

St. Michael's Church and Ocean Grove History

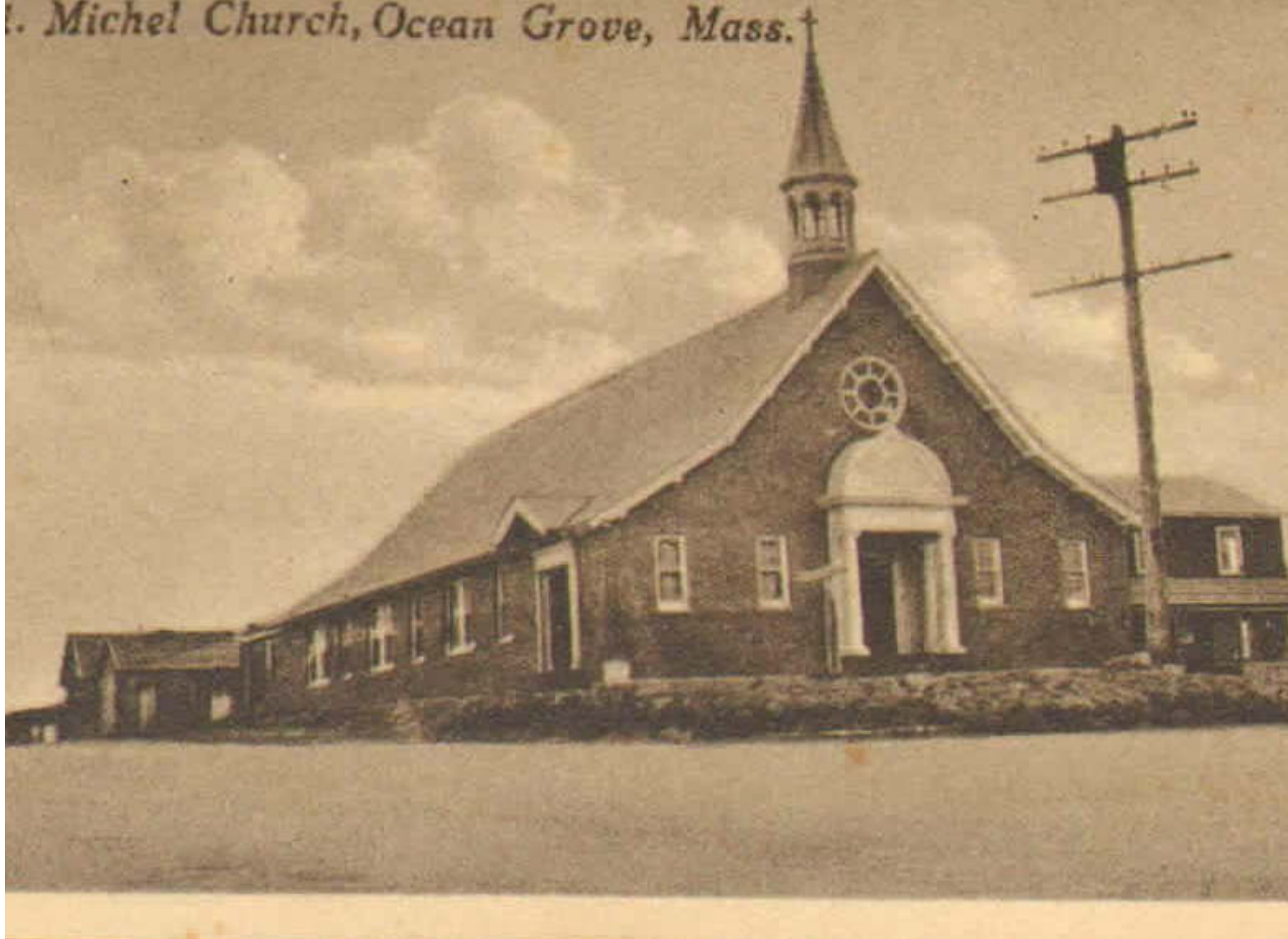
Cheryl Bogle, President, Swansea Historical Society

