

Coney Island: Visions of an American Dreamland

Glossary

Astroland Park—This park opened at Coney Island in 1962, and was inspired by the space race. It closed in 2008.

Bathhouse—With the development of Coney Island as a seaside destination and resort area, “sea bathing” was promoted for health as well as recreation—a much-needed activity for the crowded residents of Manhattan. In the 1860s and 1870s, several bathhouses at Coney Island were constructed for the purpose of changing clothes, renting bathing suits, and/or taking public showers. In urban areas, such as New York City in the late 19th century, bathhouses (or public places for washing up) were also scattered across the city as a health and hygiene effort due to crowded housing and shared bathrooms.

Boardwalk—This is a wooden plank walkway typically constructed at the seashore or over a marshy area. The boardwalk on Coney Island was the main entrance to several amusement parks at Coney over the years and today hosts a variety of small restaurants.

Brighton Beach—This is one of the beaches at Coney Island and is located at the south end of Brooklyn. Brighton Beach is named for the English seaside resort city of Brighton. The Brighton Beach resort, Coney Island, was built in 1868 and was one of several hotels available for tourists at Coney.

Bowery—During the turn of the 20th century, the Bowery stretched from West 10th Street all the way to the Steeplechase Park entrance at West 16th. At one point, the six blocks of the

Bowery housed many saloons, dance halls, public baths, and theaters. During World War II, the Bowery became primarily a destination for drinking. Games and a penny arcade later lined this small street, known as the underbelly of Coney Island.

Carousel—William F. Mangels patented the gears that controlled the galloping motion on carousels in 1907. Mangels opened a carousel horse-carving factory at Coney Island. The horses carved at Coney had a distinctive, colorful, and realistic style with horses displaying expressive and animated features. These distinctive Coney island carousel horses were carved by Marcus Illions, Charles Looff, Charles Carmel, Solomon Stein, and Harry Goldstein.

Centennial Iron Tower—This historic structure was purchased at the 1876 Philadelphia Centennial Exposition and opened to the public July 4, 1876 at Coney Island. This tower was 300 feet high and offered several observation decks.

Coney Island of the Mind—This phrase refers to a collection of poetry written by Lawrence Ferlinghetti published in 1958. Ferlinghetti included several poems that refer to his time growing up in New York.

Cyclone—This track roller coaster opened at Coney Island in 1927 and is still in operation today. Its design has influenced many roller coasters across the country. More than 30 different roller coasters were built at Coney Island from 1884 through the 1930s.

Dreamland Park—This amusement park opened in 1904 and was destroyed by a fire in 1911. This was the last of the big three amusement parks in Coney Island.

Elephant Hotel—This 122-foot elephant-shaped hotel opened at Coney Island's Brighton Beach in August 1844 as a tourist

attraction and a place to stay. Although a popular family attraction, it also attracted prostitutes and their clients. It burned down in 1896.

George C. Tilyou—This entrepreneur opened Steeplechase Park in 1897 inspired by visiting the World’s Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893. Tilyou intended to create a seaside park in New York—a Central Park by the shore.

Luna Park—Fred Thompson and Elmer Dundy opened Luna Park in 1903, a park that was illuminated by 250,000 electric lights and featured Thompson and Dundy’s famous attraction “A Trip to the Moon.”

Major Mite—Born as Clarence Chesterfield Howerton in 1913, this individual was part of Coney Island’s sideshow scene. His stature (only two feet tall) provided him with his livelihood—he travelled with Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus (often appearing with the world’s tallest man), and appeared in the *Wizard of Oz* among other films. He died in 1975.

Melting Pot—A term that refers to a place where people of different cultures, ethnic backgrounds, and lifestyles come together or are mixed together inadvertently.

Mermaid Parade—The founders of the non-profit organization, Coney Island USA, launched the Mermaid Parade as an annual event (similar to Mardi Gras) that is held on the summer solstice with floats, marching bands, mummers, flags, and banners. The first Mermaid Parade at Coney Island was in 1983. It has replaced the Fourth of July as the biggest annual draw at Coney Island.

Morris Engel—Engel was a Brooklyn photographer who worked for many national magazines and filmed the motion picture *Little Fugitive* with his wife, photographer Rugh Orkin, in 1953. *Little*

Fugitive is a film about a 7-year old boy who runs away to Coney Island.

Nathan's Famous Hot Dogs—On the Bowery outside of the amusement parks is this concessionaire, who still operates today. In the 1930s, a visitor could eat a Nathan's hot dog for five cents. Nathan Handwerker established this eatery in 1916 after working for a time with Charles Feltman. Feltman was a German immigrant who owned a Coney resort and invented the American "hot dog" in 1874.

