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Congress Hall: a Mainstay of Upper Class Victorian America
Robyn L. Binns
Victorian America was an age of transitions; politically, socially, industrially, and even geographically the United States was experiencing a series of transformations. Amid the changes Congress Hall (fig. 1) was rising from the ashes to once again become the preferred destination of the cities’ elite. This essay will argue that concepts of social class are central to its function, and that Congress Hall’s popularity during its heyday will be related to changes occurring in American Victorian society at the time, highlighting the transformations in economic stratum, medical practices, and transportation technology.

From an aerial view, Congress Hall is comprised of two main wings, set at right angles to each other and measuring approximately 250 feet in length and 75 feet in width. The southern wing runs parallel to the beach, and affords a direct seafront view to the rooms along its eastern side. The eastern wing extends towards the beach and also has a single story addition on its northern side, measuring approximately 50 feet wide and 200 feet long, running parallel to it. The addition begins 50 feet from the intersection of the two wings, and then extends the remaining 200 feet to the end of the eastern wing. This layout affords the maximum number of rooms to have full or partial views of the ocean and was typical for resort hotels of the late nineteenth century. In Cape May alone, along with Congress Hall, the Windsor, the Colonial, and the Stockton all applied this architectural design.
Congress Hall is surrounded by a multi-story colonnade consisting of fifty-five, white, square, wooden columns. The base of the column extends a few inches wider than the main shaft and is approximately one foot in height. The transition from the base to the shaft is a small piece of wood, similar to a quarter-round, which curves from the wider base to the shaft. The capital of the column is made up of a simple design; it consists of stepped molding surrounding the shaft. The columns extend up the three floors of the hotel to support the high veranda at the mansard level.

Underneath the veranda is a patio of poured concrete which surrounds the building. It is of a light gray color and imprinted with horizontal and vertical lines, giving the concrete a checkerboard look. Along the length of the patio that faces the beach there are numerous rocking chairs sitting in a row and facing the sea.

The main building is made of brick, painted in a pale yellow color. It has three floors, a mansard and a basement. Each floor has eighty-eight windows, not including the back entryway. The first floor’s windows are taller than the others and are the only ones with shutters; a recent addition to increase the similarity between the Congress Hall of today and the original. Some of the first floor’s windows are in fact doors, designed to keep a symmetrical appearance along the first floor. All three floors have top hung casement windows with eight panes of glass.

The second floor is the only one that has balconies coming from the guest room windows. There are nine balconies; four on the wing running parallel to the beach, and five on the wing running towards the beach. All of the balconies have views of the ocean. The balconies are entirely white and vary in length; extending from two to four windows. Lights are placed under each balcony to shine down upon the patio.
Each balcony consists of wooden decking upon which one stands and a balustrade topped by a round wooden railing. The white, wooden deck is approximately eight inches thick and has a solid, smooth appearance. The balustrade is composed of white, wooden planks with a pattern carved out of them. Each plank is placed directly next to its neighbor, so on a quick glance it appears the balustrade is a solid piece with gingerbread work. From the bottom to the top, the pattern on the plank starts with a few inches of undecorated wood. The plank then takes the appearance of a bell, then an oval in top of the bell, followed by an upside-down bell. Each plank is symmetrical both vertically and horizontally. Carved out of the inside of each bell-shape are two hearts, one facing upwards and the other downwards, connected by their points. The points are exaggerated so that it looks as if the hearts are being pulled away from one another. In the center of the oval, a rounded cross is carved. Above the balustrade is a white, wooden railing forming an additional barrier. Within each balcony sit white, wooden, rocking-chairs. The third floor is the same as the second, but without the balconies.

The mansard level has fifty-five dormer windows. Most of these have two side-by-side windows which have four panes of glass in each. The three

Figure 2. View of Congress Hall from the west. (Photograph by Robyn L. Binns.)
dormers on the end of each wing are a single window, as well as the two dormers at the intersection of the two wings. The slate roof is covered with 18,000 shingles and is trimmed in white.

