



Landscape, ideology, and religion: a geography of Ocean Grove, New Jersey

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In this paper, I examine Ocean Grove, New Jersey, a religious community established in 1869 by the Methodist Church as a camp meeting site. The founders selected a location and designed the physical and cultural landscapes according to an ideology of perfectionism, autonomy, exclusion, and homogeneity. Even though the community has experienced dramatic changes in the last fifty years, I argue that the physical, cultural, and political geography of Ocean Grove has served to perpetuate this ideology. However, I also argue that even though it is such a singular place, in accordance with Harvey's claim that all places must accommodate to capital accumulation, Ocean Grove's history shows examples of some quite familiar responses to a larger system of political, social, cultural, and economic circumstances.

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Introduction

In a recent text on cultural geography, Mitchell argues that a fundamental question for geographers is how normative visions and social relations are worked out in particular places and at particular times.^[1] Landscapes are representations of these normative visions and social relations; landscapes also influence their production and reproduction. It makes sense, then, that geographers^[2] and other researchers^[3] examine the relationships of landscapes, ideology, and social relations. Yet Mitchell also points out that landscapes tend to reify or “naturalize” the production and reproduction of social relations. They mystify the “contentiousness” of those relations, instead “creating a smooth surface, a mute representation, a clear view that is little clouded by considerations of inequality, power, coercion, or resistance”.^[4] Normative visions and social relations are informed by ideologies of power. To understand how these visions and relations are worked out in particular places and times means penetrating the reifying and mystifying tendencies of landscapes in order to expose the ways in which power reinforces itself within landscapes.

In this paper, I propose to examine ideology and power within a religious landscape. Baker and other historical geographers^[5] have noted the importance of religious communities in their call for research into the ideology underlying landscapes, while geographers of religion have urged that the reciprocal relationships between religion and landscapes be explored.^[6] There are several reasons for this emphasis on sacred spaces. Simmel^[7] articulates one reason in arguing that although religion is aspatial,

involving “profound attachments not bound to place”,^[8] religious ideology must manifest itself within geographic space—the ability of religion to endure depends on its having a “spatial grounding”^[9] and shared participation in rituals and ceremonies of worship situated in given “space-bound communities”.^[10] In other words, as Lefebvre rhetorically asks, “What would remain of religious ideology if it were not based on places . . . ? What would remain of the Church if there were no churches?”^[11] Another reason is that sacred spaces not only reproduce religious ideology, they reflect prevailing economic and political ideologies of the time period. Harvey makes the point that being a religious haven does not exempt a place from having to make accommodations to capital accumulation similar to that of secular communities.^[12] Religious groups must confront issues within and beyond the boundaries of their community, including relationships with other groups, perseverance in a place, and possibilities for diffusion to adjacent areas.^[13] Further, sacred spaces are liminal spaces: ‘in-between’ places within the secular that are saturated with symbolic meanings and ideology.^[14] Efforts to represent religious ideology can make the production and reproduction of cultural landscapes in sacred spaces quite deliberate, establishing them as extreme examples of what Mitchell describes as “places transformed into controlled representations”.^[15] This deliberateness of production and reproduction can help uncover many sorts of ideological relations and situations. Finally, as Peet argues in his interpretation of Foucault’s theory of religious discourse, religion and its discourse is not just a quest for meaning, it is a justification for power, informing economic and political practice.^[16]

In my examination of a religious community, I am particularly interested in the transformations of ideology, social relations, and landscape under changing social, political, and economic conditions. Although ideology has been defined in many ways,^[17] my use of the concept follows Baker’s definition that “ideologies offer ordered, simplified versions of the world; they substitute a single certainty for a multiplicity of ambiguities; they tender to individuals both an ordered view of the world and of their own place within its natural and social system”.^[18] My area of study is Ocean Grove, New Jersey, a community founded by the Methodist Church in 1869 as a camp meeting site. Ocean Grove lends itself to such an analysis for several reasons. First, it is an example of what Anderson and Gale call an “unambiguous” cultural geography—a place that developed from “deliberate acts of cultural construction”.^[19] Second, while most landscapes in the United States result from innumerable individual decisions as opposed to a clearly identifiable author, Ocean Grove has a very distinctive author—the Methodist Church.^[20] Third, Ocean Grove has distinct geographic boundaries separating it from surrounding communities.

Ocean Grove is an exceptional place with a singular biography, yet, an examination of historical and current landscapes and documents will show how a carefully designed physical, cultural, and political geography can continue to embody and reproduce the ideologies of its founders within changing networks of political, social, and economic power.

In the first section, I will outline the history of Ocean Grove, situating it within the social, cultural, political, and economic conditions of the times. I will examine the ideologies of its founders and leaders, and consider ways they have been manifested within the landscape. In the second section, I will explore contemporary conditions in Ocean Grove, focusing on impacts of political challenges and economic changes. I will discuss how a voluntary organization has in many ways mimicked the original government run by the Methodist Church and how this organization continues to reproduce certain ideologies.

