INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

1 NAME
HISTORIC "LUCY" THE MARGATE ELEPHANT
AND/OR COMMON

2 LOCATION
STREET & NUMBER Margate City
CITY, TOWN Margate City
STATE New Jersey
VICINITY OF New Jersey

3 CLASSIFICATION
CATEGORY x DISTRICT
 _ BUILDING(S)
 _ STRUCTURE
 _ SITE
 _ OBJECT

OWNERSHIP x PUBLIC
 _ PRIVATE
 _ BOTH

PUBLIC ACQUISITION
 _ IN PROCESS
 _ BEING CONSIDERED

STATUS x OCCUPIED
 _ UNOCCUPIED
 _ WORK IN PROGRESS
 _ ACCESSIBLE
 x YES: RESTRICTED
 _ YES: UNRESTRICTED
 _ NO

PRESENT USE x MUSEUM
 _ AGRICULTURE
 _ COMMERCIAL
 _ EDUCATIONAL
 _ ENTERTAINMENT
 _ INDUSTRIAL
 _ MILITARY
 _ RELIGIOUS
 _ SCIENTIFIC
 _ TRANSPORTATION
 _ OTHER

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY
NAME Margate City
STREET & NUMBER Ventor and Washington Avenues
CITY, TOWN Margate City
STATE New Jersey
VICINITY OF New Jersey

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION
COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC Atlantic City Surrogate's Office
STREET & NUMBER Main Street
CITY, TOWN Margate City
STATE New Jersey

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS
TITLE Historic American Buildings Survey
DATE 1969
DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS Library of Congress
CITY, TOWN Washington, D.C.
STATE
John Milner, AIA Architect of the restoration, has provided the following description:

The most appropriate early description of Lucy the Elephant was written by her inventor, James V. Lafferty, and included in his petition to the Commissioner of Patents dated May 19th, 1882.

"My invention consists of a building in the form of an animal (i.e. an Elephant) the body of which is floored and divided into 2 rooms, closets, etc., and the legs contain the stairs which lead to the body, said legs being hollow so as to be of increased strength for properly supporting the body, and the elevation of the body permitting the circulation of air below the same, the entire device presenting a unique appearance, and producing a building which is well ventilated and lighted.

A chute communicates with the front of the body and extends to the ground where it may be connected with a sewer or other conduit for conveying slops, ashes, etc., to the sewer or conduit, said chute being of the form of the trunk of the elephant and containing trussing . . . for supporting the front of the body, said trussing being concealed by the covering or wall of the trunk.

The lower end of the chute enters or is connected with a box around which is a seat, said box resting on the ground or proper supports thereon and concealing said lower end of the chute and the connection with the conduit and presenting the appearance of a trough from which the animal is feeding or drinking.

An upper story may be supported on the body, access whereto is had from the floor by means of stairs which are properly located in the walls of the body and sustained in position, said story being in the form of a howdah which completing the semblance of a bedecked elephant, acts as the observatory of the building.

It will be seen that the structure is novel and unique."

Lucy was assembled basically as a large frame box, composed of massive 12" x 12" timbers. The structural frame was carefully braced with diagonal members, providing a rigid system which has successfully withstood heavy winds and storms for nearly a century. Lucy's shape was achieved by applying curved built-up members over the frame and enclosing the whole composition with sheathing boards and heavy terne plate.

Legend tells us that Lafferty used a live elephant, which he chained to the beach, as a model for Lucy. But in fact, Lafferty and a man named William Free
Architectural Follies are now generally accepted as a legitimate architectural expression. They are still a strange and startling sight to those used to structures of a traditional form. "Lucy" is one of those now rare examples of what G.E. Kidder-Smith calls Zoomorphic vernacular and she is the last of the American breed--two others, one at Cape May, New Jersey and the other at Coney Island have long since disappeared.

Constructing oversized elephant-buildings is not a new idea--in the 19th century the practice approached the significance of a cult. Clay Lancaster, in his book on Architectural Follies, discusses the breed at length, from Ptolemy's dummy on wheels, Phillip of Burgundy's 15th century mechanical elephant, Henri II had several elephant automats--propelled by men inside and two great French schemes for elephant-buildings that never materialized, one for Louis XV by Ribart and the other for Napoleon by Alavoine.

