

A Visit to a True New Jersey Gem – The NJ Maritime Museum in Beach Haven

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Here in the Northeast of the US we might not have warm, blue water but -- we DO have cold, green water! And we have historic wrecks, amazing sea life including seals, sharks and whales to marvel at. And best of all - we have the unique **New Jersey Maritime Museum** in Beach Haven – where many wonders of maritime history, culture and scuba diving in New Jersey and the northeast can be explored!

Dive News Network had the pleasure of visiting the NJ Maritime Museum (NJMM) recently. Deb Whitcraft, Curator and President of NJMM greeted me warmly and I was escorted through the Museum by David Swope, Research Volunteer. Everyone with an interest in NJ/northeast maritime history, culture and scuba diving will quickly be immersed in the richly informative and rewarding exhibits and resources of the Museum!



NJ Maritime Museum in Beach Haven, NJ

NJMM was founded ten years ago in its newly-constructed home in Beach Haven near the bay side of Long Beach Island (LBI). Beach Haven is a seaside resort village located on LBI, a 20-mile long barrier island oriented south-southwest to north-northeast about two miles off the southern New Jersey coast. Since its founding the Museum has grown into the revered focal point for NJ and northeast maritime historians and scuba divers who have devoted their time, energy and personal donations of artifacts to this singular Museum.



Documentation and research at NJMM

Visitors and researchers benefit from log data of maritime biology and events including weather, marine advocacy and environmental protection, ship wrecks and other maritime accidents, and artwork (some recovered from wrecks) stretching back many years. These exhibits and data are meticulously maintained, analyzed and displayed by the devoted curatorial and research staff. Much of the incident/event data has been carefully digitized and catalogued for current and future benefit of researchers the world over. This is an ongoing, extensive effort embarked upon in 2011, with currently over 5000 maritime incidents carefully documented and accessible for review and analysis using Google Fusion and other state-of-the-art data access methods. This effort not only makes this a unique, worldwide internet-accessible repository, but also protects the documentation for the future. The Museum is also mapping the better-known shipwrecks in the NJ/NY vicinity in order to document their location and debris fields for future generations of scuba divers and researchers. Thus maritime archaeology also is a prominent objective of the museum, chronicling the importance of maritime commerce in this area through the discovery and display of artifacts recovered off the bottom.



Conference Room at NJMM

The Museum team collaborates with other regional museums, historical societies, the New York-based Explorers Club and government agencies such as National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) to provide facilities and a forum for information exchange, public awareness and discovery in this unique venue. The US Coast Guard for example has at its fingertips a unique and extensive, accessible database of maritime incidents for analysis and review. The community-at-large benefits as well through local elementary and high school groups visits to the

Museum to learn about the many aspects of maritime history, culture and advocacy for the marine environment which are the focus of the Museum. For example, the Museum conducts a Marine Sciences Camp for teens and K-8, and collaborates with several other regional organizations to assist with stranded marine mammals.



Kentucky Bourbon off the wreck of the Lizzy D

Exhibits are drawn from all over the NJ/NY metropolitan maritime community. So many of these unique exhibits caught our attention that it is just not possible to give a full account! But to mention a few: visitors can marvel at the unopened bottles of 100-proof Kentucky bourbon recovered off the *Lizzie D*, a tug boat serving as a rum-runner during The Prohibition Era which sank in 80' of water off Atlantic Beach Inlet (offshore nearby Brooklyn, NY) due to unknown circumstances in 1922. (Reportedly, bottles containing this solution were “chemically assessed” upon discovery of the

wreck in 1977, and the contents were determined by shared consensus of all those engaged in the effort to be uniquely and highly suitable for their originally-intended purpose!) There are also artifacts from wrecks many of us have dived on over the years, such as *USS San Diego* and *U-853* to name just a few. Exhibits include items retrieved from the *Andrea Doria*. Even ordinary details, such as pharmacy bottles from the infirmary and artillery shells (deactivated of course !!) from *USS San Diego*!

