection.



Ocean City Beach Patrol, circa 1934.

The Boardwalk, officially known as Atlantic Avenue, dates back to 1902, when several oceanfront hotel owners got together and constructed a wooden walkway for the convenience of their guests. At high tide, the wooden walkway was rolled up and stored on hotel porches. Around 1920, a permanent promenade was built. It ran about five blocks and was expanded to 15th Street in the 1920's. At one time, the beach was narrow and the boardwalk was high above the sand. People would gather under the boardwalk to find shade. After being leveled by a storm in March, 1962, it was rebuilt to its present 2.9 mile length, ending at 27th Street. The boardwalk can be considered a walking tour unto itself. Ride a bike in the morning, take a tram at night or, have a leisurely stroll during the afternoon. Enjoy all the boardwalk has to offer, the interesting shops, tasty foods, and amusements or take a seat on a boardwalk bench and watch the world walk by.



Let's begin our tour here.
There will be many areas which will be great for taking photographs.
These are designated by the camera icon.

1. Ocean City Life-Saving Station Museum ~ Boardwalk at the Inlet

This is a United States Life-Saving Station. It was built in Ocean City in 1891 and replaced an earlier station house. This building housed the crew members (called surfmen) and equipment used to rescue mariners in distress from the numerous shipwrecks which occurred off the Del-Mar-Va coast. In 1915, the Life-Saving Service became the United States Coast Guard and this building continued to be used as a station house until 1965. The heroism of the men once stationed here is well documented. The abandoned building was saved by the Town of Ocean City in 1977, when it was relocated from its original site on Caroline Street to the Inlet site, and dedicated as a museum. The museum houses the colorful history of Ocean City and of the United States Life-Saving Service. It is considered Ocean City's showplace. Open to the public. Admission fee.



Watch Tower ~ Boardwalk at the Inlet

This tower was erected by the United States Coast Guard in the 1934-35 time period. After the storm of 1933 cut the Inlet at Ocean City, there was a need (for safety's sake) to watch over the boats that entered and left the Inlet. The tower was manned twenty-four hours a day by the Coast Guard crew stationed at Ocean City. During World War II, they had the added responsibility as a look-out for German submarines that frequently plied the waters of Ocean City. The Germans sank thirteen vessels off the Eastern Shore of Maryland, Delaware and Virginia. It is the only watchtower of its era left standing on the East Coast. The tower is owned by the Town of Ocean City and is part of the Life-Saving Station Museum. Not open to the public.



Photos courtesy of Eric Doerzbach

2. Trimper's Amusements ~ Boardwalk near the Inlet.

For over one hundred years, the Trimper family has provided a carnival atmosphere to the south end of the town. There are many outside amusements, but the "gem" that everyone should see and experience is the 1902 Herschell-Spellman Carousel, located within the Trimper Rides building. This wonderful ride, with its forty-five animals, three chariots and a rocking chair is the oldest continually operating carousel in the nation. Five generations of visitors have enjoyed many of the antique rides; the Whip, the caged Ferris wheel, the children's carousel and the rolling boats. Open to the public. Ticket sales.

Hungry?
Try some of the famous Thrasher's french fries, an Ocean City fixture since 1922. But, no ketchup allowed, only vinegar. Or, stop by Dolle's Candy Store for some of their home made treats that have been enjoyed since 1910.

3. Pier Building ~ Boardwalk, Oceanside

Erected around 1926, the current pier building stands in the same location as the first pavilion, which was finished in July, 1907. Facing the entrance to the pier, the pavilions have been a focal point for entertainment, social and commercial activity since the early twentieth century. The 1907 pavilion contained a dancing pavilion, skating rink, bowling alleys, pool room and refreshment booths. Ocean City's neoclassical pier building is the only example of entertainment-related seaside architecture in Maryland.

4. The Atlantic Hotel ~ Boardwalk at Somerset Street

The Atlantic Hotel was one of the first hotels to offer accommodations to the public. The current, four-story, H-shaped frame hotel is an early twentieth century replacement of the Victorian hotel that burned in December, 1925. The present large building was erected in its place by Charles W. Purnell, who had acquired the hotel property in June, 1922. The Purnell family still owns and operates the business.



Postcard depicting the original Atlantic Hotel. Courtesy of The Ocean City Life-Saving Station Museum.

Continuing north on the Boardwalk, turn west on Dorchester Street where we will find...

5. The Dorchester Street Murals

Painted in the summer of 2003 by artists Earl Cantine, Colleen Black and Juro, these are renderings which depict old Ocean City Post Cards.

Bill Gibbs, Nannie Fisher & children, circa 1913. Courtesy of The Ocean City Life-Saving Station Museum, Nannie Fisher Collection.



