

SHIPWRECK SCAVENGER HUNT

Artifacts & Monuments Along the Jersey Shore

by Jill Ocone

Up until the mid-twentieth century, when “travel-by-vessel” was the only option for shipping goods or touring, intrepid sea captains had no choice but to brave and embrace the mighty Atlantic.

New Jersey’s uneven coastline often made for a treacherous voyage. Its barren barrier islands had a mix of changing tides and shifting shoals and inlets with nothing visible but dunes and brush for miles. With its wicked nor’easters, deadly gales, and frigid waters in winter, even the most experienced captain dreaded navigating the seas off New Jersey—no matter how

massive or sturdy the vessel he piloted. And for good reason—over five-thousand documented and undocumented shipwrecks have occurred off the Jersey coast. In fact, wherever a person steps into the ocean at the Jersey Shore, there is at least one shipwreck within one mile’s distance.

In Ocean and Monmouth counties, a deep appreciation of maritime culture and history has been bolstered by an often-unnoticed public display of artifacts and monuments to these wrecks, many of which tell tragic tales of loss as well as heroic stories of rescue and survival.

Anchor from the *New Era*

Church of St. Andrew By-The-Sea, 150 Elberon Avenue, Allenhurst

On November 13, 1854, the clipper ship *New Era* struck a sandbar off what was called Deal Beach during a nor’easter. Parallel to where Asbury Park’s Convention Hall stands today, the colossal ship lay helpless. The storm hampered lifesaving attempts by many locals on shore, who could not reach the stranded vessel because of the immense waves. More than half of the 400 men, women, and children onboard the doomed craft died, most as a result of exposure.

The incident inspired a local up-and-coming writer named Stephen Crane (see page 10) to write an essay

titled “The Wreck of the *New Era*” in 1891: “*The wreck of the New Era in 1854 was the worst disaster that ever occurred on the New Jersey coast, the land of shipwrecks and summer resorts, of horror at sea and hilarity on land. On many parts of the shore, the rotting timbers of wrecked vessels lie thick, but none of the monuments to human suffering tell so much as that little path of foam which until a few years ago led away from a bunch of old timbers and marked the spot where the New Era went down.*”

It is believed that the Morro Castle crushed and buried the remains of the



The anchor from the *New Era* on the grounds of the Church of St. Andrew By-The-Sea in Allenhurst.

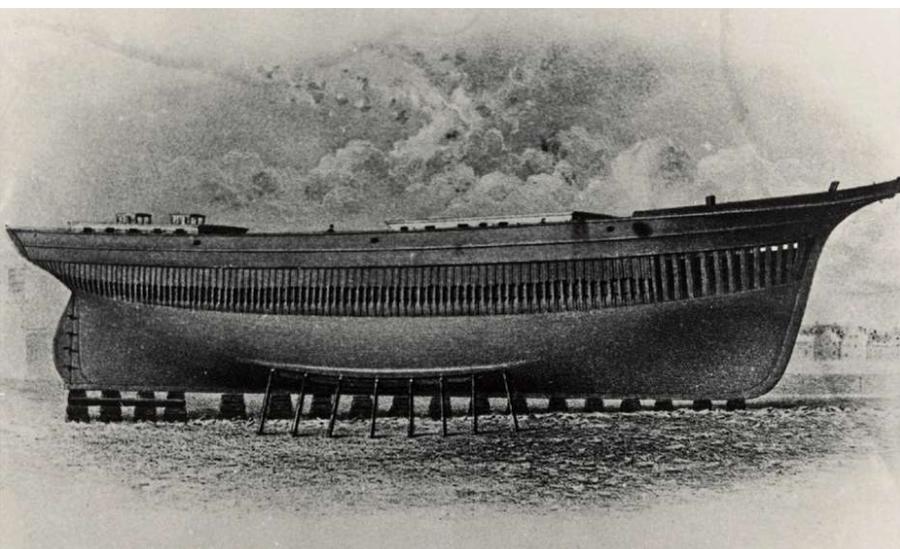
New Era when it beached at the same spot (see below). However, in 1999, a research team led by Dr. Richard Fernicola and his brother, Gregory, recovered the *New Era*’s anchor in the waters just off Asbury Park’s Seventh Avenue beach.

On July 21, 2002, the anchor and a plaque memorializing the victims and honoring Abner Allen, the namesake of Allenhurst and first rescuer on the scene of the *New Era* shipwreck, was dedicated on the grounds of the Church of St. Andrew By-The-Sea in Allenhurst.

