

OCEAN CITY, MARYLAND – THEN & NOW

By Gordon Katz

LOT 45 Part One: 1875 – 1917

Lot 45, located on the southeast corner of Baltimore Avenue and Wicomico Street, sits in the heart of downtown Ocean City. The lot has a frontage of eighty feet on the east side of Baltimore Avenue and a depth of fifty feet along the south side of Wicomico Street. It was among the very first properties in the new resort to be developed after the Atlantic Hotel opened on July 4, 1875. The latest establishment to make its home there, a restaurant and bar called “The Pour House”, only dates to May 2011. There have been many others who have taken their turn in years past. Here is a look back at a bit of the history of lot 45.

Dr. Hillary R. Pitts from Berlin drew lot 45 at the stockholders’ meeting held at the Atlantic Hotel on August 31, 1875. At the time, Dr. Pitts was the president of both the Atlantic Hotel Company and the Wicomico & Pocomoke Railroad. He and the other stockholders who had drawn or purchased the lots along the south side of Wicomico Street had all improved their properties by 1877. The rapid development of those lots isn’t surprising, in that the area was the focal point of activity in the youthful days of Ocean City. On the north side of Wicomico

Street stood the Atlantic Hotel, occupying most of an entire city block and bustling with summertime visitors. The train depot, through which hundreds or occasionally thousands of passengers came and went each day during the season, sat on the western edge of the hotel’s property. Across Baltimore Avenue from the Atlantic Hotel, Samuel J. Massey had opened the Seaside

Charles Gallagher, had purchased the two lots on Wicomico Street originally drawn by James B. Dirickson and Zadock P. Henry, Jr. Gallagher opened a store where he peddled, among other merchandise, his company’s Gallagher & Burton brand of whiskey. Dr. Pitts erected his own cottage on the corner lot at Baltimore Avenue, a two-story structure with a wrap-around porch that faced both Baltimore Avenue and Wicomico Street.

It isn’t known for certain if the Pitts cottage housed a commercial enterprise, which seems likely given its location, or if it was simply used as a private residence. After Dr. Pitts died in 1887, his son John subdivided lot 45.

In 1891 he sold the northerly part, thirty-eight feet wide and fifty feet deep, along with the house, to two brothers, George W. Henry of Baltimore and James P. Henry from Berlin, for \$730. He sold the remaining undeveloped southerly part in 1892 to Ida K. Aydelotte, from Philadelphia, for \$100.

George and James Henry were the sons of Robert J. Henry, the superintendent of the Wicomico & Pocomoke Railroad and a tireless promoter of Ocean City until his death in 1893. It was said that “every person who visited



This is the only available view of the house on lot 45, circa 1907. The large building in the foreground left of center with the dormers is the Seaside Hotel. The porch facing Wicomico Street and the roofline of the house are visible just above the roof of the hotel. The neighboring buildings originally erected by Charles Gallagher can be seen to the left of the house in this picture.

Hotel in 1877.

The early Wicomico Street developers included John B. Myers, Jr., a wealthy Philadelphian and the husband of Lemuel Showell’s sister Mary Ellen, who built a handsome house that took up the two lots closest to Atlantic Avenue (now the Boardwalk) plus a third lot on Atlantic Avenue. Next door to Myers, another Philadelphian and Atlantic Hotel Company stockholder, liquor merchant

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Then & Now Continued.....

Part Two: 1917 to the Present will appear in the next edition of Scuttlebutt.

George Henry was a druggist who had moved to Baltimore in the late 1880s to take the position of chief clerk of the Maryland Penitentiary. What his older brother James did for a living is unknown.

George Henry acquired his brother's interest in 1894. He mortgaged the property in 1897, but by late 1900 he was in default. A public sale was held on February 16, 1901 at which Berlin hotel keeper and real estate speculator Thomas T. Savage entered the high bid of \$660. Less than three months later, Savage sold the house and land to William Taber for \$1,150.

William Taber was the oldest of the surviving children of Stephen Taber, the Long Island businessman who had owned more than two thousand acres on Sinepuxent Beach and the mainland when he died in 1886. William was the only Taber family member to remain a property owner in Ocean City after the bulk of his late father's vast holdings in Worcester County were sold off in 1890. He and his wife Sarah had earlier acquired Charles Gallagher's two lots and store on Wicomico Street in 1891, and the Myers property on the corner of Wicomico Street and the Boardwalk in 1898. The couple had also built a large house on the beach between South 2nd and South 3rd Streets in 1897 that was admired for its expensive furnishings. The

house was destroyed by a storm in October 1903. The Tabers rented out their properties, other than the beach house, to commercial tenants. One of the later tenants was Rudolph Dolle, who opened his well-known caramel popcorn and salt water taffy stand in the former Myers house in 1910.

