History of Asbury Park and Long Branch

Together with the Traditions of the Indians & Settlers of Monmouth & Ocean Counties, N. J.

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Early History of Long Branch

From SALTER'S History of Monmouth Co.

THE earliest mention of Long Branch in any historical works that the writer of this has found is in Watson's Annals of Philadelphia, published in 1830, as follows:

"This place before the Revolution, was owned by Colonel White, a British officer and an inhabitant of New York. The small house he occupied as a summer residence was existing among a clump of houses owned by Renshaw in 1830. In consequence of the war the place was confiscated. The house was first used as a boarding house by Elliston Perot of Philadelphia, in 1788. At that time the whole premises were in charge of one old woman left to keep the place from injury. Of her Mr. Perot begged an asylum for himself and family, which was granted, provided he could get beds and bedding from others. Being pleased with the place he repeated his visit there three successive years, taking his friends with him. In 1790-1, Mr. McKnight of Monmouth, noticing the liking shown for the place, deemed it a good speculation to buy it. He bought the whole premises, containing one hundred acres for £700 and then got Mr. Perot and others to loan him $2,000 to improve it. He then opened it for a watering place, and before his death it was supposed he had made forty thousand dollars by the investment. The estate was sold to Renshaw for $13,000. Elliston Perot was really the founder of Long Branch as a summer resort.

"Long Branch takes its name from a brook, a branch of the South Shrewsbury River which runs in a direct line northward along the coast.

"Tradition points to an Indian Fishery, established in 1734, as the first occupation of this place which was styled at that time Lands' End. A legend tells us that in those early times four men, Slocum, Parker, Wardell and Hulett, came from Rhode Island in quest of land. They found the Indians friendly but not disposed to sell. It was proposed by the Yankees that a wrestling match should be made up between one Indian and one of the whites, to be decided by the best in three rounds. If the champion of the white man won, they were to have as much land as they could walk around in a day; if otherwise they were to leave peaceably. John Slocum was selected for the struggle—a man of great proportions, athletic and of great strength.

"Great preparations were made to witness the encounter. The spot chosen was the present Fishing Land. Slocum proved too much for the Indian, and after a hard struggle won.

"The land was divided and the descendants to this day own a portion of the land gained by the struggle."

HISTORY OF ASBURY PARK.

By James A. Bradley.

ONE afternoon in May, 1870, I was walking down Broadway, New York, and suddenly ran against my friend, David H. Brown, Esq., Treasurer of the Ocean Grove Association 'How is Ocean Grove getting along?' I asked. 'Very fairly,' said he, 'why don't you buy a lot? Those who have their names put

down now have first choice,' 'well put me down for two,' said I. A few days after, in company with some friends we started for Ocean Grove. We took the boat for Port Monmouth, thence by railroad to Eatontown. The sea-shore route was opened a few days afterwards. After dining at Mr. Brown's country house at Eatontown, we drove to Ocean Grove in carriages. The turnpike company had just commenced operations, and from Great Pond to Ocean Grove was one of the worst roads that could be imagined. I was completely taken with Ocean Grove and its surroundings—so much so that I purchased the first lot ever sold there, the premium being $85.

"Having for some time previous been in bad health, I concluded to try what I had been recommended—sea air. Too close application to business had made inroads on my constitution and my nervous system was seriously affected. So a few days after purchasing the lots, taking two horses, carriage and tent, and John Baker, my colored man, I left the hum of the city behind, to become an inhabitant of the wild woods, where my wearied body and brain might rest, lulled to sleep by the murmuring sea at night and awakened in the morning by the songs of birds in the pine trees surrounding my couch.

"John and I arrived at Ocean Grove just at nightfall, and having got our horses under shelter in a barn belonging to Charles Rogers, near the present Ocean Grove school house, we entered the woods, and about half a mile off, erected our tent, it was too dark to get poles, so we hung the tent on the beams of what was afterwards the Association office, the first building ever erected in Ocean Grove. (This building stood near the Auditorium and was afterward torn down or removed).

