

Hidden Maritime Mysteries

Stories in the Sands



Typical packet ship of the mid-19th century.

Picture this: you are sitting on the beach relaxing with your hair warmed from the sun and your toes wiggling in the sand. Before you, all types and sizes of boats pass by on the ocean as far as your eyes can see.

Some are passenger vessels with majestic sails suspended from three masts while others are long steamships in the middle of their journey, delivering precious cargo to a distant port.

This once thriving maritime industry played a prolific role in shaping shore culture—from the launching of the United States Lifesaving Service to sparking underwater explorations by scuba divers. The history and stories found in the sands of local beaches most often go unnoticed by the casual beachgoer...but these hidden tales are the real pulse of the Jersey Shore that still beats today.

Well known author and historian Margaret Thomas Buchholz, who hails from Long Beach Island, captures readers through her weaving of details and unique voice in her now classic book, *New Jersey Shipwrecks: 350 Years in the Graveyard of the Atlantic* (Down the Shore Publishing, 2004). She writes, "The staggering number of reported shipwrecks over the

centuries — about 5000 including both documented and undocumented — has earned New Jersey waters the sorrowful epithet, 'Graveyard of the Atlantic.'"

With its ever-shifting elements and boundaries, one fact that is commonly overlooked is the coastline's impermanence. "Groins, or jetties on the beach, slow currents down and also slow the movement of sand," says Steve Nagiewicz, professor of Marine Archaeology and Maritime History at Stockton University and author of *Hidden History of Maritime New Jersey* (History Press, 2016). Nagiewicz explains that the constant shifting of sand from storms, currents, and beach replenishment efforts cause wrecks and associated artifacts to either become more exposed or more buried. As a result, the location and depth of wrecks under the beach or water change over time.

Each wreck, along with its artifacts and circumstances, tells a unique story. Combining those stories with the sagas of human loss and survival creates narratives greater than those produced by big movie studios, narratives that stem from the sands at some of the Jersey Shore's most popular beaches.

Sandy Hook: Packet Ship *Aurora*

On November 7, 1827, the packet ship *Aurora* was sailing from Liverpool, England to New York with forty passengers onboard when gale-force winds, rain, and thick fog caused it to run aground six miles south of Sandy Hook. Captain John Taubman along with forty-five passengers and crew beat the odds and reached the shore of Sandy Hook in small rowboats; however, six crew who chose to stay onboard lost their lives. The ship's three masts eventually fell into about eleven feet of water with most of its cargo intact, including thousands of dollars of Staffordshire China, hardware, and household goods.

The *Aurora* silently rested on the seafloor right off Sandy Hook where tides and currents screamed in and out of New York Harbor for 175 years and remained unseen to the anglers above it, the beachgoers near it, or the boaters passing over it.

In 2002, curiosity led divers to locate the *Aurora* and its trove of treasures, and since then, over 3,000 artifacts have been removed from the ill-fated vessel's bones, which today is near the bridge connecting Highlands to Sea Bright. Several pieces of the vessel's Staffordshire China, notebooks, pieces of slate, and door knobs are on display at the New Jersey Maritime Museum in Beach Haven.

Leonardo: Steamship *Alexander Hamilton*

Built in 1924, the *Alexander Hamilton* was a side-paddle-wheel steamboat that could handle more than 3,000 passengers on its three complete decks and 345-foot length. The vessel spent much of its life at South Street Seaport then the Brooklyn Naval Yard. The *Hamilton* was the last steam-powered riverboat of the Hudson River Day Line and sailed its last voyage in 1971. In 1975, the vessel arrived in Atlantic

courtesy of the Naval History and Heritage Command



The Alexander Hamilton, circa 1959.

courtesy Steve Nagiewicz

Highlands, having been bought by the Railroad Pier Co. with intentions to turn it into a restaurant. However, the boat hit a sandbar about one hundred feet from shore and sat stuck in that location for two years before finally being freed from the muck in 1977 by a group who hoped to resurrect it as a museum.

The *Alexander Hamilton* was then moved to a temporary home along the east side of the Naval Pier in Leonardo, but in November 1977, a sudden storm caused the *Hamilton* to catch fire, and it sunk. Just months earlier, on March 25, 1977, the *Hamilton* had been added to the National Register of Historic Places.

Today, her outline can sometimes still be discerned in satellite imagery as she rests next to the older of two piers that extend more than two miles into Raritan Bay within a national defense security zone. Despite being a National Historic Site, the *Alexander Hamilton* is not accessible to the public.

Long Branch, Seven Presidents Oceanfront Park: *Chauncey Jerome*

Just off Seven Presidents Oceanfront Park in Long Branch lies the packet ship *Chauncey Jerome*, which ran aground on January 12, 1854. Owned by noted American clockmaker Chauncey Jerome, the ship's resting site was added to the National Register of Historic Places on March 1, 1996. The site, under twenty feet of water, is protected; spearfishing and artifact removal are forbidden. The *Chauncey Jerome's* capstan is on display at the New

Jersey Shipwreck Museum in Wall Township.

Long Branch/Elberon, "Dual Wrecks" *Adonis* and *Rusland*

The *Adonis*, a five hundred-ton wood-hulled bark, ran aground in bad weather and thick fog on March 8, 1859 just off Long Branch while sailing to New York from England. All crew onboard were rescued. There were no passengers.

Ten days later, on March 18, the *Adonis* broke into pieces during another storm. After being stripped of its planking and salvageable cargo, what remained of the vessel, including many large grindstones in its hold, was abandoned on the ocean floor with its bow facing the beach.



