

SCUTTLEBUTT

U.S. LIFE-SAVING SERVICE PART V: NOTHING LASTS FOREVER

BY TOM WIMBROW

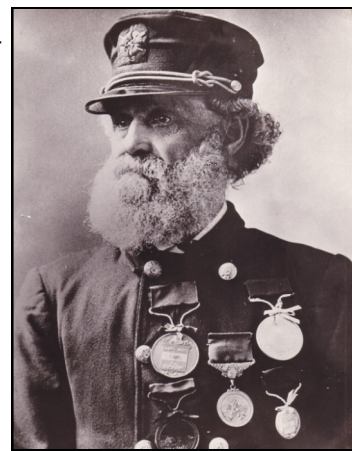
With the arrival of the Twentieth Century, considerable change was evident throughout the United States. The Transcontinental Railroad had been a reality long enough to greatly alter the manner in which goods and people were transported; indeed, the government had become concerned that rail transportation was in danger of becoming a monopoly causing economic harm to the farmers and small businessmen of the nation. The Western frontier no longer existed; the nation was inhabited from sea to sea.

Other changes that more directly affected the U.S. Life-Saving Service were also in evidence. Ships were increasingly powered by steam and small vessels were experimenting with the new technology of internal combustion. This meant that vessels propelled by wind and sail were on the decline. It should also be noted that aides to navigation had improved. In 1852 the United States had 333 lighthouses on its coasts. By 1913 the number had increased to 1462. Within those lighthouses the technology for providing the light had vastly improved. Kerosene had replaced whale oil and soon electricity would replace kerosene.

Unfortunately, the U.S. Life-Saving Service was still employing the technology of the 1870's. No longer was it necessary for ships to hug the coast, navigating by visual landmarks. It was now possible to safely cruise out of the sight of land. This meant tower watches during daylight and beach patrols during darkness had a lessened impact on saving lives. Equally, it was becoming obvious that the Lyle Gun with a range of 300 to 400 yards and oar-powered surfboats were no longer an effective means for saving lives during periods of maritime distress.

There was another less obvious concern. Despite his best efforts, Sumner Kimball had been unable to convince Congress of the need for a pension system for the lifesavers. The pay had never been good and the lack of a pension system in old age was becoming a deterrent to the future of the Service. Those still willing to serve hung on with the fading hope that Congress would finally come to its senses and establish a pension system. Someone once noted that by 1915 stations were overseen by Keepers in their seventies with the backbreaking work of rescues carried out by Surfmen in their sixties. It was increasingly evident that change was forthcoming.

Concurrent with the realities of change, brought forth by national growth, there were vast changes in the manufacturing capabilities of American industry. It was the age of the "Robber Barons", a time when the government assumed a laissez faire attitude toward regulation of commerce and avoided dealing with issues that developed as a result. Monopolies, especially in the rail system, were increasingly an issue and this was to indirectly affect the future of the U.S. Life-Saving Service. President Theodore Roosevelt (1901-1909) was the first to struggle with the need to bring more regulation to American commerce and his successor, William Howard Taft (1909-1913), continued to grapple with a reluctant Congress on the issue of regulating the excesses of free enterprise. Out of this turmoil came a reform movement referred as the "Progressive Movement". The Progressives not only wished to see reform in industry, but also wanted a more democratic government that was more efficient and more responsive to the needs of all the people. Legislation enacted by congress in 1910 and 1911 resulted in President Taft appointing a commission to find ways to improve the economy and efficiency of the federal government. Soon to be known as the "Taft Commission", this group was empowered to begin the process of streamlining government. This was to eventually lead to the demise of the U.S. Life-Saving Service.