The building at that time was without roof. We were without light, and soon after lunching on some crackers we lay down to sleep, our heads resting on the carriage cushions, and our covering being carriage blankets. So we spent our first night at Ocean Grove, and so began an entire change in my mode of life, and which led eventually to an almost complete restoration to health.

"In the morning Baker sighed and said, 'Mr. B., this is a wilderness place.' He was homesick; for let the reader, who perhaps has been on the same spot during the busy summer season, and heard the continuous click of the telegraph instrument and seen the vast throng of men and maidens call for their letters when the mail arrives, remember it was far different on the morning of which we are writing; although it was the 10th of June, not a soul was within hearing distance of us, I cheered him by saying: 'Oh! don't be cast down' and soon we were eating our morning lunch. That finished, we proceeded to my lots on the lake, and pitched our small tent on the ground now built upon and owned by Rev. Alfred Cookman's widow. My large tent was erected, and so we began our Crusoe life. During the day we occasionally saw Forman Franklin's men who worked about the grounds, and at night we were left to our solitude. Mr. Franklin's men tented on the lots now covered by the Hayward cottage, but on Sundays went to their homes in the interior of the township.

"Baker was my steward, housekeeper and cook. I procured a box and dug a hole in the ground and put it in, and that was our ice house. We would sometimes drive to Long Branch, six miles away, and procure food, principally canned goods. Mr. Franklin's men indulged

more in fresh meats than Baker and I, so I would trade canned goods for the old fashioned savory stew that gave muscle to the men who first removed briars and brush from Ocean Grove and made its streets.

"One evening Baker and I took a stroll along the ocean and I proposed a bath. Baker smiled and said, 'No, no.' 'But remember, John, cleanliness is next to godliness.' I took an ocean bath ; but, oh, how different from the way bathers usually enjoy the surf, the waves dashing over their heads. I laid down on the soft sand and allowed the water to just touch my body, and I can tell you, reader, it is somewhat lonely to trust yourself in the great ocean in the twilight and alone. After I had been lying on the beach for a little while, I looked around to see what had become of Baker. He had plucked up courage by my example and had really divested himself of his clothes, and, coward, like myself, barely allowed the water to touch him. His dusky skin was somewhat in contrast with the white sand, and the whole scene forcibly reminded me of Robinson Crusoe and his man Friday.

"During the camp-meeting that took place in August, we often heard the inquiry, 'who owns the land on the other side of the lake?' One day Rev. Wm. B. Osborne and myself went over, and at the risk of having our clothes torn off, worked our way through the briars until we reached Sunset Lake. And, like the red man of whom we read in tradition, we could say 'Alabama—here we rest ; ' for we stood on the banks of as beautiful a sheet of water as can be found anywhere. We returned to the Grove by way of the beach, and soon set to work to make up a company to purchase the land. We learned the owner would not sell the land in parcels, but the pur-

chaser must take the whole or none. Here was a difficulty ; five hundred acres !—wilderness and barren sand-waste, without a house or inhabitant, and not a foot of cultivated soil in the whole tract. 'Never mind,' said some, 'the more land we have the more profit we will have.' Our company was to consist of eight persons, some of whom were very enthusiastic ; but when the cool nights of autumn came along, it chilled their enthusiasm, and their example had its chilling effect on me. But I often thought of the matter, and as soon as I heard that Bishop Simpson, of the M. E. Church, urged the Ocean Grove Association to purchase it, to prevent its falling into the hands of some one who was not in sympathy with the enterprise they had in their hands, I called on David H. Brown, and proposed he should join me in the purchase by taking one-eighth, the price asked being $90,000. 'No,' said he, 'I am determined to have nothing to do with any enterprise in that neighborhood that would seem to place me in an inconsistent position, as I am now treasurer of the Ocean Grove Association. This I will do ; I will write to every member of the Association, and if they say buy it, I am inclined to think I shall not oppose it, although I think we have enough land now. But if they do not buy it, you can. And as you wish me to negotiate the purchase, I will do so, on condition that you advance the requisite amount to secure the property, and if the Association decide to take it, your money to be refunded, we are to have a week's option to consider the matter.' A majority of the Association decided not to purchase the land, although some urged it very strongly ; so the property became mine—I, at the same time assuring them that the property would

be resold only to such parties as would appreciate the situation of the place.

