Long Island Traditions

NEWSLETTER

longislandtraditions.org
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TravelStorys Self-Guided Cellphone Tours: East End Backstory

Long Island Traditions is proud to announce the release of its second tour on TravelStorys; The East End Back Story tour. TravelStorys is a series of self-guided cell phone tours that offers users the chance to hear stories of East End fishermen and baymen, including bayman Ken Mades and offshore fisherman Billy Reed of Hampton Bays, Dave Clarke, the last owners of the Promised Land Fish Company of Amagansett, the Hanff Boatyard in Greenport, and the stories of legendary Jack Combs. The TravelStorys self-guided cell phone tours allow those curious to hear these tales a chance to tap into these invaluable resources of Long Island history at the time of their choosing and also while following proper spacing guidelines during these pandemic times.

The TravelStorys app is free to download and allows users to visit the sites at their own pace. You can also hear the stories on the TravelStorys website. The project was funded and made possible by the Robert W. Lion Gardiner Foundation and the New York State Council on the Arts.

Bay House Tours 2021

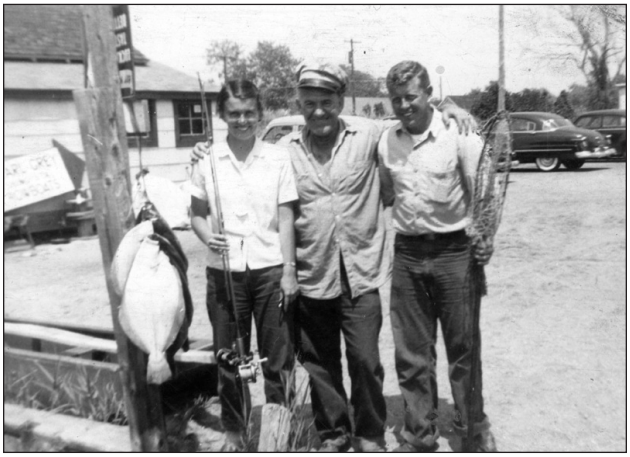
As of this writing, we are optimistic that we will be able to offer Bay House tours in the late summer or early fall of 2021. Stay tuned for details! Remember that members get first chance to sign up for these tours, and you receive a discount. If you have not renewed you can always do so by sending us a check or going to our website at longislandtraditions.org. One of the new benefits of joining is our brand new tote bag featuring a drawing of the McNeece bay house.

In Tribute: Bud Toomey

We were saddened to hear that boatyard owner Bud Toomey recently passed away. We thought you might enjoy learning more about him, from our exhibit "From Shore to Shore: Boat Builders and Boatyards of Long Island and Westchester." The exhibit is currently on display at the Sayville Public Library.

Bud Toomey, the founder of the Toomey Boatyard, grew up with saltwater in his veins. "My father from the time I was 2 years old enjoyed boating. When I was 6 years old he got me a row boat. I used to row around in the canals. That started me into boating. There was a man up the street from me – Johnny Becker – who was a boat builder in Amityville. He created a lot of interest in me in learning how to do some boat work – not a craftsman by any means – but I did learn a lot

See **Bud Toomey** on page 4



June 18 1955. Courtesy Toomey family.

Mary, Phil (customer) and Buddy Toomey at the fishing station.

Long Island Traditions Inc.

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Tabla Program April 1 with Sejal Kukadia

Please join teacher and tabla player, Sejal Kukadia, for a virtual performance of traditional Indian tabla playing via the East Meadow Public Library, on April 1, 2021 at 7 pm. Learning to play and perform tabla was historically a male-oriented profession, and the art was passed down from generation to generation through families. Kukadia is one of the only female classical tabla soloists in the United States. Kukadia was born and raised in upstate New York, where she was surrounded by traditional Indian musical instruments. After attending an Indian percussion concert in Manhattan, she made a spontaneous but decidedly firm decision to become a devoted student of tabla. She moved to India to start a four-year-long, serious and intense study of the tabla. She trained under *guru* Pandit Divyang Vakil, one of India's foremost tabla masters. She was one of very few female students studying to become a professional tabla player. She was also the only American.

Tabla master Sejal Kukadia

Kukadia along with some of her tabla students will perform and discuss the art of tabla playing. To register for the program, April 1 at 7 pm visit the East Meadow Library website. LI Traditions partnered with the Nicholas Center for Autism Creative Arts Program in January, where Kukadia led a 3-day virtual workshop. The 25 participants learned how to hold the tabla in the proper position, play different notes and recite the tabla language. ■

Reggie Jones

Earlier this year we learned that lifeguard legend Reggie Jones had passed away. We first met Reggie in 1994 as part of our research on Jones Beach, and worked with him for many years until his health deteriorated. Reggie appeared on countless radio and television shows, including David Letterman and National Public Radio. He kept watch at Field 6 at Jones Beach until his retirement in 2009. Reggie was recognized as one of the longest serving lifeguards in the world. You can learn more about Reggie at our "Freeport Waters" exhibit on the Nautical Mile in Freeport, and on our YouTube channel. We were fortunate to see his son Gavin Jones at our virtual program with the East Meadow Library when we screened George Pozderec's documentary "Jones Beach: An American Riviera" in January. The video is for sale for those interested – visit the shop page on our website: longislandtraditions.org. A memorial service is being planned for this summer. ■

John Remsen

Boat Builder John Remsen recently passed away. In 1987 I began working in Freeport, documenting local maritime culture for the Long Island Arts Council at Freeport. One of the first people I met was John Remsen Sr. who was the fourth generation of his family to work on the bay. John was born in 1933, and at a young age was already catching bait fish using handmade killey traps, a skill he learned from his great grandfather, Alanson Ellison. As a youngster John would surf net using a dory. "I would go with my father in the boat to watch him doing things and that's how I learned." They would often go to a nearby oyster house where the older baymen would tell stories and fix their nets. John would also work with his grandfather all day long and then row home.

