

Curious Cape Cod: When huge rock bands roamed the region: Remembering the mighty Coliseum :: Reader View

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SOUTH YARMOUTH — I was rummaging through the cedar chest to extract my beloved chartreuse sweater vest, when I was overcome by the powerful scent of mothballs. Suddenly, I was in the front row of an [Iron Butterfly](#) concert, being pummeled by the opening notes of

["In-A-Gadda-Da-Vida."](#) The lead singer stumbled to the microphone and belted out the following message:

"Please tell us all about the [Cape Cod Coliseum!](#)"

What the heck did that mean? Was there some sort of Roman amphitheater on the Cape, with lobster-powered chariots and codpiece-clad fishermen poking each other with tridents? That would be great!

But something in my Swiss cheese memory whispered "hey, dude — this is all about rock 'n' roll."

Flummoxed, I whistled for the Curious Prius and donned my SmartBoy 3000 headband, which would infuse information into my cranium as I drove. The [first thing that popped up](#) about this coliseum mystery was written by the outstanding [Cape historian Duncan Oliver](#) and published in the Yarmouth Register newspaper in 2015:

"Thirty to 40 years ago, you wouldn't have to leave Yarmouth to see concerts by the Beach Boys, J. Geils, David Bowie, Boston Pops, the London Symphony and many others. You'd be able to watch a pre-season NHL hockey game featuring the Boston Bruins, as well as professional wrestling and boxing. Sound incredible? Welcome to the history of the Cape Cod Coliseum, located on Whites Path in South Yarmouth."

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According to Oliver, the approximately 7,000-seat venue opened in 1972 and was initially home ice for the Cape Cod Cubs, a minor league hockey team. But over the years, tons of other events were held, including boxing, wrestling and an incredible variety of rock concerts. Oliver's list of acts that played the Coliseum included Aerosmith, the Clash, Van Halen, the Grateful Dead and many more.

It's hard to imagine that Cape Cod was once a hotbed of rock. I pulled the Prius over on the side of Whites Path and looked down a driveway at what was once the Coliseum. It seems to be a warehouse of sorts now, with fences blocking off part of the parking lot. A pretty quiet place.

I needed someone to tell me what it was like during the glory days, so I reached out to my super-buddy Greg Bryant, former Cape Cod Times editor and knower of many things. He cranked out this tribute, which really brings the era alive:

"You have to remember that Cape Cod, in the 1970s when I was in high school, was a major musical wasteland. Our radio stations were filled with Top 40 playlists and music for older folks. Our few record stores failed to quench our thirst for something different.

From the fan files: [Lemonheads' Evan Dando surprise performance at Walgreens in Falmouth](#)

"So when the Cape Cod Coliseum began booking big rock acts, it was like a lightning bolt going wham! onto our sandy shores. It was seriously thrilling. The venue was conveniently located a speedy 15-minute drive from my home. The closest comparable venues were in Providence and Boston, visits my parents would nix, even (though) I wanted to go.

"My first concert was The Beach Boys, who at the time caught the wave of a revival of their music. Loggins and Messina was another, though in retrospect I'm rather clueless what drew me to the concert. My favorite was Emerson, Lake and Palmer, supporting their 'Brain Salad Surgery' album in 1974 and one of my favorite bands at the time.

From the fan files: [A Big Wow for The Kills](#)

"Later, I passed on seeing The Clash, who I adored, and quite a few other acts. Why? Acoustics. Appalling acoustics. Wretched acoustics. Unbearable acoustics. The kind you should expect from a venue built as an ice rink, granted. Notes ricocheted crazily off concrete walls, ceiling and floor, and finally delivered to my ears as a manic unworldly shriek.

"There was also the summer heat: the place was a raging inferno. Super hot, packed with profusely sweaty bodies with soaked clothing.

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"And we all dreaded the epic exit. The Coliseum's dirt parking lot ensured chaos as vehicles jockeyed for supremacy onto Whites Path — and freedom. Tempers flared. Beeping horns. Aggression. Our eardrums madly ringing all the banshee screams of the music. Our energy, what was not sucked from our beings during the concert, was completely sapped by the humid night air as we idled forever in immovable cars, craving our homes."

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Many thanks to the great Greg! The whole thing makes me think Cape Cod needs a new Coliseum. We've got about 75,000 more people living here than in the mid-1980s, when the venue closed after a run with wrestling impresario Vince McMahon at the helm. And heck, Aerosmith is still touring! I say we all get together and light our lighters, hold them high and demand a giant music palace. Cape Cod wants to rock!

What do you want to know about Cape Cod? To ask a Curious Cape Cod question, email me at ewilliams@capecodonline.com. I'll do my best to figure things out!

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