Joshua James, legendary life-saver, died on active duty at age

Staff**Sandra D. Hurley***Executive Director / Curator***Diane Knuckles***Assistant Curator****Board of Directors*****Nancy Howard***President***Hunter "Bunk" Mann***Vice President***Gordon E. Katz***Treasurer***Melanie Merryweather***Secretary***Hal Adkins****Janet Cherrix****Amanda Cropper****G. Alfred Harrison****John B. Lynch****Joseph E. Moore, Esq.****Louis S. Parsons III****Tom Perry****J. D. Quillin III****Robert Rothermel, Jr.****Margaret Steimer****Newt Weaver****Thomas D. Wimbrow****Richard W. Meehan***City Council Liaison***OCEAN CITY, MARYLAND – *THEN & NOW***
LOTS 18, 19, 20 and 35 – The "Maryland Inn property"**By Gordon E. Katz**

Lots 18, 19, 20 and 35 form an L-shaped parcel on the southwest corner of Caroline Street and the Boardwalk. Because the four lots were not brought together as a consolidated property until 1961, what follows is a brief history of each up to that point.

Lot 18

Lot 18, located on the Boardwalk between Caroline Street and Talbot Street, was among the first properties to be developed in Ocean City following the opening of the Atlantic Hotel on July 4, 1875. Stephen Taber, the wealthy Long Island businessman who deeded the land on which Ocean City was founded, drew lot 18 at the stockholders' meeting of the Atlantic Hotel Company held at the hotel on August 31, 1875. But Taber evinced little interest in the resort, and he sold his lot shortly after the drawing to William L. Sirmon, the railroad agent at Delmar, Delaware, for his cost of \$100. By 1877 Sirmon erected a two-story plus attic cottage on the lot, with seven rooms and porches on the front and back providing a view of both the ocean and the bay.

William Sirmon put the house and lot up for sale in 1883 with a listing price of \$1,300, which he claimed was "a bargain". However, there was little demand for Ocean City real estate in the 1880s. Sirmon was finally able to find a buyer in 1889 when Snow Hill attorney George M. Upshur, a former Speaker of the Maryland House of Delegates, and William C. Franklin, the son of Atlantic Hotel Company stockholder Littleton P. Franklin, agreed to pay him \$500 for the property. The two men's timing was fortuitous, as Ocean City experienced a real estate boom in the early 1890s following the opening in 1890 of the Baltimore and Eastern Shore Railroad, with its quicker route to the beach. Franklin, who served as a town commissioner from 1892 to 1894, sold his half interest to Upshur in 1892 for \$700, nearly tripling his initial investment.

George Upshur moved his family from Snow Hill to Baltimore in 1892, but kept close ties to Worcester County. Upshur maintained his beach cottage, which he and Sarah frequented often during the summer season, hobnobbing with the elite of Ocean City society. He was elected Mayor of Ocean City in 1896 following a bitterly contested campaign that pitted the "progressives" of Baltimore and Washington against a ticket of "locals" headed by Daniel Trimper, Sr., and Edward Hobbs, owner of the Eastern Shore Hotel. Upshur served a single two-year term.

In September 1903 Sarah Upshur fell ill during a stay at the cottage. She was transported to Baltimore by express train for medical care but her condition worsened and she died on September 14 at the age of 53. Following his wife's death, George spent less time in Ocean City. He rented his cottage to friends and eventually sold the property in 1906 to Baltimorean Amelia Dieter. The sale price is not recorded.

Amelia Dieter operated a millinery shop in Baltimore, where she lived with her brother John, a traveling salesman, and her sister Louise, none of whom ever married. Amelia gave the former Upshur cottage the name "Le Nid", French for "The Nest". In 1935 Amelia, then 77, conveyed her interest to John and Louise. John died the following year, and in 1937 Louise sold the "Le Nid" to John and Louella Hagan, the owners of the neighboring lot 19.