Under construction. The *New Era* was built in 1854, the same year it wrecked.

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courtesy of New Jersey Maritime Museum



The Morro Castle Monument

Asbury Park Boardwalk, outside Convention Hall and the Paramount Theatre



courtesy of New Jersey Maritime Museum

The burnt hull of the Morro Castle washed ashore in Asbury Park on September 8, 1934.

The Morro Castle incident is one of the most well-known maritime tragedies to happen along the east coast. On September 8, 1934, while traveling from Havana, Cuba to New York, a fire broke out on the ocean liner off Long Beach Island. As passengers and crew tried to escape the burning hull, chaos ensued with 30-knot winds and rough seas further compounding the situation. Many passengers were unintentionally killed due to their lack of knowledge about how to

properly wear life preservers, and bodies washed ashore from Spring Lake to Point Pleasant Beach.

Despite rescue efforts from both citizens on shore and other vessels, 137 of the 549 people onboard the Morro Castle lost their lives. The burnt and empty hull finally beached itself directly parallel to Convention Hall in Asbury Park and became a tourist attraction, until it was refloated off the beach and towed to New York where it was dismantled and salvaged the following March.

In 2009, the Asbury Park Historical Society dedicated a monument on the south side of Convention Hall to remember both the victims from the disaster and to honor “the many courageous Jersey Shore residents who risked their own lives or provided assistance to rescue Morro Castle survivors from rough seas and recover the victims who washed ashore or who were pulled from the sea.”



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A recovered lifejacket from the Morro Castle at the Point Pleasant Historical Society and Museum in Point Pleasant Beach.

The New Jersey Maritime Museum in Beach Haven has an entire room dedicated to artifacts, documents, photos, and FBI files from the Morro Castle, and two lifejackets recovered from the ocean liner are a part of the Point Pleasant Historical Society and Museum’s collection in Point Pleasant Beach.

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The Morro Castle memorial outside Asbury Park’s Convention Hall and Paramount Theatre.

The Malta Foremast and Anchor from an Unknown Vessel

Ocean and 8th Avenues, Belmar

Sailing from Antwerp to New York on November 24, 1885, the schooner *Malta*, formerly named *The Queen of the South*, ran aground near the foot of 9th Avenue and Ocean Beach due to high winds and rough ocean conditions. (Belmar was known as Ocean Beach in the late 1800s.) The ship pounded on the sandbar as the waves pounded upon the stranded vessel, and eventually its mizzenmast tumbled into the sea. One sailor, who jumped overboard in a panic, lost his life when the sea carried him away.

Parts of the ship were salvaged, and remains of the hull are still visible today. "It's well out to sea," said Pat McCormick, vice president of the Belmar Historical Society, "but part of the stern can be seen off 9th Avenue on days with very low tides."

Standing tall on the corner of 8th and Ocean Avenues on the southwest side of the intersection appears



The foremast of the *Malta* at 8th and Ocean Avenues in Belmar.

to be a flagpole—but it is actually the foremast (or front mast) of the *Malta*, which was salvaged by local authorities and originally mounted to the land as a standpipe for the sewer system. "It's an early 19th century effort to recycle," McCormick said, "and there's an identifying marker at its base."

Guide rails, which guide the sail up the mast, are still visible along the

foremast, and the cap (which secured the upper mast) is still attached at the top. Historic photos of the *Malta* show the same foremast on the vessel.

Facing the foremast, on the ocean side of Ocean Avenue, lies an anchor from an unknown vessel that was donated by the landmark business, Klein's Fish Market and Waterside Café, according to McCormick.



Anchor from an unknown vessel, also at 8th and Ocean Avenues.



Ocean Avenue in Belmar, circa 1920. The *Malta* ran aground off 9th Avenue on November 24, 1885. Parts of the ship were salvaged. In this photo, a piece of the stern can be seen off the coast. Says local historian Pat McCormick, "It's well out to sea, but part of the stern can [still] be seen [today] off 9th Avenue on days with very low tides."

Anchors from the *Vizcaya* and the *Cornelius Hargraves*

**Shipwreck Grill, Brielle
and Captain Bill's Landing,
Point Pleasant Beach**

Despite currently sitting in different counties (although less than a half mile apart as the bird flies), a single incident on October 30, 1890 links these two anchors: the collision of the 211' schooner *Cornelius Hargraves* and the 287' steamer *Vizcaya* directly east of the Barnegat Inlet.



