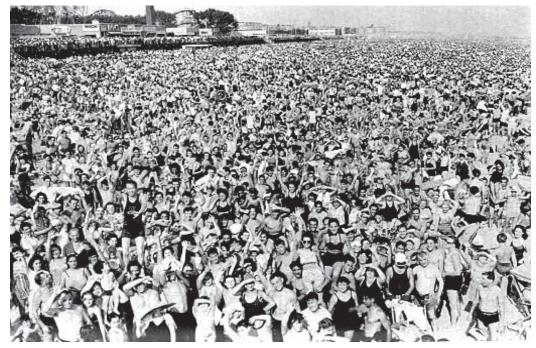
CONEY | SLAND: THE GREATEST AMERICAN AMUSEMENT AREA

by Steve Feller

Today we think of Disney World as a collection of the best American amusement parks. Collectively, on average, just under 60,000 people a day fork over well more than a hundred dollars per visitor. Its peak capacity is estimated to be 100,000. However, attendance peaks in Coney Island's storied past surpassed 1,000,000 people a day¹—yes 10 times that of Disney World. The picture below shows Coney Island beach on a peak day in the summer of 1940. This translates into hundreds of millions or even over a billion visitors over the years.



The beach at Coney Island, 1940

Coney Island occupies miles of Southern Brooklyn, New York (see map). It forms a peninsular with Brighton Beach and Manhattan Beach to its east. Its beaches and boardwalk are magnificent.

Coney Island was in development as an entertainment area for over a hundred years and its most popular period was in the early part of the 20th century. It is still active and has undergone a significant revival. The key to its vast popularity was the development of several subway lines that brought the millions to the amusements for a nickel. The subway lines had been railroads that brought far fewer numbers of people to Coney Island (http://www.lirrhistory.com/culver.html).



Map of Brooklyn neighborhoods. Coney Island is at the Southern part of Brooklyn²



Roundtrip railroad tickets to West Brighton right next to Coney Island from Long Island City



Share certificate from the New York, Greenwood, and Coney Island Railroad Company



Share certificate from the *Brooklyn*, Flatbush, and Coney Island Railway Company

Patrons of the subway paid five cents from 1904 to 1948, then ten cents until 1953 when the 15-cent token was first issued.







To left is an example of a nickel that had the value of the original fare of the New York subway system and on the right is an example of the 15-cent token. The token was used until 1966 when yhe fare increased several times over a few years and larger tokens were issued. The last of the six token designs was made in 2003.

There were thousands of rides and amusements in Coney Island. During its peak years there were three main attractions; these were similar to theme parks of today: Steeplechase Park, Luna Park, and Dreamland. However, these, without question, outdid the modern Disney and Universal parks in terms of thrills and excitement. These parks were not just G rated but also ventured into the non-pc world with recreated tenement fires, paid exhibits where patrons could see live babies in incubators, exhibits of African villagers and small people who were brought to Coney Island to live and be gawked at, rides with sexual innuendos, and more. In total it was the pinnacle of American entertainment for decades. It was amusement for the masses

Here is a brief overview of the three large and grand attractions in 20th century Coney Island:

Steeplechase Park (1893-1964)

This was the longest lived of the three parks. This park occupied 15 acres and had a capacity of 90,000 people.

Luna Park (1903-1944) Luna Park had more extensive and spectacular but fewer attractions than Steeplechase Park. This park was the original and grandest of the Luna Parks which numbered in the many dozens around the world. There is even a modern but smaller Luna Park in Coney Island today.



Luna Park token (uniface)



Royal Arcanum Day at Luna Park, June 23, 1903. This was to celebrate an insurance company.



Luna Park in Coney Island at night from the early 20th century.

Dreamland (1904-1911)

Dreamland was the shortest lived of the main parks at Coney Island While Luna Park was lit with 250,000 electric bulbs Dreamland had over a million. The postcard image below shows the magnificent result. It was designed to outdo Luna Park. There was a distinct oriental theme to its design. It was elegant and had many higher-class exhibits and entertainers.



Dreamland at Night

The parks were absolutely astounding and over the years had hundreds if not thousands of attractions. Jeffrey Stanton in 1998 posted a thorough list of attractions for the Coney Island parks at https://www.westland.net/coneyisland/articles/ridelist.htm. It would likely take 50 pages of small print to list them all and the list would have a lot of duplication. Thus, I have elected to give just the attractions at Steeplechase Park, and these have been edited down. I have included period postcards of the parks to indicate just how special these places were.



