

The Beacon

A Collaboration Between
The Margate City Historical Society and The Margate Public Library

How the Railroads came to Margate

The Railroad Years

- **1854** July 4. Camden & Atlantic RR opened public service from Camden to Atlantic City.
- **1876** Philadelphia & Atlantic City RR opens service from Camden to Atlantic City.
- **1879** West Jersey & Atlantic RR (organized by the PA RR built a line off of the Cape May line).
- **1881** South Atlantic City Branch of the Camden & Atlantic RR Built to modern-day Margate.
- **1884** Track extended to Longport.
- **1888** Rapid Transit "steam motors" replace RR mules in AC.
- **1889** Electric Street cars to Atlantic Ave in AC.

The Railroads Shape the Development of Absecon Island

Railroad companies engineered the blossoming of Absecon Island. Before the railroad only a few settlers eked out a living from the sandy soil, and then with the advent of railroads, everything changed. Cars were not mass produced in America until around 1900; trains arrived on Absecon Island in 1854, offering a dependable, economical modality for land travel that put the New Jersey shore within reach of what is now considered nearby Philadelphia. The railroad companies were the first developers of the island. Beyond laying the track and building the engines, the Camden & Atlantic Railroad provided the vast capital that was needed to



Pennsylvania Railroad's steam engine model HC1 traveled from Philadelphia to Atlantic City. This photo dated June 22, 1919. Photo: Pennsylvania RR Technical and Historical Society.

develop the Island, and the advertising to popularize it as a destination. For a hundred years, railroads dominated Absecon Island, and they made it what it is today.

Dr. Jonathan Pitney, who first recommended Absecon Island as a health resort, was so sure of himself that he took it upon himself to establish The Camden and Atlantic Railroad Company on June 4, 1852. The Camden & Atlantic

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Trolley Tracks in Margate

The same railroad companies that defined and developed Atlantic City were also foundational to



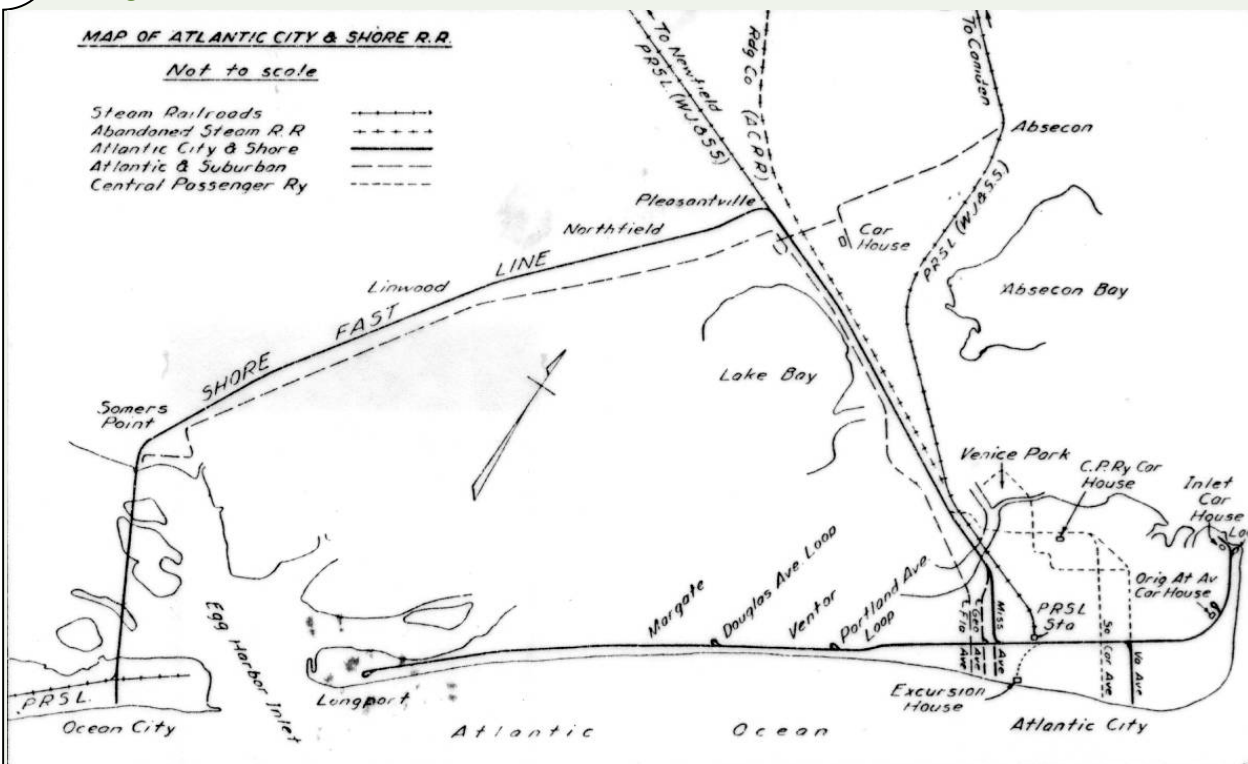
the city that would become Margate. Frank Tiemann writes that "The Camden and Atlantic Land Company bought [what is now] Ventnor and the upper half of Margate from Mark Reed for the sum of \$1,680.00 in 1853." (Frank Tiemann) In 1861, the Railroad was "authorized to build to the lower end of the Absecon Island. [modern Margate]" (Hamilton & Francis, 1951, pg. 4)