Historical foundations

Camp meetings and the theology of perfection

The first camp meetings in the United States were products of the Protestant evangelical revival of the late 1700s. These tended to be rather wild and emotional affairs, full of fire and brimstone. After the Civil War, a burgeoning of religious fervor led to a resurgence of interest in camp meetings and the development of many permanent sites, including Shelter Island, NY, Martha's Vineyard, MA, and Pacific Grove, CA. The new camp meetings tended to be calmer, serving as places of spiritual and physical renewal where devout Protestants could get away from urban everyday life for a few weeks each summer.^[21] This everyday life from which many Protestants wanted to escape was full of newly defined threats: Southern and Eastern European immigrants, Catholics, the modernizing forces of industrialization and urbanization. Cities had become increasingly alienating to the white middle-classes,^[22] and this developed into an ideology of "rural purity versus big city corruption".^[23] While quite a few year-round rural utopian communities were created,^[24] camp meetings were a compromise: they enabled Protestants to maintain their prudent, hardworking urban lifestyles during most of the year, thereby giving them the financial wherewithal to be able to take several weeks of sacred vacation in the summer.

Most camp meetings were developed by Methodists, based on John Wesley's holiness movement of seeking perfection and salvation through virtuous living. Church leaders believed that a few weeks of spiritual and physical activity at camp meetings would produce enough holiness to sustain people throughout the rest of the year.^[25] Locations in the mountains or coastal areas were preferred, and in the 1869, several Methodist leaders searched along the New Jersey coast for a place to "provide for the holding of camp meetings of an elevated character, especially for the promotion of Christian holiness and to afford to those who would spend a few days or weeks at the seashore an opportunity to do so at moderate cost, free from temptations to dissipation usually found at fashionable watering place".^[26]

In order to ensure freedom from 'temptations to dissipation', church leaders wanted locations that were geographically separate from the surrounding areas—preferably with no mosquitoes. They found what they were looking for in a one-mile square piece of land 43 miles south of New York City. It was inaccessible on three sides, with the Atlantic Ocean to the east, small lakes along the northern and southern borders, and nary a mosquito to be seen or felt (Figure 1). Thereupon, the church leaders purchased the land, named it Ocean Grove, and constructed a high brick fence with two locking gates along the only non-physical boundary on the western perimeter (Figure 2).

The government and infrastructure of Ocean Grove

To oversee the site, the Church formed the Ocean Grove Camp Meeting Association (CMA), composed of 26 internally appointed trustees—thirteen ministers and thirteen laymen. According to the bylaws, its purpose was to "provide and maintain for members and friends of the United Methodist Church a proper, convenient, and desirable permanent camp-meeting ground and Christian seaside resort".^[27] In 1870 the New Jersey Legislature granted the CMA a charter giving them the authority to develop and enforce all ordinances, appoint and pay police officers, operate a court of law, construct and administer all infrastructure and services, including a library and a school, and to own the land in perpetuity. Nine years later, when the Legislature established



Figure 1. Map of major New Jersey beach communities and the Garden State Parkway.

Ocean Grove, New Jersey

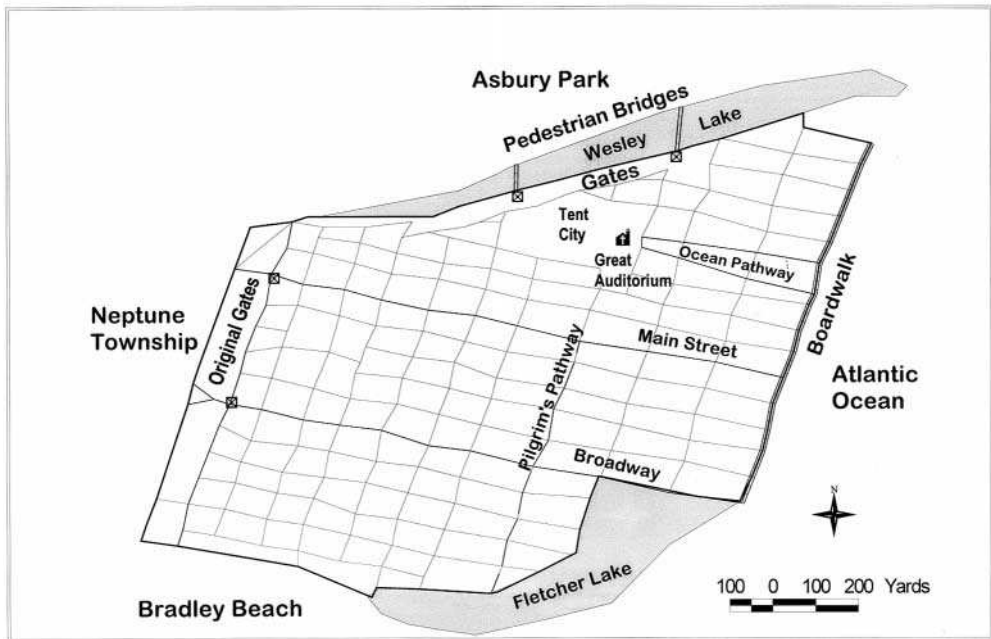


Figure 2. Map of Ocean Grove.

Neptune Township on adjacent land, they included Ocean Grove within its boundaries but left intact the CMA's governing authority. By law the CMA had to pay taxes to Neptune Township, but chose not to receive any services so as to remain autonomous.