.....Continued page 5

U.S.L.S.S. CONTINUED

The work of the Taft Commission was to directly affect the Treasury Department by calling to scrutiny four entities that were of great interest to Treasury. These were the U.S. Life-Saving Service, the Steamboat Inspection Service, the U.S. Lighthouse Service, and, most complex of all, the U.S. Revenue Cutter Service. All had originally been a part of the Treasury Department; however, the U.S. Lighthouse Service and the Steamboat Inspection Service had been transferred to the Commerce Department a number of years earlier. Ironically, the U.S. Revenue Cutter Service had a pension system. After much debate, in an effort to eliminate duplication of effort and streamline operations, the Commission recommended the duties of the U.S. Life-Saving Service and the U.S. Lighthouse Service be combined and placed in the Commerce Department, with a savings of \$150,000.

This recommendation did not sit well with Kimball and his associates. They issued a minority report in which they pointed out the duties of the two establishments were, in fact, quite different. While both services were often located near each other and both organizations helped mariners, that was where the similarities ended. They noted lighthouses were "fixed agencies requiring the constant, undivided, and vigilant attention of their keepers and crews on the spot". Life-Saving Stations, on the other hand, were "merely the headquarters of the crews, whose duties require them to go wherever their services may be needed at wrecks and also to patrol the beaches and maintain watches for the early discovery of wrecks and the hastening of relief." It was also noted that Lighthouse Keepers did not need small boat-handling skills in order to do their job. The Commission also noted that the U.S. Revenue Cutter Service no longer performed any duty that could not be performed equally well by some existing service.

Space does not permit a detailed examination of all the political wrangling that ensued following the release of the Taft Commission report. Numerous alternatives were put forth with a number of Departments lobbying for outcomes that would protect their turf. Before the issue was finally settled, Taft was no longer in office and Woodrow Wilson was president. Eventually, it was agreed that a plan be developed and implemented to recommend Congress combine the Revenue Cutter Service and the Life-Saving Service into one unit, under the Treasury Department, to be named the U.S. Coast Guard. Most likely Kimball agreed to this resolution, at least in part, because of the existence of a Pension System in the Revenue Cutter Service that would automatically accrue to his men.

A bill to create the U.S. Coast Guard was finally introduced in the House of Representatives and was steered through the House by Representative William C. Adamson of Georgia. The Act to Create the Coast Guard was approved on January 20, 1915 with 212 yeas and 79 nays. It should be noted some of the nays were entered by Congressmen still expressing a reluctance to extending retirement benefits to U.S. Life-Saving personnel!

In 1915 Sumner Kimball was 81 years old and had served as Superintendent of the Life-Saving Service for 44 years. At this point, with pension secure, he submitted his retirement request but he was not yet finished with his connection to the Life-Saving Service. In May, 1915 he was appointed president of the Board on Life Saving Apparatus, a position he held until his death in 1923.

**WELCOME ABOARD
NEW MEMBERS!**

*The President and Board
of Directors take great
pleasure in welcoming the
following new members:*

FAMILY

Faith & Charles Bunting

Ocean City, Maryland

Deborah & Lawrence Long

Frankford, Delaware

Carol & Tim McGuire

Ocean City, Maryland

Shawn & Beth VonHagel

Middletown, Delaware

INDIVIDUAL

Irene Abeel

Ellicott City, Maryland

Don Bloom

Ocean City, Maryland

Nancy Bloom

Ocean City, Maryland

Dawn Messick

Whaleyville, Maryland

Bonnie Mitrecic

Ocean City, Maryland

U.S.L.S.S. CONTINUED.....

While many of the traditions of the U.S. Life-Saving Service remain evident in the present day Coast Guard, the men who helped establish these proud traditions have all faded into history along with their leader Sumner Increase Kimball. The majority of the American public know little of Kimball or the thousands of men who risked life and limb to save the lives and property of others. For the most part they did not seek notoriety; rather they looked upon their life at the station as a means to use the skills they possessed to provide for their needs and the needs of their families. Nonetheless, it seems fitting as we close this brief history of the U.S. Life-Saving Service, and celebrate the one-hundredth anniversary of the founding of the U.S. Coast Guard, that we pay tribute to these stoic, often heroic, men with the words of the great English poet, Alfred Lord Tennyson. We can have confidence these words best expressed their feelings as they looked back through the eyes of old age on the life they had lived:

Sunset and evening star,
And one clear call for me!
And may there be no moaning of the bar,
When I put out to sea,

But such a tide as moving seems asleep,
Too full for sound and foam,
When that which drew from out the boundless deep
Turns again home.