(Continued on page 2)

MAP OF ATLANTIC CITY & SHORE R.R.

Not to scale

Steam Railroads ————
 Abandoned Steam R.R. - - - - -
 Atlantic City & Shore ————
 Atlantic & Suburban - - - - -
 Central Passenger Ry - - - - -



A map of the Shore Fast Line as it ran at the peak of service during the 1920s and 1930s.

Trolley Tracks in Margate

- **1926** Boardwalk & Virginia Avenue to Margate service ended.
- **1933** South Jersey & AC RR (owned by Reading RR) and West Jersey Seashore RR (PRR owned) consolidated into PRR Seashore Lines.
- **1936** Last summer of daily service of the open car on Atlantic Ave in Margate and Longport.
- **1944** Great Atlantic Hurricane Disrupts services on rail lines.
- **1945** Atlantic City Transportation Company takes over trolleys.
- **1955** End of Trolley Service in Margate.

(Continued from page 1)

However, Camden and Atlantic did not take immediate advantage of this authorization. At the time, there were few residents on the southern end of the Island, and hence, little reason to extend rail service beyond Atlantic City.

Perhaps the most important early resident of Margate was Lucy the Elephant. Lucy the Elephant, as a good Margate history buff will know, was the brainchild of a Philadelphia developer named James V. Lafferty. Lafferty constructed the "Elephant Hotel," as it was then known, in 1881 in an attempt to increase the desirability and property values south of Atlantic City. His success prompted The Camden

and Atlantic Railroad to extend tracks to (now Margate) later in 1881. (Frank Tiemann) The Camden & Atlantic Railroad came under the control of the Pennsylvania Railroad in 1883. They built farther, to Longport in 1884. South Atlantic City and Longport were first served weekly on Sundays by full-sized steam engines. So-called "rapid transit" followed in 1888. (Hamilton & Francis, 1951, pg. 4-5) These Baldwin locomotives were also steam engines which operated from Tennessee Avenue in Atlantic City to Longport. They stopped only at specified stations. (In Atlantic City, local transit was still accomplished by street cars on tracks pulled by mules or horses!

