

Long Island Traditions

NEWSLETTER

www.longislandtraditions.org
info@longislandtraditions.org

Vol. 21 No.3
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Editor's note: Bob Doxsee will be among our honored guests on our "Boating with the Baymen" tour on October 12 (see accompanying article).

"Memories Of Meadow Island"

By Bob Doxsee Jr.

When my parents were married in July of 1923, their first home was a wood framed cottage facing Swift Creek. Pop operated an ocean fish-trap company from the island, and the cottage was to be our summer home for over a decade and the scene of my earliest childhood recollections. Access to the island was by boat only. As there was no electricity or running water, cooking and heating were by kerosene stoves and lamps. We had a rain barrel and an outdoor privy. Mother put up homemade root beer in reusable bottles, topping them off with an old fashioned rack and pinion bottlecapper. Beyond a foot bridge over by the fish camp was an artesian well. It was close by the bank but gushed forth cool, sweet, fresh water.

Although spartan, the Island was a popular place in summer. A number of artists vacationed there in bohemian style. Ernie Wagner was a flautist with the New York Philharmonic and was host to intellectuals of many persuasions.

My earliest memories were of following our tame black duck under the

See **Memories** on page 3



The Doxsee family houses at Meadow Island c. 1928.

Courtesy Bob Doxsee Jr.

Boating with the Baymen: Working the Waters of Long Island

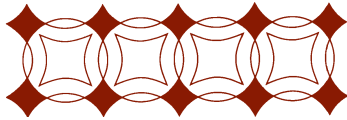
Sunday, October 12 at 2pm

The Miss Freeport, 85 Woodcleft Avenue, Freeport

The final tour for the season explores the traditions of fishermen and baymen, boat builders and bay house owners of Freeport and neighboring communities. The Miss Freeport tour boat is a large passenger cruise boat that will travel the waterways of Hempstead Bay, where guests can see the bay houses, the marshlands of the western bays, and various historic sites of the south shore.

Participants include the legendary Bob Doxsee of Doxsee Sea Clam in Point Lookout, boat builders Al Grover who broke the Guinness Book of World Records with his trans-Atlantic voyage in his Grover-built skiff, and Fred Scopinich whose family built rum runners and navy boats. Other guests on the 3-hour cruise will include bay house owner and boat builder John Remsen Sr., and fishermen Joey Scavone and Tony Sougstad. The tour will be moderated by LI Traditions' director Nancy Solomon.

The tour takes place on board the Miss Freeport, located at 85 Woodcleft Avenue in Freeport. Tickets are \$40/adult, \$20/children under 16, with discounts for families and groups. Space is limited and reservations are required! To reserve your spot call Long Island Traditions at (516) 767-8803 or visit www.longislandtraditions.org.



Long Island Traditions Inc.

Dedicated to the documentation and preservation of Long Island's living cultural heritage.

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For more information call: (516) 767-8803, fax: (516) 767-8805, write to us at: 382 Main St., Port Washington, NY 11050
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“Working the Waters: Maritime Culture of Long Island” at the Tobay Boat Show

Friday- Sunday, September 26-28, 2014
Tobay Beach

Long Island Traditions will present its 2nd annual “Working the Waters: Maritime Culture of Long Island” program in collaboration with the NY Marine Trades Association “Tobay Boat Show” at Tobay Beach on the Ocean Parkway, next to Jones Beach in Massapequa, New York. “Working the Waters: Maritime Culture of Long Island” will present to the public first-hand accounts about the contemporary and historic traditions of commercial and recreational fishermen, the factors affecting these traditions and their future on Long Island in the wake of Superstorm Sandy and the decline of the bays.

Highlights of the event include decorative decoy carvers Red Oster, Ken Budny, Tom Stewart and George Rigby, fishermen Tony Sougstad, Gary Blackler, Fred Menges and Bill Fetzer, Chuck Tekula and Joey Scavone, boat model builder Chris Hale and maritime driftwood painter Herb Jurist, among many others. There will also be family and children fishing lessons taught by master recreational fisherman Reed Riemer. Boat Show and Festival admission is \$10 (seniors \$8, children 12 and under are free) and will take place at Tobay Beach on Ocean Parkway in Massapequa.