The main entrance to Congress Hall is located on the western side of the southern wing facing inland (fig. 2). The doorway is enclosed by a white frame with a sign above saying, “Congress Hall,” which is illuminated at night. The double doors are original, being twelve feet tall and constructed of wood painted a dark brown color. Each door has a glass insert on the top half of the door, with sidelights on either side. These reach the height of the door and are divided horizontally into two pieces; the top piece of glass being shorter than the lower piece. Next to the door stands a vintage gas street lamp, now converted to electricity.

At the interior junction of two wings facing the sea, an entrance is located which provides common access for guest to the veranda. The entrance consists of what appears to be four doors, although only the center two are functional, placed in the center of the corner fitted wall. The center two doors are a dark brown color, matching the main entrance, and the two on either side are white. Each door has one large glass insert in the top half and the bottom half is of a panel construction. The design consists of two square panels placed above two longer rectangular panels. On either side of the doors are two gas sconces protruding from the wall. Above is another wooden “Congress Hall” sign that is illuminated at night. Above the doors are two sets of three fixed side-by-side windows, one of each being located on the levels of the second and third floors. Each set of windows are encased in a white frame, and have eight panes of glass.

Congress Hall sits on a property adjacent to the beach. It boasts sprawling lawns, which in times past were used to satisfy the growing ardor for baseball and outdoor concerts. Congress Hall was built before the age of the automobile, and in turn was not equipped to handle the needs
of the guests who arrive in them. There is no paved parking lot, just the grass of the field that guests can park their cars on. At one time an application for an underground parking garage was submitted but it was never approved.

The interior of Congress Hall consists of 104 guest rooms, half as many as the originally constructed due to the introduction of modern plumbing and the addition of bathrooms, two restaurants, and an assortment of shops. The first floor is mainly occupied by the large ballroom, lobby, and shops. Originally planned with guest rooms on the first floor, these have since been converted into up-scale boutiques.

Most hallways are wide with curved plaster walls and wooden floors with carpet runners.

When Congress Hall was refurbished in 2002, the owner wanted to capture the essence of its original design, with a few modern conveniences added. Much of the interior design has been a recreation of the hotel during the late nineteenth century. The pattern on the stripped carpets in the guest rooms (fig. 3) was inspired by the carpet that ran through the hotel, the plaster walls were all painted in solid bold pastels, and many of the fixtures were styled after the originals. The grand ballroom was also refurbished, keeping many of its original fixtures. The design was simple and elegant, representative of when the hotel was rebuilt after the fire in late Victorian era.
The concept of the modern hotel did not appear until 1793 with the opening of the Union Public Hotel. Until this time travelers would stay in taverns or inns.¹ The grand resort hotel rose from this conception. Unlike ordinary hotels the grand hotels had a distinct architectural and landscape style, and provided its guests a complete experience of an upper class holiday, from technological advancements to social entertainment.

Examining the architecture of a grand hotel, the eye is first drawn to its sheer size. The enormity of the structure was enough to set it apart from the average and helped to embed an image of exclusivity and wealth, as large-scale construction was only available to those with access to capital and financial institutions.² When choosing an architectural style for the grand hotel the decision had to encompass more than just selecting an attractive style, but it also had to emit a feeling of being special and had to impart a recognizable perception of the good life. Due to this, the architecture of the grand hotel rarely has been at the forefront of architectural styles, and instead has been built in familiar styles with novel additions to reinforce the notion that the hotel is a distinct place.³

In keeping with the theme of the grand resort hotel as a place of luxury, various technological advances were often included in the construction to provide visitors unique experiences that they would not normally get in their own home: improved fireplaces; gas, and eventually electric lights; wire and box-spring mattresses; elevators; telegraph communication; bell and telephone systems; steam heat; and hot and cold running water were just a few of the

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advanced amenities offered. Also included in the construction of the grand hotels were ballrooms, a mainstay of upper class culture. Magnificent ballrooms were constructed in each of these hotels, allowing for numerous hops and balls throughout the season. This gave visitors the opportunity to display their wealth, social standing and fashion, a ritual which was embedded in upper class culture.

