

# Long Island Traditions

## NEWSLETTER

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### Artist Profile: Peter Heinz, Boat Builder

#### East Marion, Long Island

**P**eter Heinz was born in Brooklyn, just steps away from Gravesend Bay where he could wander as a young boy and explore the working waterfront. His family moved to Long Island in 1948. While working as a school teacher in Manhasset, he opened the Long Island Sound Sailing Center in 1960-61 in Port Washington where he lived. Heinz repaired fiber glass sailboats that were damaged in local competitions and races. He also sold sailboats including the Flying Dutchman series built in San Francisco. "Sometimes we would sell a fleet of "FJs" to the Amagansett Yacht club. Sometimes to colleges or



Courtesy Peter Heinz

**Peter Heinz's 18-foot flat bottom skiff is made of marine mahogany. "We used bronze screws because I wanted a traditional look." Peter's son Tom helped design and build the boat, a process that took four months.**

prep schools. Yet working on the boats could also be cumbersome. "I didn't enjoy working on the boat bottoms – sanding the bottoms and all that. You would be breathing in the bottom paint dust, but I'm still here. I enjoyed doing the interior wood working, rigging the boats for racing, and trying to get better performance out of them."

When Peter retired he moved to East Marion on Long Island's north fork. He decided to build a traditional

See **Peter Heinz** on page 2

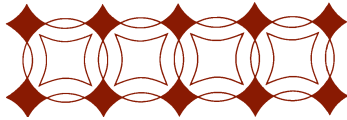
### From the Waterfront Eyes on Sandy

**T**hey've closed off the bay to everyone. Our bay house is gone. My father's boat tools, over 100 years old, are gone." These were just some of the things I heard immediately after Hurricane Sandy struck Long Island. As if the storm was not fierce enough, Sandy struck at high tide during a full moon, when the bay is at its' highest height.

As a folklorist, I knew that this storm was one for the history books. While the Hurricane of 1938 is legendary, Long Island was far less populated at that time, and only the barrier islands were struck. Sandy, in contrast, affected more than 3 million people on Long Island alone, not to mention all the residents of lower New York City including the Rockaways, Coney Island, Sheepshead Bay, Staten Island, and other lower New York areas. By now you have heard of the economic and ecological damage Sandy has wrought, but my goal in this column is to give you a more intimate portrait of how this storm affected people who carry on maritime traditions.

The Remsen family of Freeport is a 7<sup>th</sup> generation Long Island family that works the bays near Freeport. Like many families they live on a canal where they have built garveys, a shallow water flat bottom boat, and harvest killies, a small bait fish used by recreational fishermen to catch fluke, flounder, striped bass and other finfish. They have owned 3 bay houses since the late 1800s, the most recent one built in 1954. These traditions are carried on by John & Grace Remsen, along with their son John Remsen Jr. and his family. They have been involved in Long Island Traditions' maritime programs since 1987, because they

See **From the Waterfront** on page 3



## Long Island Traditions Inc.

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

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## From Shore To Shore Exhibit Opening and Programs

**ArtsWestchester, 31 Mamaroneck Avenue,  
White Plains**

After 2 years of ethnographic research, Long Island Traditions and ArtsWestchester are proud to announce the opening of "From Shore to Shore: Boat Builders and Boatyards of Westchester and Long Island." Curated by Long Island Traditions director Nancy Solomon and ArtsWestchester staff folklorist Tom Van Buren, this exhibit explores the history, traditions and future of traditional boat building. This first part explores the regions of Westchester boat builders and boatyards and those of Long Island's north shore. The exhibit is open Mondays - Saturdays from 12 - 5 pm. Admission is free to the exhibit and all programs.

There are several programs associated with the exhibit:

**January 19:** Family programs including oar carving with Rocking the Boat, coopering with Jim Taylor of Community Boatworks of the Hudson Valley, and gallery tours with curators Nancy Solomon and Tom Van Buren.

**February 2:** Conversation with boat builders Maurice Piot, Daryl Eason, and Betty Arink and Phil Schiavone of the Bayles Boat Shop.

**February 9:** Preserving our maritime culture and architecture with preservationists Bonnie Wilkinson Mark, Mark Peckham, John Stilgoe, architect and filmmaker Ken Sargeant.

As part of the exhibit you can also listen and watch multi-media profiles of the builders and yards featured in the exhibit.

Funding for the exhibit is made possible by the National Endowment for the Arts, the New York State Council on the Arts, the New York Council for the Humanities and various individuals. For more information visit our web site, or call ArtsWestchester at (914) 428-4220.

### Peter Heinz continued from page 1

wooden skiff. "It is a traditional skiff you might see on Long Island's south shore, Chesapeake Bay, in shallow water areas. Where people wanted a boat they could build inexpensively and simply. I started out making it 16 foot and then said what the hell - figure I'll add two more feet. Some of the tools I got from my father, like the hand planes. I used bronze screws - I wanted a traditional look so I used traditional materials. Working with wood is enjoyable. Fiberglass is miserable." Wooden boats like Peter's attract attention. "We get a lot favorable comments on it. It looks good in the water. We can roll it right into the beach. Kids sit in it and go snapper fishing. So it worked out well."

