

Many families visited Carr's and Sparrow's Beaches to enjoy warm-weather activities and great musical entertainment.



Sarah Vaughan, a well-known jazz singer, performed at Carr's in 1956.

In the 1950's, the general manager of Carr's Beach was Rufus E. Mitchell. Mr. Mitchell was a close friend of Charles W. "Hoppy" Adams, Jr., the disc jockey on WANN-AM Radio station (Pamphlet 0098). A *Baltimore Sun* news article on February 21, 2003, cited Adams' contention that "Mr. Rufus booked any artist that hit the top ten; he had all the stars – the Temptations, Four Tops, the Supremes, Aretha Franklin, Ruth Brown. I've seen buses come up from North Carolina, the Delmarva Peninsula and, of course, Baltimore and Washington. The traffic would be backed up along the roads into Carr's." Those days are gone now, but for some people the memories remain.



In a 1950's Swimsuit Contest at Carr's Hoppy Adams (front R) introduces unknown swimsuit contestant.

In a mixed blessing, desegregation in the mid-1960's undermined venues like Carr's and Sparrow's, but many older citizens still have pleasant memories of "back in the day."

The next pamphlet will focus on other memorable events and happenings at the entertainment complex known simply to thousands as "The Beaches."



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African-American History of Harford County, Maryland©



Remembering Carr's and Sparrow's Beaches

Part 1

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Sharing Our History
Through Research and
Discussion

Cover: A vintage postcard (c 1930 - 1945) picturing Sparrow's Beach.

Introduction

Not until the 1960's were major centers of entertainment in Central Maryland open to African-Americans. These included summertime settings such as swimming pools, beaches, amusement parks, and concert venues. To enjoy such attractions during the Era of Jim Crow, people of color from Harford County had to trek to areas near Baltimore and Annapolis.

This pamphlet provides insight into the experiences of Harford County's older generation, persons 60-years or older who ventured to Anne Arundel County in search of amenities denied them locally. Two such facilities were Carr's Beach and Sparrow's Beach amusement areas, known collectively as "The Beach," to enjoy swimming, carnival-like rides, and many other coastal and musical activities.

On the Waterfront

Denied service by an Annapolis-area restaurant, Charles Douglass, son of the renown Frederick Douglass and a long-time employee of the Treasury Department, in 1893 bought 40-acres of waterfront property where he established Highland Beach, a residential community for affluent African-Americans. Later, resorts that catered exclusively to African-Americans began to spring up on the Chesapeake

Bay between the 1930's and the 1950's.

The Beaches

The origins of Carr's and Sparrow's Beaches go back to 1902 when Frederick Carr, a former slave, and his wife Mary acquired 180 acres of farmland on the Annapolis Neck Peninsula. Here the couple hosted picnics and church outings and took in boarders. Shortly before Frederick Carr's death, the family founded Carr's Beach in 1926 and Sparrow's Beach in 1931, overseen by daughters Florence Carr Sparrow and Elizabeth Carr Smith. Just a few miles north of Highland Beach, the locations were open to African-Americans, primarily from Baltimore and Washington, and were decidedly commercial in nature.

In 1948, after the death of Elizabeth Carr Smith, the facility was acquired by William L. "Little Willie" Adams, a Baltimore entrepreneur who formed a company that expanded recreational and entertainment facilities for its patrons (see Pamphlet 0098). It was Adams who established Carr's Beach as one of the major stops for African-American artists and musicians on the Chitlin' Circuit, a group of East Coast and southern show business venues that tailored to black audiences.

Activities and Entertainment

"The Beach" abounded with activities. During the week the sites were places for day camps, religious services, and

church picnics. On Saturdays and Sundays, as individuals and groups descended on the area, diversions for persons of all ages took prominence, especially during the early part of the day — swimming, picnicking, amusement rides, and beauty contests. Dance competitions or instructions in the latest dance steps were other regular entertainments -- as was just relaxing with a drink at the outdoor adult bar.

Mrs. Lillian Jackson of Baltimore, currently in her 80's, has fond memories of going to Carr's. She recalled, "Every summer Sunday in the early 1940's, Mr. Henry Carter, a neighbor in Chase, MD, would put some hay in the back of his 1938 truck, load his five daughters and me and my siblings, and off we'd go to Carr's Beach. Oh, it was a good time." Mrs. Jackson also remembered, "there was a building on the grounds called the *Bug House*, but adults said 'No children are allowed to go into the *Bug House*'."



A replica of a food and drink ticket used at "The Beaches."