

McConnell's elegy on the death of the automobile frontier may seem worlds apart from commercial archeologists' joyful hunt along the living roadside, we may have more in common than meets the eye. He misses the open road. We don't want to lose it. Might not our SCA's purpose "to recognize the unique historical significance of the twentieth century built environment and cultural landscapes of North America" be furthered by understanding both the road trip *and* the roadside? McConnell's book raises at least my curiosity about the future as well as the past.

Since conducting a historic sites survey in 1975 through east-central Illinois for the Illinois Department of Conservation, the automobile landscape has fascinated Keith A. Sculle. He has published many articles and co-authored five books on the subject.

Vacationing on the Jersey Shore

By Charles A. Stansfield Jr.
(Mechanicsburg, Pa.: Stackpole Books, 2004)
243 pp. \$19.95 softcover

Reviewed by Douglas Towne

The first indication we were pushing the limits of weirdness – even for Atlantic City – occurred when the rubbernecking driver of a passing beer truck became transfixed on the strange sidewalk sideshow, nearly sideswiping a parked car. Overlooking such distractions, I continued filming my old high school friend as he donned a wedding dress on New York Avenue while being serenaded by a German masseuse singing, a cappella, Edith Piaf songs.

That's how I spent my vacation on the Jersey Shore, at least when not manically racing go-carts on the pier or overdosing on James' Saltwater Taffy. Perhaps wisely, not all these activities are covered by Charles Stansfield Jr. in *Vacationing on the Jersey Shore*. Still, this book is indispensable if you're a roadside enthusiast planning on cruising the Jersey coastline and an interesting read even if you never set foot in the Garden State.

In the preface, Stansfield puts forth the book's intention. "Appreciating a place – fully knowing its unique flavors and pleasures, its 'personality' – means understanding its nature, its historic roots, and its process of development." The author achieves his objective in the first half of the book by exploring the many facets of the Jersey shore, an exploration that adds depth and understanding to the milieu of features that interest commercial archeologists. Like Bruce Springsteen's debut, *Greetings From Asbury Park*, it's a vivid portrayal of the region.

A good example is how a boardwalk reveals the age of seaside towns. If paralleled by an oceanfront drive, as in Cape May, the resort originally served vacationers arriving by horse-powered carriages. If perpendicular streets dead end at the boardwalk, as in Atlantic City, the resort is a product of

the railroads. Additional boardwalk specifics add to the enjoyment of these (writes Stansfield), "Recreational service districts ... selling vacationers items they want but don't really need."

A geography professor by trade, Stansfield's 40-year academic focus on the subject comes across as if you're casually chatting on the shore while throwing back a few. However, it's doubtful many beachgoers are as studied and articulate ... or have such an amazing supply of vintage postcards and photographs to share.

Topical sidebars pop up throughout the book providing just enough information to pique one's curiosity without taking the reader off track. The 53 subjects range from the Miss America contest (an event designed to stretch the vacation season) to the legend of the Jersey devil (more than just a hockey team mascot) to Gifts of the Sea ("jetsam" is material that floats when deliberately tossed overboard, "flotsam" is material that was accidentally lost) to Oysters "R" in Season (prior to refrigeration, oysters were likely to spoil in warm weather).

A shore tour from the northern, New York-influenced resorts to the southern towns catering to Philadelphians concludes the book. Stansfield captures the nuances of each community without cataloguing every cool roadside stop. At a

time when the roadside artifacts we covet are making the transition from alternative to mainstream – from blight to tourist attraction – it's invigorating to leave some serendipity in our travels. Randomly stumbling upon a neon edifice is more electrifying than locating signs using GPS coordinates from a book.

That serendipity was very much in evidence on my previously alluded to Jersey trip. Getting together with old friends for a wedding near the shore, we decided to make a video about marriage as a nuptial gift. To our delight, Atlantic City was a target-rich environment in which to interview memorable characters. The filming commenced with "Boardwalk Bernie," an elderly gentleman in green suspenders, who charged a buck to serenade the newlyweds with "Moon River" on his harmonica. Our feature climaxed when we happened upon a masseuse sweeping the entry to her studio. Requesting her thoughts on marriage, she responded by inexplicably bringing out her used wedding gown. The rest is history, a series of memorable events that an excellent guidebook, such as *Vacationing on the Jersey Shore*, could add depth to, but could never envision ... and probably wouldn't want to.

Book review editor Douglas Towne recently began writing for the *Phoenix New Times*, an arts and entertainment weekly newspaper. He's still in shock from his editor's instructions to be "irreverent and outrageous," the very qualities that are frowned upon at his day job as a government hydrologist.