The Nickel Empire—This is another name for Coney Island in the 1930s, where for five cents, a person could take the subway to the beach and boardwalk, ride rides, see performances, and eat hot dogs. From 1930–1939 Coney was known as the "Poor Man's Riviera" and the "Paradise for the Proletariat."

Parachute Jump—In 1941, the Parachute Jump was moved from the 1939–40 New York World's Fair and was placed at Steeplechase Park. Ten (out of twelve) chutes typically operated daily and jumpers could ride for 35–50 cents (depending on the size of the crowd). This ride was popular during World War II especially.

Percy's Pocket Dictionary of Coney Island—This 1880s publication provided a guided overview of the Coney Island seashore complete with maps and detailed descriptions of bathing opportunities, hotels, railroad transportation, restaurants, and other amusements available to tourists who wished to explore the area.

Pip And Flip—Sisters Jenny Lee and Elvira Snow from Georgia were born with microcephaly, a neuro-developmental disorder characterized by an abnormally small cranium and brain. The Snow sisters became known as "Pip and Flip" and were part of

the World Circus Sideshow at Coney Island and were marketed as being from an exotic culture instead of being associated with their condition.

Resort—A place or destination for vacation or recreation that is frequented for that purpose.

Steeplechase Park—This park, opened in 1897 by George C. Tilyou, was part circus, fairground, world's fair, and dime museum that featured a mechanical racecourse, and a gondola cruise among other rides. It burned down in 1907, was rebuilt by Tilyou, and became the longest-running amusement park in Coney Island until it closed in 1966. Steeplechase Park Funny Face was the signature icon, which resulted in the site's nickname, "The Funny Place."

Spook-a-Rama—This was the longest ride at Coney Island. Passengers were seated in high-backed chairs and rode through a pair of swinging doors and underneath a blood-red waterfall and past cheesy dramas enacted by monstrous spiders, junked mannequins, and cult-horror characters.

Surf Avenue—This is the main avenue at Coney Island and is parallel to the boardwalk on the beachfront.

The Ten-in-One—This was the nickname of the Coney Island sideshows, named for the one ticket that granted entry to ten sideshow attractions. Some sideshows were inside the parks but others were on the Bowery, a short street outside the park gates.

Thunderbolt roller coaster—This wooden roller coaster designed by John Miller operated at Coney Island from 1925 until 1982, when it was torn down. A new steel namesake Thunderbolt rollercoaster replaced it at Luna Park in 2014.

Tornado roller coaster—This roller coaster opened in 1926 and closed in 1997 at Coney Island. It was designed by Fred Church and operated by Fred Thompson along the Bowery.

Topsy the Elephant—Topsy the elephant was executed by electricians for the Edison Company at the former site of the Elephant Hotel at Coney Island. The 1903 execution served as a publicity stunt at Luna Park. After she was tormented with a lit cigarette, the abused elephant became unruly, and the owners decided to kill her. The execution had an audience of an estimated fifteen hundred witnesses and was filmed by Thomas Edison's movie studio.

Tunnel of Laughs—This ride was located on the Bowery at Coney Island and like the Spook-a-Rama, featured a dark side.

Weegee—Born Arthur Fellig, in 1899, he earned the nickname Weegee during his early career as a press photographer in New York City. His sixth sense for crime—often led him to a crime scene ahead of police—similar to the fortune- and future-telling properties of the Ouija board. Weegee also worked as a filmmaker, performer, and technical consultant.

William F. Mangels—Mangels was an amusement manufacturer and inventor who worked for Fred Thompson. He manufactured carousels at Luna Park, Coney Island, and invented the ride "The Whip" among others. He produced galloping horse carousels.

Woody Guthrie—Singer-songwriter Woody Guthrie came to New York after travelling the United States and writing the song, "This Land is Your Land." He moved to Coney Island at 3520 Mermaid Avenue with his wife and three young children. He died in 1967 in a hospital in Queens, New York, following a 15-year battle with Huntington's disease.

Wonderland Circus Sideshow, Coney Island—This was Coney Island’s longest-lasting sideshow on the Bowery.

World Circus Sideshow—Sam Wagner’s World Circus Sideshow operated between 1922–1941 and was located on Surf Avenue at Coney Island. It featured many famous attractions and performers. The first tent sideshow performers at Coney Island appeared in the 1880s on the beach.

Wonder Wheel—It was built in 1918-1920 by the Eccentric Ferris Wheel Company and opened at Coney Island in 1920. It is one of the oldest rides in Coney Island and is an official New York City landmark.