The *Vizcaya*.

Both ships sank within minutes about one-quarter of a mile apart from each other. Some survivors clung to mast tops protruding from the ocean while others were picked up by passing ships and by *Hargraves'* lifeboats. Sixty-nine lives were lost on the *Vizcaya*, including all of the women and children on board.

The vessels' locations on the bottom of the Atlantic are well-known



The anchor from the *Vizcaya* at the Shipwreck Grill in Brielle.

courtesy of New Jersey Maritime Museum

courtesy of New Jersey Maritime Museum



The *Cornelius Hargraves'* anchor at Captain Bill's Landing in Point Pleasant Beach.

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dive spots. Enter attorney, restaurateur, and longtime diver Bill Cleary, owner of the popular Red's Lobster Pot restaurant and Captain Bill's Landing in Point Pleasant Beach and the Shipwreck Grill restaurant in Brielle.

After modeling the Shipwreck Grill's logo from an online image of the *Vizcaya's* anchor, Cleary wondered if he could possibly retrieve the anchor to adorn the front of the restaurant, thus adding it to his already impressive collection of authentic maritime artifacts. Cleary and friends devised a salvage plan, which took almost a year to complete. They eventually set out on Cleary's dive boat *Depth Charge*, and

after freeing the *Vizcaya's* anchor from its chain and other wreckage, the scallop boat *Discovery* aided in hoisting the 2,000-plus-pound anchor to the surface. It took another year to remove the growth and crust that formed on the anchor before it became a permanent fixture at the Shipwreck Grill.

Ten years later, Cleary set his sights on the *Cornelius Hargraves'* anchor, which still lay at the bottom. With help from local marine biologist Chris Wojcik and friends, he eventually recovered and restored that anchor as well, which now sits at Captain Bill's Landing as a pillar of the maritime spirit.

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The *Cornelius Hargraves*.

courtesy of New Jersey Maritime Museum

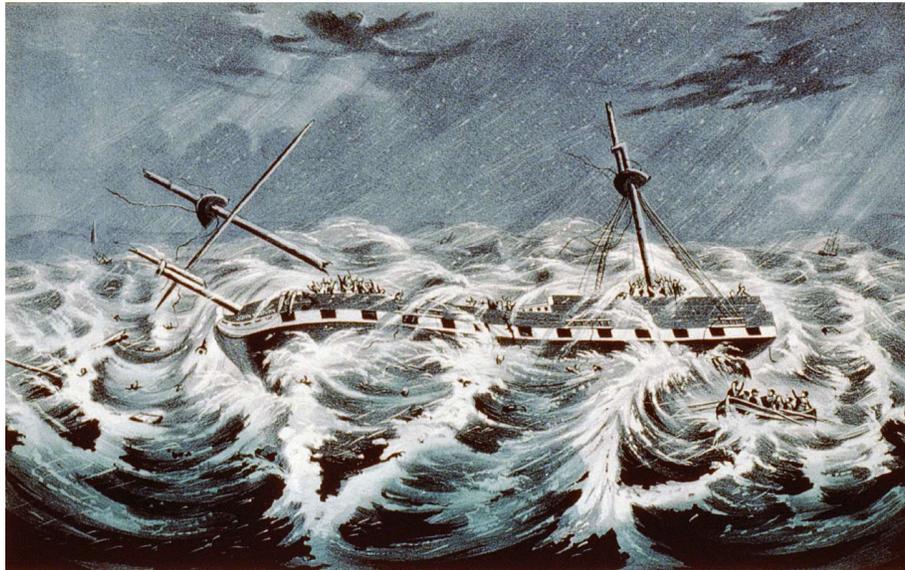
The John Minturn Monument

900-block of Ocean Road (Route 88 East), Point Pleasant

In February 1846, ten ships sank off the New Jersey coast during what became known as The Great Storm of 1846, including the 100-foot packet ship John Minturn, which became beached on Squan Beach.

Although estimates vary, the offi-

cial death toll was recorded at 51, which included the ship's captain, Amos Stark, and his wife and children. Local sea captains rushed to the scene to assist with rescue and recovery efforts, with many of the bodies brought to Point Pleasant.



Wreck of the Ship John Minturn. Lithograph and published by N. Currier, 1846.