Stump^[28] notes that religious fundamentalists exert enormous control over secular spaces in order to protect and maintain their sacred spaces. For the CMA, such a desire for control resulted in one of the first planned communities in the United States.^[29] The ideal landscape they wished to create was a utopian one, representing the quest for order in the landscape and reflecting Wesley's theology of perfection.^[30] To achieve this ideal, they began with narrow streets—many named after famous Methodist figures—laid out in an uncomplicated grid. Sidewalks were constructed and trees were planted along the streets. Next, a boardwalk was built along the beach, with no stores or amusements, only a pavilion and a fishing pier. Then, a Main Avenue running perpendicular to the ocean was constructed as a center for commercial activity, with benches placed along the sidewalks to attract people to the town center to dawdle, relax, and socialize. In order to afford most residents an unobstructed view of the ocean from their front porch and to diffuse the ocean breezes throughout the town, each house in the first two blocks off the boardwalk was set two feet back from the building west of it, creating a funnel effect. Finally, lot sizes were tiny, and rather than the mansions of other resorts, the houses were small and very close together (Figure 3). In keeping with housing reformers of the era who tried to build moral and spiritual order through architecture,^[31] the CMA specified houses must be built using a vernacular Victorian style with simple lines and minimal “gingerbread”, and with front porches in close proximity to the porch next door.^[32] This densely packed community had the dual role of encouraging socialization and enhancing social control.

The religious infrastructure, on the other hand, was situated in a park-like setting with the buildings set far apart and a broad grassy thoroughfare running from the beach to the octagon-shaped preaching grove. Behind the preaching grove were approximately 600 tents with permanent wooden cabins attached at the rear for summer visitors.^[33] The preaching grove was rebuilt several times until in 1894 the famous Great Auditorium permanently replaced it. About the size of a football field, the Great Auditorium seats 6500 people. The walls are movable to let in the fresh air and to let overflow worshippers



Figure 3. Restored Victorian homes (photo by Daniel G. Baker).



Figure 4. Great Auditorium and Ocean Pathway (photo by Daniel G. Baker).

participate in the service. Constructed to counter the emotional outpourings of other camp meetings, the building reflects a sense of order, light, and space. The Great Auditorium continues to be the focal point—geographically and culturally—in Ocean Grove (Figure 4).

Autonomy, authenticity, exclusion, and homogeneity

In a discussion of Fitzgerald's^[34] work on alternative communities, Harvey^[35] points out that such communities perceive themselves as centers of virtue and authenticity amidst decay and corruption, and develop some form of exclusionary politics in order to maintain their moral integrity. Ocean Grove followed this scenario: the Methodist Church focused on close community ties rather than on expansion into widespread geographic areas.^[36] Along with holiness and perfection, the CMA wanted autonomy and a place of 'authentic' community to protect their heritage and sense of fellowship.

The CMA developed a set of restrictive 'blue laws' that were set up to promote the embodiment of perfection within the social structure, but were intended also to serve as

a means of exclusion. Liquor and tobacco could not be sold or consumed at any time, and dancing was prohibited. On Sundays, the beach and all stores were closed, except for restaurants and the pharmacy, and no activity other than attending church was allowed. This included bicycling, gardening, any kind of play, home repairs, and exercise. The gates of the town were closed between midnight Saturday and midnight Sunday and no traffic or parked vehicles other than emergency vehicles were allowed on the streets; all vehicles had to be removed to parking lots outside of the town gates each Saturday evening and could be retrieved again early Monday morning.^[37] The laws served their purpose in keeping out those who desired leisure activities that were somewhere more stimulating.

Homogeneity was essential to the quest for authenticity. Only devout Methodists could visit during the first few years, and only during the summer months. However, by 1875, three hundred cottages had been constructed and some people were beginning to stay year-round. The CMA passed an ordinance permitting residence only to those who could demonstrate via a letter from their minister that they were practicing Methodists and who could successfully negotiate a series of interviews with the trustees. This ordinance was relaxed somewhat in the early 1900s to include members of other Protestants faiths, and by the 1920s even a few Catholics were permitted to move into Ocean Grove—as long as they had documentation of weekly church attendance from their priests.

The CMA could carry out these exclusive practices because they owned the land. People could own their structures, but they could only rent the land with approval from the CMA. Once approved, however, they did receive an automatically self-renewing 99-year lease as an affirmation that they could never be removed from the property. Nonetheless, the interview process and the rules and regulations gave the CMA an unusual power with respect to the population of Ocean Grove.

Geographic isolation, complete control of the government, perpetual ownership of the land, blue laws, and stringent regulations were all means of discouraging unwanted tourists or residents. And just in case these mechanisms failed, the Ocean Grove police constantly patrolled the boundaries to make sure that ‘improper persons’ did not venture in; residents themselves were encouraged to seek out and report any misconduct within the community.^[38]

Although the CMA initially set up a controlled, limited-access environment in order to maintain a resort for the people of the Methodist Church, they soon perceived another reason for guarding the borders of Ocean Grove, a danger developing right next door.

