

Long Island Traditions

NEWSLETTER

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On The Bay: 2nd Edition Release

In 1992 the first edition of On The Bay: Bayhouses and maritime culture on Long Island's Marshlands was released, amidst the backdrop that the houses could be lost forever. Since the book's release the houses have been preserved. To celebrate this victory, now almost 20 years old, Long Island Traditions is proud to announce the 2nd edition of this book, written by director Nancy Solomon. The book chronicles the design and history of these fragile structures, some which date to the 1800s, with historic photographs and the photographs taken by renowned photographer Martha Cooper in 1988-89. There are also some newer photographs included in the 2nd edition, and a new preface and forward by Nancy Solomon and historian Ed Smits.

Two release events are scheduled for August. On Thursday, August 18 the Starfish Book Café, located at 186 Park Avenue,

Amityville, will host a reading and signing with Nancy Solomon at 6pm. The café will be open for food and snacks. On Tuesday, August 23 the Seaford Historical Society will host an illustrated presentation by Nancy Solomon. The Historical Society is located at 3890 Waverly Avenue, Seaford and the event will begin at 7:30 pm.

Sale copies will be available in mid-august through Long Island Traditions' web site www.longislandtraditions.org, and at the following locations: Starfish Book Café, 186 Park Avenue in Amityville and the Sea Horse Gift Shop located at 165 Woodcleft Ave in Freeport.



Photo by Martha Cooper.

The Smith bay house c. 1989. The house floated to a different location after a severe northeaster in 1992 lifted it off its pole foundation.

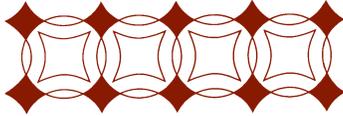
Artist Profile: Boat Builder Bill Spadaro

Last year I had the pleasure of meeting and interviewing Billy Spadaro, a frequent guest at the South Bay Boat Repair yard in Patchogue still operating under the gentle stewardship of Charlie Balsamo, who is semi-retired. Billy assists Charlie on several projects, as well as building his own watercraft. Bill has a long history of constructing, restoring and building traditional wooden and combination wood and fiberglass boats.

Bill grew up in West Sayville, the Dutch fishermen's community where oystering, clamming and boat building were common occupations in the close-knit village. There were several boatyards including Jorgensen's boat yard where Bill spent many hours as a young boy and teenager building wooden boats with Sam Jorgensen, including a white cedar dory. By the age of 14 he had built his first boat – a 25-foot Tylercraft sailboat. After working at Tylercraft for 6 years he then moved to Jorgensen's shipyard where he built clam boats and also garveys that were able to cut the ice due to its unique oak front sheathing.

Over the years Spadaro built custom made cat boats, while also building boats for friends and family, including a 17-foot wooden dory with his son Stephen, an Adirondack guide boat made from a kit, and a cabin cruiser he reconfigured to serve as a fishing boat. He also built a 36-foot lobster boat based on a New

See **Bill Spadaro** on page 3



Long Island Traditions Inc.

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

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Funding News

Long Island Traditions is pleased to announce that it has received two grants from the National Endowment for the Arts. The first grant will support our ethnic dance class program at the East Meadow and Mineola Public Libraries. They include a fall dance class series on Paraguayan Dance music led by Berta Gauto and master teachers from Panamabi Vera. The 4-class series will take place in October-November at the East Meadow Library, culminating in a performance on November 5th. Beginning in November Tony DaSilva and Michele Carlos will be offering classes in traditional Portuguese dance at the Mineola Public Library, culminating in a performance by Ranchos Juventude on December 5th. All the classes will be free and open to people young and old. Stay tuned for details.

The NEA is also supporting the development of a museum exhibit on boat builders and boatyards in Westchester and Long Island. LI Traditions is currently researching traditional commercial and recreational boat builders on Long Island. If you know a boat builder contact us at (516) 767-8803 or send us an e-mail. And read about Bill Spadaro in this issue. The exhibit will open in November 2012 at the ArtsWestchester Gallery in White Plains and will be featured in July-August 2013 at the Port Jefferson Village Center. We are also interested in working boatyards on Long Island, so if you know of one let us know.

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Photo loaned by Robert Harter c. 1989.

Rob and Ron Harter of Bellmore and Ronkonkoma built two commercial fishing boats - the Puffin and the North Sea which operated until they sold them in 2004.

Visit Us on Facebook

For all you social networking folks out there, check out our new Long Island Traditions facebook group. You'll see and read what our friends share with us, keep up to date with us, and see some photographs of what we're up to. Join our group as a friend and help us grow!

England design, adding a cabin for the convenience of the shipmates.