St. Michael's Church Swansea Community Center

In the early 1900s, Ocean Grove was a lovely resort area, studded with many summer homes and a few year-round homes. People came from Fall River, Bristol, Warren and Pawtucket and would travel back home by electric car to attend Sunday mass. As a result, a number of residents campaigned to raise money to build a new church. They were successful and the archdiocese approved the construction of St. Michael's Church and school in 1922 to support the increasing population of the Ocean Grove area.



St. Michel Church, Ocean Grove, Mass.



ST. MICHAELS CHURCH, OCEAN GROVE, MASS.



ST. MICHAEL'S PAROCHIAL SCHOOL
OCEAN GROVE, MASS.



Realizing that a new church was imminent, many residents winterized their summer homes. This was one reason the Ocean Grove and Bluffs area grew into a vibrant resort community. In 1963, the church was expanded to accommodate the increasing population. This expansion included a redesigned front entrance.



Town of Swansea Purchases St. Michael's Church

In March of 2008, the Town of Swansea purchased St. Michael's Church from the Diocese of Fall River for the sum of \$420,000, with an additional cost of \$580,000 for renovations.

St. Michael's Church was renamed the Swansea Community Center and became the new home for the Swansea Council on Aging.



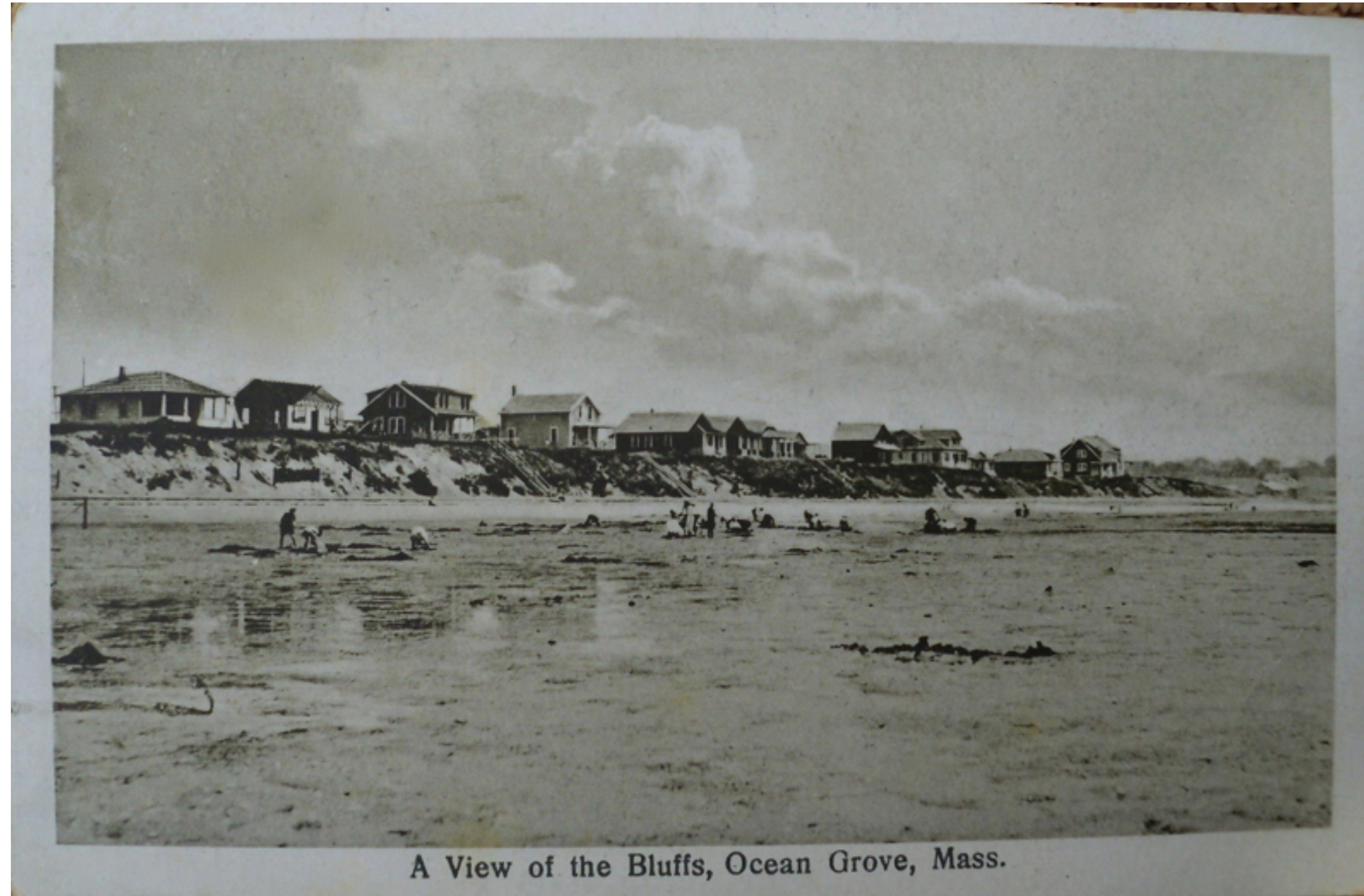
Many locals grew up in the shadow of St. Michael's Church. They were baptized, made their first communion and confirmation, got married and even buried loved ones. They have fond memories of the former priests, including Father Gendreau and Father Sharp.



