



Records & Information Services

Municipal Library Notes - August 2022 SPOTLIGHT ON BEACHES

Spotlight on: Beaches

By Christine Bruzzese, Director, Municipal Library

During the summer people visit beaches for relief from the heat and for relaxation. The Municipal Library contains materials on beaches, parks, and recreational areas. A look at the vertical file on “Bathing Beaches” provides several newspaper articles about beaches and a couple of interesting items from city agency publications.

Today there are many reports of beaches being declared unsafe because of sharks and other dangers. Here is an excerpt from a Board of Health policy statement dated 1962 on beach safety.

DECLARATION OF POLICY BY THE BOARD OF HEALTH OF THE DEPARTMENT OF
HEALTH OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK FOR THE GUIDANCE OF THE COMMISSIONER
OF HEALTH IN RELATION TO WATERS OF BATHING BEACHES

WHEREAS, the records of the Department of Health indicate that the pollution of the waters at some of the bathing beaches in the City of New York is increasing, and

WHEREAS, such pollution at some beach or beaches may reach an intensity dangerous to those who use such waters for bathing and swimming, and

WHEREAS, it is necessary in the public interest to institute standards for the legal administrative guidance of the Commissioner of Health in relation to the pollution of waters at bathing beaches, now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, that the Board of Health of the Department of Health of The City of New York adopt, and hereby adopts, for waters of bathing beaches other than those waters coming within the purview of Section 340-A of the Sanitary Code, a classification as follows:

Class A: Approved Beach Waters

- Group 1. Safe Waters
 - (a) Epidemiological experience satisfactory, and
 - (b) Sanitary survey satisfactory, and
 - (c) Coliform average not in excess of 1000
- Group 2. Approved, but subject to reclassification in light of continuing observation
 - (a) Epidemiological experience satisfactory
 - (b) Sanitary survey satisfactory but beach waters exposed to increasing pollution, or
 - (c) Coliform average above 1000 but not in excess of 2400

Class B: Polluted Beach Waters Not Recommended for Bathing

- (a) Epidemiological experience satisfactory
- (b) Sanitary survey discloses sewage material on beach or in water immediately adjacent to beach, and
- (c) Coliform average above 2400, with fifty per cent of samples in average above 2400

Class C: Unsafe Beach Waters

- (a) Epidemiological experience discloses evidence of

One of the most famous public beaches in New York City is Orchard Beach in the Bronx. This is a short history from a 1984 issue of the "Daily Plant" newsletter, published by the Parks Department.

PARK HISTORY:
 ORCHARD BEACH, III
The Daily Plant (N.Y.C. Dept. of Parks + Recreat.) II: 185 (6/19/84)

Orchard Beach remained a highly managed and accessible public beach throughout Robert Moses's tenure as Parks Commissioner. By the 1970's, however, the beach had once again been taken over by a tent colony.

The use of the beachfront was controlled by illegal vendors, who set up booths in appointed locations. Merchants operated out of tents, selling food and liquor, as well as drugs and games of chance. By the summer of 1980, the Department moved against the illegal vendors, the second tent colony in the park's history. The tents were relegated to an area which became known as "Las Vegas Alley" until all the illegal vending could be eliminated, with the help of the police, in the summer of 1982.

Deputy Commissioner ROBERT SANTOS, who, as Bronx Borough Commissioner, organized the Orchard Beach cleanup from 1981 to 1983, said that the Department had to be forceful to regain control over the beach. By pressuring concessionaires to serve the large Hispanic population which used the beach, and by centralizing concessions, the beach was integrated. Santos used organizational pressures to increase the accessibility of, and enforcement of rules and regulations at, Orchard Beach.

Although the bath house, which dates from 1936, no longer serves its original purpose, it is being considered for numerous uses. In the 1970's, it was proposed for use as a theater-in-the-round, but the plans were never approved.

