

# A Day's Trip

excerpt from

## Welcome to My Wildwood

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A collection of notes explaining what the Wildwoods were like to grow up in during the early 1900s

It is early morning in a time long ago, a simpler, less hectic time and the sun has just come up over the horizon in this summer of 1951. I am asleep in the attic of our bungalow by the front window when Harry Moeckle awakens me. I dress quickly and we walk east on 1st Ave, cross the railroad tracks and north on NJ Ave. There is still a hush over the Anglesea section of North Wildwood and we talk in low voices so that we do not disturb those who are still sleeping. We are going to Moore's Pier at Spruce and NJ Aves. to see for ourselves the weather and ocean conditions before we commit ourselves to going deep-sea fishing.

As we reach the pier the sun is still low on the horizon, it is a brilliant gold-pink and its rays turn the waters of the becalmed inlet all shimmering where they reflect off the few small ripples. Although it is still very early, there is much activity. We are somewhat surprised by all that is going on. Trucks are coming and going with deliveries. A large number of people are already on the pier in addition to the captains and mates.

People come to the pier by foot, trolley car, bus or car. There is ample parking along the foot walk or in the rubble strewn parking lot on the east side of NJ Ave. opposite Moore's. With all the activity around us it is still quiet, still peaceful, no one yelling or screaming shouting to "park your car here." There is no need. People know this is the place. At one time the "Fisherman's Special" trains came huffing and puffing into town. They let their cars full of people off at Anglesea R.R. Station at 1st and New Jersey Ave.

When Moore's Inlet Café was built in 1913 the Pier was called Mace's after Charles Mace. Most of the boats were commercial fishing boats but there were at least 22 party boats at the pier.

As we reach the main pier we see that one boat dock is empty. That captain has sailed over to Olson's Pier to gas up. There is a boat on the marine rail at Olson's Boat Yard being hauled. There is activity at Jessie's Pier on Hereford Ave where the Patricia-C is berthed. We find Captains O'Brien and Wiederstorm, of the Sea Hawk II and Miss Wildwood, and talk to them about the weather, ocean conditions and yesterday's catch. We ask about yesterday's catch even though I was on the pier when the fleet came in and I know there was a good "catch". We also ask about ocean conditions even though we can see for ourselves that it is calm. There are no breakers on the Ocean Bar or on the Bay Bar opposite us. There are only long gentle swells moving up the bay. We can see all this right from the pier. There is no other pier quite like this one. Harry wants to go out, but has no

money. He makes some sort of arrangement with one of the captains. Today, it will be the Miss Wildwood. It is agreed and I am off to home and breakfast. On the way I pass the mates who are preparing the day's bait. The surf clams are delivered in bushel bags made of burlap. They make it look easy and I suppose it is with practice, to shuck a clam. They sit on a piling; take a clam, run a knife around the top inside of the clam shell cutting both muscles at the back of the shell and the clam is open. Repeat on the bottom and drop the meat into a bucket or can with its juice. The shells are dropped into another burlap bag.

Some of the captains are in Moore's Café having an eye-opener. All of the captains have run-up their engines, some are doing it now. Boat engines are very cranky in their damp environment and some skippers such as Capt. Harris of the Loucille II, are having difficulty starting them. Some captains run-up their engines every fifteen minutes or so. They do this either to give patrons a sense of security and the knowledge they won't be left behind, or they just know their engines.

I reach home, but am unable to eat much. I wasn't very hungry last night after working at Marguerite's Fudge Shop. I just figure it is nerves, so I keep telling myself, I want to go. I pick up my lunch, my rod, reel, and a bucket and back to the pier I go. I almost run up New Jersey Ave. I reach the wooden walkway alongside Moore's. I hear the boards under my feet, they yield to my weight. It is somehow a pleasant feeling.

When you consider the total cost of this trip, you can see why we have carefully planned this trip over the past several weeks. The trip itself cost \$2.50 for a full day. The hooks, sinkers and rig total almost \$2. more. With money set aside for the "pool" and soda, the total cost of the trip could amount to about \$6. Earning .40¢ an hour it has taken me about 15 hours of work to pay for this trip. Maybe I can sell some of the fish I catch on the pier to make up part of the cost. The most important thing, I tell myself, is the coming day and not if I catch a lot of fish.

