Executive director Nancy Solomon is the author of a new book published by The History Press. “Boat Building and Boat Yards of Long Island: A Tribute to Tradition” explores the contemporary traditional boat builders and boat yards of Long Island, through a series of interviews conducted as part of the 2013 exhibit From Shore to Shore: Boat Builders and Boat Yards of Long Island. In this book Solomon documents the traditions and places of Long Island’s boat building industry from a contemporary perspective. Solomon focuses on the boat builders and boat yards of Long Island’s south shore, north shore and the east end. Highlights include the Bayles Boat Shop, the Scopinich family, the Weeks Yacht Yard, the Steiger Craft boat shop among others. The book contains personal narratives along with historical and contemporary photographs.

The book will be available for purchase through the History Press and at Long Island Traditions public programs beginning December 4th. The current program schedule is:

**December 4:** Freeport Memorial Library at 2:30 pm. 144 West Merrick Road.

**December 6:** American Legion Hall at 5 pm. 102 3rd Street, Greenport. Featuring Steven Sanfilippo, folk singer.

**December 9:** Oyster Bay Historical Society at 7pm. 20 Summit Street, Oyster Bay.

**December 12:** Long Island Maritime Museum at 1pm. 88 West Street, West Sayville.

All programs are free! And check our website and the History Press website to order copies online.

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We are pleased to offer a new e-book on our website: “From the Edge of the Marsh,” by Jeff Keene II, a native of Baldwin. Filled with stories of a by-gone era the e-book is told from the perspective of a bay house on the south shore. The illustrated book is only available electronically from Long Island Traditions’ website: [www.longislandtraditions.org](http://www.longislandtraditions.org). Purchasers will be sent a link to download the electronic book.

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Last call for raffle tickets! Have you always wanted to own a gorgeous canvas framed print by renowned artist Daniel Pollera? Who hasn’t! Pollera has been doing incredibly lifelike paintings of Bay Houses of the South Shore for many years. We are pleased to offer raffle tickets to win “Golden Meadow,” which depicts the shoreline of Meadow Island during a magnificent sunset. Tickets are $15, or 3 for $25, or 5 for $40, and are available for purchase on our webpage – [www.longislandtraditions.org](http://www.longislandtraditions.org). Drawing takes place December 6, 2021 at noon, so make sure to get your tickets before then!
Peru Andino Peruvian Dance and Music

Please join us on November 28, 2021 at 3pm at Landmark on Main Street in Port Washington for a wonderful afternoon of music and dance with Peru Andino New York. Led by founders Peter Apaza and Rosa Volida, the group performs traditional music and dance while costumed in handmade Peruvian attire. The group includes people, aged 14 and up, who have been performing in the New York area since 1990. Their extensive repertoire of dances includes marinera Puneña, diablada, morenada, tuntuna, tobas, cullada, saya, llamarama, nigrillos, turkuy, and carnival de Arequipa.

Peter Apaza was born in the city of Puno, in the southern region of Puno, Peru. He brought his traditional music with him to the U.S. and later founded Peru Andino with his sister, Rosa Volida. Peru Andino has an extensive repertoire of 30 dances and an extensive collection of traditional costume dresses.

The program is part of World Music Sundays at Landmark, made possible by a partnership with Long Island Traditions and a rapid relief grant from the New York State Council on the Arts. The program is free but proof of vaccination is required for entry. For more information visit www.landmarkonmainstreet.org or call (516) 767-6444.

Cultural Profile: Peter Needham and Coecles Harbor Marina, Shelter Island

By Nancy Solomon

Editors note: this profile is one of many in the new upcoming book “Boat Building and Boat Yards of Long Island” published by the History Press.

It’s not often that you get to hear about the rich and famous when you do this kind of work, so this yard was exciting to document.

Peter Needham grew up in Glen Cove, the son of an aerospace engineer. As a boy Needham remembers that “my father had a Rhodes 18, a Celebrity which is a wooden boat built over in Holland. I had a dingy. One day I found a rowboat that was smashed on the rocks – and I dragged it half a mile down the beach – pulled it out of water – and my grandfather helped put new planks on the bottom and get it back in water. That became my first boat – a little wooden row boat. We lived on an island in Glen Cove. Surround by water, was used to water. Big part of our lives.”

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In 1973 the Needham family decided to buy the historic Coecles Harbor Marina & Boatyard on Shelter Island, a forgotten jewel where traditional fishing boats and pleasure craft once reigned. As Peter Needham recalls “I don’t know where my father got the idea but he came home one day and said ‘hey kids what do you think of buying a boat yard?’ We said it sounds great. We sold everything in Glen Cove, packed up and moved out here and started working.

Peter spent a lot of time on the water, taking sailing lessons, racing small sail boats, had rowing around Shelter Island in a small rowboat. As he grew up Peter learned that “Long Island Sound could be very rough and I learned to appreciate what the water could do to you, and I also learned about boat design. Peter enjoyed all aspects of the water. “I’m interested in both motor and sailboats. I got a well - rounded picture of the yachting scene.”

