

[Kyle Morgan] 0:00

Who was Cassimer Whitman Boynton, and what was his vision for the property he purchased on the Arthur Kill in Sewaren?

[Tara Dubay] 0:12

Cassimer Boynton was a businessman. He was born in Bangor, Maine. He went to Brooklyn and studied engineering. He ended up on the west coast in San Francisco and he was indigenous into the waterways in San Francisco. He came back to the east coast, where he built a factory in Sewaren, and they manufactured fire brick and hollow tiles which was used to lay sewer lines in the town. So, he was very much a businessman first.

[Kyle Morgan] 0:53

Sounds like an entrepreneur of his time.

[Tara Dubay] 0:55

He was, he was a visionary. He saw an opportunity in the Sewaren waterfront and purchased 300 acres. He saw that Henry Ackers already had some boat houses and there was a competitive spirit between them. He said, I could do that, but I could do it better than him. So, whatever Ackers did, Boynton wanted to one up him all the time. That was the beginning of the Boynton Beach Resort, which he aptly named after himself.

[Kyle Morgan] 1:31

When did Boynton Beach Resort first open and what were some of the key attractions during its early days?

[Tara Dubay] 1:37

1876, They were attracting people with shade trees and picnic groves. It was a slow start. They had plans to build a pavilion and by the next season, the pavilion was built. They added attractions one by one year after year because they wanted to be able to advertise new features every year and keep their clientele coming year after year for visits.

[Kyle Morgan] 2:11

Now, Boynton Beach over time featured a bathing beach, pony rides, shooting galleries, a bowling alley even amusement rides like a Ferris Wheel, a merry go round and a bamboo slide. What would you think it would have been like to visit Boynton Beach in those golden days and experience those attractions during that time?

[Tara Dubay] 2:33

Well, it was certainly a family resort. They attracted with many of the amusement rides of the day. It was also for adults. They had boat rentals and they had plenty of them and bath houses and as you mentioned all the rides and amusements. The nightlife was beyond what anybody could dream up for a beautiful summer evening. It was really the social place to be in the Gilded Age.

[Kyle Morgan] 3:10

So, a lot of the socialites during that time would be attending Boynton Beach?

[Tara Dubay] 3:19

Absolutely, some people spend most of their summers there, not just on the weekend. They would vacation there and that was their vacation time. It was, you know if your neighbor was going, you would give your husband a nudge and say let's go there too, because it was very prestigious to say that you did spend some time at Boynton Beach.

[Kyle Morgan] 3:44

That's really cool. Can you tell me a little bit more about the Boynton Beach dance pavilion. What was the atmosphere like on Saturday nights with the live orchestra? What do you think it would be like then?

[Tara Dubay] 3:55

Well, the live orchestra would come in and they would hire the finest chefs from New York. The women would wear their finest gowns and the men their formal attire. It was just dancing inside and outside on the dance floor. Children were included in the dance pavilion; it wasn't adult alone. It was really a highlight of a summer socialite event, that wanted to be bragged about, wanting to be talked about for years to come.

[Kyle Morgan] 4:33

Can you tell me a little bit about the history of the Sewaren Hotel that was near Boynton Beach and some of the notable guests that stayed at the hotel?

[Tara Dubay] 4:41

Well, the Sewaren Hotel opened in 1887 by Robert Weeks DeForest who is the son in law of John Taylor Johnson, who I'll circle back to in a little bit. They had famous actress, Maude Adams and Thomas Edison spent many nights at Sewaren Hotel. He had a standing order with the tavern that was over by Crab Beach, which is another area in Sewaren which was kind of touted as the poor man's Boynton Beach. Edison would have a case of lager beer delivered to his room once a week and the delivery boy who was the son of the owner would bring in his lager beer and he would have to bring it at dark. He always said that how ironic for the inventor of the light to sit in the dark to receive his beer.

[Kyle Morgan] 5:53

That's an amazing story. Now, Boynton Beach itself has a reputation for a wholesome family friendly resort due to Cassimer Boynton principles. How do you think the lack of alcohol shaped the actual resort during that timeframe? Do you think it actually had any kind of influence on the characters of the clientele that attended Boynton Beach?

[Tara Dubay] 6:24

People came year after year. There was no alcohol in his resort, but it seemed to not matter because they were always crowded. People came year after year. But if they really wanted to have a drink, there was the tavern over by Crab Beach. The Sewaren Hotel was right next door. There was a rumor that there might have been an underground distillery, but we don't know that for sure. But there was certainly opportunity to have alcohol, it just was not served on Boynton property.

[Kyle Morgan] 7:03

So even though Boynton Beach was a nonalcoholic location, the ability to stay in the town of Sewaren, there was other things for adults to do in the area. So that really drew people to the resort because now you have this great family resort but at the same time when the nighttime comes you can always go to see Sewaren Hotel or go to tavern and indulge in what you like to do. Or maybe even the underground distillery offered you something.

[Tara Dubay] 7:27

I'm sure there were some people that did have their higher morals and we're also on the nonalcoholic phase, so it certainly did not hurt business.

[Kyle Morgan] 7:44

So, during that timeframe transportation was a was a big thing. C.W Boynton built the trolley system that provided transportation into the resort. Can you tell me about this trolley system and maybe how it contributed to making Boynton Beach such a popular destination during that time?

[Tara Dubay] 8:00

Well, again, Mr. Boynton was a businessman, and he knew one of the keys to the success of his Boynton Beach Resort was to get people there. To get people there he had to build the infrastructure to get people to the resort easily. He built a trolley system from Rahway to Sewaren and then from Woodbridge into Sewaren. There were plans on bringing it into Perth Amboy, but that never happened. They did have kind of a crude looking ferry system on pulleys to pull people in, see there were ferries that came twice a week from New York. I had mentioned about John Taylor Johnson, who was the father-in-law of the owner of the Sewaren Hotel, he had purchased property and Sewaren and he was the president of the Central Railroad of New Jersey. He had the railroad come in, there was an actual train depot in Sewaren as well. So, it was anything they could do to get people to the resort easily without too much of a hassle. And they were pretty successful for quite a few years.