"After the purchase, the briars before alluded to, with the tangled underbush, were removed at a cost of several thousand dollars, and very few would now suppose that the choice spot upon which are now erected beautiful cottages was so recently a jungle.

"As stated above, it was supposed that immense profits would result from the purchase of the land known as Asbury Park, but the man who has tried to meet every emergency that has arisen is wiser now than when he first risked a fortune in an entirely new and untried scheme. There was not, so far as he knew, a seaside resort, an incorporated town, on the American continent or in Europe, where in the deeds the sale of intoxicating liquor was prohibited. 'With your restriction you can never make a seaside resort a success so near New York,' said the timid and the croakers, but the founder of Asbury Park, with an intense and life long hatred of the liquor traffic, has given hundreds and hundreds of deeds, which are on record at the County Clerk's office, and contain a protest against the curse of society which the American people strangely allow to exist; and yet Asbury Park notwithstanding, did grow, and its success has been so great that the anti-liquor clause is now a feature in the deeds of many seaside resorts started on the New Jersey coast within the past ten years.

"In 1871, the only means of reaching New York from Ocean Grove and what is now Asbury Park was by stage to Long Branch, which was then the nearest railroad station, thence by railroad to Sandy Hook, and by steamer Jesse Hoyt across the bay to New York. The

travel between Long Branch and what is now Asbury Park was so light that daily trips could not be sustained. To keep up daily trips, the founder of Asbury Park gave the use of his rockaway, with a horse, to William Poland, Jr., as a subsidy. Poland added his own horse. The horse donated was used up in the service, but the old carriage remains, and has since been used as a plaything to amuse the children who were born since the time of the historical facts here recorded.

"There are more than eight hundred cottages, besides hotels. The finest Masonic lodge-room in Monmouth county was erected by the late Allen R. Cook, who was for a long time the esteemed Superintendent of Asbury Park. We have also one of the best planned school houses in the State, with a daily attendance of seven hundred ; the school lot fronts on three streets.

"Asbury Park was assessed in 1869 at $15,000. The assessed valuation in 1896 was $3,376,300.00

"Streets running at right angles to the sea are from one to two hundred feet wide, an advantage possessed by no other seaside resort on the New Jersey coast. The depot grounds are the finest on the line of the Long Branch Division of the Central Railroad of New Jersey, and with adjoining streets cover four acres.

"In the matter of electric lights, Asbury Park was the pioneer along the Monmouth County coast.

"The First National Bank of Asbury Park was organized for business in the early part of 1886, and the Asbury Park and Ocean Grove Bank in 1889. Their success has been great, the deposits in the summer of 1896 running up to nearly $1,250,000.00.

"The first street car line in Monmouth county had

its birth in Asbury Park. The cars are propelled by electricity, and besides a belt line encircling the town, they are now running between Belmar and Pleasure Bay, with prospects of continuing the road all along the coast in the near future."

INDIAN WILL.

