



THE PIER in its heyday. The hotel at center is the Rockingham, and to the left of it, the famed Casino, center of social life at the Pier.

The old summer hotels of Rhode Island; slowly, one by one

THEY GO TO JOIN THE LARKIN

By BRADFORD F. SWAN

Once upon a time the old wooden hotels stretched the length of Ocean Road at Narragansett Pier. They sprinkled the rising ground at Watch Hill and clustered about Old Harbor at Block Island. Then the Cold Spring House in Wickford rang to the bibulous shouts of Brown alumni at reunions, and the Muenchinger King in Newport rocked gently when the New York Yacht Club's fleet came in on its annual cruise.

Today their number has dwindled horribly. Right at the start of the summer the huge Ocean House at Block Island burned to the ground, thereby eliminating from the ranks of the wooden hotels in this state one of the largest white elephants. The Ocean House boasted one of the longest bars in the world. Whether it was or not it probably looked that way most of the time, with its slim population making a sharp contrast with the vast spaces.

A few of the old hotels seem to be doing all right. The Ocean House at Bluff Avenue and Plimpton Road in Watch Hill is well groomed and looks prosperous, with a bevy of guests seated under gay umbrellas on the terrace.

And reports have it that the Massasoit, sitting a block back from the waterfront, on Mathewson Street in Narragansett Pier, still retains a loyal clientele — a sort of porch-sitting brigade which goes inside for bridge games at night. The Massasoit, too, keeps up the old standards of quiet decorum, they say.

Of course, the Green Inn, down where Ocean Road takes a jog and becomes South Pier Road, has maintained its popularity right through the years, but somehow it seems to the casual observer to be in a different class from the great, squared-off hotels, due probably to the rambling nature of its architecture, which is sort of Neo-Newport Cottage.

When one speaks of rambling structures right to mind comes that famous Newport hostelry, the Muenchinger King—or M-K, as it is called by the cognoscenti and short-winded. The M-K is on the upswing these days, after a period

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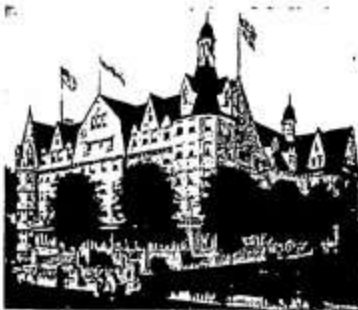


BIG AND ELEGANT was the Larkin House at Watch Hill, built in 1869. From it, and the seven other hotels on the hill, guests enjoyed the fine view.



STILL GOING strong is Watch Hill's Ocean House. In the 1890s, the resort on Little Narragansett Bay had seven hotels, big ones.

POSTCARD view of the Imperial at the Pier, one of the big ones in the days when a room with meals ran from \$2.50 to \$5 a day per person, and cheaper by the week.



ONE OF THE FEW survivors at the Pier is The Breakers, which in the 1850s was The Atwood. It had 100 rooms.

THE EPITOME of late Victorian elegance and, if you will, discomfort is suggested by the front parlor of the Imperial at the Pier.



LUNCHEON CROWD at old Narragansett Pier Casino when it was the center of the resort's social life. In the Casino ballroom, the elite of the summer colony danced nightly. It burned in 1900.

THE ROCKINGHAM at the Pier, because of its location on the beach and adjoining the Casino, was on the expensive side. This picture was made in September, 1900, just after the fire started which destroyed the hotel.



THE ATLANTIC HOUSE in Newport was on Pelham Street near Bellevue Avenue. It was built about 1844.



THE SECOND OCEAN HOUSE on Bellevue Avenue was a Gothic Revival structure which replaced the first Ocean House, burned in 1845.



WHERE the Viking Hotel stands today was the Hill-Top-Inn, once the home of architect Richard M. Hunt.



TODAY'S Muenchinger-King in Newport includes numerous additions to what was the Dr. David King house.

Of Watch Hill's eight hotels of the 1890s, only two remain



HIGHLAND HOUSE, Block Island, built in 1877 by Alonzo Mitchell, still stands but is not being operated. Ball game here is between rival hotel inns.



QUEEN of hotels at Block Island was the *Ocean View* which, in its prime, had its own doctor and daily reports of the stock market. Begun by Nicholas Ball in 1872 with accommodations for 500, the giant came to an end (below) on July 6, 1966.



OAKLAND BEACH is referred to in a tourists' guide of the early 1890s as a "most noted and popular" resort and the big Oakland Beach Hotel as "the largest summer hostelry on the west coast of Narragansett Bay." The hotel was lighted by gas, had water from its own spring, vegetables from its farm.

of semi-somnolence, and rumor flies about the City by the Sea that it is well on the way to becoming one of the swiftest spots for everyone from the teenagers to the discotheque set.

But where are the Mount Hope, the Continental, the Revere, and the Atlantic of yesteryear, that once lined Ocean Road at the Pier? Gone, every one. And where's the Atwood? Well, that's still there, but now it's named The Breakers. And the Atlantic's name has been preserved in an establishment known as the Atlantic House Motor Inn.

The Cold Spring House—known colloquially, by some as the Cold Water House—changed hands at the beginning of the summer, but its new owners did not open it for the season.

Out on Block Island the old wooden hotels are really making their last stand, although there is no reason a great wooden hotel, properly operated—as Wentworth-by-the-Sea outside Portsmouth, N.H., is—cannot do a good business in summer and, after the season, as a base for professional and business conventions.

The Manlases (I believe that's the old Indian name for the island), the Surf, the Spring House, cluster about the edge of Old Harbor or on the hill-sides rising toward the south. The Vaill Hotel still operates near Mohegan Bluffs, the venerable High View, once

the Connecticut House, is amidships, geographically speaking, on the island, and the Narragansett Inn is a flourishing hostelry at New Harbor.

Watch Hill really laid it on thick in the great days of the wooden hotels. Daniel F. Larkin, once described as "a magnificently bearded lighthouse-keeper," built in 1869 the great white Larkin hotel, which had rooms for 400 guests. By the 1890s there were no fewer than eight hotels on Watch Hill. Of these only the Narragansett Inn, down near the harbor bathing beach, and the Ocean House up on the hill remain today. Adjoining the Narragansett is a block of shops which occupy the ground floor of what was once another hotel. Its second story is taken up by a hostelry yclept the Bay-view, which had at least one guest the day this reporter visited the scene; she was sitting on the upper porch, wearing a broad-brimmed, floppy straw hat and watching the bathers and the yachts.

Nearby a policeman was harvesting the receipts of the parking meters. He was asked the name of the erstwhile hotel and when it disappeared.

"It was a hotel, all right," he said, "but it burned long ago. Long before my time."

Gone, too, are the Plimpton, the Atlantic, and the Watch Hill. Gone to join the great white Larkin. □

Pictures by Bradford F. Swan, Robert Dowdle and from the Journal-Bulletin News Library; engravings from a private collection.



NO TRACE remains of the Lyman House, south of Sakonnet harbor.