6. The Jefferson ~ 3 Dorchester Street

The Jefferson was built around 1903 by U.S. Life-Saving Service Keeper Joshua J. Dunton. Originally the building was known as Dunton Cottage and was also known as Pierce Hall in the 1940s.

7. Tarry-A-While ~ 108 Dorchester Street

This house was built in 1897 as a guest house. It is a rare survivor of the city's late nineteenth century architecture. There is little ornamentation. For over one hundred years, this property had been in the possession of Thomas J. & Sallie Cropper and their descendants. The Tarry-A-While could accommodate 25 guests. It was one of the first houses to offer running water in each bedroom. The building was originally located at 8 Dorchester Street and, due to new construction in that area, is now owned by the Town of Ocean City and, on November 15, 2004, was moved to its present location.

Next we will take a walk north on Philadelphia Avenue to Talbot St. and turn east towards the boardwalk once again to find

8. St. Mary's Star of the Sea Catholic Church ~ Baltimore Avenue & Talbot Street

(Southwest Corner)
The oldest existing building in Ocean City, this Catholic Church was erected in 1878, just a few years after the founding of the town. It is an historical and architectural treasure. Why, when so early on in the 1880s and early 1890s, when no one lived here in the winter time, was such a nice house of worship built? It can only be assumed that many of the people who did come to Ocean City at that time were mainly of the Catholic faith. It was not until the 1920s that the first Catholic family came to settle in the town. The Rectory to the south of the church was built prior to 1911. Although several architectural changes have taken place, the rectory still retains most of its original appearance.

9. E. Purnell Store and Town Market ~ Baltimore Avenue & Talbot Street

(Southeast Corner)
Built around 1898, the old Edwin L. Purnell store is a distinctive commercial building that survives from the early period of Ocean City history. Notable is the exterior sheathing of fish-scale shingles on the second floor exterior. Despite alterations on the first floor, this building retains its original appearance, to a large degree. The Town Market, next door, is also one of the few relatively intact commercial buildings that dates from Ocean City's early history, being built around the same time as its neighbor.

Baltimore Avenue Looking South from 3rd Street, circa 1915. Courtesy of The Ocean City Life-Saving Station Museum.

10. Perdue House
~ Baltimore Avenue & Talbot Street

(Northwest Corner)
Built around 1905, this is the largest and most elaborate of the Queen Anne style Victorian dwellings to remain in Ocean City. Also known as the Taylor House, this is one of the best preserved of a small number of Queen Anne dwellings in town. Harlan & Minnie Perdue purchased the house in 1934 and the family interests were maintained until 1980.

Let's walk east on Talbot Street to the boardwalk. When you reach the corner, you may want to stop for a bag or box or bucket of Fisher's caramel Popcorn, well known by people the world over. Heading north on the boardwalk, we will stop at Caroline Street to see...

11. Caroline Street Enlarged Post Cards

In 2004, computer imaging was used to enlarge actual post cards and placed the results on this wall.

Walking north on the boardwalk, we come to the...

12. Boardwalk Arch

The Boardwalk Arch was built by the Town of Ocean City in 2000 as a greeting to our many visitors.

Taking another detour off of the boardwalk, we will turn down North Division Street to see...

13. Ocean City Baptist Church
~ Baltimore Avenue & North Division Street

The Ocean City Baptist Church was originally built around 1896 for the Presbyterian congregation that formed in the resort town. The title was transferred to the Baptist Church in the early 1960s.

Let's wander west 1 block on North Division Street for a view of the White Marlin Statue. This was erected in 2002 by the Ocean City Development Corporation and funded through private contributions. It is meant to welcome visitors coming in over the Rt. 50 Bridge. While here, why not take that photo.

Let's walk north on Philadelphia Avenue to First Street and once again turn east to the boardwalk. Heading north on the boardwalk we will continue to Third Street. In front of the Plim Plaza Hotel, at Second Street, you will find some palm trees on the beach side which present a perfect photo opportunity.

Leaving the Boardwalk one more time at Third Street, we are going to see:

14. St. Paul's By The Sea Episcopal Church
~ 3rd Street & Baltimore Avenue

This was the second church to be erected in the Town of Ocean City. The cornerstone was laid in 1900 and the church was completed and consecrated in 1903. The interior of the church is quite beautiful. Numerous stained glass windows adorn the sanctuary and the building has an air of peacefulness about it. The church was originally built on exposed pilings, allowing storm surges to pass beneath the building. Over the years, a basement was added and the rectory was built in 1923.

15. City Hall ~ Third Street & Baltimore Avenue

(Northwest corner)
Built in 1915, this building was erected as a college to augment the Towson College of the Maryland State Teacher's Association. The idea of a college in Ocean City was abandoned two years later and the building was then designated as a Worcester County school for children from Ocean City and the outlying areas. It served as the hub of social and cultural activities for over half a century. The last class to graduate from the high school was in 1954, with twenty-two students accepting diplomas. Elementary levels used the school well into the 1960s. In 1968, the Town of Ocean City acquired the building and it has since been used as the Town's City Hall. It recently underwent a massive restoration. Open during business hours, Monday through Friday ~ 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

Let's continue by taking a stroll west on 3rd Street to Chicago Avenue where we will find our municipal parks, skate bowl and the bayside boardwalk used for fishing, crabbing and just general, relaxing fun. The skate bowl, built in 1977, is the oldest of its kind on the east coast of the United States.

Returning to St. Louis Avenue, we will head south to see:

16. Bayside Fishermen's Homes

This is one of the few remaining sections of Ocean City that has not been greatly disturbed by progress. The street is lined with small bungalows, once the homes of commercial fishermen and tradesmen. The George B. Cropper Concrete Company that sits on the bay front, was founded many years ago and is the only heavy industry business in the resort. (Feel free to stroll the neighborhood but, please respect the privacy of the residents.)

As we continue south, we will walk under the Route 50 bridge towards the bayside fishing marinas. Since the turn of the century, fishing marinas have existed along the bay south of the Ocean City Bridge. Much excitement and many fish tales have always entertained crowds that gather for the return of the sport-fishing boats in the early evening. Piers can be found at the end of Talbot, Dorchester and Somerset Streets. Several restaurants of long standing such as the Angler Restaurant (since 1934), M. R. Duck's and the Marina Deck cater to the public. Any of these would be an excellent choice for a lunch or dinner stop, if you want to take a rest here.

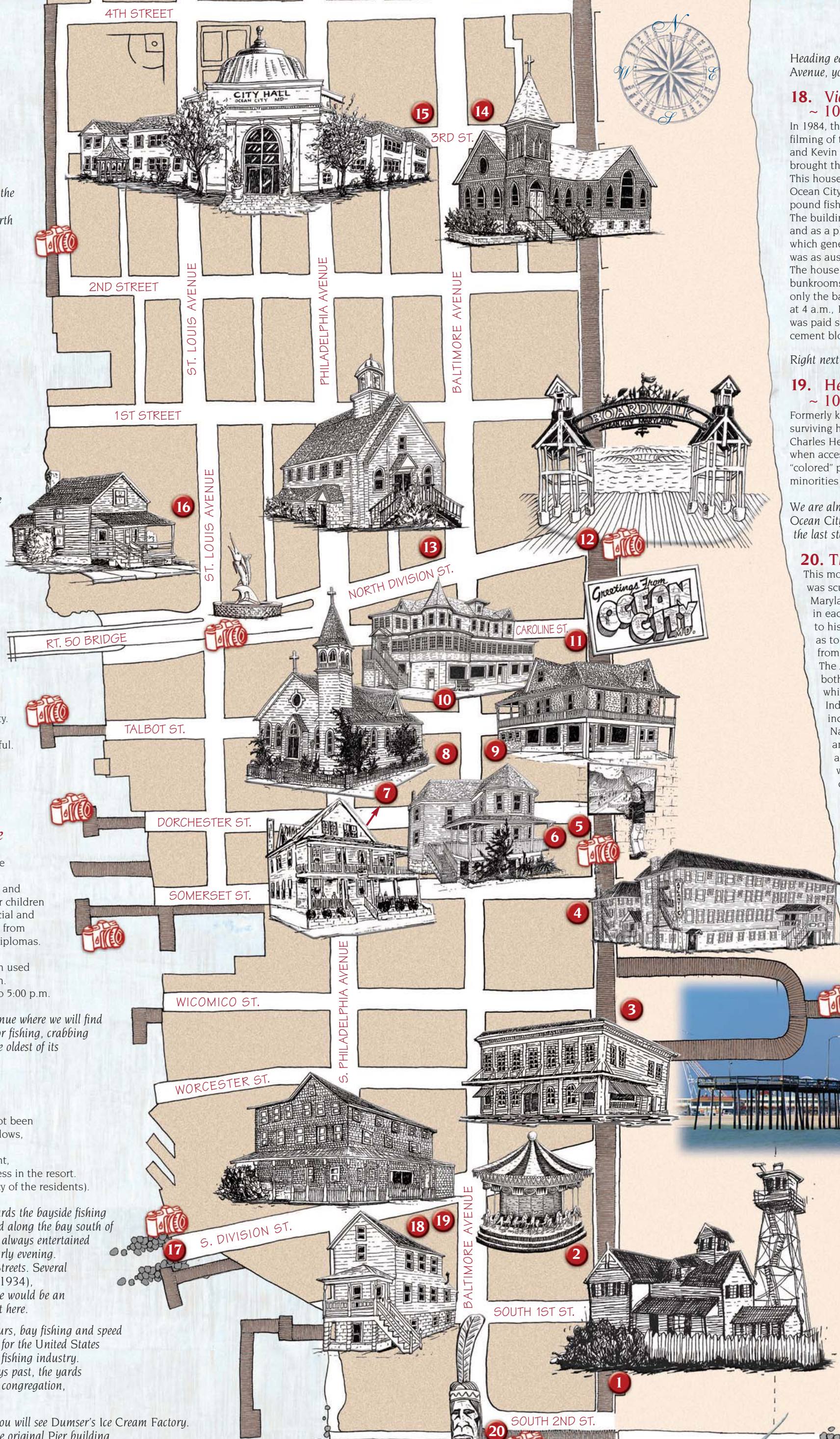
Today, the docks are busy with charters for sport-fishing, nature tours, bay fishing and speed boat rides. You can still find some of the homes of men who worked for the United States Life-Saving Service and those in the commercial fishing and sports fishing industry. Their wives rented out rooms in their homes for extra money. In days past, the yards were well tended, flowers abounded and front porches were places of congregation, spending time whiling away the evenings.

