

HISTORIC DISTRICT

X

Location

In 1970, the Cape May Historic District was incorporated into both the National and State Registers of Historic Places. This listing includes part of West Cape May. The heart of the district is its primary area in downtown Cape May City, where the densest concentrations of historic buildings are found. The secondary area surrounds it, extending along the Cape May City beachfront, down the Lafayette-Washington Street corridor, and into West Cape May. Figure X-1 depicts the location of the historic district. Table X-1 provides a listing of historic properties the Borough has compiled and considers significant.

Architectural Styles

The historic district is a showcase of the building styles of the late Victorian period. All of the eclectic styles fancied by a newly rich America are here: Gothic, Exotic, Italianate (both Renaissance and American Bracketed Villa), Romanesque, Second Empire, Stick, Queen Anne, and Shingle. Carpenter-builders improvised freely, often producing hybrid structures that combined elements from several styles. The district also contains examples of the early-twentieth century Bungalow, Georgian Revival, Spanish Revival and Tudor Revival styles.

Romantic Character

Late Victorian architecture on Cape Island is picturesque in overall style. It aims at dramatic effect: unusual and irregular shapes, exaggerated proportions, eye catching silhouettes, bold use of materials, varied textures, and intricate and diverse detailing. Builders reveled in sharply contrasting colors and flamboyant ornamentation. They were rebelling against the classical style of architecture that had stressed restraint, formality, and symmetrical arrangement, but was deemed too austere and quiet for the vigorous new national mood. Many buildings in the historic district are also high style – designed by an architect for a prominent person.

Use of New Technology

Innovations in construction technology made late nineteenth century building styles possible. Light wooden framing, machine-made nails, power jigsaws, and mass-produced decorative details allowed builders to inexpensively produce bigger and much more highly ornamented structures. Wood became the building material of choice as the completion of a national system of freight rail lines opened up the vast forests of the Pacific Northwest to exploitation.

Ornament

Lacy “gingerbread” trim is synonymous with Cape Island’s late Victorian architecture. The building façade became an artist’s canvas on which an abstract design in ornamental fretwork (pierced, carved wood) was painted in a rainbow of colors.

West Cape May Historic District



Figure X-1. Historic District within the Borough of West Cape May.

Table X-1. Listing of Historic Sites as Compiled by Marie Iacanangelo for the West Cape May Environmental Commission.

West Cape May was once called Eldredge. It was incorporated as a borough in 1884 being formed from Lower Township. It was reincorporated in 1890 and in 1897. Out of it was made South Cape May Borough in 1895.

Address	Block Lot	Comments
416 South Broadway	30, 10	Daniel's Restaurant, a.k.a. Whilldin-Miller House – c. 1680 Whaler's Cottage. The T. Newkirk House (circa 1680 – 1875). There are many stories and legends about this old house. The oldest part, circa 1680, containing the giant fireplace, was said to be a base of the Town Bank Whalers. Later it is known to have housed the wounded of the Revolution, followed by a number of additions and changes. The front section was added in the 1870's.
110 North Broadway	34, 7	Mangia Restaurant – c. 1870 – was a Boarding House.
115 North Broadway	4, 1.10	Buttonwood Bed & Breakfast – c. 1908 – Lizzee Richardson Home.
121 North Broadway	4, 2	Old Cape May Life Savings before Coast Guard – Capt. James Eldredge.
139 North Broadway	4, 17	The present bridal shop- once was the post office for West Cape May. Popularly known as the Eldredge house Aug. 2, 1898 – the name was changed to West Cape May Nov. 8, 1908 – the post office was discontinued March 31, 1930.
201 North Broadway	5, 1	Antique shop, but once was connected with the Gold Beaters Industry.
209 North Broadway	5, 21	c. 1800's– was home of Capt. Wm. C. Eldredge, Delaware River pilot– oldest in age and membership of the Delaware River Pilots of New Jersey– his grave is found at Cold Spring Cemetery, and has a boat carved on the gravestone (National Archives).
307 North Broadway	6, 21	Once part of a large plantation – Great great grandfather of David Hand then later a Delaware River Pilot Charles P. Eldredge – c. 1850 perhaps earlier. The house was once part of the underground railroad.

