

Victorian homes were castles, trophy cases of the affluent

Cape May's most unique attraction is its amazing collection of seaside Victorian homes, hotels and other structures. It's growing number of neo-Victorian homes and buildings is another attraction.

Combined, they're a major reason why folks endure the challenging journey to travel all the way down to the tip of the Jersey Cape to vacation (or resort, as the Victorians called it), bypassing other resorts. Therefore, we should remind ourselves just what those homes in particular were to the Victorians and their neo-Victorian counterparts today.

Victorian homes were literal and figurative castles by the sea. They were created to establish islands of domestic tranquility for



their owners to retreat to after enduring the struggles in the savage, highly competitive, virtually unregulated business world.

After the daily struggles, in which only the fittest survived, the Victorian man returned to his castle where his wife had established the island of domestic tranquility where he could revitalize himself for the next day's

struggles. This was especially true of homes in Cape May that were almost exclusively second (or third) homes used for resorting.

They were designed to be as magnificent and ostentatious as possible, thus displaying their owner's wealth and success, which in the Victorians' view reflected their owner's virtue and favor with God according to

the Protestant Work Ethic and Social Darwinist theory.

Once at home, servants at the entrance halls served as guards at the moat of the castle, strictly limiting entrance and protecting the family within. Visitors who were permitted inside, a select socioeconomic elite deemed worthy, beheld a honeycomb of individual specialized rooms and overall, a huge indoor trophy case displaying simultaneously the family's wealth, sophistication and good taste.

Those rooms open to the public were the general parlor, dining room and music room. Each was crammed with a mass of artifacts and furniture displaying the family's wealth. If the visitor had to use the bathroom, the very existence of the

"modern" technology in it like flush toilets and hot and cold running water were also displays of affluence.

The food served in the dining room offered yet another chance to display the family's affluence and sophistication. Remember, the Victorians dined. Consuming food was secondary to showing off their good taste, sophistication and number of servants.

Indeed, throughout the house the visitor was consistently surrounded with those living trophies of affluence, multiple servants. The more the better. Always silent but always there as status symbols.

How strange, modern folks might say. We're certainly not like that today. Really?

Behold Cape May's neo-

Victorian homes. Ever growing in size and number, they're really modern castles and trophy cases. They're the ultimate status symbols of the success of their owners, who are justly proud of their affluence just as the Victorians were.

Most moderns are just not as open and honest about their ostentation as modern society likes to pretend it's equalitarian all the while becoming more elitist.

A retired history teacher, school administrator, university professor and Museum Education Director Emeritus for the Cape May MAC, R.E. Heinly is the author of the book Victorian Cape May. He writes this column weekly on the Victorian Era highlighting its foibles and fascinations.

Nature Talks

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the joys for the naturalist is attempting to put a finger on the hows and whys of these movements.

And then there is the curious case of Cape May's microclimate. Since the bay and ocean border the county on three sides,

winter temperatures are almost always a few degrees warmer here than surrounding areas, the difference more noticeable on Cape Island.

This disparity has a significant impact on our winter birdlife, and Cape May tends to have greater species diversity and more

individuals of each species than anywhere else in the region.

In some winters, there are more bird species residing in Cape May than anywhere else on the East Coast north of Florida.

Changes in the composition of wintering species are also easiest to detect

here, and with recent winters featuring warmer conditions, that composition is taking on a more southern flavor.

Baltimore orioles are now regular, albeit low-density, winter residents, and even a few ruby-throated hummingbirds have given it a go during

winter, including several this year.

Winter is a great time for the naturalist to slow down and reset their intentions for the year ahead, but it is also a season full of its own joys, changes and mysteries. And perhaps no place offers more of these than Cape May.

Tom Reed is a lifelong Cape May County resident. He directs the migration monitoring projects of New Jersey Audubon's Cape May Bird Observatory and serves as the avian naturalist with the Cape May Whale Watch & Research Center.

Other Side

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lighthouses and assorted river beacons remain. Venture north from Fourteen Foot Bank, along the bay's shipping channel, and one passes the Mia Maull Shoal Light, locations of both the former Elbow of Cross and Cross Ledge lights and, finally, the Ship John Shoal Light.

Land-based lights include the East Point Light, situat-

ed at the mouth of the Maurice River, and, of course, the familiar and famous Cape May Lighthouse.

Although not lighthouses in the strict sense, a collection of river beacons still guide mariners through dangerous waters of the bay. These beacons are arranged in pairs, a shorter Front Range Light and a taller Rear Range Light.

When lined up vertically, one on top of the other,

these lights keep vessels safely within the defined shipping channel.

The East Point and Cape May lighthouses and most of the river beacons can be accessed by land. The rest of the Delaware Bay lights can be observed only by vessel.

Twice every summer, the Delaware Bay Lighthouse Keepers and Friends Association charters the FV Bonanza out of Fortescue

to visit these structures. Interestingly, a couple are now privately owned, including the Brandywine Light, which is owned by the family who also operates the Cape May Whale Watching vessels out of the Miss Chris Marina.