The upper class was undoubtedly the target guests of the grand resort hotels. They provided a forum for social entertainment, new amenities and luxuries that only the elite of the community could afford to experience. The clientele of the grand hotels of the era included business tycoons, political leaders, socialites, and captains of industry. The hotels offered them an open stage upon which to display their wealth and mingle with those of similar status. In combination with Cape May’s reputation for lavishness, Congress Hall quickly rose to become one of the first grand resort hotels.

The Congress Hall that stands today is not the original structure that was built in 1816. The previous hotel was destroyed by a fire on November 9, 1878 that also took with it thirty-five acres of prime beachfront property. However, the reputation

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5 Limerick, Ferguson, and Oliver, 29.


established by the original was engrained in the rebirth of hotel.

The first Congress Hall (fig. 4) stood for sixty years, set back a few feet from where the current Congress Hall resides. Its architecture was also grand in design and similar to the style of the current building; its general exterior dimensions, having three floors, towering pillars and imposing verandas. Due to its size, the original hotel was called the Big House, but was later changed to Congress Hall to commemorate its original owner, Thomas Hughes, appointment to the House of Representatives. In 1856 the interior was redone to account for modern luxuries, technologies and furniture, as was announced in the *New York Daily Times*.

“The subscriber has the pleasure to announce to the public that he has recently fitted up in a style of superior elegance and comfort, this well-known and popular establishment…with spacious and airy chambers, ample and extensive corridors, superb drawing rooms, and a dining hall unsurpassed by any in the United States. The furniture, which is entirely new, is one of the most costly and luxurious description…Connected with the establishment is a telegraphic station, communicating with all parts of the Union.”

The sweeping lawns the hotel resided on were well suited for the new leisure activities in the nineteenth century. The large six-acre lawns were perfectly capable for providing enough space to create a baseball field. During the summer of 1865, baseball spread throughout Cape May and the first game was played between guests of the Columbia and Congress Hall. This brought about an effort to organize a baseball club to play regular match games; September 1866 the new club was established. In addition to using the lawn as a baseball field, a pavilion was built on the lawns to accommodate a band for outdoor concerts.

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These social activities attracted many upper class citizens, but especially high
government officials. By spending his summers there, President Franklin Pierce established
Congress Hall as a favored summer retreat for future presidents such as James Buchanan and
Ulysses S. Grant. Other political leaders followed suit. In August 1874, Secretary of the
Treasury Bristow and his family, and Honorable B. H. Bristow visited Congress Hall. All
served to establish its reputation as a destination of the politically powerful and elite, a reputation
which endured even after the original structure was destroyed by fire.

Although the physical structure was consumed in the fire of 1878, it would take more
than a fire to damage its place and function among those of means. The design of the new hotel
capitalized on this in a particularly clever fashion. Having kept its style and location so closely
aligned with the original allowed Congress Hall’s reputation and social foundations to remain
intact, even after the complete loss of the physical structure. The newly rebuilt hotel closely
resembled the original; although built in brick instead of wood in an attempt to prevent another
disastrous fire to the building. Architecturally the hotel’s style resembled that of an antebellum
Southern mansion, which seemed standard issue in the 1870s compared to the elaborate Gothic
styles which were the trend in architectural movements of the time. However, as stated earlier,
the architectural style of a grand resort hotel was not meant to be at the forefront of architectural
movements, but instead to display a clearly recognizable symbol of the upper class, unique to the
area.

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12 Wright, 19.
14 Limerick, Ferguson, and Oliver, 13.
Figure 5. The rebuilt Congress Hall with its staff circa 1920. (Source: www.congresshall.com.)

