

# *Coney Island: Visions of an American Dreamland*

## Coney Island Timeline

Here are some key events related to the development of Coney Island and in relation to world's fairs and expositions around the United States. Investigate more key moments in the history of United States amusement parks in your own state via this link to make local connections to this timeline.

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**1823** The town of Gravesend authorized the formation of the Coney Island Road and Bridge Company to provide better access to Coney Island and opened the Shell Road (paved with oyster shells) and installed a wooden bridge over Coney Island Creek.

**1829** The Coney Island Road and Bridge Company opened the first hotel, Coney Island House.

**1845** A tent-covered circular dance platform called the Pavilion was constructed at Coney Island and was considered its first "amusement."

Steamboat service from Manhattan to a pier near the Pavilion at Coney Island was introduced for a fare of 12 1/2 cents.

**1862** The Coney Island and Brooklyn Railroad opened a horse car line—the first direct rail line into Coney Island.

- 1871** German immigrant Charles Feltman came to Coney Island and opened a small saloon, which later expanded into the largest restaurant at Coney Island. Feltman sold German-style sausages on a bun, a food that became known as the “hot dog.”
- 1875** Andrew Culver bought out the old Coney Island Road and Bridge Company and ran a steam railroad along its route and built a beachfront terminal.
- 1876** The Centennial Tower, bought by Thomas Culver at the Philadelphia Centennial Exposition of 1876 (the first world’s fair held in the United States), opened July 4, at Coney Island.
- 1877** The Manhattan Beach Hotel, a summertime resort for the wealthy at Manhattan Beach at Coney Island, opened for business.
- 1878** Coney Island’s first steam railroad was completed—the Brooklyn Flatbush and Coney Island Railroad.
- Hotel Brighton at Brighton Beach, a seaside resort that catered to the wealthy, opened.
- 1880** This year, more than one million visitors came to Brighton Beach by railroad.
- 1884** James V. Lafferty’s famous Elephant Hotel opened at West Twelfth Street.
- One of the first roller coasters in America opened at Coney Island, the Switchback Railway.
- 1893** The World’s Columbian Exposition opened in Chicago. This was the first world’s fair with a separate

amusement area (midway)—this midway inspired Coney Island’s amusements.

- 1894** America’s first bike path, designed and built by Frederic Law Olmsted, opened along Ocean Parkway connecting Coney Island to the rest of Brooklyn.
- 1895** Paul Boyton built the world’s first enclosed amusement park (Sea Lion Park) at Coney Island that featured a roller coaster, a Shoot-the-Chutes ride, and a circus.
- 1897** George Tilyou opened Steeplechase Park that featured a mechanical horse race and other amusements. The Tennessee Centennial Exposition in Nashville, Tennessee took place.
- 1898** The Trans-Mississippi Exposition was held in Omaha, Nebraska.
- 1901** The Pan-American Exposition took place in Buffalo, New York.
- 1903** Luna Park is opened by Fred Thompson and Elmer “Skip” Dundy—the park enfolded Boyton’s Shoot-the-Chutes amusement and a lagoon as its centerpiece.
- 1904** Dreamland Park, founded by William H. Reynolds and a small group of New York politicians), opened directly opposite Luna Park. The Louisiana Purchase Exposition took place in Saint Louis, Missouri.
- 1907** A fire destroyed parts of Steeplechase Park and the park was rebuilt by George Tilyou.

The Jamestown Tercentenary Exposition took place in

Jamestown, Virginia.

- 1909** The Alaska-Yukon International Exposition took place in Seattle, Washington.
- 1911** Dreamland's attraction Hell Gate caught on fire and destroyed the entire park.
- 1915** San Francisco held the Panama-Pacific International Exposition. San Diego held the Panama-California Exposition.
- 1916** Nathan Handwerker started a nickel hot dog stand at Coney Island.
- 1919** The "New West End" subway terminal (today known as Stillwell Avenue Terminal) was built at Coney Island.
- 1920** The Wonder Wheel opened at Coney Island.
- 1921** The Big Dipper roller coaster opened.
- 1922** The first completed section of the new Coney Island Boardwalk was completed.
- 1925** The Thunderbolt roller coaster opened.
- 1926** The Sesquicentennial International Exposition opened in Philadelphia.
- 1927** The Cyclone roller coaster opened at Coney Island. The Half Moon Hotel opened.
- 1928** The Pacific Southwest Exposition was held in Long Beach, California.
- 1933–34** A Century of Progress Exposition was held in Chicago,

Illinois.

**1939–40** The New York World’s Fair in Flushing, Meadows Park, took place in Queens.

San Francisco held the Golden Gate International Exposition.

**1941** The Parachute Jump was moved to Steeplechase Park from the 1939–40 New York World’s Fair.

**1942** Coney Island closed to the public in May and was converted into a training ground for WWII troops. It reopened in June.

**1946** Luna Park closed due to a series of fires and decreased revenues.

**1962** Astroland Park opened.

**1964–66** Steeplechase Park closed. Real estate developer Fred Trump, (father of Donald), bought the park and demolished it to erect high-rise developments.

**1966** Steeplechase Park was demolished.

**1980** Coney Island USA a non-profit organization, was created for the purpose of revitalizing the sideshow tradition at Coney Island.

**1982** The Thunderbolt roller coaster closed.

**1983** The first Mermaid Parade, an annual event organized by Coney Island U.S. A. that celebrates the start of the summer in June, took place.

**1991** The Cyclone roller coaster was placed on the National

Register of Historic Places.

- 2004** The Coney Island History Project, a non-profit organization dedicated to increase awareness about Coney Island, opened.
- 2008** Astroland Park closed.
- 2016** The B & B Carousell at Coney Island was added to the National Register of Historic Places.