



Steel Pier, Atlantic City: Showplace of the Nation

Steve Liebowitz

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For much of the 20th century Steel Pier in Atlantic City, NJ, was the center of American entertainment on the East Coast. There were big bands, movies, sideshows, acrobats, flag-pole sitters, Frank Sinatra, Miss America -- and throngs of people lining up to get a seat so they could watch brave horses and riders dive into a pool of water. It was aptly called the "Showplace of the Nation" and it was all that and more. This all-in-one entertainment mecca on the Boardwalk, novel in its day, has never been matched, not even at latter-day theme parks. Where else could you take the entire family for a day and see fortune-telling parakeets, the World of Tomorrow, John Philip Sousa and his band, a bear on a bicycle, World Famous Diving Horses, take a ride below the sea in the Diving Bell, spend the evening in the marine ballroom, and take in a movie -- all for one ticket? It was a colossal offering of escape, popular culture, fun and fantasy. It was a grand treat served up with gusto and cotton candy, a destination not to be missed -- an empire of grand-thinking impresarios, oddities and glamor that meshed into one cohesive and attainable summer destination. This large-format coffee-table book, published in full color, includes 227 historic photographs, illustrations, and advertising images. Steel Pier evokes a time when more really was more, a time when there was so much invention, talent and industry that it could only be experienced in one place -- at the edge of the continent, in a city that took its name from a vast ocean, on a great pier reaching out into the sea. (Benjamin Franklin Awards 2010 finalist: Regional Book, Cover Design, and Interior Design.)

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