Lancaster goes on to place Lucy in this genealogy:

"Such grandiosity as that of an Elephant Triomphal would be out of place in America, but by the very virtue of abandoning the superficial trimmings Americans often were able to bring the essential features to realization. An elephant building exists in America. It is referred to as the Elephant House, or, more usually, as the Elephant Hotel at Margate City, near Atlantic City, New Jersey. No pedestal or platform supports this elephant, for he is a pleb pedestrian with feet planted firmly on the ground. In the practical American manner he is depicted in a feeding attitude. Summer vacationists have flocked to this section of the Atlantic coast for several generations, and a good percentage still go to view the baggy-kneed landmark. Constructed by James V. Lafferty about 1883, the monster has an overall length of about seventy-five feet, the height to the peak of the original howdah surpassing this measurement by ten feet. Over a million pieces of timber went into the construction of the thing, plus four tons of bolts, bars, and nails, and twelve thousand square feet of tin for covering it--according to the leaflet passed out by the proprietors.

Twin newel stairways are in the hind legs, one for ascent and the other for descent. The interior space is divided up into rooms devoted to the ordinary purposes of a house, including a reception room eighteen feet square, dining room, kitchen, and several bedrooms.
10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY
UTM REFERENCES

ZONE EASTING NORTHING

[Table of UTM references]

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

See continuation sheet

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STATE</th>
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FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE
Carolyn Pitts, Architectural Historian

ORGANIZATION
Historic Sites Survey, National Park Service

STREET & NUMBER
1100 L Street, N.W.

CITY OR TOWN
Washington, D.C. 20240

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:
NATIONAL ___ STATE ___ LOCAL ___

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

FEDERAL REPRESENTATIVE SIGNATURE

TITLE

DATE

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

ATTEST:

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE
designed the building without any such aid. J. Mason Kirby, a Quaker from Philadelphia, performed the actual construction, which eventually cost Lafferty $38,000.

Lucy's skeleton is a large frame box of 12x12 inch timbers and 8,560 wooden ribs. Her skin is 12,000 square feet of heavy tin and 24 glass windows. Her body measures 80 feet in circumference and 38 feet in length. Her ears are 17 feet long, her tusks 22 feet. The trunk is 26 feet long and was designed to double as a chute for garbage disposal. The whole elephant weighs 90 tons.

Access to the interior was gained through two spiral staircases, one in each rear leg. The walls and ceiling are plastered and the floors were wood. A beaded wainscot extended around the perimeter of the main space, and miniature pointed doorways led to the side rooms. The original interior woodwork was in the Gothic Revival style.

The original domed interior space was partitioned into separate rooms in 1902. In 1928 a violent storm blew off the original ornate howdah, and it was replaced by the present howdah. With these two exceptions, Lucy has undergone only minor alterations and repairs. Most of her original fabric remains although in poor condition.

Although Lucy's present exterior appearance is somewhat weary, it reflects only surface deterioration. Her structural frame has remained in good condition, due largely to the ample air spaces around the timbers, which have eliminated prolonged dampness. These air spaces will greatly facilitate the installation of new heating, cooling, and electrical systems to be included as part of the restoration.
Twenty windows are for the admission of light, besides the eighteen-inch portholes that serve for eyes. Staircases to each side of the belly take one to the howdah, where, from an elevation of sixty-five feet, is obtained a wide vista of the sea. The cost of building the elephant is said to have been $38,000.

Lafferty built a similar hotel on Coney Island at about the same time, though the latter one only survived until 1896 in which year the elephant was burned (or some say, was cremated). The Coney Island construction, billed as the 'Elephant Colossus,' was bigger than the one farther down the Atlantic coast; it had complete stories within the torso, the overall height amounting to 122 feet. The interior of this jumbo was put to good usage, one accommodating a cigar store and the other a diorama, later one or the other converted into an elevator shaft. Staircases were in the hind legs and one could engage a room in any part of the animal's anatomy. A third elephant, 'the Light of Asia,' was built at Cape May in 1885 but she died of neglect and vandalism in 1900.

A patent was taken out on the invention by James V. Lafferty. It was filed 3 June 1882, and granted on December the 5th. The description was accompanied by a diagram representing a side elevation and plan of the 'building in the form of an animal, the body of which is floored and divided into rooms, closets, and Etc., and the legs contain the stairs . . . said legs being hollow, so as to be of increased strength for properly supporting the body.' One wonders that old Mother Nature never thought of the supporting quality of hollow legs; but, on the other hand, how could Mr. Lafferty locate his stairs in them if they weren't? There is only a single large, rectangular room, however, the leftover spaces all portioned off into closets, and even inner-closets. The trunk was a useful member, having a chute inside (marked 'F' on plans) for the disposal of 'slops, ashes, etc.' In the next paragraph we read: 'The elevation of the body permits the circulation of air beneath it and removes it from the dampness and moisture of the ground . . . Furthermore, the body is exposed to light and air on all sides, wherefore it provides a healthy and suitable place of occupancy for invalids and others.'