Interior of St. Michael Church

Historical Ocean Grove and the Bluffs

Many people have an incorrect notion of what and where Ocean Grove truly is. Historical Ocean Grove starts at the Swansea Community Center and includes the streets to the left and right of the Center, encompassing the neighborhoods from the Center back to Town Beach. Over the years, Ocean Grove has grown to include neighborhoods up to Wilbur Avenue and Gardners Neck Road. These area are not considered part of Historical Ocean Grove.



Some think of Ocean Grove as a series of neighborhoods and the Town Beach, but, historically, it was much more. Ocean Grove began to grow during the 1890s.











It was an up-and-coming vacation spot where people could enjoy the beach, concessions area, popular live bands and performers like the US Marine Band, Julius Levy and George Caskin.



The Bluffs, Dance Hall, Ocean Grove, Mass.



People stayed in tents on the beach at the Bluffs, and as the area's popularity grew, so did the housing situation. Summer cottages began to pop up overnight, replacing the beach tents. Ocean Grove also began to grow. Families opened up grocery stores, meat markets, dinettes and bakeries.





S. J. PHELPS

OCEAN GROVE
MARKET

FRESH GROCERIES



Bellevue Market



**IN THE BLUFF'S HEYDAY, IT WAS DIFFICULT TO FIND A
VACANT SPOT TO SPREAD A BLANKET.**

All this and the Ocean Grove railroad station came along prior to the 1938 hurricane. This devastating event wiped out scores of cottages and businesses and took many years to rebuild. In the late 1940s, the area began to develop into year-round neighborhoods. Ocean Grove and the Bluffs remained popular through the 1960s.



Wreckage of pavilion at Ocean Grove, pictured the morning after the st



Summer homes at Ocean Grove were piled upon each other and reduced to ruins by storm.



Shambles created by hurricane as it swept through Ocean Grove.



Ruins of year-round homes at Ocean Grove which were ripped from foundations by wind.

Following the hurricane of 1938, many businesses closed and buildings demolished along with the history of the area. The area's historical designation is not due to the architectural details of the buildings, but rather what the area was to Swansea. This is why the National Registry application for the Bluffs and Ocean Grove was denied.



f year-round homes at Ocean Grove which were ripped from foundations



The End