Like other youngsters on Shelter Island, Peter built little boats when was a kid. “I had a pond near by – where I took airplane engines and built hydroplanes – stuck these engines on them and set them on pond. I always wanted a toy sailboat when I was a kid which I never got. But I did build a few pond boats. Nothing major.” Peter got the materials “from whatever I could find in my father’s scrap bin. And whatever tools they had.” Ironically “I was a terrible carpenter when I was a kid.”

After graduating from high school Peter enrolled at Southampton College, which later merged with the State University of New York, and studied marine biology. When not in school Peter and his brother “worked in the boatyard summers and winters.” According to Peter they did the worst jobs in the yard. Needham remembers that “the very worst job was an old 36-foot wooden power boat. It had 50 years’ worth of copper bottom paint on it. Gus asked us to grind all the copper bottom paint off - in the middle of winter. We were on a creeper – a thing that you slide underneath car. We used a big grinder, all of the copper bottom dust got all over you – I was covered in red dust. Till this day I can still taste it” Peter remembered. Winter jobs included painting the wooden boats, and sanding them.

As he got older Peter got the notion to sail around the world. He bought a lot of books, read about it, but he was missing a boat. Peter couldn’t afford much. “I found a 100-year-old schooner sunken on the bottom in Greenport.” When he raised the boat, it had pumps on it. Peter purchased the vessel, and proceeded to dismantled it and replaced all the pieces in it, spending 5,000 hours on it, but never completed the project. As Peter explained “I learned a lot about carpentry and how a boat was put together. By taking the boat apart you could see how you put all the pieces together. You start to understand why things go together, and what their functions are. By making new pieces for the boat, you learned how to use all the tools and machines in the shop.

Needham never did sail around the world. Instead he sailed up and down the coast – from the Caribbean to Maine. However, he decided to make the yard his home and career. Mentored by Gus Caicai, the yard’s manager, Needham learned from him “not so much about boat building but about working with people. When we bought the boatyard, Gus Ciacia, who had worked in the Greenport shipyard during World War II building boats, was the foreman. Gus mentored me when I first started to learn. His way of teaching was to let me make a mistake, and then point out what was wrong rather than warning me ahead of time.” Among the skills he learned was how to caulk a wooden boat, which he considers a lost art, as more boats are made of fiberglass.

Peter’s first boat was a fiberglass sailboat based on a design from the Hinkley Company. He spent two years on and off building it for an imaginary Hamptons client. According to Peter “It turned out to be a spectacular yacht.” Needham still owns it. It was supposed to be built for sale but he got too attached to her. He launched the boat in 1986. Peter recalls that the “The boat was the showcase at the yard. People would come down and say they want the hull to be painted just like Genesis (the boat), and the rigging and interior to look like Genesis. A lot of the things, like colors, started to be called Genesis Blue, Genesis cream.”

As a result of the success of the Genesis, Billy Joel learned about Needham and the yard. “I did a 28-foot ‘Downeaster Isle’ boat for Billy Joel. It is a traditionally styled lobster boat that I built as a yacht, with a single engine and a deep keel. I named her the Half Shell. Billy wanted a bigger boat, so I ended up building the Down-easter ‘Alexa’ – that he sung about – a 36-foot boat from Maine.” The Davidson shipyard in East Rockaway, which is also featured in this book, supplied the motor. Needham also built Joel a mahogany speed boat.

When asked to describe what it’s like to work with a celebrity, Peter recounts this story. “The first time Billy Joel came in, he was all scruffy. I said “Hey” to him – I didn’t even know it was him. We built the Downeaster Alexa. Billy came down almost every day and looked at every single thing we were doing. Although we were known for our paint and brush work, he said it was too nice. He did not want it like that. He wanted it to look like the paint was just slapped on.

It’s a tough thing to teach an artist to do sloppy painting.” Joel continues to use the boat today.

When I asked Peter Needham what the most unusual request was from a customer, he shared this story.

“There was a young guy from Manhattan – in his early 30s – who knew nothing about boats. He saw a small clip of our boat on News12 (a cable television station) and he loved it. He wanted one. He had zero boating experience. I had to explain what a bow, stern, deck, GPS, and teak were. When
it came time to making decisions about the equipment he said ‘check off everything a nice boat should have and then go over it.’ Peter does that. I didn’t meet him until the day the boat was launched. Together we drove the boat back to Manhattan – because the insurance company didn’t let him run the boat by himself. I found him a captain to teach him how to boat. This guy didn’t know anything about water, boats - that was very interesting. Needham hired a captain, who is always there. They never got into any trouble.”

Coecles Harbor Marina is perhaps one of the few yards included in this book that will survive in the future, as more people look to the water for their rest and relaxation. Needham has a modest but stable staff and is able to both run the marina and work on boats. Peter’s children are avid sailboat racers and he goes to their regatta’s when time allows. Let’s hope the yard continues far off into the future.

**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.*

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

**November 28, 2021:** Peru Andino New York performs at Landmark on Main Street, Port Washington, NY. 3 pm. Free. Proof of vaccination required. [www.landmarkonmainstreet.org](http://www.landmarkonmainstreet.org)

**December 4, 6, 9 & 12:** Boat Building and Boat Yards book signing programs. (see accompanying article for details)

**December 6, 2021:** Bay House raffle drawing. 12 pm. Watch us on facebook for the drawing!

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