

RESORTS AND PASTIMES



—From the book.

Bathing by electric light at Coney Island, 1880.

Rambunctious Resort

"Good Old Coney Island," by **Edo McCullough** (Scribners. 344 pp. \$5.95), is a nostalgic history of the popular Brooklyn watering place.

By Jo Ranson

EDO McCULLOUGH, a veteran Coney Island buff with a huge grab bag of seaside material, has fashioned a nostalgic, merry-go-roundish account of the greatest outdoor amusement area in the world. Crowded with memorabilia, "Good Old Coney Island," as he calls it, is a "sentimental journey into the past" that will be cherished by the more venerable inhabitants of New York City and those who have visited it in their time. The younger fry will find a great deal of fascination and color in this easy-reading, plentifully illustrated chronicle of the frenzied and flamboyant spa on the edge of the Atlantic Ocean.

Peter Tilyou, a pioneer Coney Islander, was the author's grandfather and George C. Tilyou, the alert showman, was his uncle. Mr. McCullough's father ran many profitable shooting galleries on the strand and among his innovations were moving targets—a mechanical achievement that turned numerous city slickers into sharp-eyed marksmen. The author's brothers and cousins are among the big present-day game and ride operators at the Island.

With such a heritage and a shameless habit of collecting everything about the Island, Mr. McCullough has ably set down the various phases of the stretch of sand and ocean. It was here that the exuberant Walt Whit-

man was in the habit of swimming naked. It is here that millions of pilgrims from the steaming city swarm over the beach like tightly-jammed domestic sardines.

It is Mr. McCullough's belief that Coney Island went through several highly dramatic stages before it arrived at its present state. These periods, in his estimate, were the notorious, the elegant, and the garish. Now Coney is aiming to be a symbol of stability and supposed beauty.

In the recounting of the Island's history, the author has focused on a wide assortment of bizarre and unconventional happenings at the rollicking resort. He has recorded the unscrupulous dealings of John Y. McKane, the crude boss of Coney and Gravesend; the lordly goings-on at the three celebrated race tracks, Sheepshead Bay, Brighton Beach, and Gravesend; the many shenanigans during the heavyweight prize fights staged by William Brady at the Coney Island Athletic Club; the rise and fall of both Luna Park and Dreamland Park, with particular emphasis on the terrible conflagration that wiped out the latter attraction; the eminent role of Tilyou's Steeplechase Park; the sizzling saga of the hot dog and a thorough appraisal of Charles Feltman, the Leonardo da Vinci of the frankfurter, and Nathan Handwerker, the latter-day exponent and connoisseur of Coney Island Chicken or "Red Hot." Brillat-Savarin couldn't hold a grill to these two searching post-graduate students of the sausage.

There are also discerning portraits of other colorful outdoor showmen, notably Fred Thompson and Elmer ("Skip") Dundy, who built Luna Park; Sam Gumpertz, who managed the ill-fated Dreamland Park and later headed the Ringling Brothers and Barnum and Bailey Circus; Captain Paul Boyton, the man in the rubber suit and his extraordinary briny exploits; Dr. Martin Couney,



Your Literary I. Q.

Conducted by John T. Winterich

"TO BED, TO BED, TO BED!"

Beds are among the commoner furnishings of fiction, and even of drama and mythology. Ruth B. Stebbins of Elizabeth, New Jersey, offers a collection of resting-places several of which could take the modifier "last." Please locate them. Rise and shine on page 37.

1. This mythological hood used to tie his snatch victims to an iron bed, stretching them to fit if they were too short, and lopping off pieces of them if they were too long.
2. This bed, ten feet and nine inches square (it actually existed once and may still) owes some of its literary fame to an allusion made to it by one of Shakespeare's more dissolute characters.
3. This hotel bed was crowned by a monstrous canopy which could be dropped to fit snugly and smother the occupant.
4. After forty years, a locked bedroom was opened and the bed within gave up its terrible secret.
5. A narrow, white-counterpaned bed that was clamped to the floor of a Surrey dwelling aroused the suspicions of an infallible private detective.
6. At two a.m. an army cot collapsed under its occupant, and his clamor aroused the household, including his father, who had retired to the grandfather's attic couch to think.
7. Three distinct knocks heard at the foot of this four-poster were the prelude to a hair-raising experience.
8. A young girl killed herself in a bed in a New York theatrical boarding-house; a week later the same bed accepted a young man who had been looking for her for months and who followed her in suicide.

beloved physician and foremost authority on the care and feeding of "preemies"; "Boss" Tweed and his hideaway at Norton's Point; the original Kenny Sutherland, Dick Newton, and other seaside scoundrels—all of these and more the reader will discover in this lively report of the various stages that gave Coney Island its international fame.