A first-floor room is dedicated to the devastating ship fire which destroyed the passenger ship *SS Morro Castle* with grievous loss of 135 passengers and crew. Deb Whitcraft and Gretchen Coyle have written the



definitive account of the ship's fire (*Inferno At Sea – Stories of Death and Survival Aboard the Morro Castle*) which documents the disaster, the subsequent beaching of the burning ship at Asbury Park, and the many passenger ship

procedural measures and marine safety enhancements which were instituted in the wake of the disaster.



Another room is reserved to honor the men of the U.S. Life-Saving Service (the precursor the U.S. Coast Guard). The men and women of USCGS risk their lives, putting themselves in harm's way in the service of mariners in distress under the most dangerous weather conditions. This room celebrates their efforts in our region, and is informative and inspiring! *Semper Paratus! Always Ready!* To which we say, 'Thank you to all the Coasties'!



Many scuba divers in the NJ/NY diving community had the privilege of diving the boat *Garloo* out of Captree State Park on Long Island (and before that, the *Wahoo*) captained by the venerable Captain Hank Garvin, who passed away in May 2015. Captain Garvin pioneered safe wreck diving techniques and brought the joy of diving to a whole new generation of scuba divers. He was rough and tumble on the outside, but had unbounded concern for those in his charge and his crew. He was beloved by so many in the diving community. A permanent tribute to Captain Hank Garvin was dedicated in April 2016 at the Museum complete with videos and his entire, extensive collection of

wreck artifacts which were donated by his family to the Museum for all to behold and draw inspiration from. For those who knew Captain Garvin personally or ever dived from his boat, this memorial exhibit celebrating his life and times is a true "must do", and a way to reconnect with the Captain across time and space.

Admission of the Museum is free, as is the library and high speed wifi internet access. Be sure to visit the gift shop for books, Museum-logo'd apparel and treats of every kind. The gracious, engaging staff at the Museum cordially invite all inquiries at 609-492-0202 or via email to info@njmaritimemuseum.org. The team encourages checking for the many active events and monthly presentations at NJMM at their website and Facebook at www.njmaritimemuseum.org and www.facebook.com/NJMaritimeMuseum. The Museum is open all summer of course, and also during the weekends during winter months (and on weekdays by appointment).

And for those who have a past personal connection to Long Beach Island, a visit to the Museum and LBI (including ice cream parlor Skipper Dipper!) is likely to stir long-lost, cherished memories. I caught my first fish – it was a blowfish – off the pier at Andy's Bait 'n' Tackle shop in Barnegat many moons ago (and was happy to set it free, watching it swim away). And photos of Beach Haven's graceful three-masted schooner '*Lucy Evelyn*' (she burned down in 1972) stirred memories of my childhood and family joy of long-ago summers on LBI with my own family, members of who are themselves cherished memories...



Barnegat Lighthouse

While in the area visiting the Museum, sojourners can stroll the bustling main street of Beach Haven, browsing galleries, shops, mini-golf and other entertainment for kids. And then explore *all* of Long Beach Island, offering miles of inviting, world-famous beaches to get some sand between your toes. There are fishing boats, marinas aplenty, seafood restaurants to suit every budget and occasion, many options for accommodations, and enjoyable and historic Barnegat Lighthouse State Park at the north end of the island. Visitors are thus all set up for a glorious few days on Long Beach Island! It is a good bet that a visit after Labor Day (if you can arrange it into your family schedule) would be especially rewarding, with reduced numbers of vacationers after the start of the school year. Boaters and divers have plenty to explore - and for fishermen (especially after Labor Day) Barnegat Marina serves as the kickoff for offshore overnight fishing trips for the seasonal tuna species of albacore and big eye, colorful and acrobatic mahi-mahi and the other species which inhabit the richly-diverse continental shelf marine biome of the offshore Hudson Canyon. Thus any time of the year, Long Beach Island has plenty to offer - so after your visit to the Museum grab your sunscreen and see you at the marina!