Twilight and evening bell,
And after that the dark.
And may there be no sadness of farewell,
When I embark;

For tho' from out our bourne of Time and Place
The flood may bear me far,
I hope to see my Pilot face to face
When I have crost the bar.



USCG surfboat drill at North Beach in 1942. Front to back; Lloyd Piercy, Stan Lowjewski, Lorenzo and "Buster" Manera

100TH ANNIVERSARY OF UNITED STATES COAST GUARD

In commemoration of the 100th Anniversary of the United States Coast Guard this year we are developing a new exhibit. The display will include artifacts from the Ocean City station as well as the neighboring stations of Isle of Wight, North Beach, Green Run and Pope's Island. There will also be a slide show of photographs showcasing Coast Guard members from 1915 to the present.

Anyone with photographs of people during their service in the Ocean City area is urged to share them with us for this new exhibit.

Please contact Sandy Hurley by phone (410) 289-4991
or email: Sandy@ocmuseum.org

THEN & NOW CONTINUED.....

Lot 19

The Philadelphia-based chemical company Harrison Brothers & Co. drew lot 19, on the corner of the Boardwalk and Caroline Street, at the stockholders' meeting in 1875. The three brothers, John, George and Thomas, sold the undeveloped lot for \$650 in 1894 to Belle P. Moore, the wife of John P. Moore, who was then Mayor of Snow Hill, and later a Maryland State Senator. John Moore and future Maryland Governor John Walter Smith were principals in the lumber firm Smith, Moore & Co. Moore's biographical sketch published in the *Maryland Manual* in 1899 described him as "one of the wealthiest men of Worcester County."

Mr. and Mrs. Moore built a large two and a half story "cottage" on the lot by 1895., which they dubbed the "Washington House", although it was more commonly known simply as "Senator Moore's cottage". The Moores spent most of the summertime, when they weren't traveling abroad, at their cottage in Ocean City, where they entertained friends and acquaintances. No doubt political deals were struck there as well.

Senator Moore died in 1918, and his widow Belle sold the property to Oscar M. Purnell in 1921. Purnell was an attorney from Snow Hill who was an active player in the Ocean City real estate market from the mid-1890s until his death in 1936. Purnell conveyed the "Senator Moore Cottage" to Lillian Duncan Purnell, the wife of the Ocean City Coast Guard station keeper William I. Purnell, in early 1922. Lillian chose the name "Maryland Inn" for her establishment, which she advertised that summer as providing "A-1 service".



Figure 1: Postcard view of the Maryland Inn (lot 19) circa 1924. The "Le Nid" (lot 18) is pictured at the left. A small portion of the "Sea Breeze Hotel" (lot 35) can be seen at the right along the south side of Caroline Street.

Cindy Vollmerhausen collection.

Lillian and William borrowed nearly \$13,000 after the 1922 season to renovate and expand the Maryland Inn. **Figure 1** provides a view of the building after the work was completed.

Capt. and Mrs. Purnell took on a business partner in 1926 when they sold a half-interest in the Maryland Inn to John and Louella Hagan. John Hagan was a native of Norway who had immigrated to the U.S. in his early teens and made his way to the fish camps of southern New Jersey. In January 1897 John and Charlie Ludlam arrived in Ocean City and set out the first fish pounds, launching a new industry that would employ nearly one-quarter of the working men in Ocean City by 1900. Charlie's father Christopher Ludlam joined the two men later in the spring of 1897 after his retirement from the U.S. Life-Saving Service on May 1.