After the fire, Congress Hall (fig. 5) was able to rebuild its structure and preserve its reputation, and soon after its reopening resumed its place as the center of society and home to those in power. During the summer of 1891, President Benjamin Harrison converted Congress Hall into a “Summer White House” while the actual White House was undergoing its own renovations. Although Harrison and his wife Caroline spent the summer in a cottage in Cape May, it was unsuitable for office affairs, so he had one of Congress Hall’s ground floor rooms converted to serve as an executive office for himself. Harrison returned to Congress Hall in 1893 where he delivered the principle address at the Fourth of July celebration.¹⁵

The new Congress Hall quickly reclaimed its place as the center of summer society. Its ballroom was home to many hops and balls that were attended by the, “elite of the island.”¹⁶ Its lawns also boasted numerous outdoor concerts. John Philip Sousa, a famous composer known

especially for his marches, was so taken with Congress Hall that in 1882 he composed the “Congress Hall March,” which he debuted on the lawn of Congress Hall.\textsuperscript{17}

In rebuilding Congress Hall, it was important to keep the impression of upper class exclusivity intact. America was in the midst of the Gilded Age, where opulence and extravagance was king. The upper class sought locations in which they could display their wealth and socialize with people in similar society. However, at the same time, there was an intermediate stratum emerging with increased access to leisure activities.\textsuperscript{18} For the first time, holidays and vacations were not just for the upper class.\textsuperscript{19} In foregoing cutting edge architecture the hotel again relied upon the social traditions and habits of its clientele to ensure its unique standing amongst the growing competition.

The Victorian era witnessed many transformations; however the population increase of cities was at the forefront, which encouraged those with financial means to leave the cities during the summer months. The population of Philadelphia was especially important to the popularity

\begin{table}[h]
\begin{tabular}{|c|c|c|c|}
\hline
Year & Philadelphia (including suburbs) & New York & Boston & Baltimore \\
\hline
1710 & 9,000 & & 11,000 & \\
1720 & 8,500 & 11,000 & 13,000 & \\
1730 & 10,500 & 13,000 & 17,000 & \\
1740 & 13,400 & 14,000 & 15,731 & \\
1750 & 18,756 & 15,631 & & \\
1760 & 28,000 & 15,520 & & \\
1770 & 30,000 & 18,000 & 8,000 & \\
1780 & 42,444 & 33,131 & 18,038 & 13,503 \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\caption{Population of seaport cities. (Source: W. S. Rossiter, \textit{A Century of Population Growth} [Washington, D. C., 1909], 11.)}
\end{table}

\textsuperscript{17} Kenneth Berger, \textit{The March King and His Band: The Story of John Philip Sousa} (New York: Exposition Press, 1957).

\textsuperscript{18} The debate over the emergence of the middle class has been a heated topic among historians for some time. Stuart Blumin examines this notion in his work \textit{The Emergence of the Middle Class: Social Experience in the American City, 1760-1900}. In his opening chapter, he offers a social history on class, sorting out what he finds useful from each thought, and eventually provides the reader with his own view. He concludes that the emergence of an intermediate class was defined by changes in economic production, but also distinguished by a common way of life that included consumption, residence, formal and informal voluntary associations, and family life. These changes, he argues, did not occur until the nineteenth century.

of Congress Hall since that is where many of its guests traveled from. As Rossiter illustrates (fig. 6), the population influx occurred steadily throughout the eighteenth century. However, the importance of Philadelphia as a seaport city throughout the nineteenth century led to a rapid increase in population, and in 1900 the population of Philadelphia was 1,293,697, making it the third largest city in the nation. Overcrowding in the city was felt most during the summer months by the inhabitants:

“Within the last ten days I have died daily with the heat in New York, in Philadelphia, in the shady values of Juniata...For relief I rushed to the sea-breezes of Cape May, and lo! It was hotter still. Wer it not for the constant breeze from the ocean., it would be as bad here as in the pent up city.”

Without the breeze from the ocean, there was no relief from the heat.

The congested conditions in combination with the heat of the summer months led to an even greater number deaths caused by widespread disease that thrived in this environment. The nineteenth century city was plagued by cholera, typhoid and yellow fever, and could empty the streets of bustling cities overnight. Infants, the elderly, and those deemed delicate were especially cautioned to avoid this type of setting with good reason. During the nineteenth century, a consistent seasonal pattern of summer mortality of infants and one year olds was observed that corresponded with yearly summer epidemics of diarrheal disease. To evade this unfortunate situation doctors advised Americans to avoid the danger entirely by the early removal of infants and toddlers from the city to the safer environment of the seaside. This, however, was an option only available to those with the financial means to do so.