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In 1976, the Point Pleasant Rotary Club placed a monument along Ocean Road in memory of those lost in the *Minturn* disaster. "That stretch of the road was known as 'Captain's Row,' said Point Pleasant Historical Society and Museum curator Richard Morris. "A lot of people think that's where the bodies were buried, but no evidence has ever been found. The Fleming brothers, who helped with the *Minturn* rescue and recovery efforts, lived near where the monument was placed."

Anchor, Cleat, and Portholes from an Unknown Naval Vessel

The Jolly Tar, 56 Bridge Avenue, Bay Head

Over the years, many children have played on the large anchor and cleat in front of The Jolly Tar in Bay Head; however, their origin is largely unknown. "They were here when I purchased the property in 1977," said store owner Evalyn Shippee. "I do know they came from a U.S. Navy vessel, possibly a destroyer or battleship."

Shippee estimates the previous owner purchased the items, along with the two original ship portholes that balance the front door as windows, as salvage in the early 1970s. "I, for one, was really happy they were in place in front of the building when a Cadillac ran the traffic light and headed for a crash into the building's front window," Shippee explained, recalling the incident from years ago. "The cleat stopped the car and while the Cadillac was a mess, the store sustained only minor damage."



The Jolly Tar, Bay Head.

photos by Jill Ocone

1904 “Unknown from the Sea” Monuments

Point Pleasant, Toms River, Manahawkin

With so many potter’s graves for victims of the mighty Atlantic along the Jersey Shore, the State of New Jersey erected three monuments in 1904 at unmarked graves where the unknown dead who fell victim to the sea were laid to rest.

The ships of origin are nameless for those buried at the plots within White Lawn Cemetery in Point Pleasant and Riverside Cemetery in Toms River. However, numerous victims from the *Powhatan* disaster were buried in the plot within Old Manahawkin Cemetery, located at The Old Manahawkin Baptist

Church on Route 9 and Lakeshore Drive.

The *Powhatan* sailed from Havre, France in March 1854 with over 300 people on board, including immigrants and crew, and encountered an enormous storm, described as a hurricane within a blizzard, on April 16, 1854 while en route to New York. The storm overpowered the stranded packet ship with freezing waves and blinding snow. Bodies washed up on southern New Jersey beaches for days afterwards, but more than half were never recovered.

“The *Powhatan* is commonly misquoted as the ‘Absecum’ wreck,” Deb Whitcraft, curator of the New Jersey Maritime Museum said, “because so many bodies washed ashore there. The boat actually ran aground in Great Swamp, which today is Surf City.”

The body count was so great they were put on wagons and distributed to several local cemeteries, including Old Manahawkin Cemetery. “Other mass burial plots for *Powhatan* victims are in Smithville, Barnegat, and Pleasantville,” Whitcraft explained.



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“Unknown from the Sea” monument at White Lawn Cemetery in Point Pleasant.

“Villagers cleaned and dressed the bodies, which were then apportioned so that no single cemetery would be overburdened or overwhelmed.”

The *Powhatan* remains the worst maritime loss of life along the Atlantic coast.



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Monument at Old Manahawkin Cemetery. Numerous victims from the *Powhatan* disaster were buried here.

Bollard from an Unknown Vessel

Chippy’s Fresh French Fries, 404 Ocean Avenue, Point Pleasant Beach

A large, rusted bollard with two vertical bits stands in front of the offices of Chippy’s Fresh French Fries, a few feet from the road. A bollard is welded to a vessel’s deck to secure the mooring lines. “One of the fishing boats on Channel Drive pulled it up in their nets while fishing,” Chippy’s owner Jim Miller said. “My father, Charles Miller, saw it, purchased it, and moved it (with a lot of help) to where it is now.”

An air of mystery surrounds the bollard, including where it was found, the boat that hauled it in, and the ship it came from. Despite the unknowns, the elder Miller thought it would look nice in front of his building, and his son agrees. “Nonetheless, It’s an interesting conversation piece,” Miller said.

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The Fortuna Anchor

Ship Bottom Municipal Building, 1621 Long Beach Boulevard, Ship Bottom

On January 18, 1910 during a vicious winter storm, the *Fortuna*, a 193-foot-long, iron hulled, three-masted Italian bark, ran aground near what is today 16th Street in Ship Bottom. Lifesaving responders quickly arrived on the scene and rescued the seventeen people on board, which included the captain, crew, and four passengers. The wrecked ship capsized in the beach's sand and lay on its side for much of 1910, before most of its remains were cut up for salvage.