Steeplechase Park in Coney Island, NY



Wooden nickel from Steeplechase Park, Coney Island, NY

These are the rides year by year at Steeplechase Park.

- Revolving Airship Tower 1894-1907 (aerial corkscrew ride)
- Razzle Dazzle 1891 (circular swing for 70 people
 pushed by workers like a see saw)
 Note: later called Wedding Ring & Hoop-a-La
- Ferris Wheel 1894 1964 (125 foot diameter wheel with 12 18 passenger cars)
- Aerial Slide (slide on pulley from tower to sand)
- Intermural Bicycle Railroad 1894 (bicycle track
 probably moved to Steeplechase in 1905)
- Gravity Steeplechase Racecourse 1899 (horses raced along six guided tracks) Note: later called Steeplechase Ride or "The Horses"
- Voylitscope 1900 (illusion of travelling fast without motion)
- Earthquake Floor 1900
- The Skating Floor 1900
- The Electric Fountain 1900
- The Pneumatic Gun 1900
- The Hoodoo Room 1900
- The Electric Seal 1900
- The Human Cage 1900
- The California Bats 1900 (joke attraction 2 broken bricks in box)
- Puzzle Hall 1900
- The Revolving Seal 1900
- The Art Room 1900
- The Eccentric Fountain 1900
- The Dancing Floor 1900
- The Maze 1900
- A Trip to the Moon 1902 only (cyclorama using projections)
- Giant Seesaw 1902-1907 (2 Ferris Wheels at end of teeter board)
 Note: aka Aero Cycle
- Darkness & Dawn 1902- 1905?? (cyclorama) **Note:** aka Dante's Inferno
- Elephant Rides
- Bounding Billows (like Luna's Witching Waves)
- Canals of Venice 1903 1905?
- Ocean / Steeplechase Pier 1904-1908 (3 story bathing pavilion with 2000 changing rooms. Cruise ships could dock there. A square-rigged sailing ship moored there.)
- French Voyage 1904 1907 (walk-in boat)
- House Upside Down 1904-1910 (burned 1911) (2-1/2 story structure with German Village restaurant on ground floor; furniture nailed upside down on second floor.)
- Holy Land 1904-1905 (near beach circular building depicted on Sanborn map)

- Satin Theater 1904-1907
- Sea Serpent 1904
- Dew Drop 1904 (spiral tower slide)
- House of Too Much Trouble 1904
- St. Louis Exposition 1904
- Ballroom 1904
- Earthquake Stairway 1905 (split stairs)
 Note: aka The Funny Stairway
- Japanese Tea Garden 1905
- Atlantis Under the Sea 1905
- Foolish House m 1905 (mirror maze)
- Miniature Steam Railroad 1906 1940
- Cave of the Winds 1906-1907 (site where 1907 fire originated)

Note: aka Tower of the Four Winds

- Pony Track 1906 (Shetland ponies for children)
- Fads & Fancies Building 1906 (numerous novel amusements)
- Carousel 1906 (flying horse apparatus cost \$25,000)
- Automobile Sensation 1906 (illusion of moving automobile striking pedestrian)
- Flatiron Building 1906 (repro of skinny Manhattan skyscraper hit by gust of wind (electric fan) that blows men's hats off.)
- L.A. Thompson Scenic Railroad 1907
- Coaster Figure Eight 1907
- Third Degree Regions 1907
- Cyclone House 1907
- Laricola 1907
- Skating Rink 1907
- Haunted House 1907
- Shoe Fly 1907
- Wooblywalk 1907
- Human Roulette Table 1907 (large spinning wheel where patrons tried to hang on, but were spun off to the surrounding bowl)
- Human Zoo 1907 (a crawl-space exit lead to a cage where other patrons laughed and made fun of those in it.)
- Jumping Floor 1907
- St. Augustine Tower 1907 (wind machine)
- Barrel of Love (moved to Steeplechase-1907)
- Night swimming in huge tank 1907
- Pavilion of Fun 1908-1966 (building 450 x 270 feet & 63 feet high at highest point, covered the following amusements: Insanitarium with Blowhole Theater, Comedy Lane, Battleship Roll, Laughing Gallery, Bounding Billows, Uncle Sam, Down & Out, Bicycle Carousel, Human Pool Table, Hoop-la, Panama Slide, and many others.)

