

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