This persisted until May 10, 1889.) (Hamilton & Francis, 1951, pg. 5)

The iconic cars of the Margate rails were undoubtedly the "Open Cars" that debuted in 1890. In 1893, the South Atlantic City branch was converted from steam to electric service. (Hamilton & Francis, 1951, pg. 5) The year 1896 saw the beginning of corporate consolidations on the South Jersey rail infrastructure. The Camden & Atlantic, The West Jersey Railroad, and The West Jersey & Atlantic came together to form the West Jersey and Seashore lines. In 1907 service from Atlantic City was extended across the Meadows, via Somers' Point and across great Egg

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Walt Whitman Rides the Rails to the Sea

Facts are the backbone of our historical record, but the flesh of history is in primary sources. Writings from the past (rather than about the past) enrich our human connection to our predecessors. The great American writer and humanist Walt Whitman made his home in South Jersey. He wrote a lyrical first-hand account of his experience riding the new rails from his home in Camden to Absecon Island in 1879. The entire piece can be found on pages 145-151 in the excellent collection Shore Chronicles: diaries and traveler's tales from the Jersey Shore 1764-1955, edited by Margaret Thomas Buchholz, available at the Margate Public Library. Below is an excerpted portion. Whitman had suffered a stroke at the time of his trip.

Walking slowing, or rather hobbling (my paralysis, though partial seems permanent), the hundred rods to the little platform and shanty bearing the big name of "Pennsylvania Junction," were not without enjoyment to me, in this pleasant mixture of cold and sunbeams...

From the car-windows a view of the country, in its winter garb. These farms are mostly devoted to market truck, and are generally well cultivated. Passing the little station of Glenwood and Collingswood—then stopping at old, beautiful, rich and quite populous Haddonfield, with its fine tree-lined main street (Revolutionary, military reminiscences too—a tradition that the Continental Congress itself held a session here)...

Five miles from Kirkwood we strike the thrifty town of Berlin (old name Long-a-Coming, which they had much better kept). We reach Atco, three miles further on—quite a brisk settlement in the brush, with a newspaper, some stores, and a little branch railroad to Williamstown. At the eighteen mile post the grade of the railroad reaches its highest

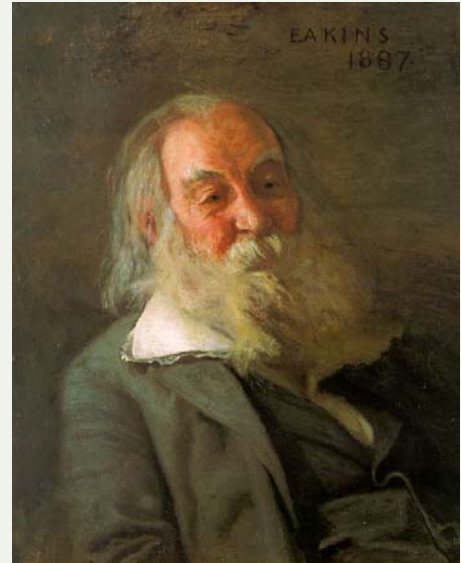
Right: Portrait of the poet Walt Whitman by the painter Thomas Eakins from 1887, after the stroke that left Whitman partially paralyzed. Whitman is said to have approved of the portrait, thinking it quite realistic.

point, being one hundred and eighty feet above the sea. Here is what is called by the engineer, "the divide," the water on the west flowing to the Delaware, and on the East to the Ocean.

The soil has now become sandy and thin, and continues so for the ensuing forty miles; flat, thin, bare gray-white, yet not without agreeable features—pines, cedars, scrub oaks plenty—patches of clear fields, but much larger patches of pines and sand...

...The whole route (at any rate from Haddonfield to the Seashore) has been literally made and opened up to growth by the Camden and Atlantic Railroad. That has furnished spine to a section previously without any...

We come to Egg Harbor City, settled about twenty five years ago by the Germans, and now with quite a reputation for grape culture and wine-making—scattered houses off



in the distances, and a little branch railroad to May's Landing; then Pomona, and then another lively town, Absecon, and old and quite good-sized settlement, 52 miles from Philadelphia...

Passing right through five or six miles (I could have journeyed with delight for a hundred of these ordorous sea prairies we come to the end—the Camden and Atlantic depot, within good gun-shot of the beach. I no sooner land from the cars than I meet impromptu with young Mr. English (of the just mentioned *Review* newspaper), who treats me with all brotherly and gen-

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(Continued from page 3)

tlemanly kindness, posts me up about things, puts me on the best roads, and starts me right. A flat, still sandy, still meadow region (some old hummocks with their hard sedge, in tufts, still remaining) an island, but good hard roads and plenty of them, really pleasant streets, very little show of trees, shrubbery, etc., but in lieu of them a superb range of ocean beach—miles and miles of it, for driving walking, bathing—a real Sea Beach City indeed, with salt waves and sandy shores ad libitum.