Capt. Hagan's fish camp in Ocean City was located in the oceanfront block between South 3rd Street and South 4th Street, an area that is now covered by the inlet. He was also a partner with John M. Mumford and Edwin J. Thomas in a second camp located two blocks farther west, on the west side of Philadelphia Avenue.

Pound fishing was a physically demanding and often dangerous occupation, as well as an ecologically devastating enterprise that resulted in overfishing and steadily declining hauls. At the urging of his wife, the former Louella C. Quillen, a local girl from Berlin, John decided to get out of the business. He sold his fish camp in 1924 to Rev. William C. Poole, an itinerant minister who had established the Methodist church in Ocean City in 1916. Rev. Poole also bought the second camp from John and his partners at the same time. John and Louella used the proceeds to buy their interest in the Maryland Inn.

.....Continued page 6

THEN & NOW CONTINUED

William and Lillian Purnell sold their remaining interest in the Maryland Inn in 1928 to Hilda Bounds, the wife of George C. Bounds, a lumber wholesaler from Hebron, Maryland. John and Louella Hagan gained sole ownership of the Maryland Inn in 1929 by buying out Hilda Bounds' interest.

Capt. and Mrs. Hagan undertook a major reconstruction and expansion of the Maryland Inn following the 1947 season. The "Le Nid" cottage on lot 18 was demolished and replaced by a new building similar in design to the one on lot 19, which was also extensively renovated at the same time.



The Maryland Inn (lots 18 and 19) circa 1960.

Cindy Vollmerhausen collection.

*"Philadelphia
businessman Edward F.
Fassitt drew the lot at
the stockholders' meeting
in 1875."*

Lot 20

Lot 20, which joins lot 19 on the south side of Caroline Street, has been used for the same purpose throughout the years as it is today: providing a parking area and means of ingress and egress for lots 18 and 19 on the Boardwalk. Philadelphia businessman Edward F. Fassitt drew the lot at the stockholders' meeting in 1875. George M. Upshur, the owner of lot 18, and John P. Moore, the owner of lot 19, eventually purchased the lot jointly in 1899. Amelia Dieter acquired Upshur's interest in 1906 and later purchased Moore's interest in 1929. She and John Hagan evidently worked out an arrangement to share the lot, which Hagan bought from Louise Dieter in 1940.

Lot 35

Lot 35, the westernmost part of the Maryland Inn property on the south side of Caroline Street, was developed somewhat later than lots 18 and 19. The Delaware firm of William Lea & Sons drew the lot at the 1875 meeting, but did nothing with it. Amelia Dieter's brother John bought the vacant lot in 1907 from William Lea's heirs, and erected an architecturally undistinguished two-story cement block boarding house with a wide porch facing on Caroline Street that he called the "Belmar".

.....Continued page 7

THEN & NOW CONTIUED

John Dieter sold the property to Annie Milbourne in 1919 for \$2,400. Annie ran into financial difficulties almost immediately after having to borrow the funds needed to repair major damage to the cottage caused by the destructive storm of February 4 – 5, 1920 . Her father, John T. Tubbs, a Bishopville, Maryland widower who worked as a fireman in a saw mill, bailed her out in 1921 by buying the house and lot and assuming Annie's outstanding debts, which included two mortgages and a judgment lien.

Ralph Parsons, a railroad man who lived in Pittsville, and his wife Mary bought the boarding house from John Tubbs in 1925. Mr. and Mrs. Parsons operated the facility for nearly 20 years as the "Sea Breeze Hotel" before selling it in 1944 to Ironshire, Maryland shopkeeper Harold V. Quillen. Quillen sold out two years later to Claude and Edna Bassett, the owners of the Roosevelt Hotel on the Boardwalk at North Division Street, and the former owners of the Liberty Farms Hotel, later renamed "The Majestic", on the Boardwalk at 7th Street. The Bassetts sold the much larger Roosevelt Hotel about six months later. Maryland Inn, Inc., the corporate entity created by John and Louella Hagan in 1955 to hold title to the Inn, bought the former Sea Breeze Hotel property from Mr. and Mrs. Bassett and other parties in 1961.