For 90 years Lucy has been admired by children, a source of amusement for adults and occasionally a sobering influence—there is a tale that "sailors on ships in the Atlantic are said to have given up rum abruptly after one sight of Lucy towering on the beach looking directly out to sea at them."
In the last several years the elephant has been the object of a preservation campaign with funding from Federal sources (National Park Service, HUD Bicentennial Commission), State and private donors. Her credentials include the National Register of Historic Places, and the Historic American Buildings Survey (National Park Service). During 1974, 12,000 visitors arrived and 18,000 more came in 1975. The elephant has been stabilized, painted and completely restored—she will have a new howdah when funds permit. Lucy is now almost unique and an important Victorian monument in the history of American architecture.

Addendum:

An architectural folly comes from the French folie which meant "Delight" or "favorite abode." The English gave the term the added connotation of something uncomplimentary reflecting the foolishness of the builder. More follies were built in America than anywhere else and they are usually incomplete due to the bad planning of the builder or out of scale and style, often whimsical. An architectural folly is now an accepted architectural category.

Many famous follies have long since disappeared: P. T. Barnum's "Iranistan," Mrs. Trollope's "Bazaar," and "Flower's Folly" at Fiskkill, New York. The old world had follies as well—the Tower of Babel, the Villa Palagonia in Sicily and near Paris the Desert de Retz—all now in ruins. The Brighton Pavilion, however, has been splendidly restored. Follies came in all sizes and shapes and made of a variety of materials, some designed by famous architects, many by anonymous craftsmen.
Partial List of Publications In Which "Lucy" the Margate Elephant is Featured.

Cunningham, John T. The New Jersey Sampler.

Lancaster, Clay. Architectural Follies of America.

Boucher, Jack E. Absegami Yesteryear.

Devlin, Harry. What Kind of a House is That?

American Heritage, April, 1975.


SO JEX, Convention Booklet, April 14, 1972.

Atlantic City & County ABC Book, Atlantic City Dept. of Public Relations, 1975.

Life, August 21, 1970.


Constructioneer, October 19, 1970.


Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians.


House Beautiful, August 1974.


"Lucy" the Margate Elephant

BEGINNING at a point at the intersection of the South Line of Atlantic Avenue with the west line of Decatur Avenue and extends (1) West along the South line of Atlantic Avenue, one hundred five and one half feet (105 1/2) to a point being the division line of lands of estate of Israel G. Adams, thence (2) to a point width, extending south between parallel lines one of which is the West line of Decatur Avenue and the other the said division line above mentioned twenty five hundred and seventy five (2575) feet more or less, to the Exterior line established by the Riparian Commission of New Jersey in Atlantic Ocean, said Decatur Avenue being forty feet wide.
LUCY
THE MARGATE ELEPHANT

ATLANTIC AVENUE AND DECATUR STREET, MARGATE, ATLANTIC COUNTY, NEW JERSEY

James V. Lafferty of Philadelphia conceived the huge project of using a real estate promotion to save development of South Atlantic City. The idea was rejected by the owners. The wood frame - the clad structure was erected on the beach in 1902 by the J. Asaun Company (Contractors) and Norbert Dreyfus (In Smith) and is the oldest example of the American architectural style of the Victorian Period. In December 1905, Lafferty was granted U.S. Patent No. 746,089 for his invention of an improvement to buildings. Two other Elephant structures were constructed along the Beach Front, but have not survived. Rechristened "Lucy" circa 1927, the building has served as an office, tavern, restaurant and a tour of curiosity, surviving many changes. In 1905, under the direction of James V. Lafferty and William D. Miller, the structure was relocated about fifty feet farther from the shore, saved from demolition in 1906 by the New York committee for the Margate City, and moved to a city park two blocks down the beach. In 1912, the Margate Elephant lasted through thousands of visitors and is currently undergoing restoration.

These drawings were prepared for the Margate Elephant by the restoration architect, John D. Miller, AIA. The survey was conducted in 1976 by the Historic American Buildings Survey, under the direction of John D. Miller, AIA and Robert L. Scudiero, Architect, by Jeffrey C. Bourke, Charles D. Harris and Benjamin Walbert.

Location Map:

Regional Map:

Survey No.

Historic American Buildings Survey

SHEET 1 OF 4 SHEETS