I have a fine and bracing drive along the smooth sand (the carriage wheels hardly made a dent in it). The bright sun, the sparkling waves, the foam, the view—Brigantine Beach, a sail here and there in the distance—the vital, vast, monotonous sea—all the fascination of simple, uninterrupted space, shore, salt atmosphere, sky (people who go there often and get used to it get infatuated and won't go anywhere else), were the items of my drive. Then, after nearly two hours of this shore, we trotted rapidly around

and through the city itself—capital good roads everywhere, hard, smooth, well-kept, a pleasure to drive on them. Atlantic avenue, the principal street; Pacific Avenue, with its rows of choice private cottages, and many, many others. (I had the good fortune to be driven around by William Biddle, a young married man—a hackman by occupation-- an excellent companion and cicerone—(owner of his own good team and carriage). Then after dinner (as there were nearly two hours to spare) I walked off in another direction (hardly met or saw a person), and taking possession of what appeared to have been the reception room of an old bath-house range, had a broad expanse of view all to myself—quaint, refreshing, unimpeded—the dry area of sedge and Indian grass immediately before and round me—space, space, with a sort of grimness about it—simple, unornamented space. In front, as far as I could see, and right and left, plenty of beach, only broken by a few unpainted houses, in piles, here and there—distant vessels, and the far-off, just visible trailing smoke of an in-

ward bound steamer. More plainly, ship, brigs, schooners, in sign in the distance. How silently, spiritually like phantoms (even in the midst of the bright sunshine and the objective world around me), they glide away off there—most of them with every sail set to the firm and steady wind. How the main attraction and fascination are in sea and shore! How the soul dwells on their simplicity, eternity, grimness, absence of art! Although it is not generally thought of, except in connection with hot weather, I am not sure but Atlantic City would suit me just as well, perhaps best, for winter quarters. As to bad weather, it is no worse than anywhere else; and when fine, the pleasures and characteristic attractions are inimitable...

The entire piece can be found on pages 145-151 in the excellent collection Shore Chronicles: diaries and traveler's tales from the Jersey Shore 1764-1955, edited by Margaret Thomas Buchholz, available at the Margate Public Library.



A Pennsylvania Railroad E6 steam engine. This model of engine served on the tracks between Camden and Atlantic City during the 1920s. (Many years after Whitman's ride down the same tracks.)

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Trolley Tracks in Margate

(Continued from page 2)

Harbor Bay to Ocean City on the *Shore Fast Line*. (Hamilton & Francis, 1951, pg. 7-8)

Some Margatians may still remember service from the Inlet to Longport, this began in 1908. (Hamilton & Francis, 1951, pg. 9) During WWI the old Tennessee Ave. to Longport service was discontinued, and in 1921 the line from Boardwalk-Virginia Avenue to then Savannah (now Clermont) was cut back to the Portland avenue loop in Ventnor. It was extended again to Cedar Grove (Margate) in 1923 and then discontinued altogether in 1926. (Hamilton & Francis, 1951, pg. 10) This left only the line most familiar in the Margatian popular memory: the Atlantic Avenue line.

The Great Depression brought further consolidation of many seashore transit services under the auspices of the Pennsylvania-Reading Seashore Lines. The beloved "Open Cars" that had been in service since 1890, served only weekends in the summer of 1937, only 2 days in 1938, and only on the July 4th in 1939. They were scrapped in 1939. (Hamilton & Francis, 1951, pg. 13) A new Brilliner car was purchased in

1938, and a fleet of 24 came on in 1940. The Great Atlantic Hurricane disrupted trolley service to Margate in 1944. The Atlantic City Transportation company took over the line in 1945. The trolleys lasted until 1955 when the Brilliner cars were scrapped and the right-of-ways were sold to the cities to raise money for a fleet of buses.