Eventually Spadaro opened a factory where he built dories, using his custom made designs. The factory was located on Patchogue Creek near several boat builders and restorers including Weeks Boat Yard and South Bay Boat Repair. He employed 9 builders, turning out 10 boats daily for old timers and youngsters who liked the simple design and affordability. His design included lower gunnels “to make it easier to pull in



Photo by Nancy Solomon 2010.

Bill Spadaro of Patchogue built this dory using time honored tools and techniques.

the nets.” Over time he built over 8000 boats, working with his friend Al Terry. Like other builders, his customers came by word of mouth, never refusing a job. They included gill net and pound trap fishermen from Montauk and other parts of Long Island. In addition Bill also worked on fishing boats, including area lobster boats. He remembers that offshore fishermen often tangled with international Russian ships that had little understanding of the geographical separation between trawler and lobster fishing grounds. As a result of his fishing experience Bill knew what features to include on his boats.

“It’s pretty basic. Once you do it, it’s pretty simple. The type of material used affects how long a boat lasts. You want a heavy boat for commercial fishing. If a boat is maintained properly it can last a hundred years. Some boats need caulking and others need very little. Wooden boats should be hauled out on yearly basis. If a wood is treated properly caulking may not be needed. Polymers are more forgiving. Caring for a boat is yearly maintenance. It is vitally important to keep air circulating. Closing up all the windows and doors is the worst thing you can do. Let it breathe.”

In recent years, as boat building has declined, Spadaro and other builders have turned their attention to restoring boats, a

growing field for builders like Spadaro, Paul Ketcham and Charles Balsamo on Long Island. He has a particular fondness for historic launch boats, asserting “If I was a millionaire I would have dozens of them.”

One of the most important parts of building a boat is having the right tools. As Bill reflects “Sam Jorgensen was strict in his ways. He really knew what he was talking about. He always had the proper tools – whatever application he was doing he always had the right tool.” Hand tools are preferred, and older ones are particularly valuable to boat builders. As Bill explains “Electrical tools don’t have the feel of a regular hand tool.”

Although Spadaro and other builders are pessimistic about the future of boat building – Bill states that “I don’t know if there is going to be a future around here. Wood boats – people cannot afford them. Maybe commercially but on a private basis they are very rare.” It is people like his son Stephen who may keep this tradition alive. ■

Stan Stevens House in Bellmore

A dedicated group of preservationists in Bellmore have launched a campaign to preserve the house of the late Stan Stevens, a commercial boat builder and tugboat captain who lived on Bellmore Avenue in his adult life in a home constructed by his father in the early 1920s. According to Christine Keller, who is leading the preservation effort, “Captain” Stan Stevens owned a tugboat business that had been involved in many historic building projects within the Bellmore community and on the South Shore of Long Island. His two tugboats were “The Husky” and “The Wrestler.” Stan Stevens’ tug boat business was involved in the building of the Wantagh Parkway to Jones Beach, moving brick and cement to build the Jones Beach Water Tower, dredging the land for the building of “South” Bellmore, and towing steel and other materials to build the Fire Island Causeway.” He also worked the bay, harvesting clams and other shellfish in his spare time.

His home is being nominated as a landmark in the Town of Hempstead. If you would like to support this effort write the Building Department – Landmarks Commission at One Washington Street, Hempstead, NY 11550 or call (516) 538-8500. You can stay in touch with the Bellmore Preservation Group on Facebook. ■

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. The deadline is the 1st of June, September, December and March.

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

June 19 – September 17: Exhibit "The Bountiful Bay and Sea...a Celebration of our local sea and bay heritage." Westhampton Beach Historical Society. Tuthill House Museum, 101 Mill Rd, Westhampton Beach. Museum hours Saturday 10am-2pm. Free admission. Also open for group tours on request. For information call Bob Murray (631) 288-1139

Through September 30th: Exhibition: *Robert Moses on Long Island 1925-1975* Coe Hall, Planting Fields State Park. 11:30am– 3:30 pm For information call (516) 922-8600.

August 18: Book signing On The Bay Starfish Café, 186 Park Avenue, Amityville. 6 pm. See accompanying article.

August 23: Book signing On The Bay. Seaford Historical Society. 3890 Waverly Avenue, Seaford. 7:30 pm. See accompanying article.

August 27: Scottish Games at Old Westbury Gardens. 71 old Westbury Road, Old Westbury. 8am – 5pm. \$15/adult \$10/seniors. For information call (516) 333-0048

Sept 17: Ceili with Pete Kelly Ceili Band. Irish Arts Center. 8pm \$20. Irish American Society, 297 Willis Avenue, Mineola NY 11501. For information call (516) 746-9392.

October 22–23: 26th Annual Rock Hall Country Fair. 199 Broadway, Lawrence. 11:00 a.m.–5:00 p.m. Featuring decoy carver George Rigby, native American dancers, and woodworkers and blacksmithing. For information (516) 239-1157.

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