Ocean Grove and Asbury Park

In 1871, James Bradley, a wealthy Methodist reformer, bought the land on the other side of the lake to the north of Ocean Grove. He called the area Asbury Park, and although he established it as a secular community, he was adamant that it be a ‘respectable resort’. Following the model of Ocean Grove, he planned the city and established blue laws. The CMA built two pedestrian bridges across Wesley Lake between Ocean Grove and Asbury Park to encourage a close relationship, but because the city was incorporated with a traditional form of government, neither Bradley nor the Methodist Church had legal control. Bradley tried to maintain his original vision by encouraging the government to uphold the blue law ordinances, but very quickly he was challenged by hotel and other business owners who wanted to create a more modern resort. After a few years, enforcement of blue laws got lax, and while the changes were not extreme, the CMA next

door in Ocean Grove became increasingly perturbed. They managed to thwart more than a few projects related to Asbury, including the development of Sunday amusements, plans for Sunday train service to the Asbury Park/Ocean Grove station, and liquor licenses for the large hotels. Probably the major influence Ocean Grove had in shaping the geography along the Central New Jersey Coast was in prohibiting the construction of a beach road that was to run from Ocean County in the south to the northern part of Monmouth County.^[39]

But by the turn of the century, tourism was booming in Asbury and continued to do so until the 1950s. Asbury Park life became increasingly worldly, with liquor, Sunday activities, dancing, and eventually Sunday train service. In response, Ocean Grove became even more conservative. Uminowicz suggests that “surrounded by these ‘powers of darkness’, it was not surprising that a fortress mentality gripped the leadership of the Ocean Grove Camp Meeting Association”.^[40] Yet, Ocean Grove also benefited by having such a threat right next door—defining Asbury Park as the ‘other’ gave Ocean Grove a greater sense of purpose and led to a stronger commitment on the part of residents and visitors.

Ocean Grove in the twentieth century

Political challenges to Ocean Grove and the CMA

Not everyone in Ocean Grove remained content with the structure of the governing system. During the first half of the twentieth century many campaigns were organized to convert Ocean Grove into a borough with a traditional government. Probably the strongest challenge prior to the 1970s occurred in 1920 by a group of Ocean Grove’s leading citizens who believed that an elected body was more suitable to for governance than was an appointed group of Methodist leaders. The CMA went along with the group in the interest of community solidarity and helped draft the Ocean Grove Borough Bill. The state ultimately declared that enforcement of such extreme blue law ordinances exceeded the powers of a civil government and that the borough was unconstitutional as long as the blue laws were in effect. Rather than revoke the ordinances, the residents overwhelming voted to return governance to the CMA.^[41]

In the late 1970s, a set of campaigns was leveled against the governmental structure of Ocean Grove. In 1975, a suit was filed by a newspaper service, arguing that the ordinances against newspaper sales and driving on Sundays were unconstitutional because they infringed upon freedom of the press and violated the Fourteenth Amendment guarantee against unreasonable interference with the conduct of a lawful business. The New Jersey Supreme Court decided in a 5–4 vote that the CMA ordinance must be changed. However, they argued for the maintenance of the CMA as the local governmental structure, reasoning that in general the CMA ruled secularly and did a superior job at governing, and that Ocean Grove would not be able to maintain its unique character within a secular government.^[42]

In 1977, another case was brought before the New Jersey Supreme Court, this time by a person convicted of drunk driving by the Ocean Grove court. The suit argued that the CMA’s court of law was invalid under the establishment of religion clause in the 1st Amendment, which called for the separation of church and state. The composition of the Supreme Court had changed, and this time they declared that the CMA government was in fact unconstitutional. The basis for their decision centered on the fact that members of the CMA Board of Trustees had to be Methodist and were not elected but were appointed for life. In their conclusion, the judges stated: “The legislature has, in effect,

transformed this religious organization into Ocean Grove's civil government . . . Such fusion of secular and ecclesiastical power violates both the letter and the spirit of the First Amendment and runs afoul of the 'establishment clause' of our state constitution".^[43] The US Supreme Court refused to hear an appeal and in January 1980, the governance of Ocean Grove was transferred to Neptune Township—an adjacent lower to middle-income community.

Under Neptune Township's governance, the blue laws were whittled down to banning the sale of alcohol and keeping the beaches closed until 12:30 on Sundays. The CMA maintained authority over the religious community, and continued to own the religious infrastructure, the beach, and the land. The latter enabled them to maintain some degree of control, including the implementation of lease restrictions and initial interviews with all homeowners.^[44] Although Ocean Grove was still separated from the rest of Neptune Township on the west by a major road, the opening of the gates to Sunday traffic was the most representative of Ocean Grove's loss of autonomy and separateness. As Messenger suggests: "Anyone, anytime could [now] enter the gates of holiness. [This] violated the very core of Ocean Grove's . . . identity. From the outset, its founders had intended the boundaries to hold against all the forces of the world that were inimical to the pursuit of holiness".^[45]

Ocean Grove, economics, and change

Although some 100 residents formed a committee to call for the secession of Ocean Grove from Neptune Township, the movement never gained much support. In fact, the termination of the CMA governing structure in 1979 was somewhat of a relief for the CMA trustees. By 1977, financial difficulties had already forced the CMA to disband the Ocean Grove Police and accept police protection and garbage removal from Neptune Township, and an autonomous jurisdiction and self-governance no longer made economic sense.^[46]