IN days gone by, the singular character and eccentric acts of the noted Indian Will formed the theme of many a fireside story among our ancestors, many of which are still remembered by older citizens. Some of the traditionary incidents given below differ in some particulars, but we give them as related to us many years ago by old residents. Indian Will was evidently quite a traveler and well known from Barnegat almost to the Highlands. At Forked River, it is said he often visited Samuel Chamberlain on the neck of land between the north and middle branches and was generally followed by a pack of lean, hungry dogs, which he kept to defend himself from his Indian enemies. The following tradition was published in 1842 by Howe, in "Historical Collections of New Jersey":

"About the year 1670, the Indians sold out the section of the country near Eatontown to Lewis Morris, for a barrel of cider, and emigrated to Crosswicks and Cranberry. One of them, called Indian Will, remained, and dwelt in wigwam between Tinton Falls and Swimming River. His tribe were in consequence exasperated, and at various times sent messengers to kill him in single combat; but, being a brave athletic man, he always came off conqueror.

"One day while partaking of a breakfast of suppawn and milk with a silver spoon at Mr. Eaton's, he casually remarked that he knew where there was plenty of such. They promised that if he would show them where, they would give him a red coat and cocked hat. In a short time he was arrayed in that dress, and it is said the Eatons suddenly became wealthy. About 80 years since, in pulling down an old mansion in Shrewsbury, in which a maiden member of this family had resided, a quantity of *cob* dollars, supposed to have been Kidd's money, was found concealed in the cellar wall. These coins were mostly square or oblong shape, the corners of which wore out the pocket"

A variation of this tradition is as frequently heard in the following manner:

"Indian Will often visited the family of Derrick Longstreet at Manasquan and one time showed them some silver money which excited their curiosity. They wished to know where he got it and wanted Will to let them have it. Will refused to part with it, but told them he had found it in a trunk along the beach, and there was plenty of yellow money besides; but as the yellow money was not as pretty as the white, he did not want it, and Longstreet might have it. So Longstreet went with him and found the money in a trunk covered over with a tarpaulin and buried in the sand. Will kept the white money and Longstreet the yellow (gold) and this satisfactory division made the Longstreets wealthy.

"Captain Kidd did not sail on his glorious cruises until 1696, and as the money found by Will was discovered in 1670, it is impossible that it could be a portion of that wonderful Captain's treasures.

"Will was, from the description of men who knew him, stout, broad-shouldered, prominent Indian featured with rings in his ears and one in his nose. Among other things which Will had done to excite the ill-will of other Indians, was the killing of his wife. Her brother Jacob determined on revenge. He pursued him, and finding him unarmed, undertook to march him off captive. As they were going along, Will espied a pine knot on the ground, managed to pick it up and dealt Jacob a fatal blow. As he dropped to the ground, Will tauntingly exclaimed, 'Jacob, look up at the sun—you will never see it again.'

"When five Indians set out to kill Will once he got them intoxicated and despatched them with a hatchet."

Following told by Thomas Cook: Origin of the name of "Will's Hole" Squan River.

"Indian Will lived in a cabin in the woods near Cook's place. One day he brought home a musk-rat, which he ordered his wife to cook for dinner; she obeyed, but when it was placed upon the table she refused to partake of it.

"'Very well,' said he, 'if you are too good to eat musk rat you are too good to live with me,' and thereupon he took her to the place or hole in the river and drowned her."

The following tradition is also told by Mr. Cook:

"Indian Will had three brothers-in-law, two of whom resided on Long Island, and when in course of time, word reached them that their sister had been drowned, they crossed over to Jersey to avenge her death. When they reached Indian Will's cabin, he was inside eating clam soup. Knowing their errand he invited them to

dinner telling them he would fight it out with them afterward. They sat down to eat, but before concluding their dinner Will pretended he heard some one coming, and hurried to the door, outside of which the visitors had left their guns, one of which Will caught up and fired and killed one Indian. He then shot the other as he rushed at him. Later on Will met his other brother-in-law, and was told by him that he would kill him. Will picked up a large log of pine and crushed in his enemy's head. Indian Will finally died alone in his cabin."

INDIAN PETER.

(A Tradition of Imlaystown.)

