
Seven Presidents Oceanfront Park

Brief Lifeguarding History

As early as 1734 Long Branch was a camping ground for the Cranberry Indians. Long Branch, which derived its name from being the extensive or "long" branch of land adjacent to the Shrewsbury River, was reclaimed by a group of settlers from Rhode Island who then sold out portions of the land to proprietors with the purpose of building hotels. The growth of Long Branch as a seaside resort began.

It was in 1828 that boats from New York started to dock directly at the first of three Long Branch piers. Long Branch was said to have "arrived" in 1860 when Paris dress designers visited to copy the American society's acceptable fashions. Later that year, Mrs. Abraham Lincoln vacationed in Long Branch. Her vacation is considered a factor in the rapid increase of attention to the Jersey Shore.

Long Branch soon became the "Summer Capitol". From 1869 to 1884, Long Branch was the predominant Presidential vacation spot and four of the seven presidents spent time in Long Branch.

In 1869 President Ulysses S. Grant came because of the areas reputation for "gaming and gayety". Grant frequented the Pennsylvania Club, the most extravagant gambling house. Later, President Chester A. Arthur became a frequent visitor of the club as well. Rutherford B. Hayes spent several summers at the Elberon Hotel in the 1870's.

Hayes successor, President James A. Garfield enjoyed the social scene of Long Branch, including Monmouth Racetrack, gambling houses, and of course, the beaches. In July, 1881, President Garfield was shot in Washington D.C. and because of the summer heat, he requested to be moved to Long Branch for the cool ocean breezes. Long Branch was thrust into national limelight - but Garfield died thirteen days after his arrival.

After the State Legislature banned gambling and bookmaking in 1897, Long Branch began a steady decline as a premier seaside resort - however Presidents Benjamin Harrison and William McKinley both summered there.

Meanwhile, the specific area of present day Seven Presidents Park was the eastern residence of William "Buffalo Bill" Cody, and his Wild West Show. Cody named the land "The Reservation" and nine homes were built in the early 1900's. The last remaining home is referred to as the Cody House or the Cherokee Lodge. It is a recognized landmark located in the northwest corner of Seven Presidents Park.

In 1916, Woodrow Wilson spent some time vacationing in Long Branch suggesting a revival of the "Summer Capitol". These high hopes for such a revival were short lived as President Wilson left after a brief stay.

The very busy vacation spot of the 1860's became a mellow section of the shore in the 1960's. Surf shops catering toward the local surfers of the area were the most frequented places, not large hotels and gambling houses. The beach goers were no longer tourists, but locals from the immediate area. Western Long Branch grew into a well-populated urban area with several department stores and factories.

In 1977, the northeastern beach area of Long Branch became part of Monmouth County Park System whereby beaches were lifeguarded by County employees. It was leased by the City of Long Branch to the Park System which eventually acquired all rights to the property in 1982. The Park System named the area "Seven Presidents Oceanfront Park" in honor of the Presidents who spent time in Long Branch. The beaches known today as Joline, Kiernan (South and North), and Atlantic Avenue were then referred to as Gaskin's, Kiernan, White Sands', USO, and North End Beach.

The Park System constructed the pavilion, concession, maintenance building, lifeguard and first aid facilities, and roads and parking lots. They moved the Cherokee Lodge, now the activity center from the Indian Reservation to its present location near the maintenance building. The inaugural crew of 22 lifeguards started in 1977 were headquartered in the since demolished Gaskin's Ice House on the second floor. Rangers occupied the first floor. There was a dramatic rescue of a pilot in 1982 whose banner plane crashed off Joline Avenue beach - the plane was never recovered.

Present day Lifeguard headquarters were completed in 1984. A major sand replenishment project was done during 1997. 2009 marks the 33rd lifeguarding season. In 1990, the bathing areas were expanded. James A. Register supervised the guards from 1977 through 1988. Supervisor Michael Fowler has been with MCPS since 1989.

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