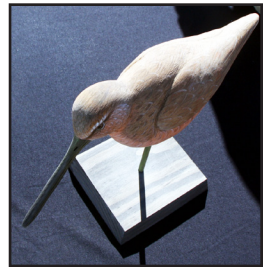


Photo by Nancy Solomon 2013

Tom Stewart of Massapequa is an award winning decoy carver who will be demonstrating his craft at the Tobay Boat Show.

The event hours are Friday, September 26 at 12 p.m.-6 p.m., Saturday & Sunday, September 27 & 28 at 10 a.m.-6 p.m. For more information, call Long Island Traditions at (516) 767-8803 or the NY Marine Trades Association at (631) 691-7050 or visit www.nyboatshows.com/Tobay.

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Photo by Nancy Solomon 2012

Joey Scavone of Freeport will be demonstrating and presenting at the Tobay Boat Show and on the Boating with the Baymen tour.

house that was set on pilings. He stayed around because one of the fishermen had mended an injured wing and kept it clipped. During the winter, his feathers came in and he flew away. The next summer, I missed my friend and looked for him in vain.

My older brother and sister played with other children on the island, mostly swimming from docks and sandy beaches. I was determined to tag along, so Mother rigged me in a life jacket, which I wore from early morning till day's end. Pop taught me to dive by holding my ankles up and letting go. It worked. Just about everything done by that incomparable man was equally direct.

In those days foreign seamen would jump ship in the Port of New York and wind up along the waterfronts of New York and New Jersey. These types made up the bulk of Pop's crew, mostly Swedes and Norwegians. Rough and ready, they were a hardworking and hard drinking lot. They were strong and silent men with huge hard hands and powerful fingers that could unlay the largest rope with a single twist. Faces weather-beaten; lips dry and cracked; forearms bronzed; arms backs and foreheads were lily white. They wore caps with pull drawer visors, trousers that were rigged with both galluses (suspenders) and wide leather belts that had attached sheath knives. The blades were worn down by constant sharpening. No real fisherman was ever without a sharp knife. The indelible circular print of a tin of Copenhagen snuff was embossed on shirt pockets while a pinch was inevitably under the lower lip. The camp itself consisted of a long dock parallel with the shore to lay boats to. As I remember, there were three long narrow buildings sheathed in tar paper and peaked metal roofs. Two buildings stored nets and gear while the other was a bunkhouse for the crew. We had a cook, just like in a western movie. I remember him fixing me up with homemade bread and jam, which I scoffed down.

Our fish traps or "pounds" were outside Jones Inlet in the ocean. They were an elaborate affair strung over acres of ocean and supported by North Carolina hickory poles jettied into the sea floor. Some were as long as ninety feet. We would ship from Freeport Point into Fulton Market.

The crew would use the "Jimmy Boat" for shore leave. She was in the twenty foot range, had a cuddy cabin forward and open cockpit aft. It had a slow turning engine with a single cylinder known as a "one lugger", and a simple magneto ignition system called "make and break." It had a distinctive chug-a-chug sound and developed low horsepower. When the gang would return from a night of drinking ashore, the boat would pretty much have to run itself. All hands and the cook would be pretty much passed out. Sometimes they would run aground or run up on the creek bank. Eventually they would get off and continue like nothing had happened. As far as I know, they always got back in time to go to sea. In my mind's eye, I see them now. So long ago, powerful, hardy, stoic, proficient seamen-inarticulate, profanes, yet the gentlest of men.