At the same time, the reader will have an opportunity to observe the social behavior of the perspiring proletariat on the beachfront and note with satisfaction the important Coney contributions made by the distinguished and unbending city planner—Park Commissioner Robert Moses. It is Bob Moses who emerges as a vital force in the removal of the wretched firetraps, cheap catch-penny amusements. It is this cursed Moses who is determined to turn the oceanfront into a decent recreational and residential area. As Mr. McCullough points out, the Park Commissioner's "tastes are urbane, civilized, and upper middle-class." When the lawless elements ran the Island, the custom was to bilk and cozen all unsuspecting visitors. Today, the games are not gimmicked, the rides are comparatively safe, the comestibles are sanitary, the physical condition of the beach is good, and the prospects for improving beach pollution are brighter than ever.

Coney is obviously destined to wear a loftier brand of Sunday clothes.

Virtually all of Commissioner Moses's beachfront improvements have been the focus of stupid attacks from midget-minded operators at the Island. Despite a constant volley of abuse from shabby local political figures and pint-sized civic cads, Commissioner Moses has done more lasting good for the Island than any other public servant in the resort's history.

City dwellers in search of relaxation need not mourn the loss of Coney's highly combustible "lath and staff" exhibitions, nor should they raise irate voices against the disappearance of gamblers and light ladies. Honorable replacements are being sought and before long Mr. McCullough's rambunctious resort will be displaying more wholesome wonders. It will be as bewitching a sight as one is likely to see for some time.

There is affection, humor, and sadness in Mr. McCullough's story and there is a great deal that the reader did not know before. He deserves the brass ring on the carousel for this ringing recreation of the old Island.

MAN ON A HORSE: Hardly a middle-aged boy is now alive who did not thrill to the Western movies of Tom Mix. Picking up as the career of William S. Hart dwindled, the iron-

jawed Mix became the most successful of all cowboy stars, astride his horse Tony performing feats which brought back days when the West was really wild. Mix would never use a double for these stunts, and suffered many injuries. Nor would he ever smoke, drink, or gamble on the screen. Behind this lay a life as exciting as any he played in films. Born in prosaic Pennsylvania, Tom went west as a boy to become a frontier marshal, then in 1898 pounded up San Juan Hill behind Teddy Roosevelt. Returning home, he became a featured star in a Wild West Show, where another feature was the drawling Will Rogers. Like all strong, silent men, Tom next fell in love, in 1909 marrying Olive Stokes, author of "*The Fabulous Tom Mix*" in collaboration with Eric Heath (Prentice-Hall, \$3.95). With her playing bit parts by his side, he began appearing in pioneer movies. From then on his path took him into the life of a top-earning Hollywood star.

Mrs. Mix is lavish in praising her husband's fine qualities, which were mental as well as physical. But she is sketchy in many details, one of them her divorce from Mix when his career was at its peak. But apparently even Hollywood cowboys had inner problems. Mix never seems to have been quite happy as a movie star. Millions poured in and his mansion became a tribute to extravagant, horrid taste. His garage contained \$75,000-\$100,000 worth of fast cars, and he gave money to friends as if it were advice. He played a strong, silent man on the screen, yet he was inexplicably frightened by the talkies and kept a book in which he put the names of other stars whose careers had been ruined by them. But even as he pulled back from making talkies the Sells-Floto Circus paid him \$20,000 a week for appearances. Encouraged by this, and still obsessed by fear of the talking screen, he undertook in the mid-1930s a circus of his own, with his daughter Ruth. It was an ill-starred venture, which eventually caused Mix to tour Europe in an effort to recoup his fortunes. Returning home in 1940, he set out to drive to the Coast in a fast, white car. Behind his head he stored a valise. As he passed over a bit of rough road, the valise bounced forward, breaking his neck.

Mrs. Mix has written her book in a manner reminiscent of subtitles in early Tom Mix movies ("For the next four years, I was busy completing the long process of becoming a woman"). Oddly, this brings a kind of charm. This is not a rounded biography, but for a short book about a Western movie star it is a touching one.

—ALLEN CHURCHILL.



DYLAN THOMAS

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