Several factors contributed to these economic changes. The first had to do with an increasingly secularized society beginning after World War I, which over the years greatly reduced the attractiveness of a religious resort. The second factor had to do with road construction. In 1952, the state developed plans to build the Garden State Parkway, which would extend from the northern to the southern tip of New Jersey. Ocean Grove and Asbury Park representatives supported the Parkway, but unlike beach communities further south, neglected to lobby for a major artery that would connect them with the Parkway. The Parkway opened in 1955 and by the end of that summer, as potential tourists bypassed the aging communities for newer, more easily accessible beach resorts to the south, officials in both Ocean Grove and Asbury Park understood the enormity of their mistake. The third factor had to do with decrepit hotels and businesses and a year-round population made up of growing numbers of elderly residents with low to moderate incomes. The decaying infrastructure was exacerbated, ironically, by the designation of Ocean Grove in 1976 as a federally protected historic district, which meant that existing buildings could no longer be torn down or rehabilitated without an extensive and expensive process.^[47] Except during the two-week camp meeting in August, tourists stayed away and local wags began referring to the town as 'Ocean Grave'.

Deinstitutionalization

The combination of antiquated infrastructure and a decimated tourist trade led to yet another dilemma in Ocean Grove: the influx of former mental patients into the

community. Until the 1950s and 1960s, most mentally ill individuals in the United States were treated in state-funded hospitals. But such issues as the development of drug therapies, negative publicity concerning institutional conditions, and the increase in federal funding for supplementary incomes and services for disabled people living outside of hospitals led to a movement in the 1970s to deinstitutionalize mentally ill patients.^[48] States understood that if they released patients and closed psychiatric hospitals, the cost and the care of the former patients would primarily be the responsibility of the federal government.^[49] New Jersey took advantage of this situation in the 1970s and sought communities that could absorb significant numbers of former patients. Ocean Grove was one of the handful of communities that met the criteria. It was already zoned for high-density use, it had many old hotels, and it had many desperate hotel owners who were willing to accept state subsidies to convert their establishments into boarding and rooming houses. The state began moving the deinstitutionalized into the town, and by 1980 Ocean Grove had become one of the top destinations in New Jersey for former patients leaving state institutions.

Deinstitutionalization may have worked if everything had gone as planned, but with changes in government administrations, along with the economic crunch of the late 1970s, both the federal and state governments ultimately reneged on promises of community mental health services. To compound the problem, the kinds of support that *were* offered generally worked better for short term crisis intervention than for serious chronic mental disorders.^[50] Boarding and rooming house owners, who received a stipend per person, tended to accept as many residents as possible, leading to major abuses and not uncommon situations where four or five people would have to share a bed. Because they had nowhere else to send the former patients, the state would not close any of the facilities; Ocean Grove had turned into what the locals and the media now called a 'psychiatric ghetto'—a dumping ground for former patients where few services were available to monitor medication usage or help with integration back into society.^[51] Because of the crowded conditions in the boarding houses and the lack of supervision, deinstitutionalized residents were quite visible on the sidewalks, lawns, parks, beach, and benches of Ocean Grove. By the mid-1980s, they made up more than ten percent of Ocean Grove's year-round population of 5000.^[52]

Asbury Park

During this time, Ocean Grove's neighbors to the north were having their own related problems, many of which overflowed into Ocean Grove. Asbury Park had suffered from the same historical circumstances as Ocean Grove, and they too had more than their share of deinstitutionalized residents.^[53] But Asbury Park also had to contend with the discriminatory effects of racism. Since the turn of the century, the city had been the home to a small population of African Americans. As the economy of Asbury Park declined during the 1950s and 1960s, more and more African and Haitian Americans moved in as Whites took flight to surrounding suburbs. During a very hot week in July 1970, race riots flared and parts of the city were destroyed. This was the death knell for an already diminished tourist trade, and by the mid-1970s, crime had become rampant, especially in the southern part of the city where more than 70 per cent of the population lived below the poverty level. Not even Bruce Springsteen and the rock music renaissance of the mid-1970s could counter the deterioration of Asbury. As increasing numbers of people traveled across the pedestrian bridges to sell drugs and solicit for prostitution, the neighborhoods in Ocean Grove adjacent to the bridges became dangerous and notorious.

This, then, was the situation in Ocean Grove by the mid-1980s: decrepit infrastructure and a meager tourist trade, a year-round population made up predominantly of low to moderate income elderly folks and former mental patients, and the diffusion of crime from Asbury Park.

Ocean Grove Homeowners' Association

Not everyone was content to let Ocean Grove continue on the path of decay. Even as a bona fide municipal government was replacing the CMA, another alternative form of governing was beginning to develop in Ocean Grove. Most people recognized that becoming an autonomous political jurisdiction did not make economic sense, yet many residents worried that incorporation into Neptune Township would destroy Ocean Grove's uniqueness and exacerbate existing problems. Given that Neptune Township had its own set of existing problems, including a significant crime rate, a high level of poverty, and a substandard educational system, there was cause for concern in Ocean Grove.

The roots of activism began to develop under the auspices of the Ocean Grove Homeowners' Association (HOA), a group of year-round residents and recent retirees, including many former executives of major New Jersey corporations who had inherited family summer homes in Ocean Grove.^[54] It was from this mix that charismatic leaders with time, energy, and organizational skills emerged. By the mid-1980s they had transformed the HOA from a social organization to what Cranson calls a "parapolitical system", acting as a quasi-government to provide for the needs of the community and to protect property values.^[55]

The HOA did four things to gain power. First, they got access to the Neptune Township government by nominating several members to major committees and supporting others to successfully run for office. By 1985, although Ocean Grove residents made up only about 20 percent of the Neptune Township population, the mayor, the police chief, and more than half the council were Ocean Grove residents and members of the HOA, and HOA members sat on most major committees and planning boards. Second, they generated considerable amounts of social capital by sponsoring monthly town meetings, community breakfasts, holiday celebrations, and daily summer activities. Third, the HOA developed a strong working relationship with state and local government officials through weekly meetings, support of candidates, persistent and effective lobbying, and friendly but firm methods of protest. Finally, the HOA instigated some very rapid and visible improvements within the landscape, including repair of curbs and streets, additional streetlights, and decorative flowerpots on roadway meridians. Additionally, they got the benches removed from Main Avenue in order to prevent vagrants and the deinstitutionalized from sleeping in public places.^[56]

By 1995, with about 1000 members, the HOA was the largest community association in New Jersey, and probably the most influential. Members had been elected or appointed to many community, local, and state governmental positions, they attended and actively participated in every meeting related to the Neptune Township government, and most of the CMA trustees were HOA members.^[57]

HOA and deinstitutionalization

After positioning themselves as an active force in Ocean Grove, the HOA's first item of business was dealing with the issue of the deinstitutionalized. Their goal was not to provide better services and living conditions; rather, they wanted to reduce the number of former mental patients living in Ocean Grove. They were not unique in this response;

a long time before the term NIMBYism, or ‘Not in My Backyard’, was coined, opposition existed against the integration of the mentally ill into the community.^[58] The HOA’s justification skipped over the Fair Housing Amendments Act of 1988, which outlawed discrimination toward the disabled, to argue that the 1990 Americans with Disabilities Act instructs that former patients must be mainstreamed. They claimed that the clustering of patients in Ocean Grove and the lack of services prevented this from happening. They also argued that as taxpayers, members of the HOA were contributing to the subsidies provided by the government, which gave them the right to have a voice in where the deinstitutionalized live.^[59] And, of course, they reiterated that one of their purposes was to protect property values.

In response to criticisms that driving the deinstitutionalized out of town was “un-Christian”, Herb Herbst, president of the HOA from 1990 to 1998, replied: “the people of the town . . . care about the mentally ill. But when the state allowed hundreds of former patients to be warehoused in substandard boarding homes, the result was disastrous”.^[60] He insisted that Ocean Grove was more than willing to take its fair share, which, based on the population of the New Jersey, should be 0.5 per cent of the population, or around 25 to 30 people. He also stated that the HOA was the only organization that could bring about a reduction of deinstitutionalized people—Neptune Township would not because of a lack of time and money; the CMA could not because they cannot have a “noncompassionate stand”.^[61]

The HOA’s first move was to get four of the largest and worst boarding and rooming houses closed. They achieved this by creating an onslaught of media attention, including taking unsuspecting elected officials and hoards of print and TV media on unannounced tours of the houses and the streets. As a result, more than 200 people lost their homes, most forced out of Ocean Grove because of the lack of facilities.^[62] The HOA’s next move was to get a mechanism in place for regulating rooming and boarding houses, and they lobbied the state government to pass a bill transferring the inspection and licensing of boarding and rooming houses from the state to local governments. This bill, known as the Palaia Bill, was passed in 1993 and Herbst became the first chair of Neptune Township’s Rooming and Boarding House Commission.^[63]

In an interesting third move, the HOA successfully fought against the construction of a community service center for the “special needs adult population”. Having argued that the lack of services was justification for getting rid of the deinstitutionalized, in turn they made certain that such services did not get built. They claimed that the center would attract even more mentally ill people to Ocean Grove, thus creating more problems than it would solve.^[64]

Finally, Governor Whitman acknowledged the HOA in developing the 1995 SHORE-EASY Plan, which enables the state to buy problematic boarding or rooming houses and convert them into single family houses.^[65] The state must then disperse the displaced residents throughout New Jersey instead of concentrating them in a few locations, regardless of the fact that many of them had lived in the same town for twenty or more years.^[66] By the middle of 1998, 197 of the 300 or so deinstitutionalized still living in Ocean Grove had been relocated—nine of those people were able to remain in Ocean Grove.^[67]

Most people in Ocean Grove and the surrounding areas, including some of the former patients, agree that there had been substantial problems with so many deinstitutionalized people in Ocean Grove. However, some people strongly believed that if the HOA had used their energies and tactics to get proper services and had supported the proposed community center, the deinstitutionalized and other Ocean Grove residents could have found ways to co-exist.^[68]

The gates

In 1995, the HOA prompted another controversial situation when they requested that Neptune Township erect gates on the Ocean Grove side of the pedestrian bridges linking Ocean Grove with Asbury Park.^[69] Their plan was that the gates be open during the day and locked at night in order to eliminate nighttime movements of drug dealers and prostitutes from Asbury Park into Ocean Grove. Neptune Township agreed with the idea. Many Ocean Grove residents supported the gates, although others argued that the gates were unnecessary and negatively symbolic, and that construction of a police substation or adding more police patrols was more appropriate.^[70] In Asbury Park, officials and residents were furious, contending that the intent was a racist one of separating predominantly white Ocean Grove from predominantly black Asbury Park, and that the gates would take away people's freedom of movement.^[71] In speaking of the Ocean Grove/Asbury Park gates, Tim Joder, director of the National Center for the Revitalization of Central Cities, stated that the situation is "probably one of a thousand like it being discussed across the United States. People want to restrict, by whatever means, what they believe is an undesirable element in their neighborhoods."^[72] The HOA, however, insisted it was a matter of crime prevention, not a matter of race.^[73] The gates went up in January 1996; two years later the crime rate in the surrounding area had dropped practically to zero.^[74]

HOA's other concerns

The HOA have had other issues on their agenda. One goal begun in the early 1980s was to create mechanisms that would ensure the upgrading of Ocean Grove's housing, businesses, and would encourage single-family housing. They used Ocean Grove's listing as a historic site in the National Register to convince Neptune Township in 1984 to create an Architectural Review Board to monitor any restorations or new construction, and they made sure that residents secured any available funds for the rehabilitation of homes or businesses. As a result, today Ocean Grove rivals Cape May as one of the premier locations in the United States for Victorian architecture.^[75] In 1990, the HOA presented Neptune Township with a detailed version of a new master plan that would protect the historic nature of the community by maintaining lot sizes, placing a 2.5-story limit on buildings, and re-zoning all of Ocean Grove, except for Main Avenue, for single family homes. The HOA's plan was accepted.^[76] Later, in 1995, when the state made plans to turn a dilapidated former high school into low-income housing, the HOA formed a non-profit subsidiary group which raised funds to purchase and convert the building into a performing arts center.^[77]

Another of the HOA's goals was to encourage upscale tourism. To bolster secular tourism, the HOA worked with the Chamber of Commerce to advertise the relaxation of many of the blue laws and the opening of the small boutiques, quaint restaurants, bed and breakfasts, and art galleries they were helping attract to Main Avenue (Figure 5). Preserving the sacred foundations of Ocean Grove was a priority for many HOA members, and they worked with the CMA to increase religious tourism and to develop contemporary religious activities, including booking major Christian rock music concerts into the historic Great Auditorium and sponsoring daily Christian music aerobics classes at the beach.^[78]

By the end of the 1990s, the HOA had fulfilled many of their goals: property values had risen, the number of deinstitutionalized had been dramatically decreased, crime had dropped, and tourists were flocking back to Ocean Grove. Financially comfortable empty-nesters and retirees, along with professionals, academics, and artists in their twenties and thirties—including a growing gay population—were moving in. Missing



Figure 5. Main Avenue, Ocean Grove, New Jersey (photo by Daniel G. Baker).

from the mix (besides ethnic and racial diversity) were middle class families. The HOA decided that a major goal for the early part of the 2000s would be to increase the number of such families. They had easily determined the cause to be the problematic Neptune Township school system, and by the end of 2000 had already made inroads into the Board of Education and Neptune school district advisory committees.^[79] In opposition to the general approval by homeowners, many renters, particularly gay residents, questioned this vision of Ocean Grove, wondering if they were being tolerated only as long as they were not too visible and restored their homes with good taste, and as long as few middle class families were competing for housing.^[80]

The HOA as a shadow state

Durkheim^[81] describes community associations as a link between monolithic governments and unorganized individuals in negotiating for what Castells^[82] calls the “collective consumption” of goods, services, and infrastructure that the government cannot or will not willingly provide. The HOA closely fits the criteria for an effective community association. It is confined to a small geographic area with a relatively homogenous population,^[83] has several charismatic leaders—retired professionals and former CEO’s of major corporations—with the necessary time, energy, personality, and organizational skills to devote to the cause,^[84] has credibility with the press,^[85] and has close access to the local government.^[86] As a result, the HOA is what Speer and Hughey call an “empowered” community association: it can reward or punish community targets, control what gets talked about in public debate, shape how residents and public officials think about the community, and generally can get things accomplished.^[87] Within 15 years the HOA was instrumental in transforming Ocean Grove from a stuffy decaying

town with a population of mostly lower income, elderly people and a significant number of very visible deinstitutionalized residents to a rather trendy town with its share of coffee bars, fashionable shops, bed and breakfasts, and art galleries.

However, community associations such as the HOA often act as parapolitical systems, what Wolch^[88] calls “shadow states”: they have state-like functions but they are not formally a part of the state and consequently do not have the same types of accountability. It is not always clear how decisions in a shadow state are made,^[89] particularly because these decisions are often based on images of the community constructed by the association.^[90] ‘Participatory distortion’ can occur if not everyone has a voice in constituting these images and if the images are at odds with the interests of some segments of the population.^[91] And because community associations hover outside of institutional election procedures, this lack of representation can be difficult to rectify.