As we walk south on Philadelphia Avenue, from Somerset Street, you will see Dumser's Ice Cream Factory. This building was constructed in 2002 and is an exact replica of the original Pier building located on the boardwalk. Want something cold to eat or drink? Stop in here and watch the ice cream being made.

We once again head south on Philadelphia Avenue to South Division Street where we will see...

17. The Old Rail Road Bridge Site

In 1876, a train trestle was erected to span the Sinepuxent Bay and provide direct transportation to the beach. Other than water transportation, this trestle was the only access across the bay until the first road bridge was built in 1918. The train trestle was soon planked to permit the passage of wagons, buggies and horses. This is where the trains would come into Ocean City with visiting traffic up until 1933. The great storm of that year destroyed the bridge and there are still myths that there was a train on the bridge at the time which now lies at the bottom of the bay.



Heading east on South Division Street, crossing Philadelphia Avenue, you will see the...

18. Violets Are Blue House
~ 103 South Division Street.

In 1984, this house was used by Columbia Pictures in the filming of the movie "Violets Are Blue," starring Sissy Spacek and Kevin Kline. The film was quite a success at the time and brought the Town of Ocean City much notoriety. This house, built circa 1912, is the only remaining building in Ocean City which is typical of those found in the commercial pound fishing camps. They were known as fish camp houses. The building served as the office to the fish camp owner and as a place to house and feed the fishing crew, which generally numbered six men. This type of structure was as austere on the interior as it was on the exterior. The house had four rooms: the office, kitchen and two upstairs bunkrooms. There were no closets and no luxuries, only the bare essentials. Meals were served to the fishermen at 4 a.m., 10 a.m. and 3 p.m. In 1915, the pound fisherman was paid seven dollars a week. The ground floor was later cement blocked and converted into a small apartment.

Right next door you will find...

19. Henry's Hotel
~ 101 South Division Street

Formerly known as "Henry's Colored Hotel," this is the last surviving hotel to serve only African-American visitors. Charles Henry and his wife Louisa purchased the hotel in 1926, when access to the beach for what was then called the "colored" population was severely restricted and only minorities stayed here. The property is no longer a hotel.

We are almost to the end of our journey of downtown Ocean City. Heading south on Baltimore Avenue, the last stop is at the inlet to see...

20. The Inlet Indian ~ At the Inlet

This monument, representing the Assateague Indian, was sculpted by Peter Toth and given to the people of Maryland as a gift. Toth has sculpted an Indian monument in each of the fifty states. The statue is to pay homage to his heritage and to raise the nation's consciousness as to the plight of the Indian. The monument, carved from a 100-year-old oak, was completed in 1976. The Assateague Indian was a sub-tribe of the Nanticoques; both spoke a dialect of the Lenapes or Delaware Indian, which made them members of the Algonkian family. Indian groups living in the vicinity of Assateague Island included the Pocomoke, Annamessex, Manokin, Nassawattes, Acquiaquia, Assateague, Chincoteague and Kicotanks. In the early 1700s, the Assateague, along with all other Indian tribes in the area, were pressured by colonists to move northward out of the region. Their migration led them through Delaware, Pennsylvania, New York and finally into Canada where they were lost to history.

It is the hope of the Downtown Association that you have enjoyed your tour of this historic area of Ocean City, Maryland and we look forward to your next visit downtown.



Postcard Of The Old Rail Road Bridge. This Is Reproduced As A Mural At Caroline Street.



Photo courtesy of Eric Dorrbauch

Photo courtesy of Eric Dorrbauch