[Kyle Morgan] 9:20

It seems like they had a very detailed transportation network to get to the Boynton Beach area. Unfortunately, Cassimer Boynton passed away in 1908 and then his wife in 1913. This was just a year before the resort completely shut down in 1914. Do you think losing its founders during these years contributed to the resort's closure?

[Tara Dubay] 9:45

Yes, it certainly did. But there were other factors that played key into this as well. When Cassimer Boynton died, his wife kept it going for a while, but industrialization was building up around them. People were maybe moving further down the Jersey coast. To say Long Branch, most people of that wealth owned their own cars. So, they were able to use that transportation to go somewhere else. Sewaren Hotel was closing down. They didn't have a lot of occupancy. It was in disrepair. By 1916 there was a fire and by the 1920s the oil refinery bought the property and the you know absorbed the streets of Boynton Beach, Sewaren Hotel property, and in the

middle, you know through the 1920s three of Boynton sons died as well. The family by 1929 there wasn't a lot of Boyntons left, the property was sold, the refineries were taken over, and other industrial were taken over.

[Kyle Morgan] 11:10

All these factors really played a major part in the transition to where Boynton Beach went to.

[Tara Dubay] 11:15

And of course, the stock market crash of 1929. World War One was on the horizon. There was just a lot of factors into the end of Boynton Beach and the Gilded Age.

[Kyle Morgan] 11:32

As you were saying in 1924, Acker's Grove and the boat house was sold to the Royal Petroleum Company, and then just a few years later in 1927, Boynton Beach this property was sold to Shell Oil Company. How did this transition from resort destination to oil industrialization impact the town of Sewaren and the waterfront itself?

[Tara Dubay] 11:52

It was not just an overnight transition. It was a slow progression of change. There were a lot of zoning variances that had to be dealt with the absorbed three public streets that they had to defunct, which was a slow process, just changing over into building the refinery, the refineries it took many years for it to come to fruition. People still enjoyed the beach for years even though there were no attractions anymore.

[Kyle Morgan] 12:33

People went up to the beach you'd say until what timeframe?

[Tara Dubay] 12:36

I would say through the 1950s. Certainly the beaches were crowded with beach goers. As you can see in this picture. There are people that are still swimming and boating and fishing. Even though there were no hotels or pony rides to be had. It was still a destination.

[Kyle Morgan] 12:59

Okay, and then so by the 1960s pollution was happening in the Arthur Kill that made these public beaches a little bit hazardous for swimming. How did the Sewaren residents respond to this environmental damage that was going on at this time?

[Tara Dubay] 13:13

Oh absolutely. It became at first in the 1950s it might have been a little unsavory, but by the 1960s there were just garbage and medical waste washing up on the beaches, and the citizens just had it with their beautiful waterfront. So, by the 1960s they were protesting and picketing and petitioning to get some change and nationally, Life Magazine took notice. They actually made a 1969 Life Magazine for their efforts into environmental issues. It wasn't until probably later in the 1970s that changes started happening, where there were efforts for cleaner waterways and pollution and how garbage is dealt with. The townspeople certainly were industrialists in making the change, fighting for their town.

[Kyle Morgan] 14:28

After this stand and national awareness in 1970s, despite the refineries and the pollution, Sewaren residents worked to preserve their splendor waterfront homes. What do you think motivated them behind this, even though there's so much change going on?

[Tara Dubay] 14:47

They still have their beautiful waterfront view. It's they enjoy their lifestyle of living on a marina or looking out their window and seeing water, even if they do see barges coming through and maybe they see some oil tanks. It doesn't take away from the beautiful water, seagulls, and salt air, it's just the lifestyle that they enjoy. It is worth fighting for. The homes there are just beautiful along Cliff Road. People have been there for generation after generation or decades on end, so they don't leave.

[Kyle Morgan] 15:37

So regardless of this pollution, the strong sense of community in Sewaren still stood strong. What elements of Boynton Beach legacy still remain today. In Sewaren if there is any?

[**Tara Dubay**] 15:53

Well, unfortunately the Boynton Beach Resort is now the oil refinery. If there are any remnants left the public will not be seeing them. It is storytelling, it is keeping the legacy alive by writing it down, documenting it, telling people, and going to the Woodbridge Museum to see the displays on Boynton Beach in its heyday.

[**Kyle Morgan**] 16:27

Outside of the actual Boynton Beach area, just maybe in the larger census. Sewaren, are there any more of these beautiful, gilded homes that still are there today?

[**Tara Dubay**] 16:35

Absolutely. Just take a ride down Cliff Road. You can see a lot of the homes that were built in the late 1870s, 1880s, 1890s. They're still there. There are newer homes built in between because of course they cut down the larger lots. But you will see those homes and you can only imagine what it was like to live in those homes at that time.

[**Kyle Morgan**] 17:02

That's awesome. And what would you like for people to know about Sewaren and its past?

[**Tara Dubay**] 17:09

Sewaren is still a great town. It's, you know, building up a little bit now, they're building a Tiki Bar. The Alvin P. Williams Park is phenomenal for children or for walking or for sitting and watching boaters go by. It really is a place to bring your boats and there still is Tavern in town. So, if you still want a case of a lager beer delivered like Thomas Edison, you can live that lifestyle and you can relive those days.

Perfect. Thank you. I appreciate it.