I Remember Margate...

This quarter featuring Mrs. Kathryn DiGiacinto and Mrs. Renée Fiore with memories of the Margate Trolleys.

We met Mrs. DiGiacinto and Mrs. Fiore for lunch at Mrs. DiGiacinto's home in Margate. Kay DiGiacinto and Renée Fiore have been friends for 60 years, but even before that Mrs. DiGiacinto knew Mrs. Fiore's father, Mr. Stanley Bowling, because starting around 1928, Bowling began working on the trolleys as a motorman. The motorman drove the trolley, while a conductor took fares and tickets. Bowling worked on the trolleys until the Atlantic City Transportation Company sold the right-of-way down Atlantic Avenue to buy buses in 1955.

Mrs. DiGiacinto came to Absecon Island sometime after the death of her mother in 1928 when she was 7. She took the trolley through three stages of her life. Starting in fourth grade, she took the trolley every day from Ventnor to visit her aunt who lived in Atlantic City



Kathryn DiGiacinto & Renée Fiore, Margate

by the inlet. Her aunt's hospitality earned her home the name of "Dew Drop Inn," though it was a private home, not an inn at all. Mrs. DiGiacinto first knew Mr. Bowling as a child when she rode the trolley to her aunt's house. Later, Mrs. DiGiacinto rode the trolley to High School each day for 7 cents each way. In the 1930s, they remember, the jitney cost 10 cents. After high school, Mrs. DiGiacinto went to work for the Radio Station then located in Convention Hall on the Boardwalk. She took the trolley then, too. Both ladies remember that the trolley ran from quite early in the morning until quite late, 1 or perhaps 2 in the morning. The friends have fond memories of the renowned "open" or "summer" cars, which ran in fair weather from 1890 through July 4, 1939. When the trolleys lines were taken out in 1955, Mr. Bowling was still a motorman. Bowling, whose family (like most Absecon Island families at the time) had not owned a car, then got a driver's license and began driving buses. "They never should have taken out the trolleys," Mrs. DiGiacinto added.

(Continued from page 1)

Railroad funded The United States Hotel and was instrumental in the establishment of the Absecon Lighthouse. (Treese, 2006, pg. 173) It was Richard Boyse Osborne (spelling disputed) of the board of the Camden & Atlantic Railroad who named Atlantic City and even chose the Oceans and States street names. (Mauger, 2008, pg. 5) The map of Absecon Island was drawn by the Camden and Atlantic Railroad, which then built the resort to the specifications of their map.

The first step in making the resort a reality was to buy the land at the terminus of the railroad, which the railroad directors did. They made their purchases through the Camden and Atlantic Land Company, which they founded in 1853. They promoted and sold building lots. (Treese, 2006, pg. 173) This was the mood of development that the Camden and Atlantic had facilitated

when "the first rail passengers arrived on Absecon Island July 4, 1854." (Hamilton & Francis, 1951, pg. 2)

The Camden and Atlantic Railroad was the first train line to run on Absecon Island, but competition came clickety-clacking in. After granting the Camden & Atlantic a considerable head start, The Philadelphia and Atlantic City Railway laid their track from Philadelphia to Atlantic City in just 90 days, opening on July 7, 1877. (Hamilton & Francis, 1951, pg. 4) The fierce competition prompted a price cutting war, and the younger company went bankrupt. It was bought by the Philadelphia and Reading Railway (of Monopoly fame). After the end of the American Civil War, the Pennsylvania Railroad was the largest corporation in the world. The venerable Pennsylvania Railroad entered the fray with a track to Atlantic City in 1879. Consolidations began as the Pennsylvania Railroad took control of the Camden and Atlantic

Railroad in 1883. (Hamilton & Francis, 1951, pg. 4)

Massive consolidation began in 1896. The Camden & Atlantic, West Jersey Railroad, and the West Jersey & Atlantic Railroad consolidated to become the West Jersey and Seashore Lines, which were controlled by the powerful Pennsylvania Railroad. Mauger writes, "Many communities can credit the railroads with their development, but no major city owes as much to them as Atlantic City. [...] by 1925, ninety-nine trains per day were arriving in Atlantic City." (Hamilton & Francis, 1951, pg. 2)

Steam locomotives even chugged down the trolley tracks into Margate on occasion into the 1940s, as many Margatians remember.

