

MAJOR ATTRACTION – THREE SALT WATER POOLS

In order to compete with traditional hotels and truly become a renowned resort, Slocum introduced higher standards of service to Ocean City. The Flanders attempted to become a “palace-like emporium” by hiring bellhops, doormen and front desk clerks to service each and every guest.

To ensure its success and continue to move the Flanders forward, Slocum took advantage of new opportunities to upgrade existing amenities and cement itself as the “QUEEN of OCEAN CITY’s HOTELS”. The most notable addition occurred after the devastating fire of 1927. The blaze leveled every structure along the boardwalk except the hotel. The city quickly recovered from the fire and rebuilt the boardwalk, a half block closer to the ocean. As the only remaining structure, this decision now effectively moved the hotel away from the beach. To keep from losing its beach-front status, Slocum and the city decided to build an extension of the main boardwalk that would connect with the hotel.

By 1928, the Flanders enjoyed local stardom, but Slocum still sought national attention as a valuable tool to put itself above the competition. With the opportunities offered by the 1927 fire, Slocum utilized the one acre boardwalk extension to transfer the Flanders into a more dominant recreation attraction. In July of 1929; Slocum opened three new salt water pools in this space consisting of an Olympic-sized main pool, children’s pool and diving pool. The Flanders kept its original pool, a 20’ by 55’ outdoor pool in its courtyard, to be used exclusively by their guests. The salt water pools were open to the public and soon became the most popular attraction in Ocean City. During summer days these pools would be filled with swimmers while boardwalk strollers would stop to watch the fun. At night, the Flanders maintained its tradition of holding local and regional swim meets which were previously held in the courtyard pool. Slocum then added spectacular water shows featuring Olympic athletes like Johnny Weismuller and the renowned Ocean City Beach Patrol. The events at the pool complex became so popular that the Flanders’s management lined the main pool with bleachers to accommodate the thousands of spectators. The Flanders’ three front pools were instrumental in showcasing the hotel as a major attraction.

The stock market crash in October of 1929 and the depression era that followed were devastating to the Flanders. After a few years of financial struggles the Ocean Front Hotel Corporation was forced to sell the Flanders to Elwood Kirkman, a multimillionaire banker and prominent lawyer from Atlantic City . Most of the

original investors were paid dimes to the dollar. After the depression, the 1930's continued to be difficult times for the hotel and the city. Ocean City's development remained relatively stagnant and its hope of being a national resort like Atlantic City faded quickly.

In the 1950's Mr. Kirkman continued to keep the face of the Flanders in front of the public eye. The three public pools were staffed by more than 30 trained instructors and life guards daily. More than 1,500 children and adults would learn to swim each and every summer at the Flanders. In 1950 the Miss New Jersey Pageant was held poolside. In 1954 the Flanders Hotel was home to the Diamond Jubilee Water Show.

The Flanders most direct competition opened on May 22nd, 1966. The Port-O-Call Hotel opened on the boardwalk at 15th street. Like its predecessor, the Port-O-Call ushered in a new wave of modern design and became the new model to compete with rising resorts like Wildwood. The Flanders struggled during and after this new wave period. Due to increasing maintenance costs, the Flanders' large pools closed for good on Labor Day 1978. The one acre pool lot sat vacant, basically a sand pit into the 1990's. In the early 1990's a developer installed a small amusement park in that space. In 1995 the amusement park was expanded from a one to three acre facility and was called Playland.

The memories from the attraction of the three salt water pools have been passed down from generation to generation. They were such a large catalyst in turning the Flanders into a successful resort.