Address	Block Lot	Comments
417 North Broadway	7, 27	Circa 1780 – the Eldredge home because it was put on a tract of Eldredge land. The closest side street off Broadway is called Eldredge Avenue. Built in 1780 at Jackson and Lafayette Streets in Cape May. This is one of the few colonial houses in this area. It was moved to West Cape May in 1850. The rear portion of the house was added in late 1800's and early 1900's. Old bills, records and a golden lock of hair were found in the attic.
308 South Broadway	29, 8	Part of the underground railroad.
131 North Broadway	4, 18.21	The Aaron W. Hand House, circa 1822-1855. This was part of the James Whilden plantation. It was given to Judith Corson Eldredge by her father, Abner Corson. In the 1800's, ownership passed back and forth from the Eldredges, the Hands, the Swains, the Crowells, and back to the Hand family. It is presently the Highland House Bed & Breakfast.
515–517 North Broadway	8,5	West Side Market – once was a feed store. It's been in continual use as a store, circa 1850.
712 North Broadway	21, 10.2	Late 1700's – c. 1757 – The Moffitt House (guesthouse).
720 North Broadway	55, 13	Circa 1810 – 1875. The Jonathan Johnson House. Originally a small early 18 th Century house with random width heart pine floors and aged beams. Porches, baths and additional rooms were added during the 1870's, making it the present "Victorinized" farmhouse.
127 Myrtle Avenue	4, 5	Albert G. Stevens' Inn (circa 1900). Built for a local physician for his bride, this house has oak interior woodwork and a "floating" staircase extending to a third floor tower room. Double parlors and wraparound porch provide the spaciousness for relaxed living found in homes of this period. The house remained in the Stevens family until 1981.
133 Myrtle Avenue	4, 6	Wilbraham Mansion – A simple farmhouse in 1840, this property was acquired in 1900 by John W. Wilbraham who enlarged and Victorinized the house by adding a wing. A rich Philadelphian, he had his own railroad car and spur come directly to the west side entrance of the home.

Address	Block Lot	Comments
Myrtle Avenue and West Perry Street	3, 1	Wilbraham Memorial Park
612 North Broadway	54, 7	Once a West Cape May Railroad Depot, now a private home.
616 North Broadway	54, 6	Sawyer House circa 1780, presently a Bed & Breakfast.
500 North Broadway	53, 5	Circa 1872 – The Union Chapel on the corner of Broadway and Fifth Avenue was affiliated with the “Old Brick Presbyterian Church” of Cold Spring. Church was moved to Broadway in 1883.
302 North Broadway	36, 9	Once home of J. Henry Eldredge.
222 North Broadway	35, 20	Once home of Dr. Clarence S. Eldredge.
102 Gold Beaten Alley	35, 5	Site of the Hastings Gold Beater Company, circa 1864 – 1881. The business was started in 1864 by George Reeves in a two-story factory situated behind his home, located opposite York Street on Broadway. Theodore (Dorey) Reeves, George’s son, continued the operation after his father’s death. Mrs. James Glase took over on Dorey’s death. Ultimately, the only part of the beating process done at the Reeve’s factory was assembling the finished foil sheets in booklets. The factory was closed in 1961 after nearly a century of operation.
826 North Broadway	55, 4	Once largest Holly tree in New Jersey was in front of house. Mrs. Wright is a descendant of the Mayflower.
Canning House Lane	N/A	Circa 1915- Off- Broadway at the borough line. The Railroad line ran through the borough farm areas to the Canning Factory where local vegetables and fruits were processed and shipped off by train to city markets.
Race track	N/A	Circa 1887 – located at Sunset Boulevard and Fourth Avenue bounded by Columbia Avenue and Stevens Street. The track consisted of 80 acres leased from the Miller Farm.