

Carroll County Times "Carroll's Yesteryears" Articles

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Bathing beauties: Today's high-cut, skin-baring styles would have shocked our modest ancestors
By Jay Graybeal

Although some wealthy Colonial Americans had summered at seaside communities, it was not until the mid-19th century that improved transportation systems made widespread travel possible. A growing middle class with disposable income and a new concept of the summer vacation grew out of the industrial revolution also spawned the railroad and steamship lines which carried vacationers to their destinations.

Nearby ocean communities such as Atlantic City, N.J., grew rapidly and attracted numerous Carroll countians. The seashore offered relief from the heat of summer, the beach and resort accommodations, which ranged from plush hotels to a dingy rented room in a private home.

Late 19th-century photographs of Carroll countians on seaside vacations are among the few artifacts that survive to document their vacations. The earliest examples, such as those of "Roddy" Walker and the Gorsuch and Englar families, are studio portraits with typical painted backgrounds and boulder props. Long flannel bathing suits and stockings, more suited for wading than swimming, were fashionable in the 1890s. Those worn by the Englar family are monogrammed and were probably supplied by the hotel where they stayed.

Improvements in camera and film technology by the turn of the century resulted in inexpensive cameras and snapshots. The candid photos of the Goldboroughs and Alice Bond were taken by someone in the vacationers' party. These later images also show that attire was changing to styles that allowed the wearer to swim. Today, these images are somewhat humorous reminders of summer vacationers of nearly a century ago.

Photo credit: Historical Society of Carroll County

Photo caption: "Grace Goldborough, Mr. Gill F. Mathews, T. Goldsborough and Noel Purcell, Atlantic City, Sept. 1899." This party of young adults had been swimming when an amateur photographer took their picture. The famous boardwalk is visible in the background.

Photo caption: "Roddy Walker and his Swimming Machine, Atlantic City 1888." Walker's swimming machine was composed of metal buoyancy tanks and oars and wooden devices attached to the feet.

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Photo caption: “Mr. and Mrs. George P. Englar and their son George Monroe Englar, Florence Englar (seated at left) and Florence Nusbaum (seated at right).” Young George Monroe Englar holds a partially peeled banana in this tintype taken in c.1895.

Photo caption: “Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Gorsuch, Nora Gorsuch (seated) and Miss Jane G. Pole (standing).” The Gorsuch family wears flannel suits, straw hats and stockings, typical beach attire of the 1890s.

Photo caption: “Alice W. Bond and two unidentified men.” Bond and her friends enjoy wading at an unidentified shore location c.1902.