

Met-Ed Retirees bus trip to Cape May at Christmastime
Thursday December 8, 2022

When we think of Cape May, New Jersey, images of the seaside resort with its pristine beaches come to mind. We discovered that Cape May also has a rich history and diverse architecture. Christmas in Cape May was an impressive display of Victorian Christmas structures and traditions. The Victorian era of the mid 1800s is the period of reign of Queen Victoria and Prince Albert, merging English royalty and German customs, such as the Christmas tree and hanging of the mistletoe.

An example of the Victorian influence was evident in our first stop: a guided tour of the Emlen Physick mansion and estate. The 18-room Victorian mansion was designed by American architect Frank Furness and built in 1879 for Dr. Emlen Physick, a descendant of a well-known prominent Philadelphia family (his grandfather was the inventor of the stomach pump). After completing medical school, he purchased 11 acres on Washington Street and built a carriage house and the 18-room mansion. Dr. Physick permanently retired as a physician at age 23 and continued to live in the mansion until he died in 1916 at age 61.

The mansion was set for demolition in 1970 until the Mid-Atlantic Center for Arts and Humanities restored and now maintains and operates the mansion as a museum. Today the organization goes by the name Cape May MAC, short for Museum, Arts, Cultures. Many original furnishings were on display throughout the house

On our way to dinner at the famous Cape May Lobster House, we turned on Beach Avenue and got a glimpse of the beaches and Atlantic Ocean. Delicious platters of crab cakes, stuffed flounder or chicken fricassee were served. At the end of dinner and before we began our holiday trolley ride through town, we were told stories of how many of these traditions began and sang holiday songs. We ended with a rendition of Twelve Days of Christmas. Each table, as a group, was assigned to sing one of the twelve days. The solo parts of Partridge in a Pear Tree and Five Golden Rings were handled magnificently by Lem, our bus driver and Larry. They may go on the road as the L & L Duo singing those classic hits.

We were then picked up at the Lobster House for a guided trolley tour of Cape May's historic streets to view the Holiday decorations and traditions. We learned more of their Victorian heritage and Christmas traditions as our guide pointed out the brightly decorated sights and sang a few more carols along the way. A perfect ending to an enjoyable trip back in time learning of the Christmas traditions that we take for granted today.

Kathy and Denis Dorward