William and Sarah Taber sold their portion of lot 45 to two brothers from Baltimore, Adolf and Ralph Michelson, for \$2,500 in 1907, taking back a mortgage of \$2,000. The Michelson family had emigrated from Russia to the burgeoning Jewish community in Baltimore in 1890 when the two boys were quite young. Adolf was a printer by trade and his younger brother Ralph ran a confectionery store. The pair had decided to try their hand as retailers in Ocean City, but unfortunately their timing wasn't good. As of April 1, 1908, all of Worcester County, including Ocean City, went "dry". For a time afterward, summer crowds and real estate values suffered as a result. The brothers gave up their venture after the 1910 season, and in early 1911 they conveyed the property back to the Tabers in exchange for the cancellation of the unpaid balance of their mortgage.

Levi (L. Wallace) Purnell, a real estate investor from Snow Hill, bought the house and lot from the Tabers in May 1911 for \$1,475. Purnell died

shortly thereafter, and his children Mary E. and Matthew Purnell sold it to Daniel and Margaret Trimper in July 1914 for \$1,200. After renting the building for several years, the Trimpers turned the deed over to their oldest grandchild, Daniel Henry Gordon, on October 23, 1917.

Daniel Henry Gordon was the son of Daniel and Margaret Trimper's daughter Maggie and her first husband, William Gordon. Maggie was already pregnant with her son when she and the rest of the Trimper family moved from Baltimore to Ocean City in early February 1893. She gave birth to the boy she named Daniel Henry on October 21, 1893. He was given the nickname "Goldie" early on (he was actually listed by that name in the 1910 census) because of his blond hair and to avoid confusing him with his grandfather.

Gordon had previously purchased the southerly part of lot 45 from Ida and Steven Aydelotte in July 1913 for \$500. The deed doesn't identify any specific improvements made by the Aydelottes in the more than twenty years that they owned the lot, and the purchase price indicates that if any had been made, they weren't of much value. When his grandparents gave Daniel Henry Gordon the northerly part of the property in 1917, ownership of lot 45 was once again held by one person.



Eby Family Visit Museum

The Eby Family (left to right) Nancy Eby Bryant, Patsy Eby Schaefer, Mary Jane Eby Swift, Beulah Eby, Rita Eby Scherping, and Ronald G. Eby visited the Museum during "Local's Appreciation Week" the last week of October. Look for the Eby Family's **March Storm of 1962** story in the "**Tides of March**" book available in the gift shop early April 2012. A Storm Party is planned to commemorate the 50th year anniversary of the March Storm on March 7, 2012 at the Convention Center. More details will be



SAVE THE DATE

Mark your calendars!!

March 7, 2012 at the Convention Center – The Ocean City Museum Society is hosting a Storm Party to commemorate the 50th Anniversary of the March 1962 Storm. More

information to follow as it becomes available.

Share Your Stories of "The Storm of the Century"

Do you have a memory of the March 1962 Storm in Ocean City, MD that you are willing to share? The Ocean

City Museum Society is putting together a video presentation of memories of the 1962 Storm to be shown at the Storm Party and to archive as oral histories. If you would be willing to have your memory recorded on video please contact Sandy or Diane at 410-289-4991.

Taylor Bank Donation



Pictured here left to right: George Hurley, Suzanne Hurley, Cindy Katz, Gordon Katz, Reese Cropper Jr., Sandy Hurley, J. D. Quillin III

Taylor Bank Chairman of the Board, Reese Cropper Jr. presents Ocean City Museum Society Board Member Gordon Katz a check for \$7,000 to fund printing of Gordon's history book about the founders of Ocean City, Maryland. The book is entitled "**102 Gentlemen and a Lady**". Reese was quoted as saying, "I am proud of the fact that Taylor Bank supports efforts to preserve local history and heritage." All proceeds raised by the sale of the book have been donated by Mr. Katz to the Ocean City Museum Society.

WELCOME ABOARD

NEW MEMBERS!

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

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Cumberland, Maryland

Pat Hipszer

Ocean Pines, Maryland

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Annapolis, Maryland

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The Times and Tides of Ocean City, Maryland

Surf's Up! Exhibit to Open June 2011

There is still time to donate your Surfing treasures to the Surf's Up! exhibit. Our Wish list – Old surf board of no value for surfing (to be used as a bench), photographs of surfing in Ocean City, postcards, advertisements, memorabilia and memories. If you have anything you would like to share, call Sandy at 410-289-4991 or email : Sandy@ocmuseum.org.



George Bert Cropper 's photograph (left) taken by Sarah Challenger Tilghman, came from the Nabb Research Center in Salisbury. George was truly one of the town's first surfers. He began surfing in Ocean City Maryland as a young man on a board he built himself. This photo shows him with the surfboard that he built in the 1920's. George's brothers painted his board with Princeton University colors. Some of those colors remain on the board today.

This photo shows George Feehley along with novice surfer Geni Chaski as they tried their hands at tandem surfing in Ocean City, Maryland 1969. George took up surfing later in his life but as you can see he mastered the sport. Thanks to Ellsworth Boyd for sending us this gem of an image!

