Exhibition Title: We All Scream for Ice Cream: A History of Summer's Favorite Treat
Curators: E. Zingman-Leith, B. Ridings
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I know I'm at risk of using some bad puns in this review—such as "couldn't resist," "enjoyable," and "leaves me cold,"—but it's difficult to write a review about an exhibit on ice cream without taking that risk. So please excuse me if I end up using one—it's not intentional. But it does seem appropriate that an exhibit on the history of this favorite dessert is being held in the historic seaside town of Cape May, New Jersey, a town that both has brightly colored 19th century architecture and shares in the Jersey Shore tradition of eating ice cream on summer evenings. So, yes, I really couldn't resist viewing *We All Scream for Ice Cream: A History of Summer's Favorite Treat* at the Emlen Physick Estate in Cape May.

I was not disappointed. The exhibit, while small (about 400 square feet), nonetheless provides a good overview of the history of ice cream and its rise in America's consciousness during the 19th and early 20th centuries (which also happens to be when Cape May rose to prominence as a resort). The east side of the exhibit chronicles the period from the roots of the concept of frozen cream through to the late 19th century. The north side of the exhibit discusses the longest-operating ice cream company in the US (Bassetts) and the development of ice cream recipes, the waffle cone, and the home icebox for storage. The western portion displays more on storage—including a four- or five-foot-long Eddy icebox from the late Victorian era—along with information on the development of scooping spoons, the creation of the ice cream truck (credit Good Humor for this), and soft serve's creation. The center area focuses on serving: containers used for selling ice cream, glass fixtures used for penny licks (small amounts of ice cream sold by street vendors around 1900), and decorative molds (Victorians liked to serve their ice cream in the shapes of fruits or animals), although a late-19th century home ice cream maker is also shown.

The most interesting portion of the exhibit is the eastern portion—the part that chronicles the development of ice cream. It briefly mentions frozen desserts eaten by ancient Romans or Persians and then describes how the modern concept of ice cream first appeared in Renaissance Italy and then spread north to France through monarchical connections, and thence to elsewhere in Europe. Britishers and Americans got the taste for it this way (Thomas Jefferson brought home a recipe when he returned from France to Virginia). Ice cream parlors developed after Nancy Johnson developed a freezer box in the 1840s and quickly became popular—especially after the Civil War—as places where women could hang out without seeming immodest. (Even if they were up to no good—the exhibit quotes a *New York Times* article from 1866 humorously discussing an apparent assignation that took place in one parlor). We then learn the history of the ice cream soda, the ice cream sundae (considered less vice-inducing by old-time clergymen than the sinfully good ice cream soda), and the banana split, whose popularity was initially spread by returning-home college students asking what they could buy at an off-campus joint. Prior to

seeing this exhibit, I was unaware both of the sundae being an offshoot of the soda and of the nature and timing of the banana split's invention.

Many visitors will also probably be unaware of the role African Americans and women played in the rise and popularity of ice cream in America. Their ingenuity—fueled perhaps by their roles in 18th and 19th century society (and also by the lack of air conditioning)—allowed them to understand what people wanted and how to get it to them. The exhibit does a very good job of emphasizing this. Augustus Jackson, a free Black man (and former White House chef), is credited with developing the modern recipe using salt for temperature control, and Alfred Cralle, an African American hotel worker in Pittsburgh, is credited with developing the modern one-handed scooping spoon, which greatly improved the efficiency of both kitchen servers and ice cream shop operations (without it, modern ice cream servers would have to work at a slower, more-irritating pace that might drive away potential customers). Similarly, the role of women is not hidden—as it usually is when talking about cuisine during this time period. Not only is the importance of Nancy Johnson's invention of a commercial icebox given appropriate emphasis—it made the ice cream parlor (and modern ice cream shop) possible—but so is the work of Agnes Marshall, an Englishwoman whose recipe book and cooking classes helped convince many of the ability to serve the confection in the home (one illustration shows a class teeming like an anthill with eager female students, presumably all homemakers). A typical history of food during this period usually focuses either upon restaurant chefs (usually white men) or staple food preparation at home (such as how white wives cooked bread or beef). Emphasizing the role of African Americans and women in the development of such a popular dessert may help a visitor realize these groups did not lack either creativity or ability when they had an outlet to express it.

The exhibit barely mentions Cape May or other communities along the New Jersey shoreline—a couple of newspaper advertisements from Cape May publications and a photo from Atlantic City are all there is. This is somewhat surprising, given both the prominence of several coastal New Jersey communities, such as Cape May, Atlantic City, and Long Branch, as beach resorts throughout this period

and the location of the exhibit, not to mention the decades-long tradition at the Jersey Shore of families buying ice cream on hot summer nights. The newspaper advertisements give the idea that ice cream has been served in Cape May since the mid-1800s, and the community's emphasis on preserving its heritage makes it easy for one to imagine people consuming ice cream in wool suits, long corseted dresses, or full-length swimsuits. But there is no mention of popular ice cream vendors that were located in the resort over the years, or in neighboring resorts (at least one venerable popular ice cream shop in a nearby town was reputedly a speakeasy during Prohibition). Space limitations may well have dictated the decision to omit more about local ice cream history and traditions, but, given Cape May's emphasis on its past, some visitors to the exhibit may be left wanting.

On the other hand, one cannot blame the exhibitors for not including more about improvements in refrigeration and its ability to improve the ice cream business. Space limitations are almost certainly the reason here too. But it would have taken a far bigger exhibition space to discuss improvements in iceboxes—and the invention of electric refrigerators—and their effect upon ice cream shops after 1900. The exhibit does discuss the rise of ice cream trucks (they started in Ohio during the interwar years) as well as different types of containers used in grocery store sales, so one realizes good refrigeration must be existing by the time these are manufactured, but a true food historian may want more on this subject. A casual visitor, however, probably will be satisfied with what the exhibit provides.

This exhibit is designed to be viewed by someone who is a lay person when it comes to ice cream, not by an expert on the subject, and it serves its purpose well. It does a good job documenting the creation of modern ice cream and its subsequent rise in popularity in the United States. It also, albeit in an indirect way, ties in well with the general Victorian and Edwardian atmosphere of Cape May, thus both helping visitors understand the methods of leisure time common to those eras and the relationship of ice cream to the society at large as it existed during these time frames. Visitors will come away with a greater appreciation of ice cream's role in American leisure time and, also, the positions African Americans and women played in developing that role.

The exhibit's size means its coverage of ice cream's history since 1950 is poor. Thus, experts and students of culinary dessert history will find this exhibit lacking, but purely because of its size, not because of its attempt to cover the material. However, the exhibit does not advertise itself as designed to satisfy an expert's taste for knowledge. A casual visitor will find it educational and gain a fuller appreciation for how long ice cream has been in American society. I would therefore recommend it for those with a limited knowledge of the subject. But, given the dearth of other museum exhibits on the history of American desserts (or culinary history in general), even an expert may find it a useful exhibit, either as a way to learn about ice cream's history in a pictorial and almost-tactile manner or as a way to gather ideas about how to mount an exhibit on the history of another culinary item.

Photo courtesy of Cape May MAC (Museums+Arts+Culture)

Jonathan Woolley