The Maryland Inn property

John Hagan died in 1960, a couple of years after he and Louella had celebrated their 60th wedding anniversary. Louella, who assumed the posts of president and general manager of Maryland Inn, Inc. following John's death, passed away in 1963. The Hagans' daughter Elizabeth took over the business, and in the fall of 1967 she arranged a sale of the Maryland Inn property to Harold Greenspan's Jelar Corp. The purchase price was not disclosed but was probably between \$250,000 and \$300,000.

The new owner closed the oceanfront dining room and converted the boardwalk façade into retail shops before the start of the 1968 season. Mr. and Mrs. George Trageser were hired to run the Inn, which they described as a "family hotel". The inn closed after the 1979 season and was torn down later that fall. A new cement block commercial building erected on the site is presently occupied by the Fun City arcade.

*"Mr. and Mrs. Parsons
operated the facility for
nearly 20 years as the
**Sea Breeze
Hotel...**"*



The Fun City arcade, located on the former site of the Maryland Inn, pictured in 2014.

Photo credit: Sandy Hurley.

100 Years Ago

From *The Baltimore Sun*, December 13, 1914:

J. G. HARRISON DEAD

Was Head Of Big Nursery Enterprise At Berlin, Md.

Berlin, Md., Dec. 12. – J. G. Harrison, head of the big nursery firm of J. G. Harrison & Sons, died at his home here this morning. He was 74 years old.

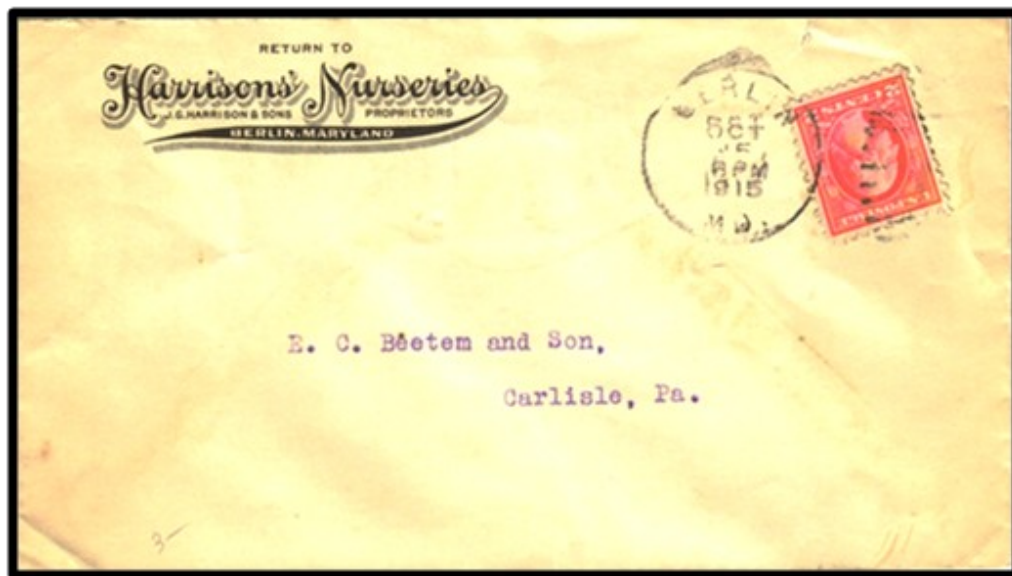
Mr. Harrison suffered a paralytic stroke Wednesday [December 9] and never recovered from its effects.

