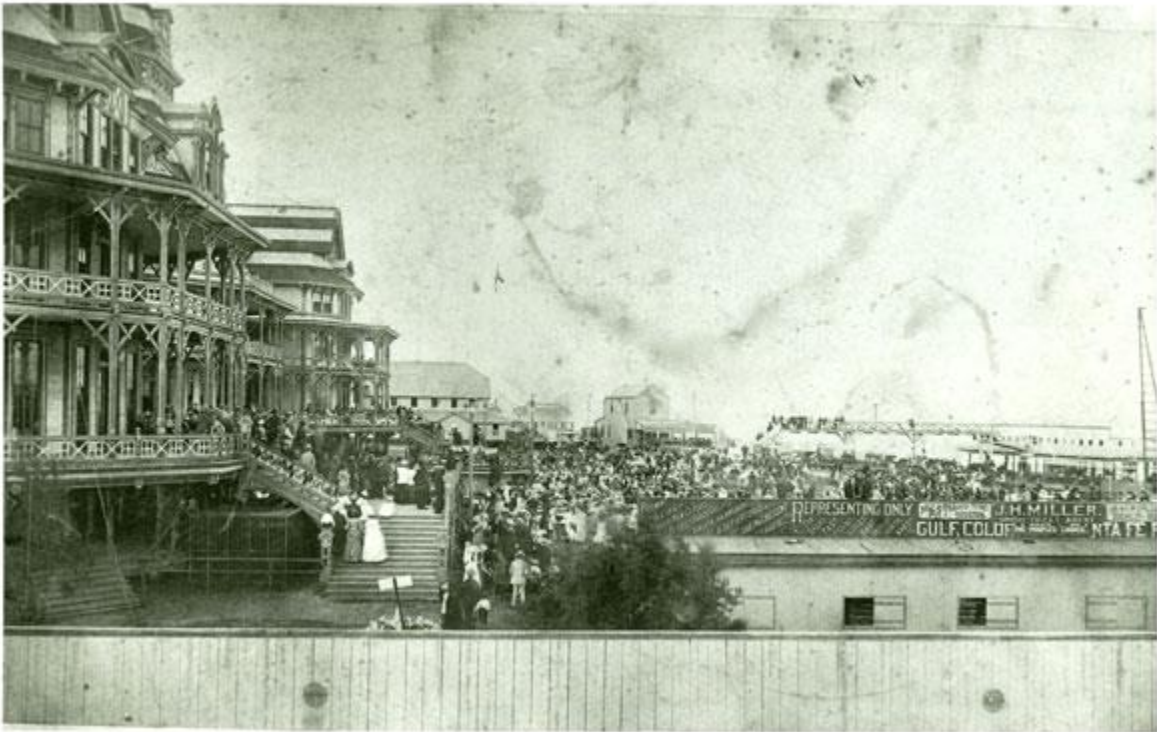
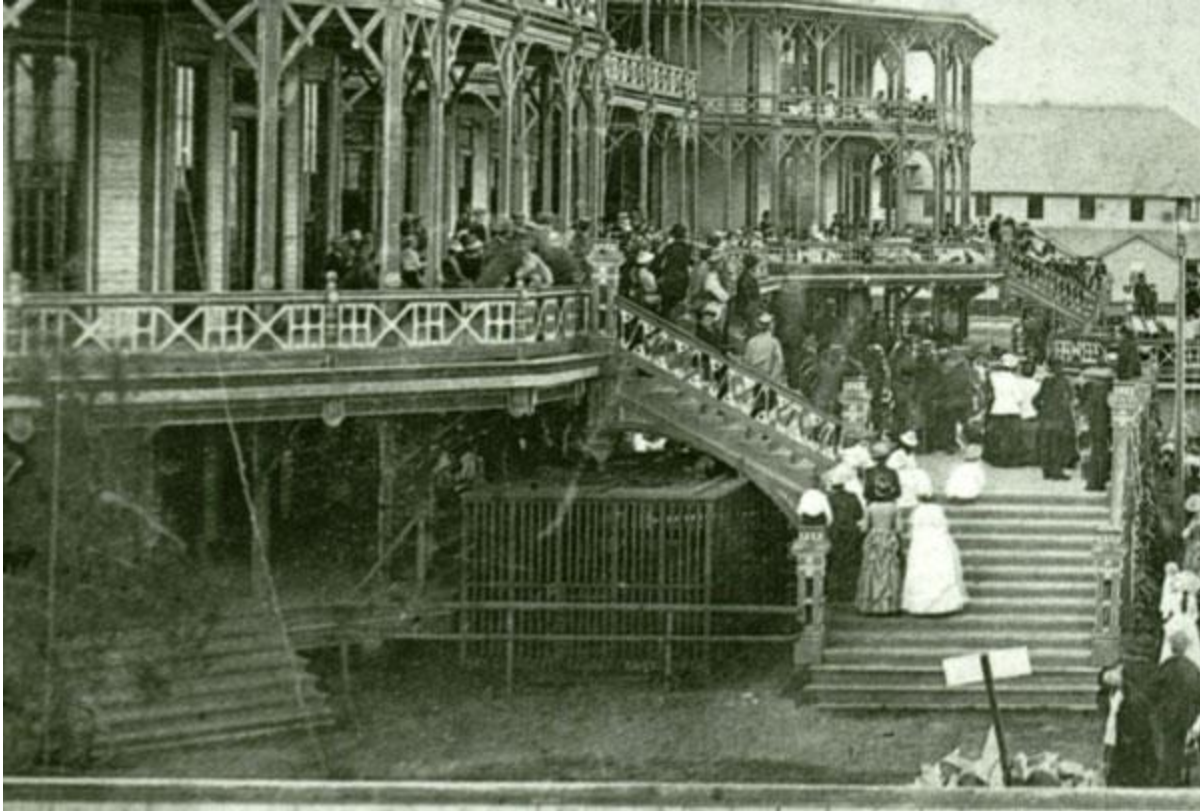