Except for the Brandywine, which is being well-maintained, most of the other structures appear to be in a sad state of disrepair. Sad is the appropriate

word since the Delaware Bay lights and beacons represent an important and under-appreciated aspect of our area's nautical history.

Those wishing to learn more about these unique, historic and picturesque structures are invited to attend the next meeting of the Delaware Bay Lighthouse Keepers and Friends Association set for 11 a.m. Jan. 25 at the Nature Center of Cape May, 1600 Delaware

Ave. There will be a break for lunch at noon and then a presentation about the challenges facing Cape May Harbor including the issue of abandoned vessels.

Mark Allen is a retired lieutenant colonel with 27 years' flying experience with the U.S. Marines and Air Force National Guard. The Other Side radio show is broadcast at 1 p.m. Fridays on WCFA-101.5 FM

Another View

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proximity to water, where food is abundant. Some nests can reach 10 feet across and weigh as much as 2,000 pounds. Pairs will continue working on the structures until females begin to lay eggs.

Mother bird will lay one to three eggs, and together with her partner, incubate for about 35 days. Both male and female bald eagles are active parents, working cooperatively to keep eggs and babies warm.

Each will take turns hunting while the other sits on the nest, but the female does most of the incubation work. The first bald eagle chicks of 2025 will begin hatching in late February and early March.

"Generally speaking, in the animal kingdom, a larg-

er organism takes longer to grow," says Chris Soucy, executive director of The Raptor Trust, a care and rehabilitation center for New Jersey's wild birds. "A bald eagle is a gigantic thing. It takes a long time to grow that big."

Upon hatching, the chicks are helpless and require close parental care. After about five weeks, the young birds begin to stand up and feed themselves when the adults deliver food. Adults will continue to feed young near the nest for several weeks as the babies learn to fly and hunt.

Young birds leave the nest in late spring at approximately 11 weeks old — by then, food sources such as fish, small mammals and waterfowl will be plentiful.

Bald eagles practically vanished from the eastern

United States prior to the banning of DDT more than 50 years ago. Efforts by state biologists led to their re-establishment in New Jersey.

Although the population has risen from only one active nest in 1982 to nearly 300 in 2025, biologists are now concerned that highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) will be infecting bald eagles, possibly starting a new decline.

Oddly, bald eagles were recently removed from the state's threatened and endangered species list — along with ospreys — on Jan. 6. Ospreys will not be affected because they do not eat waterfowl, but eagles regularly scavenge dead waterfowl that carry HPAI. Infection is always fatal.

"We are making The Raptor Trust as safe as we possibly can and taking HPAI very, very seriously," Soucy said. "Any birds that arrive that we feel have a chance of infection are placed in quarantine and staff are outfitted with full PPE. We follow guidance from New Jersey Fish and Wildlife



Provided

Bald eagles are the earliest nesting birds in the state. Since December, pairs have been gathering materials to build and repair nests, many of which are used by the same birds for years.

when handling any potential HPAI cases."

The birds of New Jersey are truly parental heroes. Most human parents can relate to the pressures of keeping food on the table, and keeping the family safe and warm in winter. But surviving in the wild requires constant skill, vigilance and a will to live that most humans in New Jersey

rarely need to summon.

There are lots of ways to observe and learn about raptors, including an eagle festival Feb. 1 at the Mauricetown Firehall. Visit conservwildlifefnj.org for more information.

The Raptor Trust in Millington is open to the public and can even host private guided tours. Visit theraportrust.org to explore

ways to support their work in helping sick and injured birds:

Mercer County Wildlife Center — a rehabilitation facility for birds and wildlife — is another place to spend time with resident raptors: mercercounty.org.

Visit njconservation.org for information about preserving New Jersey's land and natural resources.

Teacher charged

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legations in this case represent a deeply troubling breach of that trust. We will work tirelessly to ensure justice is served and to support the victim and their family throughout this process."

Middle Township Police Chief Super also commented on the arrest.

"The welfare of our children is of the utmost importance, and we are fully dedicated to pursuing jus-

tice in cases like this. Parents and guardians place immense trust in educators, and when that trust is violated, it impacts everyone," Super wrote. "I want to personally assure the parents of Middle Township that we are taking every step possible to ensure the safety of our children. Our department is working closely with the Prosecutor's Office to ensure that every aspect of this case is thoroughly investigated. If there are others

who may have relevant information, I urge them to come forward immediately. No piece of information is too small when it comes to protecting our community."

In response to the incident, the Middle Township School District has been notified and is cooperating with law enforcement. Counseling and support services are being made available to students, staff and families who may be affected by this news.

Sutherland urges anyone who may have additional information relating to this investigation to contact the Cape May County Prosecutor's Office Special Victims Unit at (609) 465-1135, or anonymously through the Prosecutor's Office website at cmcpo.tips as well as through the Cape May County Sheriff's Tip Line at cmcsheeriff.net and click on anonymous tip, or through the Cape May County Crime Stoppers at (609) 889-3597.

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