Capt. Wiederstrum of the Miss Wildwood is in his small wheel-house talking to Capt. O'Brien of the Sea-Hawk II. Capt. Wiederstrum is a big (fat) man and this helps make the wheel-house smaller. The Miss Wildwood is the same type boat as the Lucille II, known as the old fashioned type. They are fishing yachts with their below deck cabins. To get to the bow on this type of boat you have to climb around the cabin and sit on the cabin top. The two captains are talking about which grounds they will try today. All boats at the pier are equipped with the latest equipment



A great number of men arrived to Mace's Pier on the "Fishermen's Special" trains, circa 1905. From the collection of Richard Dietz



Looking southeast over Hereford Inlet, 1932



Looking northwest over Hereford Inlet, 1932

Anglesea Photos are from the collection of Betty Braidwood Taylor (1918-2009)



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including two-way radio, heads and an ice box for cold beer or soda. What will they think of next? All are U.S.C.G. certified and approved to carry a certain number of passengers.

As I sit here waiting for the engine to start its song, I take in the sights around me. I look at the pier, the sun reflecting off the ripples in the inlet. The gulls in their sky which is singularly theirs demanding an early morning hand-out. I smell the salt air, the creosoted pilings, and the breakfast cooking in the luncheonette. I hear the sound of the water lapping on the hulls of the boats, the sound of the voices around me and on the pier, and I am alone but surrounded by people. If given a choice, this is where and when I would choose. Things are as they should be. This is where I want to be.

We are off! As we back out of our slip, those on the pier and on the other boats wave to us. The boat slows, and then stops and we start to go forward toward the mouth of the channel. The channel, to the bay, is in the Mace Tract area. We pass Olson's Pier on our left where other people wave to us. There are people fishing or crabbing along New York-Hereford Ave bulkhead, we wave to each other. We cruise along Jessie's Pier where the Patricia-C, along with several other boats, is preparing to leave. There are people fishing on the green-banks as we go by. We are happy, we are safe, and the sun is out, there are jobs for everyone, things are plentiful, the war is over and Johnny has come marching home.

We have high expectations of catching a bag-full of fish or more. Some of us hope to sell some of our fish on the pier when we return to pay the cost of the trip or perhaps to rent a locker at the ice house to freeze the meat for winter. How can you beat that? A beautiful day on the ocean doing something you like, the sights, the sounds, friends you have just met (What did you say your name was?), the fresh ocean air, the deep-blue water it seems you can see forever down into – is there anything better?

With the bar behind us and Wildwood getting lower on the horizon the mates begin to distribute the cut-up clams in cardboard trays. Except for the boats around us, the ocean was empty. It does not occur to me that in all inlets on the east coast boats of all sizes and shapes have left their safe havens and are making their runs to the grounds. We will know the grounds we will be



trying first when we see a large number of boats anchored within a few feet of each other, close enough to talk between the boats. There may be as many as fifty boats on one ground at one time.

Most people are talking to their neighbor, perhaps the beginning of a new friendship, but there are few men sitting quietly looking out to sea wrapped up in their own thoughts. Are their thoughts going back as little as six years ago? A time when sailors fought a life and death struggle on the now placid surface over which we are now sailing? Are they remembering the death, destruction, explosions, fire, the very terror they faced, perhaps the death of ship-mates and ships, all those things that they faced and somehow surmounted? Are these some of the people, who sailed, especially early in the war, when the odds were against safe arrival? Are these the brave men, the heroes, who fought our ships through the far shores and ensured our freedom? Perhaps, someone I saw from afar as war-time convoys moved north and south along our coasts in convoys that stretched over the horizon in both directions? A majestic sight the meaning of which was beyond my comprehension at ten years of age in 1945? Could the oceans of the world look this placid and calm during the war? I ask the person next to me, one in deep thought, if everything is alright. He replies, he was only remembering....

I am jarred out of my reveries by Harry handing me my bait tray. It is not the fresh clams but leftovers, perhaps from yesterday. Their fame proceeds them, they do not have the most pleasant aroma. If one has a weak stomach this will decide the issue of being sea-sick or not. There are some even now for whom the clams have decided the issue. The rest of us check our tackle and bait our hooks. Hank lines and bait are furnished free on the boat. Rod and reel is more sporty, but a person with a hand line who knows what he is doing can catch more meat. We proved this on an earlier trip when one of our reels broke and we took turns with a hand line.

While I was deep in thought land disappeared behind us. The captain is jockeying for position among the boats, rather than dropping anchor at the back end of the fleet. He finds a spot and maneuvers between the boats. The engine slows to an idle. There is barely heard splash as the anchor is lowered. Line is being let out as the engine is shifted into reverse and we back down slowly. The engine stops, it is quiet, the hook has caught and we are in position. The captain says "all lines over". Some have not waited and even now they are bringing in fish.

I quickly drop my line over. My line hits bottom and I eagerly await the tug of a porgy. I wait. Nothing happens. I reel my line up and both baits are gone! I felt nothing. This happens several more times. Then I remember George Ford's advice that if you don't feel them bite, either they bit before your line hit bottom, or they bit before you got the slack out of your line. I try it. I stop my line just before it hits the bottom and raise the rod tip. If nothing happens I drop the line to the bottom and again raise the rod tip. One, or both of these work and I start to catch fish. Soon my bucket is overflowing and my fish are lying on the deck. We continue to catch fish. It's a good thing the ocean's resources are limitless or else we would catch all the fish and not leave any for those still to come.

