

Element 5 *Historical Background*

(From the "Borough of West Wildwood 50th Anniversary", 1970)

The importance of the founding and growth of West Wildwood in the early years of the 20th century can be credited to Warren D. Hann. In 1897, Warren came to Wildwood and became a stock holder and superintendent of the Wildwood and Delaware Bay Short Line Railroad. Mr. and Mrs. Hann were living at the Royal Inn in Wildwood when Warren realized the possibility of the development of land immediately west of Five Mile Beach, separated by an inlet. In 1899, he purchased the tract of marshland that became known as West Wildwood.

In 1909, the Wildwood Extension Realty Company suggested building a bridge over Sunset Lake, formerly called Post Creek. In 1910, a proposal was made to have a railroad track over the marshland that is now West Wildwood. The Wildwood and Delaware Bay Short Line Railroad connected with the Reading Lines at Wildwood Junction and W.D. Hann and E. G. Slaughter raised the capital in 1912 to run three miles of track.

In 1915, a Sample Cottage was erected on the property known today as 640 Glenwood Avenue. This property was eventually purchased by Louis Riedenauer, a former Borough Assessor. Mr. Godwin and Mr. Whitely of Philadelphia each purchased a bungalow in 1916 where the present homes located at 705 and 701 Poplar Avenue now stand.

On April 7, 1916, carloads of building material came in on the Reading Railroad for the building operations at West Wildwood. A Casino building was erected at the end of the Island. The second floor of the Casino housed the office of the W.D. Hann Company. The first floor was used for card parties and dances, and in time, became the "Mecca" of the island.

Mr. Robert Horst purchased his first home at 703 Poplar Avenue on July 4, 1917 for \$1,000. The land sold for \$500 and the bungalow sold for \$500. A deposit of \$15 was required and delivery was promised in a week. At this time only the shell was erected and three (3) years later Mr. Horst had the interior completed. This bungalow was destroyed by the 1962 storm and Mr. Horst immediately rebuilt in the same spot.

At that time there were no streets, pavements, gas or electric. Fill was being pumped onto the island thus forming the Wildwood Canal. This canal was used by Ben Hann to deliver ice by rowboat to accommodate the home owners.

Early zoning included a dividing line for building restrictions on what is known today as Neptune Avenue. From the Northwest side of Neptune Avenue to the Bay, bungalows only were permitted. From the Southeast side of Neptune Avenue to the present Venice Avenue, cottages only were permitted. Only twenty (20) foot lots could be purchased and the regulation size of the building could not exceed seventeen (17) feet.

By January 12, 1917 twenty-two (22) bungalows had been constructed and preparations were being made to erect fifty-two (52) more by the Hann Brothers. At this time our country entered World War I and restrictions on shipping freight slowed the building progress.

By April 5, 1918 sixty (60) bungalows had been constructed and plans were being made to build forty-five (45) more by the end of the year. Owing to war conditions of the railroads, it became necessary for the West Wildwood Realty company to charter a boat to transport lumber and other necessary material.

On April 20, 1920 West Wildwood became the “newest” Borough in the “oldest” County in New Jersey. This incorporation was made possible by an Act of the Legislature, carving it out of Middle Township.

The first election was held in the Casino Building on Tuesday, August 3, 1920. Of one hundred four (104) names on the registry list, forty-three (43) votes were cast. Warren D. Hann was elected Mayor, Councilmen elected were Samuel Donaldson, Effenger Kline, Eugene Lennon, Samuel McCoy, Howard Smith and Isaac Weaver. Treasurer was Harold Skirving; Assessor, J. Lowis Bachofer, and George Roth was Justice of the Peace. Borough Council elected to hold meetings in the Casino.

Mail service started in 1921 and in June of that year, phone lines entered the borough and a franchise was given for a bus line. A building boom was taking place, \$175,000, in new buildings were erected from October 1921 to October 1922.

On July 4, 1921, before a large summer crowd, the fire company (organized in 1920), demonstrated their new chemical and pumping engine. This engine was capable of pumping three streams from the canal or lake with sufficient hose to reach across the town.

Thirty (30) families stayed in West Wildwood for the winter of 1921 and fifteen (15) children were transported to the Wildwood Public Schools.

On August 3, 1929, the new Fire House was dedicated in West Wildwood. The new building, constructed entirely of brick at a cost of \$15,000, was to be used as a community center. The first floor was to house the fire apparatus. The second floor was used as a community center with a room as a council chamber for the Borough. In addition, facilities for the police department and cells for prisoners were provided. A fully equipped kitchen was in the new building. Funds for the new hall were raised by the community.

From 1930, the year around population continued to grow, with a leveling off over the past twenty years. In 1978, there were less than 300 permanent residents; currently there are roughly 550.

In the 1990’s activities in the Borough were constrained by a sewer connection moratorium that did not end until the completion of the Wildwood Regional Sewer Treatment Plant and weight restrictions on the Glenwood Avenue Bridge.

In 1997 the Borough constructed and alternate water main supply connection to the Wildwood water system. This connection was mandated by the State of New Jersey and was necessary to allow the replacement of the Glenwood Avenue Bridge. The Borough administration persuaded the Bridge project to contribute towards the permanent connection. The Bridge was completed in 1991 at which time the Borough began a series of Improvement projects. A partial list is provided as Attachment N.



Pine Avenue at Avenue J 1990 Pre-constriction Photograph



Pine Avenue at Avenue J 2016

The design mandates were; 1) get rid of the water in one tide cycle, 2) do that which the home owner cannot, 3) If you are going to inconvenience someone make a noticeable improvement



Neptune Avenue 1990 Pre-constriction Photograph



Neptune Avenue 2016

Borough Hall maintains photo albums and other documentation of West Wildwood history available to the public.