• Steeplechase Horses - 1908- 1966 (New horse racecourse had two separate courses running somewhat parallel with each other. One, 4 horses wide ran completely outside the Pavilion of Fun and the other also 4 horses wide, mostly inside the structure. The outside track was about 2100 feet long. It was lengthened by 800 feet in 1912. In 1916 the park added 5 more horses for a total of 30.



The famous mechanical horses at Steeplechase Park in Coney Island, NY, 1910. One of my early memories was riding on this thrilling ride. There will never be another.

- Insanitarium with Blowhole Theater 1908 1961 (Patrons, after riding the Steeplechase Horses, walked down a ramp onto its stage. Clowns herded them through its Comedy Lane where the men were separated from the ladies with electric cattle prods, and the jets of compressed air blew their dresses high up into the air. To escape they had to negotiate a moving section of floor called the Battleship Roll).
- Steeplechase Pier 1908 Present?
- Sunken Gardens 1908 (contained Ferris Wheel & Air Ships)
- House Upside Down 1908- 1933 (2-1/2 story structure with German Village restaurant on ground floor; furniture nailed upside down on second floor).
- Ferris Wheel 1908 1964 (125 feet diameter)
- School Days 1908 (revolving barrel on switchback track)
- Barrel of Love 1908 1964 (revolving barrel at Bowery entrance)
- Funny Stairs 1908- 1920 (Bowery lobby)
- Uncle Sam 1908 1929 (huge swing 6 rows of 4 passengers seated on a platform)

- Down & Out Tube 1908 1959 (steep scary slide in a dark tube that after 1910 dropped people onto the Human Pool Table)
- Razzle Dazzle aka Hoop-la 1908 1947 (circular swing for 70 people)
- Arkansas Traveler 1908 to 1914 (a split walkway with handrails whose pieces of floor supporting each leg moved independently and thus threw the person off balance)
- The Lion & the Mouse 1908 (in Pavilion of Fun)
- Cave of the Winds 1908 (fun house with wind machine inside)
- Shamrock Bowl 1908
- Grinder 1908 (a huge sausage machine
- Human Niagara 1908 (once you ascended the adjacent Golden Stairs you slid down this bumpy bump slide with 60 ball bearing rollers on an inclined plane and landed in a big soup bowl).
- Rope & Bridge 1908
- Shoe Fly 1908
- The Pit 1908
- The Wabbler 1908

- Spider's Web 1908
- Over & Under 1908
- Lifting the Lid 1908
- Man of the Flower 1908
- Home Sweet Home 1908
- ??? 1908 (an iron mesh maze)
- The Jungle 1908
- The Neptune 1908
- Archimedes' Wonder 1908
- Job's Elevator 1908
- Bicycle Carousel 1908 1939 (Passengers supplied motive power in this carousel style ride).
 Note: aka Bicycle Runabout
- Hat Blower 1908
- Gridiron 1908
- Animal Cage 1908
- Bowery Slide 1908 1958 (long 30-foot-high slide beneath horse track) **Note:** aka Avalanche
- Roof Garden 1908 (fake elevator that collapses in Pavilion of Fun)
- 3rd Degree Regions 1908
- Ozone Room 1908
- Dew Drop 1908 ??? (outdoor spiral tower slide)
- Human Roulette Wheel 1908 1960 (big revolving platform 30 ft diameter room for about 20 people the ride catapults people into the surrounding scoop like hollow). Note: aka Whirlpool 1917.
- Mechanical Jackass 1908 (\$5 prize for successful 5-minute ride Note: aka Wooden Donkey
- Soup Bowl 1909 1917
- Ocean Pier Trolley 1909- 1927 (ran from Steeplechase Pier to Surf Avenue 1300 feet?? transported arriving steamship passengers into park)
- Automobile Ride 1909 1917 (in Pavilion of Funthen in 1917 ride ticket lists it in the North Garden)
- Country Wedding ??? 1934 (in Pavilion of Fun)
- Undulating Swing m 1910 (in Pavilion of Fun)
- Chanticleer 1910-1963 (merry-go-round); with 38 giant chickens & 14 ostriches instead of horses)
- The Squeezer 1910 (48 diameter circus ring. The center was a mound with a downward angle and held a dozen seated people. The ring revolved and they shot off it as it gained speed. The sexes were separated on each ride. **Note:** Sounds like the Human Roulette Wheel may be its first name.)
- Human Pool Table 1910 1959 (spinning discs under Dew Drop slide in Pavilion of Fun made up of 24 large discs with adjacent ones revolving in opposite directions. The people are "players" as they are spun every which way across the ride's flat surface. Each trying to regain footing) 1924
- Dinosaur Exhibit 1910 (exhibit of a dinosaur dug up in Montana)
- The Rosarium 1910