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20 U.S. Census Bureau
During the nineteenth century the seaside was not just a place of relaxation and leisure, it was also home to what was at the time a prescribed medical treatment. Travelers, especially those coming from the cities, were arriving at the shore to partake in the medical practice of sea-bathing. This was encouraged by doctors as well as society itself, citing the evils of the overcrowded cities and praising the atmosphere of the seaside. Contemporary literature and the published media praised sea-bathing for its healing powers and encouraged periodic trips to the seashore. Cape May, and more particularly Congress Hall, capitalized on these attitudes and created an environment built around this practice.

As one historian wrote, “The pièce de résistance of a vacation at the shore was, of course, ‘sea-bathing’”\(^2\) At first sea-bathing was not considered merely a leisure activity, but as a prescription by doctors to cure many ailments.\(^3\) The instructions even went so far as to tell the patient how and when to participate in sea-bathing.\(^4\) According to doctors, it was the mixture of the salt water and sea air that contributed to restoring ones health.

Unlike the air in the city that was subject to constant contamination and lack of motion, the air at the seashore was pure and saturated with sea salts. It was said that breathing this air was invigorating and produced an instantaneous sense of exhilaration, improved ones appetite, and promoted digestion. Bathing in salt water, which was thought to be more beneficial than fresh, was credited in curing various ailments. Sea-bathing stimulated the skin and increased


\(^3\) In July 1852, General Scott was expected to be at the Anniversary Celebration of the Battles of Chippewa and Bridgewater. Due to a disease that he contracted in Mexico his physicians prescribed him sea-bathing and sea atmosphere, causing him to cancel his prior engagement. *New York Daily Times*, 22 July 1852.

\(^4\) Dr. John W. Williams wrote that noon is the best time for bathing, and also right before and after high tide. See John W. Williams, *An Essay on the Utility of Sea Bathing: in Preserving Health, and as a Remedy in Disease, Especially in Nervous, Scrophulous, Bilious, Liver, and Cutaneous Complaints: With Directions for Employing the Warm, Cold, Vapour, Shower, and Medicated Baths. Also Observations on mineral Waters, Natural and Artificial* (Portsmouth: Printed and Published by S. Mills, 1820), 76.
circulation, and was a cure for affections of the lungs; brain-affections associated with general nervous disorders; almost all chronic disease of the abdominal organs including dyspepsia, chronic diarrhea and congestions of the liver; debility from rapid growth; diseases of the kidneys and bladder; and delayed or difficult menstruation can be corrected.\textsuperscript{26}

The literature being read during the nineteenth century had a profound influence in popularizing the use of sea-bathing, and not only encouraged sea-bathing as a cure but also to bolster the health of women, who were generally considered ill and in need of treatment. Women of the nineteenth century upper classes have often been characterized as sickly and delicate to the point that it seems for these women of status being ill was in vogue. There should be no surprise at this considering the literature being read by the women. Sentimental fictions that were popular with the women exemplified heroines that were more often than not enduring under a burden of sickness, which would have caused any of a less dignified background to become incapacitated.\textsuperscript{27} The popularization of women as being of ill health even led some writers to create satire on women’s attempts to become a fashionable sufferer.\textsuperscript{28}

The renowned nineteenth-century author Jane Austen assisted in the proliferation of women as fashionable sufferers and the use of sea-bathing as a cure. Three of her most popular works, \textit{Pride and Prejudice} published in 1813, \textit{Emma} published in 1815-1816, and \textit{Persuasion} published in 1818, all included references to delicate women and the healing powers of sea-bathing.\textsuperscript{29} As with the case of Pride and Prejudice, just a mention of the shore resort of Brighton aided in its increase of recognition.