The long-term swings from informal to formal control, which have characterized the history of the use of Orchard Beach, are emblematic of the changes within city government. The Parks Department has historically tried to balance the free use of parks with maintenance and management needs. Free use of Orchard Beach in the 1900's was a success, and a large tent colony of campers vacationed there in one of the most accessible and cheapest getaways available to urban dwellers. The same freedom of access which had been successful in the 1900's was a failure in the 1930's, when access to the beach was limited to the politically powerful. The Parks Department, under Commissioner Moses, felt that the most democratic remedy was the removal of the tent colony, and the establishment of public facilities. The beach was heavily managed, and programmed activities were controlled through the 1960's. By the 1970's, however, lax control due to understaffing had led to yet another private monopoly of public space, and the battle between private and public forces to control the use of the beach was acted out again, as it was in the 1930's.

-Jennifer Cromley

Conditions in Harlem Revisited Conference

September 20, 2022

9:30 am - 6:30 pm

The Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture
515 Malcolm X Boulevard,
New York, NY 10037

Conditions in Harlem Revisited: From the 1936 Mayor's Commission Report to Today

By Pauline Toole, Commissioner, Department of Records and Information Services

The Department of Records and Information Services, the Office of the Deputy Mayor for Strategic Initiatives, the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, the McSilver Institute for Poverty Policy and Research at NYU, and the Vital City project are planning a conference to consider the recommendations and observations from the 1936 Mayor's Commission on Conditions in Harlem, data from NYC Speaks and implications for City government.

Appointed by Mayor LaGuardia after a 1935 riot in Harlem, the Commission members elicited testimony at 21 very interactive hearings and reported on six key areas: Crime and the Police, Discrimination in Employment, Home Relief, Hospitals and Health, Education and Housing. Although the report was published by The Amsterdam News; it was never issued by the City.

Recently, the Administration of Mayor Eric Adams in partnership with the NYC Speaks government organization surveyed New Yorkers on issues of concern and convened community conversations to explore topics in greater depth. The responses and discussions will help shape the initiatives that the City will implement in various communities across the New York City. Many of the survey responses and the community viewpoints are similar to those from 1936.

We are organizing a community conference to explore those similarities. We invite you to attend the conference and participate in the discussion.

September 20, 2022, 9:30 am - 6:30 pm

The Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture

515 Malcolm X Boulevard, New York, NY 10037

Click here to RSVP: <https://bit.ly/HarlemReVisited>.

The People vs Mary Jones: Rethinking Race, Sex and Gender through 19th-Century Court Records

By Riah Lee Kinsey, Intern, Department of Records and Information Services

The 1836 case of Mary Jones, a Black transgender sex worker, was rediscovered in the Municipal Archives by scholars in the 1990s and has gained publicity more recently through transgender scholarship. During a recent internship at the Municipal Archives, Riah Lee Kinsey dug deeper into the story turning up extensive documentation that has not been previously available and sharing fascinating new details about Mary Jones and her community.

Read the full story here: <https://on.nyc.gov/3Q6psBD>.

City and County of New York
 Mary Jones being Examined
 according to law answers as follows
 Ques. What is your age, place of birth, business and
 residence?
 Ans. I will be thirty three Years of age on the 12th day of
 December next, was born in this City, and
 get a living by Cooking, waiting &c and live
 at 108 Green St.
 Ques. What is your right Name?
 Ans. Peter Sewally. I am a man.
 Ques. What induced you to dress yourself in Women's
 clothes?
 Ans. I have been in the practice of painting upon Gills
 of ill fame and made up their Belles and received
 the Company at the door and received the money
 for the Robes &c and this induced me to dress
 in women's clothes, saying I looked so much
 better in them and I have always attended parties
 among the people of my own Color dressed in
 this way - and in New Orleans I always dressed
 in this way - I have been in the State House.
 Ques. Did you steal Mr Haslem's Pocket Book
 and money as charged against you?
 Ans. No Sir and I never saw the Gentleman nor
 laid eyes upon him. I threw my Pocket Book
 from the last night, and had none to throw
 away, and the Pocket Books nor money nor I
 never saw before. Peter Sewally
 Taken before me June 16. 1836.
 C. W. Schuch

Testimony of Mary Jones aka Peter Sewally, June 16, 1836.

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