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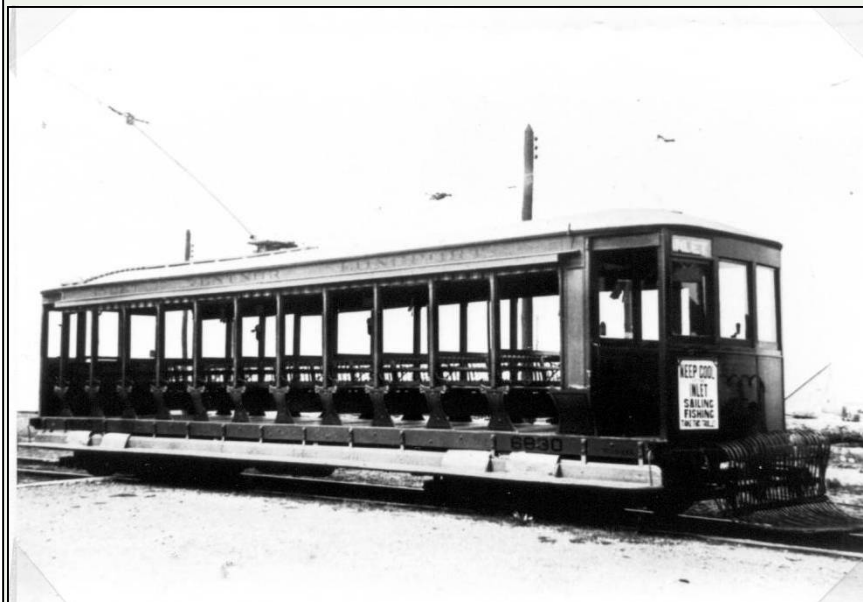
All issues of *The Beacon* are developed based on the collections of the Margate City Historical Society.

The Picture Page



Left:
Station at
Douglass
Avenue Loop in
1946.

Below: The
much vaunted
“open car”
which ran in
fair weather
between 1890-
1939



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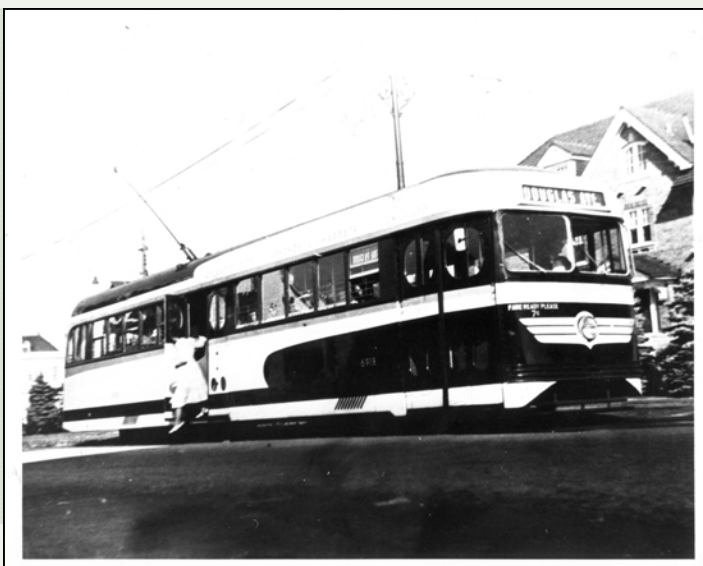
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Right:
Woman
disembarks
a trolley
bound for
the Doug-
lass Ave.
Loop in the
1940s.



Lucy E. Saxon, Editor,
Margate City Public Library

Frank Tiemann, President,
Margate City Historical Society

Jim Cahill, Director,
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