\textsuperscript{26} See Packard, \textit{Sea-Air}, 19, 22, 73-75; Williams, \textit{Utility of Sea Bathing}, 57-60; and Buchan, \textit{Domestic Medicine}.
\textsuperscript{27} Ann Douglas Wood, “‘The Fashionable Disease’: Women’s Complaints and Their Treatment in Nineteenth-Century America” \textit{Journal of Interdisciplinary History} 4 (Summer 1973) : 26-27.
\textsuperscript{28} Augustus Hoppin, \textit{A Fashionable Sufferer; or, Chapters from Life’s Comedy} (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1883).
\textsuperscript{29} In \textit{Pride and Prejudice}, Mrs. Bennet was often characterized as being ill and unwell with numerous references to her “nerves.” While discussing the regiments move to Brighton Mrs. Bennet replied that “A little sea-bathing would
Along with popular literature, print media helped to spread the use of sea-bathing. There were numerous editorials written in support of sea-bathing and its locations and also images depicting those participants (fig. 7). In one article, “The City in the Summer,” printed by the *New York Daily Times* in 1855, the author argued the case for New York to spend money to create a “healthier atmosphere” in the city. This he believed would prevent the city from losing citizens and money during the summer months when those “of certain streets and quarters…flight to the county, or the sea-side” to indulge in sea-bathing, which he claims they do because it is “absolutely necessary for the preservation of health.”

Considering the encouragement of medical practitioners with collaboration from literature and print media, one is able to see the appeal that sea-bathing brought to the public and the importance they placed on its ability to cure. Some believed so adamantly that they even provided the opportunity for future generations to participate. Due to these attitudes towards sea-bathing, resort hotels and towns, including Congress Hall, started to take advantage

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31 It was reported in *Harper's Weekly* that a Mr. Thomas Banting left the residue of his estate, valued at $100,000, in a trust for the establishment of a “Thomas Banting Memorial Institution.” This enabled convalescents to participate in sea-bathing at Worthing. See “Personal: Mr. Thomas Banting” *Harpers Weekly*, 8 August 1874.
of the situation and directed their advertisements to highlight their ability to provide for sea-bathers.

Throughout the nineteenth century, but especially in the later half, there were numerous advertisements and testaments of Cape May’s superior beaches for the use of sea-bathing that appeared in various print sources. One observer wrote to the New York Daily Times attesting to his partiality.

“My experience of sea-bathing has embraced Nabant, Newport, Montauk Point, East Hampton, Sachems Head, Coney Island, Long Branch. Deal, and Cape May. Cape May, ‘though surely bear’st the bell, Among them a’. Indeed, you could not make Cape May out of all the others put together…For advantages of the sea. There is no watering place like Cape May”32

Another ad claimed Cape May to be one of the most fashionable bathing locations with unmatched sea-bathing.33 Even the railroads joined in on the praise. The shore resorts were popular destinations for railway travelers, so the railroad companies encouraged trips. Both the Pennsylvania Railroad and the Philadelphia and Abescombe Line commended Cape May for its glorious bathing facilities and its convenient location at the end of its line.34

Figure 8. Sea-bathers in Cape May during the early 1900s. (Source: Don Pocher and Pat Pocher, Images of America: Cape May in Vintage Postcards [Charleston, S.C.: Arcadia Publishing, 1998], 46.)

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34 See “The Pennsylvania Railroad” New York Times, 7 June 1885, p.3.; and Wilson, 430.
Congress Hall did its part to capitalize on the sea-bathing trend. Unlike many hotels of the era, Congress Hall boasted beach front property, which allowed for its guests to have just a short walk to the beach. It also provided bath houses on the beach, allowing its patrons to change in and out of their swim attire directly before and after bathing on Congress Hall’s private beach.\footnote{Wright, 19, 25.}

Although Cape May was first known as a place that is good for your health as far back as 1750, it was not until the arrival of new advances in transportation that people were able to travel to Cape May with regularity and ease.\footnote{Nelson, 131.} Before the railroad reached the shores of Cape May, a vacationer had only two means to get to the seashore: overland or by water. Each of these routes meant a long and difficult journey.