- The Tippy Boats 1910
- Golden Stairs 1910 1920 (50 feet high in Bowery lobby)
- The South Pole 1910 1932 (in Pavilion of Fun but later outside near Boardwalk)
- Whirlwind Slide 1910 (Bowery lobby)
- Monster Elephant 1910 1920's
- Midget Circus 1910
- Vaudeville Theater 1910
- Racing Autos 1910 (25 full size cars 1-mile track??)
- Outdoor Swimming 1910 1963 (outside pool was 270 x 90 feet depth 3 to 6 feet; 1 diving board contained 670,000 gallons of salt water)
- Carnival of Babies 1911
- The Mixer 1911 1964 (big revolving rotating barrel @ Surf Avenue entrance)
- Marble swimming Pool 1911 1928 (50 x 200-foot indoor swimming pool in Pavilion of Fun's south end; enlarged in 1919)
- El Dorado 1912 1964 (carousel with 3 platforms revolving at different speeds; illuminated by 5000 lights).
- Airships 1912 1940 (set at corner of Surf Avenue & W 16th)
- Illusion Palace 1912 (visitors enter park at Surf Ave thru 35 ft high structure) m 1920
- Tilyou's Dreamland Circus Side Show 1912
- House Upside Down 1913 1920 (2-1/2 story structure, rebuilt after 1911 fire, with German Village restaurant on ground floor; furniture nailed upside down on second floor in Sunken Garden)
- Ballroom 1913 1942 (dancing floor 30 x 220 feet could accommodate 3500 people)
- Steeplechase Circus 1913
- Ocean Roller Coaster 1913 1920 (near pier & beach)
- Miniature Railroad 1913 1920
- Moving Pictures 1913 1917
- Aerial Slide 1913 1920
- Panama Slide 1913 1964 (slide dropped people into bowl in Pavilion of Fun)
- Crystal Maze 1913
- Mystic Stairs 1913
- Human Phonograph Slide 1913 (probably a spiral slide)
- Automobile Ride 1913 1920 (1/4 mile around park)
- Venetian Gondolas 1913 1940 (An imported English ride using a circular and possibly undulated track. Cars are in the shape of gondolas. Located outdoors)
- Hitting the Pipe 1913 (near beach)
- South Pole 1914

- Roller Skating Rink 1915 1928
- Wax Exhibit 1916 (Eden Musee wax figures)
- Dippy Dip 1917 1920 (in North Garden)
- Penny Arcade 1918 1964 (in Pavilion of Fun)
- Babyland 1920 1964 (in Pavilion of Fun miniature devices for little folks contained two Kiddie Slides, Turn-About (1946 1958), a turntable, two Hobby Horses, a Kiddie Carousel (24 aluminum miniature horses with two chariots)
- Venetian Swings 1920
- Carnival Bridge 1920
- Diamond Drop 1920 (slide??)
- Cakewalk 1923-1939 (floor shook when person attempted to walk on it)
- The Witchway ??? (swing that whirled passengers)
- Racing Derby Carousel 1924 1963 (built by Prior & Church; horses by Ilions)
- Dodgem 1924 1964 Note: aka Scooters
- Frolic 1924 1964
- Glee Sail Boats 1924
- Zip 1925 1964 (roller coaster 2200 feet long)

