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Dave the Guesser

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In 1956 Louis Armstrong and all the members of his band, who had come to perform on the pier, sat in the famous chair while Dave Glovsky tried to guess their weight.

FROM THE MUSEUM COLLECTIONS “DAVE THE GUESSER”

IT is to be expected that the museum collections of Maine Historical Society would include Liverpool pitchers, Revolutionary War rifles, Civil War swords, delicate miniatures on ivory, and elegant period costume. But should such a distinguished collection include the chair and handpainted signs of “Dave The Guesser,” who worked the pier at Old Orchard Beach from 1943 to 1997? The answer is an unequivocal *absolutely!*

The Society was fortunate to be the high bidder at an auction last summer for “Dave The Guesser’s” equipment. The acquisition includes not only the folding, blue-painted chair and the brass scale that hung on it, but a dozen of Dave’s various hand-lettered signs. “Fool the Guesser. Guess your weight within 3 pounds or win a prize,” reads one. The Society’s successful bid also included some of the prizes Dave handed out if he was not able to guess correctly a patron’s weight, age, occupation, marital status, or the make of the car he or she drove—cards of pink, orange, or lime green plastic hair ornaments (made in China) and bags of multi-colored Finest Quality Rubber Bands (made in Thailand). Dave didn’t like to have his prizes called “cheesy.”

“Dave The Guesser” was Dave Glovsky, a Portland native who died in 1997. For almost fifty years he was a fixture at Old Orchard Beach, calling out to passersby, “Hey, step right this way and let me guess your weight. Show me your hand and I’ll guess your occupation.” In 1943 he charged 25 cents a guess; by 1997 it cost a dollar to see if he knew you were a clam digger and weighed 143 pounds. A small man with a big smile, Dave waved his arms and cracked jokes. Whether he guessed correctly or not didn’t matter (although he was right more often than not); he was entertainment. As one of his last customers said, “For a dollar these days you can’t get anything. Here you can get entertained for a dollar.”

“Dave The Guesser” was a tradition at Old Orchard Beach and many of us remember him. As we walked the amusement park enjoying our paper cup of vinegar-sprinkled french fries some of us even responded to his cry of “Come on in!” His chair, signs, and the prizes he offered belong in the museum collections of Maine Historical Society. They represent folk art, Americana, and one colorful aspect of the life we have lived in the State of Maine.

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