Starting on a small scale Mr. Harrison, who was assisted later by his sons, built up one of the largest nursery enterprises in the eastern section of the United States. Hundreds of men are employed on the several thousand acres of the present plant and its products go to almost every quarter of the world. State Senator Orlando Harrison, of Worcester county, has been directing the firm's work of recent years.

He leaves a widow, who before her marriage was Miss Elizabeth Franklin; two brothers, Levin and Charles Harrison; three sisters, Mrs. Charles Hamblin, Mrs. Charles Hastings and Mrs. Eliza Jane Moore, and four children, Senator Orlando Harrison, George A. Harrison, Mrs. Della K. Powell, wife of Mayor W. B. S. Powell, of Ocean City, and Mrs. Achsah Purnell, wife of George W. Purnell, of Berlin, Md. These are children of his first wife, who before her marriage was Miss Annie Kate Collins, of Bishopville, Md.

Mr. Harrison was born in 1840 in Sussex county, Delaware. In 1883 he and his family moved to North Carolina and there he engaged in the lumber business. He came to Berlin in 1884 and began fruit growing. He was one of the pioneer orchardists of the Peninsula and developed the business of fruit growing to a high degree.

Envelope bearing corner card of Harrison's Nurseries, J. G. Harrison & Sons, Proprietors, Berlin, Maryland, postmarked at Berlin on October 15, 1915.



→ Curator's note: J. G. Harrison's son Orlando was deeply involved in a number of projects and initiatives that impacted Ocean City, including the opening of the first ocean pier in 1907, the referendum in 1908 approving "local option" (prohibition) in Worcester County, the legislation enacted in 1914 authorizing the State to construct an auto bridge into Ocean City and another bill passed in 1917 to establish the State ferry operation between Annapolis and Claiborne. Today, J. G. Harrison's great-grandsons, Hale and John, head the Harrison Group, which owns and operates numerous business enterprises in Ocean City, including properties such as the Holiday Inn Hotel & Suites on the Boardwalk at 17th Street, and the Hilton Suites Ocean City Oceanfront, on the beach between 32nd Street and 33rd Street.

READERS' FORUM

Q: What information do you have on boxing matches held in Ocean City?

A: *The earliest report we have found regarding a boxing event in Ocean City is from 1899, when a black boxer from Baltimore, Joe Gans, took on a white boxer from Boston named Jack Dobbs in a scheduled 25-round contest on July 26 (Gans knocked out Dobbs in the 4th round). The fight was held in the Trimpers' "Seabright Theatre", attached to the rear of the Seabright Hotel on the Boardwalk between South Division Street and South 1st Street (where the Haunted House amusement ride is today). Periodic matches were staged at the Seabright until 1901 or 1902. We don't know why they were discontinued.*

Former Ocean City Mayor William B. S. Powell later built an outdoor boxing arena on the northeast corner of South First Street and Baltimore Avenue around 1927. On one occasion on June 13, 1930, the fighting wasn't limited to the boxers in the ring. "Because the fight card was not carried through as advertised, several irate spectators at the Ocean City Arena last night staged fights of their own when the scheduled 8 round feature bout came to an abrupt conclusion after about one minute scuffling."

The outdoor arena hosted events during the summer months until at least 1936.

The Ocean City Museum Society extends to everyone the opportunity to become a member of the organization. Your tax-deductible donation will enable the Museum to fulfill its mission to inspire and support the interpretation and appreciation of the cultural and natural history of Ocean City, Maryland, the Worcester County coastal region, and equally, the historical role performed by the United States Life-Saving Service, and to preserve with subsequent mandate the 1891 structure that once served as the Ocean City Station.

Please complete this form and mail with a check payable to:

Ocean City Museum Society, Inc., P. O. Box 603, Ocean City, MD 21843

Student.....\$ 5.00 _____ Supporting.....\$ 100.00 _____

Individual.....\$ 10.00 _____ Sustaining.....\$ 250.00 _____

Family.....\$ 30.00 _____ Benefactor.....\$ 500.00 _____

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____