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believe in the importance of educating Long Island residents who may not be familiar with the ways of the bay.

When Sandy struck, the sewage treatment plant in nearby Bay Park, just 3 miles west of Freeport, overflowed and continues to do so as of January 2013. As a result the entire bay in western Long Island is closed to shellfishing, and many of the species frequently seen by boaters and marine biologists are not evident. In addition it is unsafe to eat any of the finfish or shellfish harvested in the bay. Consequently fishermen like the Remsens are not harvesting killies.

Like many families, the Remsen's bay house was damaged and partially destroyed. Bay houses are small wood frame structures built on the marshlands by baymen, duck hunters



Photo by Nancy Solomon.

**The Remsen bay house was destroyed along with many others during Superstorm Sandy.**

and recreational fishermen, a tradition that dates to the colonial period. The houses stand on pole foundations so that they can be moved easily, and cause no harm to the wetlands. Approximately 35 bay houses stood in the Town of Hempstead before Sandy. Currently there are 14, most of which need repairing. The Remsens used the house for storing traps and tools, and the horseshoe crabs used for bait. Other baymen also used the house as a base for working the surrounding waters.

The Remsen's have built dozens of garveys for local baymen and recreational fishermen since the 1950s. They have learned how to secure their watercraft when a severe storm is threatened. Despite their long history of weathering storms, their boats floated from the canal to their yard, a height of 10 feet. They are considered fortunate because their boats were not damaged, unlike their neighbor's boats. Shortly after the storm



Photo by Nancy Solomon.

**Port Williams remnants: Scow Creek was once home to five bay houses. Superstorm Sandy destroyed them all.**

ended, a full day later, they were able to return their boats to the canal on which they live, and survey the damage to the bay. Local boatyards suffered extensive damage to their customers' boats, which means that recreational fishermen will not be going fishing for a long time and therefore will not need bait, a staple in the work lives of baymen. With the bay closed for shellfishing, it also means that local families will not be able to enjoy clam chowder, clam pie or clams on the half shell with local clams.

It has been clear to many baymen and fishermen, recreational and commercial, that the coast is changing. Seals routinely visit Long Island for the winter, a phenomenon that began in the 1990s. Cormorants, a once rare bird, now fly in flocks throughout the year. Canadian geese are present year round. Many scientists attribute these new developments to global warming. No matter what the cause, these changes will undoubtedly affect the maritime cultural traditions of all places. We can learn from those carrying on these traditions how to survive, using a cultural survival package made of age old traditions. We invite you to share your "tools" and to learn from these experiences how to create a cultural "life preserver." ■

## Accordion Program at East Meadow

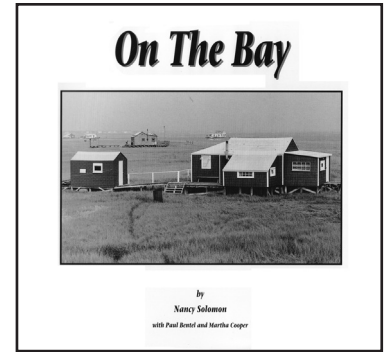
**March 10 at 2pm**

**T**he accordion is one of the few instruments that is commonly used in very different cultures. From North America to Eastern Europe, to South and Central America to Southern Europe, the accordion plays a unique role in local festivals, celebrations and other community and family events. To explore this geographical diversity Long Island Traditions is sponsoring a program with the East Meadow Public Library on Sunday, March 10 at 2 pm. Joining in the program will be Irish, Dominican and Portuguese musicians, with special guest author and ethnomusicologist Marion Jacobson, the author of [Squeeze This! A Cultural History of the Accordion in America](#). Participants will include Joseph Macedo, Ana Teixeira and Ashley Pereira of Ranchos Juventude, Luis Cordero and David Sanchez of Luis Cordero y los Amigos del Amargue, and Pete Kelly. The program is free. Funding is made possible by the NY State Council on the Arts. The library is located at 1886 Front Street, East Meadow. For more information call (516) 794-2570 x 218. ■

## Bay House Book Signing January 23

This winter we will be having another book signing event for On The Bay, so please come join us and get your new 2<sup>nd</sup> edition signed by director Nancy Solomon. The event will take place on

January 23 at 9:30 am at the Bellmore Presbyterian Church, 2740 Martin Avenue. This event is sponsored by the Pioneer Club of Long Island.



## 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.*

- January 18 – March 9:** "From Shore to Shore: Boat Builders and Boatyards of Westchester and Long Island" exhibit (see accompanying article). ArtsWestchester, 31 Mamaroneck Avenue, White Plains. (914) 428-4220 for more information and additional programs.
- Through January 31:** "Long Island at Work and at Play: Early 20th Century Photographs from SPLIA's Collections" 161 Main Street, Cold Spring Harbor. Exhibit hours 12 – 5 pm. For more information visit [www.splia.org](http://www.splia.org) or call (631)692-4664.
- March 10:** Cross Cultural Accordion Music Program. See accompanying article. 2 pm at the East Meadow Library, 1886 Front Street, East Meadow. (516) 794-2570.

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