The captains drop clam shells over the side, either whole or broken up for chum to attract the fish. You can see other chum in the water that is not clam shells. Some are not enjoying this trip. I am not criticizing, I am just making an observation, a few moments ago I thought I might join them.

One of my Porgies is very large and may do well on the balance arm later. The fish still bite so we continue fishing. Around noon we are visited by a school of summer mackerel. They don't usually bite on clam, but on this day they do. Someone hooks one reeling in his line. Soon, most of us, including myself, drop our lines just under the surface. These summer (Boston) Mackerel gives us diversion and a bit of sport. They are more lively than Porgies, but on heavy tackle they just splash around. Some have ignored the Mackerel. They are concentrating on meat in their burlap bags.

At 1:30 P.M. the captain calls "all lines up", and there is grumbling from the stern where the "meat" fisherman are sitting with their full bags. Some of the bags are so full they can't be closed anymore! They want more! They know we are moving closer to shore (in shore) to drift for fluke (summer flounder) and not that many are caught. We have sat here all day in one spot because the fishing was good.

The lines are in, the engine has started. The anchor is coming up. We are on our way inshore to drift for fluke. The mate has gone around the boat looking at the catch and says my largest porgy has a good chance to win the pool. I wish he didn't say that as there is \$3.50 in the pool (not everyone got in it) and any good size fluke would out weigh my Porgy.

We move in close to shore and we can see land. This seems to be some consolation to those

who have been "unwell". Most of us have switched to a single hook bottom rig with two large spinners and 4/0 hook. I switch to a ten ounce sinker to hold bottom better. I will add my 4oz. sinker if the tide and wind increase. A new bait is being passed out – fillet of Sea Robin which we caught earlier along with the rest of our catch.

We drifted for an hour or so about two miles off North Wildwood within sight of the black and orange striped water tower at 5<sup>th</sup> and New Jersey Ave. A few small Fluke were caught, including one by me. Fluke fishing never produces the quantity you can catch when you go porgy fishing. Fluke are usually larger and taste better. The captain has been watching the breakers on the ocean bar and the location that several other boats have crossed it. He now orders "all lines up, we're going in." Some of us are disappointed we didn't catch a "door mat" (a really big fluke of 10 or more) but, it has been a most glorious day.

As we near Moore's we can see that there is still a crowd on the pier. Half of the boats are still out so it looks like we will be able to sell our catch. The balancing of the fish will take place when we tie up at the pier. With the tide coming in and the boat being berthed bow towards the pier we pass the dock and turn into the tide. The captain puts the port bow against the outer piling and warns us "all hands and rods inside the boat". Harry and the mate quickly secure the lines and the engine is shut off. It is quiet, we can hear the people on the pier.

Mom and Dad are here to see how I made out. They ask me and I show them my fish all over the deck. There is no way to get me and my fish off the boat as things stand right now. It's decided that Dad will take his '37 Plymouth home and get the big galvanized wash tub in the back yard and bring it back, but after the weigh-in. The weigh-in is an event and people crowd the edge of the pier to watch the catch of the day. Those with large edible fish put them on the balance arm and pit one fish against another. Sometimes, unsure that the arm is accurate they ask that the fish be swapped end for end. The heavier fish goes down the lighter one goes up. My large Porgy goes on the arm and beats all comers but one, by a visible margin. It is very close but in my favor. He asks they be switched end to end. I do not object. I want to be reasonable.

The result is the same. He doesn't give up. He squeezes my fish to see if there is a sinker inside! This stinker doesn't give up and now he wants me to cut open my fish. Now, I object. There are no weights in my fish and I ask the mate to verify it. He does. I receive the enormous sum of \$3.50. Amazing!

Dad goes home to get the wash tub. I start to sell some of my catch. I sell 3 Porgies for .25¢. I don't really have to sell them, they sell themselves, and people want to buy! I sell \$3.25 worth of fish, a total of 39 fish. I sell the last 10 for .25¢ and still have plenty to take home. The wash tub is still needed. The fish are put in the tub and taken home where I spend more than an hour cleaning the fish only to give them away.

The trip cost \$2.50 including the pool. I won the pool, sold part of my catch and had fresh fish left over. I had a wonderful day on the water, fresh air and sunshine. For a layout of about \$5.00, I returned with \$7.00. Not bad!

So ends my tale of "A Day's Trip". The day ended, the trip is over, these boats sail no more – except in my memory which fades a bit more every year. Until ? Were you there? 