John was one of the few men on Long Island who built garveys, a traditional flat bottom boat used by baymen and recreational fishermen in the shallow south shore waters of Nassau and Suffolk County. During his lifetime he built over 100 boats. Like the generations before him, John maintained a traditional way of life. As a young boy he helped Ellison go haul-seining on the ocean. He also went duck hunting, trapped killies and crabs, and fished for fluke and flounder.

When asked why he started building garveys John replied "It was a need and a want that resulted in building a boat. I just wanted a garvey when I was a kid. My father had one built by a professional in Long Beach and I copied that one. Originally they were all wood boats." This dream became reality when his high school shop teacher, Joe Devlin, encouraged and taught him to build parts for his boat. He made his first boat in 1958. "When I first started it cost $350 for one boat, today (1988) it's $2500." Since then the cost has increased to $5000.

Until the 1960s the garveys were made of cedar planks and green oak. Remsen used cedar, travelling to New Gretna, NJ, and oak from Harned's Sawmill in Commack. "In order to build the boats, we air-dried the cedar at home. We also sawed and planed the edges of the planks. The oak ribs were bent with steam. We would put a pipe in a fire that would expel steam onto the oak that was placed in a steam box. Each oak rib was typically 15 - 16-feet long. Only green oak was used because dried oak would crack." Some of his garveys had low sides for clammers, which made it easier to pull in the rake, while others had high sides for eel harvesters who used traps that were easier to lift. Like other traditional boat builders, John built his boats in his garage and driveway.

Garveys built by John Remsen. Photo by Nancy Solomon

John's garveys are distinctive by their design and materials. As he explained in 2016 "I can always pick my boats out. They have a certain style. We put a sweep in the bow. The interior was made according to whoever wanted the boat. If they were clamming they may want a pilot house, and if they were fishing they may want seats or a console. Usually I could sell more than I could build." Occasionally John also built boats for gillnet fishermen who worked in Great South Bay and various east end towns. However most of his customers lived and worked in Nassau County and Western Suffolk County.

John used 20-30 forms and patterns he personally designed. He started using fiberglass in the 1960s to make the boat lighter, which eliminated the need for painting, and allowed it to be transported by trailer. Upon retirement Remsen began building garveys with his son John, a part-time bayman, for SPLASH, a local environmental group in Freeport. He received an apprenticeship grant from the NY State Council on the Arts to teach his son the advanced techniques of garvey building. On September 9, 2016, the Village of Freeport honored Remsen for his service to the country and community by naming canal number 4, Remsen Canal behind West Fourth Street in Freeport. One of John's last projects was to build a large garvey for SPLASH. He passed away in August 2020. Some of the members are recreating one of his garveys to replace an earlier one, including Rob Weltner, one of the principal founders of SPLASH. "So many people loved that boat and it represents us and it's a beautiful boat. We took the old one apart very delicately and we decided to replicate it. We beefed up a few spots." The boat will be used in 2021 to help clean the canals.

To continue the legacy Remsen's son John will continue the tradition, assisted by his cousin Tom Jefferies, a bayman, who also owns one of Remsen's garveys. We hope to see more Remsen-built garveys in the years to come.

Bud Toomey continued from page 1

from him. I would go up there and help him when he was building boats."

In 1954 the Toomey's purchased a run-down fishing station which they transformed into a rowboat rental and fishing shop for recreational fishermen. In the 1960s they began building their own boats. "They were built out of plywood, 16 feet long and about 5 feet wide. They had high sides on them and were pretty nice boats" recalls Bud. "Most of my customers all came from the city - NY and Brooklyn. The Italians used to come out to go crabbing and clamming and they were characters – they made you laugh. This was when we used to tow boats out – because back then they didn't have much money – couldn't afford to buy a motor. So we used to tow them out to the bay." Bud's wife Teddy also worked at the yard. As she explained "I painted many a bottom in my day."

Today the yard focuses on boat and mechanical repairs. "People came out, built homes, had dock space right in their backyards or went to the boatyards near their homes and asked if they can dock their boats there." Repair skills were sorely needed after Superstorm Sandy. "Out of the 50 boats – we had a couple of boats sitting on top of poles, and five got totaled. Now it's April – it will take us until August to sort through everything. A lot of the boats are a mess" recall John and Mike, Bud's children. "We can deal with another ten Irene's but not another Sandy."

The yard is now managed by John and Mike. The tiki bar is hoping to open this summer and we encourage you to visit this historic yard.

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.

April 1 at 7pm: Virtual concert with tabla master Sejal Kukadia. To register go to the East Meadow Public Library web site and click on the events calendar. This program is free.

Stay tuned on our web site and our Facebook feed for more events!

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