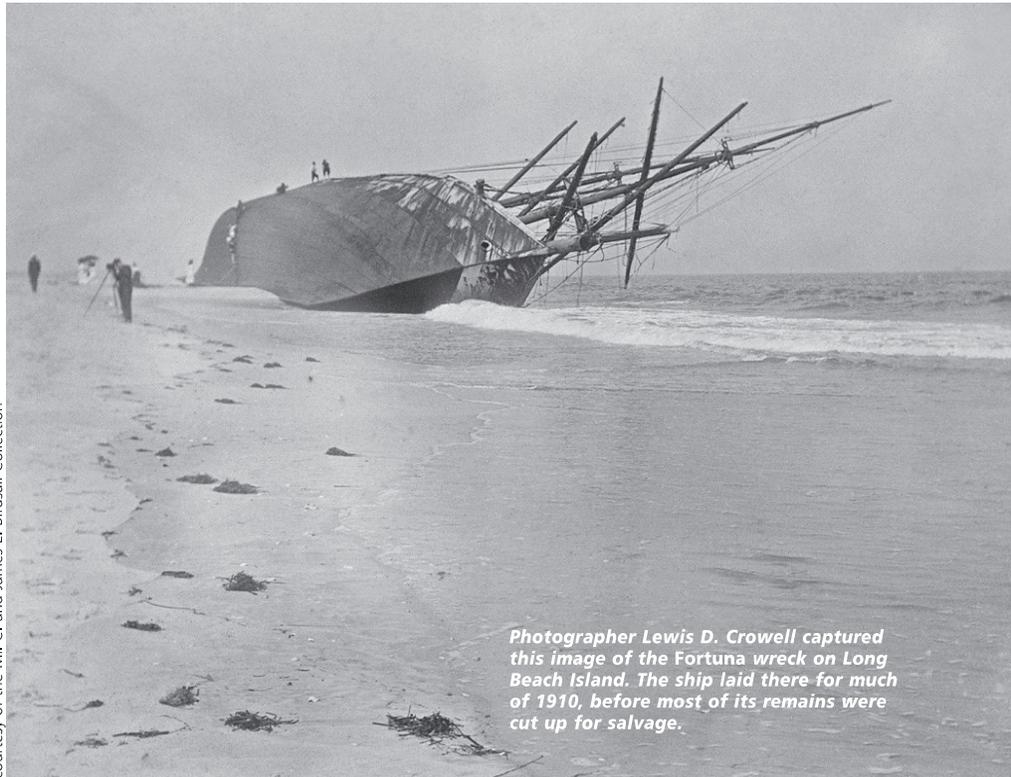
Fast-forward sixty years to the summer of 1970 when Carole Bradshaw noticed a red tile while walking the tideline on Long Beach Island. "It was not particularly pretty, but there was something about it that screamed 'pick me up and take me home,'" she wrote in her book, *Fortuna*.

That first piece from a giant puzzle sparked a journey that changed the course of Bradshaw's life. Over the next few years, Bradshaw found more tiles, each one further piquing her curiosity. Through her research, which included conversations with family members and locals, she learned the tiles were carried as ballast aboard the ill-fated *Fortuna*.

A storm in 1983 exposed the *Fortuna's* steel ribs, and while Bradshaw was photographing the remains, she noticed something protruding from the sand: the tip of the *Fortuna's* massive 6,000-pound anchor, which salvagers had left behind because of its size.

Bradshaw then embarked upon a mission to preserve the anchor as a historical artifact, and with the help of Ship Bottom's mayor at the time, Robert Nissen, the *Fortuna's* anchor was retrieved in the fall of 1983 by several volunteers. It now stands in front of the Ship Bottom Borough Hall to honor Long Beach Island's maritime history.

Bradshaw's story, however, did not end with the anchor's retrieval. In her book, *Fortuna*, she chronicles her passion to learn about and find



courtesy of the Mill C. and James E. Birdsall Collection

Photographer Lewis D. Crowell captured this image of the *Fortuna* wreck on Long Beach Island. The ship laid there for much of 1910, before most of its remains were cut up for salvage.