Wildlife by the Water's Edge: The Beach Hotel's Animal Menagerie

The Beach Hotel was Galveston's most prominent structure on the beachfront during its short existence. Designed by Galveston architect Nicholas J. Clayton (1840 - 1916), the hotel was completed in 1883 and burned in 1898. It stood on the beach between 23rd and 25th Streets.



The photograph above is in the Rosenberg Library's Galveston and Texas History Center. It shows the Beach Hotel, with crowds milling outside. In the enlargement, the observer will notice a metal cage beneath the hotel's steps. This is visual evidence of an animal menagerie, the nineteenth-century predecessor of today's roadside zoo. During the 1880s, Galveston had no city ordinances concerning the keeping of wild and exotic animals or for protecting their welfare. In August 1884, the Beach Hotel announced in advertisements in the *Galveston Daily News* its menagerie. The hotel had metal cages on its grounds with wild animals to thrill and delight its guests. The hardship of the animals can only be imagined. On display were birds, Mexican lions (mountain lions), panthers, and other wildlife.



The hotel's owners failed to realize the folly of keeping exotic and ferocious animals. A caged panther mauled a child in November 1884, prompting a \$15,000 lawsuit by his father against the Beach Hotel Company. *The Galveston Daily News*, November 6, 1885 commented in regards to the suit: "Beach Hotel...had ferocious and wild animals confined in cages near its site for the purpose of amusing the general public, among them panthers, than which none more treacherous and dangerous are known." The animal menagerie ended with the hurricane of August 20, 1886. Many animals were lost, while others, including two Mexican lions, escaped. The lions were hunted and killed, although the hunters shot one of their own by accident. Common sense evidently prevailed after the storm for the Beach Hotel never again kept an animal menagerie.

The Rosenberg library collects historic images of Galveston, including the Beach Hotel. To donate them, please contact Lauren Martino, Special Collection Manager, at lmartino@rosenberg-library.org.