 Note: aka Steeplechase Roller Coaster
- Noah's Ark 1925 1930 (rocking boat Fun House along Boardwalk)
- The Limit 1925 1934 (out & back roller coaster faced Boardwalk ran parallel to beach from W 19th to W 16th. Except for lift hill & first drop)
- Old Mill 1925 1952 (Tunnel of Love boat ride)
- Boardwalk Barrel 1928 1939 (revolving barrel)
- Caterpillar 1928 1964 (circular flat ride with slight rise - canopy closed to look like caterpillar when it reached peak speed)
- Custer Cars 1929 1937 (miniature gasoline powered cars on a track). **Note:** aka Auto speedway
- Heydey 1929 1964 (cars with wheels seating 4 people were pulled by cable around an elliptical track.
 The cars weren't steerable, but the patrons in the rear seat could by leaning to one side, then back suddenly, could make the car whip around to face backwards)
- Dangler 1929 (revolving swings in Pavilion of Fun) **Note:** aka Flyers or Swings
- Whirl 1929
- Funny Mirrors 1929 **Note:** aka Revolving Mirrors
- Cuddle-Up 1929 (not popular removed after season located along Boardwalk)
- Boardwalk Carousel 1930 1953
- Funny Cars 1930 1931 (car's axles were offset so wobbled as it moved)
- Whale 1931 1938 (large structure one walked into whale's belly along boardwalk)
- Boardwalk Whip 1931 1959 (8 car ride along Boardwalk)

- Kiddie & Diving Pools 1932 1963 (2 small circular pools built on north end of big outdoor pool. Kiddie pool a 1-foot deep wading pool.
- Circus 1933 1939 (one-ringed circus free shows daily performed in arena near boardwalk.
- Flying Turns 1934 1939 (toboggan roller coaster adjacent to Boardwalk)
- House of Glass ??? 1939 **Note:** aka Glass Works
- Chair-o-Plane 1936 (circular aerial ride)
- Infant Incubators 1936 1938
- Zoo 1936- 1958 (maze plus a few gimmicks)
- Eli Ferris Wheel 1939 1947 (along Boardwalk)
- Kiddie Fire Engines 1939 (along Boardwalk)
- California Red Bats (1939 m 1958 (joke attraction 2 broken bricks in a box with note asking people not to tell what they saw. located near Express Train platform)
- Kiddie Boats 1940's
- Steeplechase Express Train 1940 1961 (tracks ran in area near boardwalk where Flying Turns had been previously located. 1200 feet track & 5-minute ride)
- Bicycle Carousel 1941 1964 (reinstalled in Pavilion of Fun with 30 steel bicycles)
- Rocket Ships 1941 1964 (revamped Giant Swing with six- 6 passenger aluminum Buck Rogers style rocket cars; tower 80 feet high)
- Parachute Jump 1941 1964 (from N.Y. World's Fair Lifesaver Exhibit 262 ft high 12 chutes)
- Whip 1941 1964 (12 cars outdoors near Surf Avenue)
- Silver Streak 1941 1964 (circular flat ride on 30-degree tilt with 2 passenger cars travelling around perimeter @ 30 MPH -
- Kiddie Airships 1944 ???
- Turn-About 1946 1958 (a revolving turntable that kids pushed around then sat on)
- Television Studio 1947 1964 (half of Ballroom space converted into a studio shows like the Arthur Godfrey Show sometimes originated here)
- Flying Coaster late 1940's? (portable kiddie metal roller coaster along Boardwalk)
- Scrambler 1948 1962 (tub style ride moved erratically as platform spun)
- Sea Cruise 1948 1964 (8 car ride over circular undulating track)
- Kiddie Bus Line 1950 ?? 1958 (in Pavilion of Fun)
 Note: aka Gay Bus Line
- Kiddie Roto Whip 1948 1959 (8 cars 2 passengers)
- C-Cruise 1948 1964 (in Pavilion of Fun) **Note:** aka Sea Cruise
- Tree of Knowledge 1952 1964

- Crazy Clock 1953 (22 feet high animated clock from England. Cost \$10,000. Bells chimed and action started every 15 minutes)
- Optical Viewer 1954 (coin operated telescope on parachute platform)
- Carousel 1954 1963
- Poker Roll 1954 ?? (game in building along Boardwalk)
- Sky Fighter 1955 1956 (Kiddie ride on Parachute platform)
- Jolly Caterpillar 1955 (Kiddie ride on Parachute platform)

