

CONEY ISLAND

Ellis Island Connections

Nathan's

Nathan Handwerker was born in Galicia, which was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. He immigrated to New York in 1912 aboard the *S.S. Campanello* at 20 years old. On the manifest, his name is spelled "Nuchem Gewisseuheit." He worked at a restaurant in Coney Island where he sliced bread rolls. The restaurant sold hot dogs for only ten cents, which inspired him to start his own business selling them for five cents. Nathan and his wife, Ida, spent their life savings opening the stand. Ida created the recipe for the hot dogs, keeping them kosher, since the family was Jewish. The stand was unnamed until 1921, when he decided to call it "Nathan's Hot Dogs." Nathan's son, Murray Handwerker, developed the stand into the chain we now know as "Nathan's Famous." Nowadays, Nathan's gathers some of the longest lines on the boardwalk, and they host a hot dog eating contest every Fourth of July.

Paul's Daughter

Originally called "Paul & Gregory's," this iconic boardwalk restaurant was established by Paul Georgoulakos and Gregory Bitetzakis in 1962. Paul Georgoulakos arrived in New York on November 28th, 1946, aboard the *S.S. Marine Karp* with his siblings. His parents had immigrated several years before, giving the children citizenship. At 21 years old, Paul opened a milk stand at Coney Island before meeting Gregory and opening their boardwalk business. The partners were evicted from their original location in 1968 when Rockefeller bought the property. They re-opened it two years later two blocks down from the original location. Paul changed its name to "Paul's Daughter" after his daughter, Tina, who now operates the restaurant. The restaurant came close to eviction again in 2011, just short of its 50th anniversary. Owners of Luna Park assumed control of boardwalk properties and planned for large renovations. However, they offered Paul's Daughter a lease renewal and Paul was able to celebrate the anniversary. The restaurant boasts a large menu of boardwalk meals and snacks and continues to gather beach and amusement park-goers.

Sideshow

The sideshow is a crucial part of Coney Island's history. The World Circus Sideshow ran from 1922 to 1941, showcasing individuals with unique talents or physical conditions. Prince Randian was one of the most popular performers. He was known as "The Human Torso," due to his tetra-amelia syndrome, a rare genetic disorder characterized by the absence of arms and legs. He was born in Demara, British Guiana, but traveled around the world for performances. He traveled from St. Thomas, British West Indies, to New York aboard the *S.S. Parima* in 1917. He was held in the hospital for about a week before being discharged. His destination was Paterson, NJ, where his wife resided. Prince Randian's signature trick was to light a cigarette using just his lips. During his routine, he covered his body with a wool garment and moved around the stage using his hips. He also painted and wrote by holding a pen or paintbrush between his lips. Since then, Coney Island has hosted various iterations of the sideshow.

Wonder Wheel

Charles Hermann designed the Wonder Wheel, and his business partner, Herman Garms, helped his dream become a reality. Charles immigrated to New York from Romania aboard the *S.S. Ultonia* as "Karoly Hermann." He was 17 years old, and he found work as a machinist in New York and San Francisco. When he returned to New York, Charles began designing a perpetual motion machine. He was granted approval of a patent in 1915. While working on his design, Charles met Herman Garms, a German immigrant with a background in business. Herman Garms immigrated to New York from Germany aboard the *S.S. Pretoria* in 1908 as "Herman Rosenfeld." They formed a corporation called Eccentric Ferris Wheel Company to set their invention in motion. They completed the Wonder Wheel in 1920.

The Wonder Wheel is 150 feet tall; passenger cabins slide along the winding sets of rails between the hub and the rim rather than being fixed directly to the rim of the wheel like on a classic Ferris wheel. Once he saw the wheel complete, Charles Hermann sold all his shares in the company and left the operation in Herman's hands. Herman operated the wheel for six decades, sharing the work with his son, Fred Garms. During the 1960s, Coney Island faced a rapid economic decline, but the Wonder Wheel continued to take passengers. Fred Garms sold the wheel to Deno D. Vourderis, a Greek immigrant, in 1983. He renamed it Deno's Wonder Wheel and made it the central attraction of Deno's Wonder Wheel Amusement Park. The Wonder Wheel is the centerpiece of the Coney Island landscape, and it offers vast views of the ocean and the Manhattan skyline.

Luna Park

Paul Boyton was a showman and adventurer who founded Sea Lion Park, Coney Island's original amusement park. He was born in Pittsburgh in 1848 and joined the Union Navy during the Civil War. He toured with Barnum's circus before relocating to Coney Island and buying 16 acres of land to build Sea Lion Park. Boyton traveled from Liverpool to New York aboard the *S.S. Umbria* in 1893; his occupation is listed as "merchant." In 1902, Boyton sold Sea Lion Park to Frederic Thompson, an architect, inventor, and showman. He was born in Ironton, Ohio, and began designing amusement park rides at age 19. He got his start in Coney Island by bringing his ride, "A Trip to the Moon," to Sea Lion Park. When he acquired the park, he rebuilt everything and reopened it a year later under the name "Luna Park." He turned his attention away from his business in 1906 and began managing Broadway productions. Thompson traveled from Southampton to New York aboard the *S.S. Kaiser Wilhelm* in 1905; his occupation is listed as "manufacturer." The park hosts many iconic rides, such as the Cyclone, the Astrotower, and the Steeplechase.

La Marcus Thompson is known as the "Father of the Roller Coaster." He was born in Jersey, Ohio, and worked as a carpenter and grocery store operator. He had an interest in roller coaster design and accumulated almost 30 patents throughout his life. His most famous ride was the Switchback Railway, which opened in Coney Island in 1884. This was the first roller coaster in Coney Island and one of the first in the country. Three years later, he opened a ride in Atlantic City called the "Scenic Railway," which gave riders a view of the surrounding landscape. Thompson also managed the "L.A. Thompson Scenic Railway Company," which operated several iterations of the ride in Coney Island. Thompson traveled from Liverpool to New York aboard the *S.S. Mauretania* in 1913.