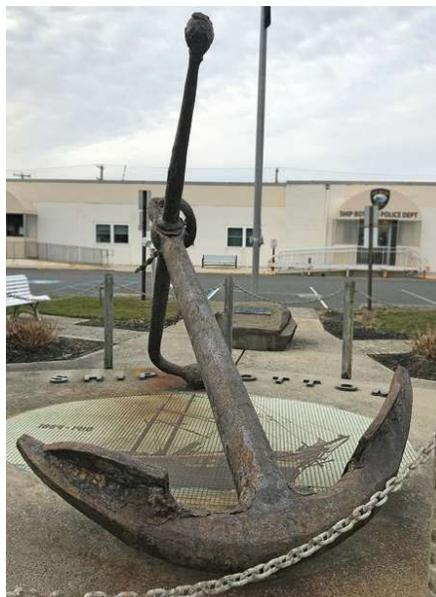
Saveria Adragna who was born on the *Fortuna* just before its 1910 mishap. Saveria's father was Captain Giovan Adragna, part owner of the *Fortuna* along with brother-in-law Captain Baldassare Savona and Captain Savona's father-in-law Aloisio Salvatore. Together, the three men chose the name *Fortuna* because it means "good fortune" in Italian.

Captain Adragna's pregnant wife, Maria, and their children, Antonina (b. 1903) and Anna (b. 1907) were also onboard. Saveria was born on the ship near Barbados and was about a month and a half old when the *Fortuna* wrecked. After being rescued, the family left Ship Bottom a week later on January 25, 1910—but what had happened to baby Saveria? Could she still be alive all these years later?

After finding the anchor, Bradshaw's seemingly impossible quest for answers led her to the United Nations, the Smithsonian Institute, the National Archives in Washington, D.C., and ultimately to Sicily, Italy where she found Saveria in 1985 in Trapani. Bradshaw also met her younger brother, Giuseppe, who was born in 1912.

The siblings traveled to Long Beach Island in September 1985 to attend the dedication ceremony of the *Fortuna's* anchor, the anchor from their father's ship, at Ship Bottom Borough Hall.

Bradshaw wrote of her discovery and quest, "It's part history, part adventure, and totally true."



The *Fortuna* anchor in Ship Bottom.

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The Stolt Dagali Anchor

**New Jersey Maritime Museum
528 Dock Road, Beach Haven**

The 583-foot, 19-plus-ton Norwegian steel hulled tanker *Stolt Dagali* collided with the luxury liner *S.S. Shalom* on November 26, 1964. Dense fog set the fast-moving *Shalom* careening straight into the *Stolt Dagali* and its bow sliced it in half. The tanker's stern sunk immediately in 120 feet of water, killing 19 of its 43 crew members, while its bow remained afloat and was eventually towed away.

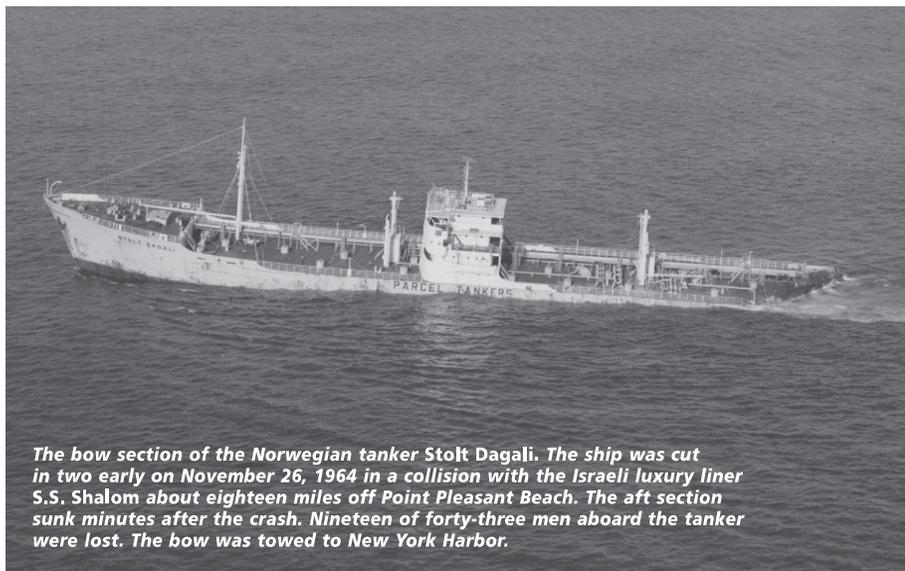
Today, the stern lies about eighteen miles off Point Pleasant Beach in what local anglers and divers refer to as "Wreck Valley," with the wrecks of the *Algol*, *Lizzie D*, and *Yankee* nearby. Despite deteriorating over the years, the remains of the *Stolt Dagali* is a popular spot for divers and bottom fish alike.

