

SEA ISLE CITY HISTORY

-- SCHOOL DAYS --

Over a 125-year span, Sea Isle City has had three public school buildings. The first was built in 1893, the third and last in 1971.

Sea Isle's First School

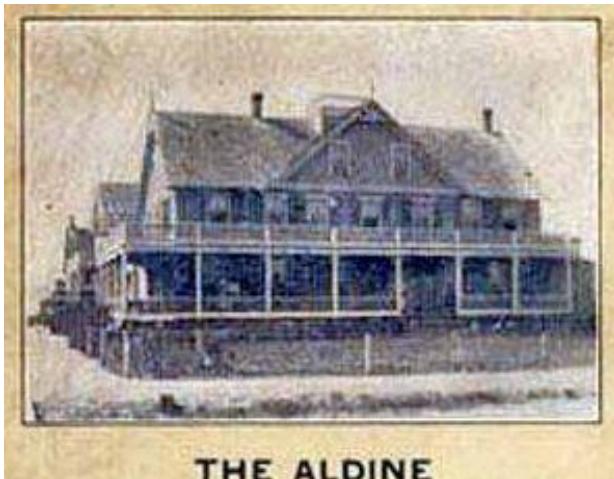
On August 15 1882, the Sea Isle Town Marshall, Henry Ludlam, was directed to take a census of all children between the ages of 5 and 18 and to organize a school district. When he wasn't busy keeping horses and mules out of the surf, Mr. Ludlam seems to have accomplished his task. New Jersey School District Number 30 was born.

The first classes were held not in a school building, but in the dining room of the Aldine House at 38th Street and Pleasure Avenue. Later they were moved to the Dolphin House on 49th Street. A school register for 1884-85 lists 67 "scholars" enrolled, with an average recorded attendance of less than half that – and no requirement for homework. In 1890 the school was reported to have one principal (Professor H.A. Shute) and one teacher (Miss Martie Townsend).

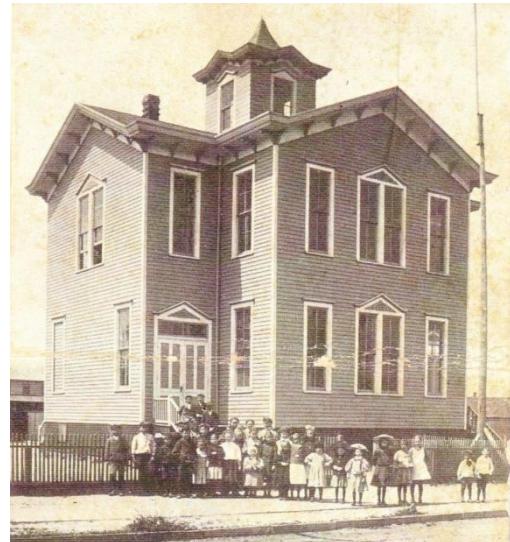
Then, a year later, to keep pace with Sea Isle City's growing need, the first dedicated grammar school building was constructed on 44th Street between Central and Landis Avenues, and served for 21 years until it was replaced by a more modern structure. The original building became the Moose Hall, and then the Convent of the Sisters of Mercy, until it was demolished in 2009. The site is used today as the St. Joseph parish administration office and rectory.

The two-foot-high bell from the first school was restored in 1976 for the Bicentennial and is currently on display at the Sea Isle City Historical Museum.

The Aldine House



Sea Isle's first school building - 1893



The New “Modern” School

In 1914, a three-story red brick building was constructed and became the new Sea Isle City Public School. It was located a few blocks from the original school, between 45th and 46th Streets on Central Avenue. Professor John Carroll was the first principal. The building provided an array of modern amenities: there were six classrooms, a large auditorium on the third floor, a library, a woodworking shop, a place for cooking classes, and an all-purpose space used as a lunch, meeting, and band practice room. It had separate rooms for boys and for girls, and even separate entrances for each.

Even education couldn't escape the Great Depression. In April, 1933, it was announced that the teachers of Sea Isle would accept a pay cut of \$200 to \$300 to keep the school going and retain all the staff. The Historical Museum has a teacher's contract signed by Alma Shellem that same year for \$700, so the cut was really significant.

The building persevered for nearly six decades, but was determined to be “structurally deficient” in 1970 – and it was time for a new school.

Public School built in 1914



Cooking class 1915



Class of 1919

The school band on the boardwalk in Sea Isle



Our Last School

Before the old school could be demolished, ground was broken for a new \$644,000 building on the same lot facing Park Road. The new Sea Isle school was typical of public architecture in the middle of the 20th century, with a single story and lots of windows. The dedication ceremony was held on February 5, 1972.

1971 – a new building begins



The new Sea Isle school



Over the years, enrollment increased and activities expanded, ranging from the arts to a full complement of boys and girls sports. Notably, the school's Sun Devils brought seven volleyball championships to Sea Isle between 1992 and 2002. Many Sea Isle students were enrolled in the National Junior Honor Society.

Dedication of the school bell – 1976



School choir – 1989



But then, as the population aged and Sea Isle became less affordable for young couples with children, the number of grammar school students began to decline. Between 2002 and 2009 enrollment dropped from 185 to just 67, and it was decided to send fifth-to-eighth grade students to Ocean City. At 6:00pm on Thursday, June 18, 2009, the last eight graduates received their diplomas.

Just three years later, the younger grades were also sent to Ocean City. The building still stands – but school is out.

The last graduating class – 2009



To see the original school tower bell, and to browse through our photos and literature about the Sea Isle schools, please visit the Sea Isle City Historical Museum at 48th Street and Central Avenue. Access our website at www.seaislemuseum.com. Call 609-263-2992 with any questions. Current hours are 10:00am – 3:00pm Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday.