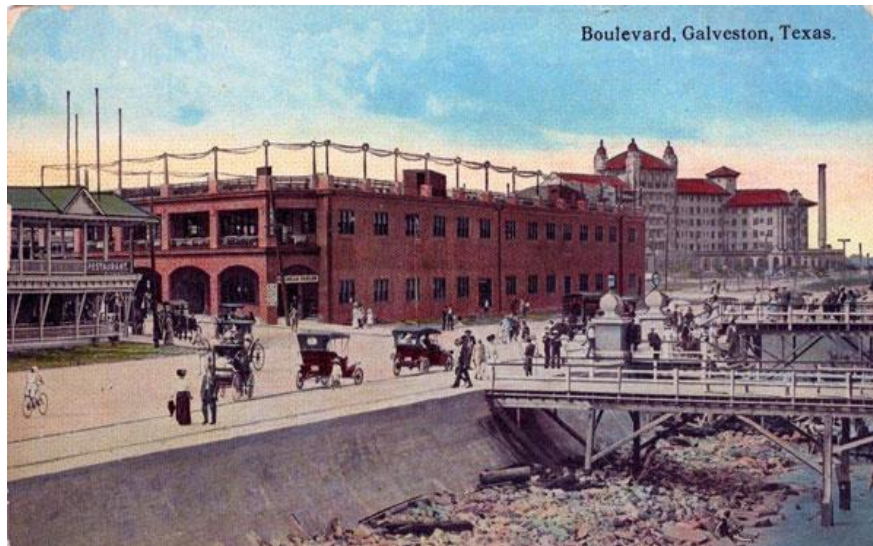


## Pleasure Palace: Galveston's Casino

In the first decade of the twentieth century, Galveston had aspirations to be “The Coney Island of the South.” In fulfillment of this slogan, two amusement parks, Electric Park (1906) and Chutes Park (1907), opened on the Seawall. However, both were mostly demolished by the fall of 1910 to facilitate the filling behind the Seawall. Their successor was the Casino, a resort pavilion completed in the spring of 1911.



The Casino filled a triangular lot bounded by Seawall Boulevard (south), Avenue Q (north) and 23rd and 24th Streets. Its construction coincided with the start of operation of the Houston-Galveston interurban in 1911. Brownie Amusement Company (Leon Brownie, president) leased the building from its owner, W. L. Moody, Jr. The Casino stood directly across from Murdoch's Bathhouse, yet another attraction that was completed during that spring.

Patterned after Young's Pier in Atlantic City, New Jersey, the Casino offered multiple attractions, including a skating rink, pool hall, dancing pavilion, and shooting gallery, in one location. The second floor had a dance hall and a restaurant. The roof featured a garden, common among Galveston beach attractions of this period; the area could hold 700 guests.

A visit to the Casino was lively, even romantic. The Galveston Daily News, August 7, 1911, recorded:

*With the music from the orchestra, the floor filled with dancers, the rumble from the roller skating rink, punctured by the popping of rifles in the shooting gallery, the whole atmosphere becomes charged with the carnival spirit of the merrymakers from many parts of Texas.*

*In the evening there are to be found on the roof garden hundreds...who have been enjoying the beach amusements throughout the day and who sit contentedly over their dinners, watching the moving pictures or looking out at the lights of the city and the ships on the Gulf.*

During the hurricane of August 16-17, 1915, the Casino sustained heavy damage. It became a makeshift bathhouse, since the other local bathhouses (the second Breakers, the third Murdoch's and the Surf) had been destroyed. Heavy damage to the Casino and a neighboring structure, the Crab Pavilion (1905), from the timbers of Breakers and Murdoch's reignited a public controversy over whether or not to build over the beach. In an election in January 1916, Galveston's voters defeated the “bathhouse amendment” to the city's charter. This would have prohibited future construction south of the Seawall.



Following the hurricane, the Casino was restored to its original condition, whereas the Crab Pavilion was demolished in January 1916. The Casino again avoided demolition when Miramar, a resort pavilion proposed in 1918, never materialized.

Charles E. Barfield, a native of Georgia, came to Galveston in 1920 to install the Great American Racing Derby at Joyland Park, in the 2100 block of Seawall Boulevard. He became owner and renovated the Casino by adding concessions to the first floor and converting the upper floor into eighteen furnished apartments. The Arcade Building, as it was now named, officially opened in March 1921. However, it lasted only seven years, being demolished in 1928. The Buccaneer Hotel, completed the following year, rose at its former site.

As an all-in-one entertainment center, the Casino bridged the gap between the two previous amusement parks and Joyland Park (1919-1928). However, its prime Seawall location and changing public tastes limited its longevity.



*Young's Pier, Atlantic City, New Jersey*

In June of 2012, [Galveston's Pleasure Pier](#) was reconstructed and opened under the management of Landry's, Inc.

The Rosenberg Library seeks images of Galveston beach attractions, including the Casino. To donate them, please contact Lauren Martino, Special Collection Manager, at [lmartino@rosenberg-library.org](mailto:lmartino@rosenberg-library.org).