

Towns of Allenhurst and Loch Arbour
New Jersey Coastal Heritage Trail
East of Deal Lake, adjacent to State Route 71
Allenhurst
Monmouth County
New Jersey

HABS No. NJ-1005

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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of Interior
Washington, D.C. 20013-7127

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
TOWNS OF ALLENHURST AND LOCH ARBOUR

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- Location: New Jersey Coastal Heritage Trail, East of Deal Lake, adjacent to State Route 71, Allenhurst, Monmouth County, New Jersey.
- Significance: Allenhurst and Loch Arbour are representative of the exclusive resorts that developed along the north New Jersey shore as a result of the coming of the railroad. During the 1860s, the completion of the Raritan and Delaware Railroad lines to New York and the Long Branch and Seashore lines along the beaches, signaled the opening of the shore to extensive resort growth.
- History: Allenhurst, an exclusive residential community bordering the Atlantic Ocean, today appearing as a southern extension of Deal, sits on what was once the private estate and farm of Abner Allen. James Bradley, founder of Asbury Park and patron of Ocean Grove, is credited with creating Deal Lake, which borders Allenhurst. The lake was formed by damming what had been an ocean inlet, making it into a freshwater lake. An 1873 Beers Atlas shows the inlet, which was called Great Bovleston Pond.

The development of substantial homes and cottages, many of which remain today, was started by the Coast Land Company around 1895. Its president, Edwin P. Benjamin, threatened 200 employees before the 1896 federal election, that he would shut down the operation if William McKinley was not elected president.¹ McKinley won the election and Allenhurst, incorporated in 1897 from land formerly in Ocean Township, was completed. The former Allen farmhouse, which the family had run as a hotel, was replaced in 1895 by the more substantial Allenhurst Inn. Between 1895 and 1898 more than 150 cottages and houses were constructed.² Supporting infrastructure included sidewalks and curbs of blue slate.³ Coast Land also had its own lumberyard, builders, and architects.⁴ One of the latter was George D. Morro of Trenton, who designed most of the homes,⁵ though at least one house may have been designed by the New York firm McKim, Mead and White. "Allenhurst! Such is the name of perhaps the finest resort on the whole New Jersey Coast," a Coast Land Company booklet declared in the promotional language of the times.⁶ Residents were offered gas or electric light "at will," while modern sewers and an artesian well,

¹ "Plumber Recalls Allenhurst When Houses Were Few" (Asbury Park, N.J.: Press, 20 Aug. 1961), NP.

² Gail Hunton and James McCabe. Monmouth County Historic Sites Inventory Summary Report (Lincroft, NJ: Monmouth County Parks System, 1984; reprint, 1990), 39.

³ Allenhurst, Allenhurst: From Lake to Ocean (New York: Coast Land Co., Andrew H. Kellogg Press, ND, ca. 1900), 8.

⁴ William E. Selby et al., "The Borough of Allenhurst Congratulates Ocean Township on its Centennial," (NA, ND).

⁵ "Allenhurst to Mark 75th Anniversary," Asbury Park Press (Asbury Park, NJ, April 16, 1972), G2.

⁶ Allenhurst, Allenhurst, 3.

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similar to that of other shore communities, were installed.⁷ Commuting by rail or rail and steamer, via Atlantic Highlands, to jobs in New York was offered as a selling point: "It is possible to leave New York even after 5 o'clock in the afternoon, and reach Allenhurst in ample time for a plunge in the surf before dinner."⁸

Today, much survives of old Allenhurst as well as of the village of Loch Arbour, which was part of Allenhurst until the twentieth century and shares its early history. The hotels, including the Allenhurst Inn on Norwood Avenue, are gone, but the residential streets never became unfashionable or were allowed to become run down. Architectural alterations have intruded less here than at other shore communities. Allenhurst's elegant, turn-of-the-century feel is epitomized by a row of Spanish Revival, tile-roofed mansions on Speirs Avenue off of Ocean Place. Smaller versions and variations on everything from American foursquare to Colonial sit scattered on leafy avenues. The Allenhurst railroad station, which had a free-standing colonnade and elaborate gardens, did not survive a preservation battle in the 1970s,⁹ though New Jersey Transit trains still stop here. The old business district on Main Street, originally "concentrated in one block so as not to be obtrusive,"¹⁰ remains unassuming but apparently viable in the age of the automobile. Main Street shopfronts host a bank, liquor and convenience stores, restaurants, and real estate offices.

What you see today in both Allenhurst and Loch Arbour is what the builders envisioned, from the trees which have now grown to maturity, down to the social system, which still mirrors the exclusivity the developers promised. Coast Land declared that Allenhurst was reserved for only "the best class of summer residents,"¹¹ which set the tone for their later history. "The promotional literature for many of the new shore towns advertised, above all, exclusivity and every modern improvement; from their beginnings, these communities resembled well-to-do suburban towns rather than rustic country retreats."¹² One still has to be wealthy to live here, a consideration that limits diversity; of 874 residents, it was estimated that fewer than five were black in 1990.¹³

⁷ Allenhurst, Allenhurst, 8.

⁸ Allenhurst, Allenhurst, 4.

⁹ Barbara Katell, "Hoping to Save RR Station," The Register (September 11, 1979), 7.

¹⁰ Allenhurst, Allenhurst, 8.

¹¹ Allenhurst, Allenhurst, 3.

¹² Hunton and McCabe, 40.

¹³ Edward L. Walsh, "Small Allenhurst Big on Location, Town Services," Asbury Park Press (Asbury Park, N.J.), H6.

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- Sources: Allenhurst, Allenhurst: From Lake to Ocean. New York: Coast Land Co., Andrew H. Kellogg Press, ca. 1900.
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Project Information:

This project was sponsored by the New Jersey Coastal Heritage Trail (NJCHT) of the National Park Service. Janet Wolf, director. The documentation was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS), Robert Kapsch, chief, under the direction of HABS historian Sara Amy Leach, project supervisor. Three historians completed the research during summer 1991: Field supervisor Sarah Allaback (Massachusetts Institute of Technology), Alfred Holden (University of Vermont), and Camille Gatzka (North Carolina). David Ames (University of Delaware) made the large-format photographs. Historian, Elizabeth Harris May (George Washington University), edited the HABS reports.