In prohibition days, many local boatmen were into rum running; a respectable trade before the gangster element became involved. They would run offshore in fast skiffs and buy from the schooners that came down from the French Islands of St. Pierre

and Miquelon off the Canadian coast and up from Nassau in the Bahamas. Outside the territorial limit was a floating marine liquor market stretching from Cape May to Montauk known as "Rum Row" where the booze trade flourished day and night. The U.S. Coast Guard could not interfere outside their jurisdiction but would try to intercept the booze coming ashore. Much of it found its way past Meadow Island, just inside Jones Inlet and up to Freeport. The most famous rum runner of all time was Captain Bill McCoy, the founder of the row. With His Gloucester salt-bank schooner, *Arethusa*, he would lay thirty miles south of Jones Inlet, an equal distance from the Jersey shore and sell to all comers for cash money. Such was his reputation for honesty in a crooked business and for the high quality of his goods that his name found its way into American folklore as a symbol of the genuine article; the "Real McCoy".

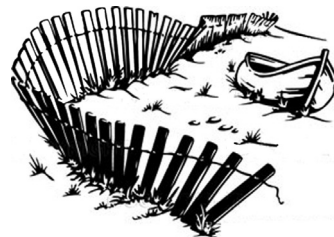
One Sunday morning during prohibition, my family was on our front porch of our cottage that faced Swift Creek when up creek steamed Captain Ben Eldred with the picket boat in hot pursuit. Suddenly Ben turned hard aport and bore down on our house. After ramming the bank at full speed, all hands jumped ashore carrying a case with Ben in the lead. As they ran by the house, each man made a respectful, "Morning Bob, Mrs. Doxsee" as if it were the most natural thing in the world.

In 1933, progress dictated that the Doxsee Brothers set up a fish packing house in Point Lookout, where roads and utilities were available. Rather than run the fish to Freeport we could ship direct to market. In 1936, Pop sailed the cottage over on a deck scow and set it up in Point Lookout.

Still emotions run strong when I think of our life on Meadow Island. A gang of Square heads, a tame black duck, the flavor of homemade root-beer, a young Bob Doxsee teaching me to dive and the pungent odor of marsh bog, creek mud and salt hay mingle with the memories of eighty years ago. ■

Changing Landscapes Exhibit: A Work in Progress

LI Traditions has received a major grant from the National Endowment for the Arts and a planning grant from the NY Council for the Humanities to create an exhibit that explores how landscapes change after storms and hurricanes, what stories and lessons residents and families share in times of natural



disasters, and what we can learn from traditional practices. If you have a story you would like to share, especially if you live in a waterfront neighborhood, call us so that we can arrange an interview. And spread the word! ■

Lecture Programs by Nancy Solomon

October 16 at 7 pm:

Patchogue Medford Library
54-60 East Main Street, Patchogue
Free admission.
For information call (631) 654-4700

In this program the following topics will be discussed and presented in an illustrated program:

- Contemporary Boat Builders
- Boat Restoration Masters
- Historic Boatyards
- Recreational and Commercial fishermen and baymen
- Decoy carvers and duck hunters
- Waterfront traditional architecture

November 18 at 7 pm:

Connetquot Public Library
760 Ocean Avenue, Bohemia
Free admission
For information call (631) 567-5079

In this program the bay houses of Long Island will be the focus, both in the Town of Hempstead and the Town of Islip. ■

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EVENTS OF INTEREST

PLEASE NOTE: If you have a Long Island concert or program that focuses on some aspect of traditional culture, drop us a line and we'll put it in our "Events of Interest" column.

Don't forget to visit our web site and our Facebook page for timely information.

September 26-28: Working the Waters at the Tobay Boat Show (see article). Tobay Beach Park, Ocean Parkway, Massapequa. For information call (516) 767-8803 or (516) 679-3900.

October 12: Boating with the Baymen at 2pm. Miss Freeport, 85 Woodcleft Avenue, Freeport. For information call (516) 767-8803.

October 16: Lecture by Nancy Solomon. 7 pm. Patchogue Medford Library, 54-60 East Main Street, Patchogue. Free admission. For information call (631) 654-4700.

November 18: Bay House lecture by Nancy Solomon. 7 pm. Connetquot Public Library, 760 Ocean Avenue, Bohemia. Free admission. For information call (631) 567- 5079.

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