After a three-year long project, professional divers Steve and Maureen Langevin, along with a team of researchers and fellow divers, recovered the *Stolt Dagali's* five-thousand-



The Stolt Dagali anchor.

pound, eight-foot-long anchor aboard their boat *Dive Voyager* in June 2009. With help from Bill Lockwood from South Amboy's Lockwood Boatworks and Belmar scallop boat captain Mark Vitolo, the anchor was lifted and then towed to Beach Haven. "I received a call from the Langevins, who said they were bringing me a present," said Whitcraft. "Here comes this anchor on a flatbed with more than four feet of growth on it. Boy, did it stink, and our neighbors weren't too pleased until we could power wash it clean," she chuckled. A dedication ceremony for the *Stolt Dagali* anchor, which currently lies in front of the New Jersey Maritime Museum alongside several other artifacts, was held in late 2009.



The bow section of the Norwegian tanker Stolt Dagali. The ship was cut in two early on November 26, 1964 in a collision with the Israeli luxury liner S.S. Shalom about eighteen miles off Point Pleasant Beach. The aft section sunk minutes after the crash. Nineteen of forty-three men aboard the tanker were lost. The bow was towed to New York Harbor.

courtesy of New Jersey Maritime Museum

The Ontario Anchor

**Long Beach Island Historical Association Museum
129 Engleside Avenue
at Beach Avenue, Beach Haven**

The clipper ship *Ontario* became grounded off the tip of Long Beach Island on March 8, 1876. No lives were lost out of the 27-men crew on board, but its whereabouts on the bottom of the sea eluded divers for decades. Then divers aboard the *Black Whale*, owned by Deb Whitcraft and her former business partner Robert Yates, happened upon the *Ontario's* anchor by accident far from the actual site of the vessel. They retrieved the 13-foot, three-and-a-half-ton artifact in the spring of 1980 and donated it to the Long Beach Island Historical Association Museum, where it still lies in the grass on the west side of the building facing the Surfflight Theatre.

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The Ontario anchor in Beach Haven.

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Artifacts from Unknown Vessels or Origins

There's no doubt that modern technology and GPS can make pinpointing locations of known shipwrecks along the Jersey coastline easier, but sometimes, it is nearly impossible to determine the origin of an artifact hauled in by fishing nets and dredges or recovered by divers. One of the reasons for the difficulty in identifying some relics is that stories failed to be passed down from generation to generation or owner to owner. Additionally, records may have been lost, inaccurate, or not kept at all, and sometimes, vessels sank without anyone realizing they had disappeared.

In addition, currents and storms will shift the ocean's unstable, silt bottom and move a wrecked vessels' remains. "In some cases, the identity or origin might never be found," Whitcraft said.



The anchor at The Shrimp Box restaurant in Point Pleasant Beach.

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Crow's nest at The Shrimp Box.

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Such is the case of the artifacts found at The Shrimp Box restaurant in Point Pleasant Beach, which boasts a large anchor and a tall crow's nest near its entrance, two smaller anchors at its parking lot opposite the building, and numerous ship air vents on its property.

Similarly, the origin of several artifacts in front of Laurelton Welding and Point Lobster Company along Point Pleasant Beach's Channel Drive could not be confirmed and remain a mystery. That mystery, however, allows

for the imagination to take over and can result in an even more thrilling narrative to take hold in one's mind.

The artifacts and monuments in the two counties serve as a reminder of the dauntless spirit of seamen and travelers and of the formidable challenges they faced in their journeys on the Atlantic. "New Jersey, with its 127-miles of coastline, has more

shipwrecks than any other state," Whitcraft said. "North Carolina calls itself the Graveyard of the Atlantic—they've got nothing on us." ♦

Special thanks to Deb Whitcraft and Dave Swope of the New Jersey Maritime Museum and Pat McCormick of the Belmar Historical Society for their generous assistance with writing this article.



Unknown anchor and bitts (used to secure a vessel with mooring lines) in front of Laurelton Welding on Channel Drive in Point Pleasant Beach.

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