Questions concerning representation and participatory distortion have been raised in Ocean Grove, where the HOA is not an elected government yet seems to have the power of one. Even the presumed checks and balances of the Neptune Township council are not convincing when a majority of the elected officials are HOA members. Many people applaud the efforts of the HOA, but not everyone entirely supports their agenda for Ocean Grove, and not every resident feels that the HOA represents their needs. Certainly one group, the deinstitutionalized, have not had fair representation. Letters to the editors of the community newspapers periodically crop up with such sentiments as “the association speaks for a very small segment of the population of our town and has for some reason become a voice for Ocean Grove”.^[92]

While not every homeowner agrees with the actions of the HOA, they do have recourse. The forty percent of Ocean Grove’s population who are renters, however, are by definition excluded from direct participation. Members of the HOA claim that homeowners do in fact constitute a representative membership because property owners have a greater commitment to the area than do renters. However, because homeownership is closely related to class, community power located within the HOA exacerbates the disenfranchisement of people with low to moderate incomes becomes.^[93]

Conclusion: ideologies old and new

Park stresses that interpretation of landscapes as cultural products entails an understanding how values and beliefs influence the use of space and are translated into architectural forms.^[94] In Ocean Grove, the Methodist founders’ normative visions of perfectionism, authenticity, autonomy, homogeneity, and exclusion were manifested in their choice of a geographically isolated piece of land, their implementation of social and political restrictions, and their design of the landscape as a bounded space, densely constructed to create a strong sense of community and social control.^[95] Their architecture had simple lines, demonstrating a sense of order and perfectionism. The boundary of the community was carefully protected, with gates constructed on the side not adjacent to water. The political structures of severe blue laws and religious requirements for residents guaranteed a controlled, homogenous community, and the CMA’s governmental function ensured autonomy.

Religious ideology was at the forefront of the CMA’s vision for Ocean Grove, while the need for economic development and accumulation of capital was secondary. Some 125 years later, the order is reversed for the HOA, which has prioritized the need for redevelopment and increased property values. And yet the normative vision of the HOA is not all that different than that of the Methodist founders. With its agenda of a homogeneous, middle-class, family oriented community that is physically and socially

TABLE 1 *Examples of attributes of perfectionism, autonomy, exclusion, and homogeneity in Ocean Grove*

	Perfectionism	Autonomy	Exclusion	Homogeneity
1869–1980				
Landscape attributes	Grid streets Geometrically shaped religious infrastructure Unobstructed ocean views Interior design of Great Auditorium	Geographic isolation and separation from surrounding areas Prohibition of beach road, Sunday train access	Main gates Pedestrian gates Prohibition of beach road, Sunday train access	Architectural styles Trees and flowering plants along streets Tightly packed community
Social and political attributes	Severe blue laws	Church-run government and infrastructure Land owned by CMA	Restriction of residents to practicing Protestants Land owned by CMA	Restriction of residents to practicing Protestants
1980–2001				
Landscape attributes	Grid streets Geometrically shaped religious infrastructure Unobstructed ocean views	Geographic separation from surrounding areas	Gates on pedestrian bridges between Ocean Grove and Asbury Park Performing Arts Center instead of low-income housing	
Social and political attributes	Modified blue laws Architectural Review Board	Land owned by CMA HOA power HOA control of Neptune Township government	Removal of deinstitutionalized mental patients	Move to make the community family-oriented Zoning Master Plan

separate from the adjacent community of Asbury Park, the HOA continues to shape the landscape of Ocean Grove based on ideologies of perfection, homogeneity, exclusion, and autonomy. They have accomplished this through the creation of architectural boards, zoning plans, locked gates, and performing arts centers, through the obstruction of community mental health services, and through the destruction of boarding and rooming houses (Table 1).

The political legacy of the CMA, along with the transfer of formal governance to Neptune Township, enabled the HOA to assume power. So too did the geographic landscape of Ocean Grove, with its one-acre square site separated from surrounding communities, its location at the shore, its many summer homes, and its densely packed streets that stimulate community interaction. The HOA has maintained or reconstructed the carefully planned infrastructure of the founders, and even as Ocean Grove is being reborn as a contemporary tourist site, the HOA has worked with the CMA to preserve its sacred foundations. Just like the CMA, the HOA has been outstanding in its ability to secure what it wants and what it believes the community needs. Property values have risen, the community is again a safe place, tourism has been revived, an enormous amount of social capital has been generated, and the Victorian charm of the town has been restored.

Ocean Grove is a particular example of the way in which ideology, geography, and social relations intersect. The result is a cultural landscape where power relations have been mystified by historic colors, trendy boutiques, and Christian aerobics, and reified by presuppositions about who has the right to space.^[96] For the CMA, this right belonged to Methodists, and then later, to practicing Christians. For the HOA, this right belongs to middle income families, not the deinstitutionalized or those with low incomes. In looking at the history of Ocean Grove, I am reminded of Iris Young's concern about communities' potential for privileging unity over difference.^[97] In Ocean Grove, there may be little political recourse for those who find this future unsettling. Yet Ocean Grove continues to be a fascinating conflation of the private and the public, the religious and the secular, a pronounced example of the way ideology and landscape produce and reproduce each other.

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Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Brooke Nappi and Kim Fallon, two of the best research assistants ever. I appreciate their perceptiveness and their assistance. And as always, thanks to Dan Baker for all kinds of support, for taking the photos, for reading and re-reading this paper, and for the thoughtful comments. I would also like to recognize the generous suggestions of two anonymous reviewers.

Notes

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