- Pretzel 1958 1964 (dark ride with 10 2 passenger cars guided along steel rail in topsy-turvy fashion.
 Note: aka Shangri-La Ha)
- Tilt-a-Whirl 1959 1964
- Roundup 1960 1964 (spinning centrifuge ride that hydraulic lifts 90 degrees in air)
- Paratrooper 1961 1964
- Roto Jet 1962 1964 (passengers moved planes up and down while ride revolved)
- Trablant 1964 (umbrella type ride which travelled in a circle in undulating fashion 24 two person seats beyond umbrella perimeter)
- Whale Boats 1964 (25 fiber glass 2 passenger battery powered boats)

Of course, there is a very large number of coupons and tokens from Coney Island. No overview article can cover this very much. Shown here is an example of a coupon from the famous original Thunderbolt rollercoaster. In 2014 the Thunderbolt was rebuilt in Coney Island but of different design.



Thirty-cent ticket to ride the Thunderbolt rollercoaster



The original Thunderbolt. As a kid in Brooklyn I rode this ride. It was built in 1925.

Some of the monetary issues are associated with the greatest restaurant there and the largest in the world. Starting as a push-cart vendor Feltman's grew to own several restaurants and amusements in Coney



Nathan's Famous in Coney Island, NY. It is still there and is the site of the annual hot dog eating contest. Today a hot dog costs \$3.15.

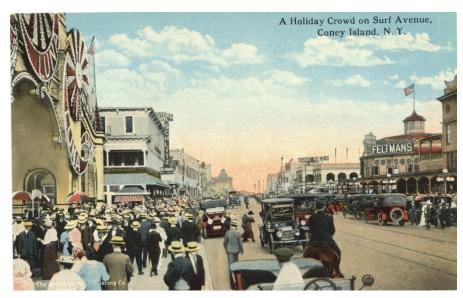
Island. This is the firm that invented the hot dog on a bun. One of their workers, Nathan Handwerker, spun off and formed his own hot dog enterprise. He cut Feltman's price in half—from a dime to nickel and the rest is history. By the 1920's, after the subway extended to Coney Island Nathan's sold 75,000 hot dogs *per weekend*. Today Nathan's Famous is one of the leading hot dog companies in the world. It has become a world-wide brand.







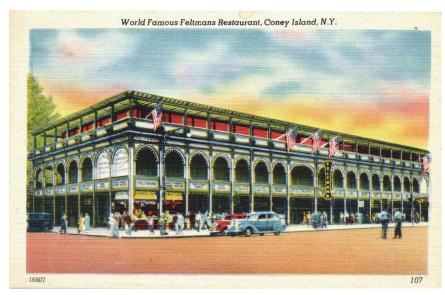
Feltman's 5-cent token Feltman's 25-cent token



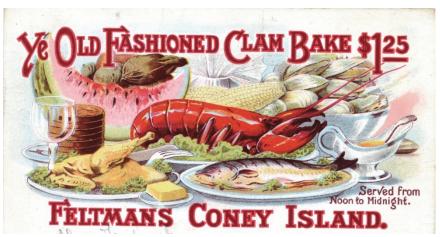
Surf Avenue, Coney Island, NY. Note the entrance to Luna Park on the left and to Feltman's on the right.



Five-cent coupon for Feltman's carousel ride for a child under 12



Feltman's world famous restaurant in Coney Island, NY



Feltman's seafood choices in Coney Island, NY

²https://www.google.com/search?q=map+of+brooklyn&tbm=isch&source=iu&ictx=1&fir=zm0JQRwjX6-FoM%253A%252CKMGE5AFjI3qPPM%252C_&vet=1&usg=AI4_kQuLbnRqm4OJa5VL3hP4XAVVPFeYQ&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwi33J_U7L_oAhUWa80KHeA2A9YQ9QEwAXoECAcQLg#imgrc=zm0JQRwjX6-FoM:

¹ https://www.google.com/search?q=coney+island+beach+1940&tbm=isch&source=iu&ictx=1&fir=C2mSNV05V9-SuM%253A%252CBHrXTTF6_qgd5M%252C_&vet=1&usg=AI4_-kTQpUE8baPJhoq3nFfpeMJ5S2_9dg&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwj47Jzo67_oAhXUB50JHS7YCggQ9QEwCXoECAkQLg