Getting from Philadelphia to Cape May by the overland pass necessitated a harsh and time consuming trip through the pine belt by wagon, or later, stagecoach. The trip often meant that travelers were up before dawn and did not arrive at their destination until after midnight. To travel the approximately 110 miles from Camden, one of the satellite towns to the north of Philadelphia, was a trip several hours longer than even the trek from Philadelphia.\footnote{Wilson, 415-418.} This trip was not a pleasant one; whether inside or outside of the coach the traveler could not escape the dust or the
heat of the summer, and there were also accidents resulting from stage drivers on rival lines racing to their destinations.\textsuperscript{38} Eventual improvements in roads and spring carriages led to an increase in travel, particularly by feminine travelers.\textsuperscript{39}

The second option to those going from Philadelphia to Cape May was by waterway. Although it was less taxing than the overland trip, it was a longer trip, often taking two days to reach Cape May compared to the one day by stagecoach. Before the steamboat graced the waters between Philadelphia and Cape May, travelers had to journey by sailboat. As early as 1802 there was a regularly running service carrying passengers during the summer season.\textsuperscript{40} The advent of the first steamboat \textit{Pennsylvania} in 1825 increased the number of trips made between the two ports, and within a few years the \textit{Delaware, Kennebec, Manhattan, Boston, and Cape May} (fig. 9) made their way onto the schedule.\textsuperscript{41} In response to this increase of steamboats, Congress Hall built its own pier, which received steamboats and sailing ships from Philadelphia, Maryland and New York.\textsuperscript{42}

The arrival of the railroad to Cape May was slow in coming. The first rail line to reach a shore resort on the New Jersey coast was in 1855, connecting Camden to Atlantic City. Originally Cape May favored the idea, but it was decided that the route from Camden to Cape

\textsuperscript{38} Alice Morse Earle, \textit{Stage-Coach and Tavern Days} (London: Macmillan & Company, 1900), 365-370.
\textsuperscript{39} See Wilson, 418.; and Earle, \textit{Stage-Coach}, 223-240.
\textsuperscript{40} Wilson, 419.
\textsuperscript{41} See Wilson, 419.; “Classified Ad: Congress Hall, Cape May, N.J” \textit{New York Daily Times}, 9 June 1856, p. 6.; and Beesley, 82.
\textsuperscript{42} Wright, 25.
May lay over unsatisfactory upland grade.\textsuperscript{43} By the end of the 1850s the Cape Island Council appropriated $10,000 to aid in building a railroad to the city.\textsuperscript{44} Walter Burrows Miller, the former owner of Congress Hall, also supported the establishment of the rail line, mortgaging much of his property to help finance it.\textsuperscript{45} In the summer of 1863, the final tracks were laid to connect the 81.24 miles from Cape May to Philadelphia; completing the West Jersey Railroad system (fig. 10).\textsuperscript{46}

There was no other single influence that proved to be more of a catalysis in the development of shore resorts during the nineteenth century than of the railroad. The advent of the railroad increased the amount of people who were able to get to the seashore, and allowed families to stay for longer periods of time, husbands having the opportunity to quickly get back to the city for business affairs. The fastest express train took only two hours and twenty-five minutes to get from station to station (fig. 11).\textsuperscript{47} This new transportation also allowed for cheaper travel, enabling those from the middle class to travel to the

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{schedule_of_trains}
\caption{Schedule of Trains. (Source: \textit{The Ocean Resort: Life at Cape May} [Philadelphia: Allen, Lane \& Scott, Printers, 1876].)}
\end{figure}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{43} Wilson, 469.
\textsuperscript{44} Originally formed as the borough of Cape Island, on March 9, 1869 it was renamed the city of Cape May. Wilson, 476.
\textsuperscript{45} Wright, 22.
\textsuperscript{46} See Wilson, 476.; and \textit{The Ocean Resort: Life at Cape May} (Philadelphia: Allen, Lane \& Scott, Printers, 1876), 24.
\textsuperscript{47} See Wilson, 477.; and \textit{The Ocean Resort}, “West Jersey Railroad Co.”
\end{flushright}
seaside as well, leading to an influx of resorts tailored to them. However, it would still be some time before those of the middle class would be visiting Congress Hall with regularity.

In conclusion, while transformations were occurring in Victorian society that could potentially diminish the polarization of classes, Congress Hall retained its identity as a resort for the upper class. Social class was a central function to the establishment of Congress Hall as seen through its architecture, social entertainments, and novel amenities offered.

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