ABOUT a century and a quarter ago an Indian named Peter, said to have been connected by relationship and business with the noted Indian Tom, after whom some, we think erroneously, consider Tom's River to be named, resided at Tom's River, but owing to an unfortunate habit of mixing too much whiskey with his water, he became unfortunate, and about the time of the war removed with his family to the vicinity of Imlaystown, where he built a wigwam by a pond not far from the village.

Shortly after he located here, his wife sickened and died. Peter loved his squaw dearly, and was almost heartbroken on account of the unlucky event. He could not bear the idea of parting with his wife, or putting her under the ground out of sight. For a day or two he was inconsolable and knew not what to do; at length a lucky idea occured to him; instead of burying her where he never more could see her, he would put a rope about her neck and place her in the pond and daily visit her. This

plan he at once put into execution, and as he daily visited her, it somewhat assuaged his poignant grief. On one of his melancholy visits to the departed partner of his bosom, he noticed in the water around her a large number of eels. To turn these eels to account was a matter of importance to Peter, for though he loved his wife, he loved money too. So he caught the eels daily, and for a week or so visited the village regularly and found a ready sale for them among the villagers.

But at length the supply failed—his novel eel trap gave out. A few days after he was in the village and numerous were the inquiries why he did not bring any more of those good eels.

"Ah," said Peter very innocently, drawing a long sight, ' me catch no more eels—me squaw all gone—boo —hoo !"

His grief aud singular reply called for an explanation, and he, thinking nothing wrong gave it.

The result was a general casting up of accounts among the villagers, terrible anathemas upon the Indian, and a holy horror of eels among that generation of Imlaystown citizens, and even to this day it is said some of their descendants would as soon eat a snake as an eel.

(The above tradition we have no doubt is substantially correct ; we derived it from Hon. Chas. Parker, for many years State Treasurer, father of Gov. Parker, who some eighty years ago while at Toms River met with some of the disgusted purchasers of Indian Peter's eels.)

A SAVORY DISH.

BATHSHEBA, an Indian Queen who resided in Burlington County, was very hospitably inclined and entertained many white guests though she may have occasionally prepared Indian delicacies for the table which the whites seldom appreciated. Some years ago Eli Collins, a well remembered aged citizen of Barnegat told the writer of this, that when he was a young man, one time he had been out from home all day, and on his way back stopped at the hut of Moluss. His wife Bash, or Bathsheba, was boiling something in a pot which sent forth a most delightful odor to a hungry man, and he was cordially invited to dine. As he had been without anything to eat all day he willingly accepted the invitation; but he soon changed his determination when he found the savory smelling dish was *hop-toad soup*.

THE INDIAN FIELD.

Shark River.

WHERE Shark River narrows almost to a brook and makes a sharp turn toward the south lies the Indian Field. It is about two hundred and fifty feet long and is shaped something on the order of a triangle. Here the Indians for generations planted their corn and from the small pieces of broken half-baked pottery found in one corner it may be said was used as a work shop.

Not many years ago a person might walk across the field and find arrow-heads and chips of flint or possibly a stone hatchet but now, at this late day, a find is rare.

About fifty feet from the Indian Field is a clearing in the woods slightly smaller than the one already described. This is the House Field. In the north eastern corner their huts were made and their families reared. Somewhere in the woods, back of the House Field (so the older inhabitants of that part of the country tell me), lies a large mortar in which the Indians used to grind their grain into flour. * It is said to be too large for any persons to cart away unaided by machinery. Still farther into the woods to the south of the House Field on the right hand side of the old wood-road (once an Indian trail) lies the burying ground. It is situated on the edge of a gully the feet of the graves facing west. So many years have passed since the last Indian was buried here that all trace of mounds have disappeared but people living in that vicinity from childhood remember visiting them and seeing about about forty graves stretched along three hundred feet of space.

* I am indebted to Dr. Peter Davison and others for information about this stone. I have made several fruitless attempts to find it.

Hollinger
pH 8.5
Mill Run F3-1719