The wreck of the Adonis.

NIMM Archives

Almost twenty years later, on March 17, 1877, the 2,538-ton iron-hulled steamship *Rusland*, with two hundred passengers and crew on board, also ran aground in bad weather while sailing from Antwerp to New York. The ship might have been freed had the wind not blown it broadside to the beach where the grindstones still in the *Adonis* below tore into its hull. Seawater rushed into the *Rusland* as all passengers and crew were rescued. The hull sunk perpendicular to the *Adonis* with its length facing the beach.

Known as the "Dual Wrecks," the boats make almost a T-shape. They are located in twenty-five feet of water in front of San Alfonso Retreat House near the southern end of two jetties. Shadows from the wrecks can sometimes be discerned in satellite imagery, depending on tides and water conditions.

One of the grindstones from the *Adonis* is on display at the New

Jersey Shipwreck Museum at InfoAge Science and History Museum in Wall Township.



The iron-hulled steamship Rusland, 1877.

NIMM Archives

Manasquan: *Amity*

The *Amity* ran aground on April 24, 1824 in fog near the southern tip of Manasquan about three hundred thirty yards offshore. All passengers and crew were rescued from the 382-ton packet ship, and much of its cargo was salvaged before the ship began to break up, except for what was in the lower holds.

Over the years, divers salvaged many tools and hardware from the vessel, and in 1995, they recovered masses of rusted sewing needles and brass buttons that helped to identify the wreck.

Today, the *Amity's* remains are within a buried wooden debris field that lies underneath the sand in an area protected from currents next to the southernmost inside rocks of the Manasquan Inlet on the Manasquan side, in line with Riverside Drive.

Bay Head: "The Bluffs Wreck"

Just off Chadwick Street in Bay Head, in front of the southernmost jetty, lies what is referred to as "*The Bluffs Wreck*," in homage to the former grand resort that used to stand on the beach directly in front of it. Researchers believe the wreck may be the *Creole*, a brig-rigged, wooden-hulled steamship that ran aground on its way from Havana, Cuba to New York on March 17, 1868. There were no casualties.

A popular dive and fishing spot, the ship's carcass still lies under twenty feet of water with its bow facing north. According to local legend,

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the wreck contained a large amount of coal, which still washes up onto the beaches near it after storms and has become a coveted treasure for beachcombers.

Mantoloking: Ayrshire

In 2014, workers building a steel sea wall, after Superstorm Sandy had ravaged the Jersey Shore, unearthed timber from a wooden ship at the border of Mantoloking and Brick beaches. Researchers believe the relics, which were about twenty to twenty-five feet underneath the sand, were part of the *Ayrshire*, a Scottish sailing ship that wrecked in front of the Chadwick Lifesaving Station on January 12, 1850 during a snowstorm with 201 people onboard, including 166 Irish and English immigrants who were escaping the potato famine.

The wreck of the *Ayrshire* is notable because it marked the first use of the Life-car lifesaving device that was invented by Joseph Francis in 1845. All but one of the people onboard the *Ayrshire* survived, with the lone casualty being a man who clung to the outside of the Life-Car that held his family before being swept into the sea and drowned.

The Life-car used that day was donated to the Smithsonian Institution National Museum of American History by Joseph Francis, where it is still on display today.



The clipper ship Meta, 1883.

NJMM Archives

Mantoloking: Meta

On October 14, 1883, the clipper ship *Meta* ran aground in heavy fog while sailing from Bremerhaven, Germany to New York. All twenty-four crew were rescued.

What's left of the *Meta*, also known as the Mantoloking Wreck, is under twenty feet of water about one hundred fifty feet off Lyman Avenue.

—Jill Ocone

More Stories Await!

An abundance of additional stories from the sands are waiting to be discovered online and at local museums.

Online

NEW JERSEY SCUBA DIVING

www.njscuba.net

Maintained by longtime diver Rich Galiano, this website is dedicated to exploring the underwater regions of New Jersey and New York. The site provides images and information on dive sites and wreck histories, marine biology, artifact details, and more.

STEVE NAGIEWICZ

www.stevenagiewicz.net

MARGARET THOMAS BUCHHOLZ

www.margaretbuchholz.com

Museums

NEW JERSEY MARITIME MUSEUM

528 Dock Road, Beach Haven
(609) 492-0202

www.NJMaritimeMuseum.org

Dedicated to the preservation of New Jersey's rich maritime history, this beautiful museum's two floors of exhibits feature shipwreck artifacts, an 1827 *Aurora* exhibit, a *Morro Castle* room, and a rare postcard collection. The museum also features a lending library, a New Jersey shipwreck database, and gift shop. WiFi Internet access and computer stations are available for use. Guest presentations are held throughout the year. Free admission. On-site parking. Handicapped accessible. Open all year. June - Aug. daily 10:00 AM - 4:00 PM; Sept. - May, Fri., Sat., Sun. 10:00 AM - 4:00 PM.



China from the Aurora exhibit on display at the New Jersey Maritime Museum.

courtesy NJMM

NEW JERSEY SHIPWRECK MUSEUM

At InfoAge Science and History Museums, 2201 Marconi Road, Wall
(732) 456-5045

Email: info@njhda.org

www.njhda.org

The New Jersey Historical Divers Association's New Jersey Shipwreck Museum contains artifacts recovered from area shipwrecks. The NJHDA iden-

tifies wrecks by recording with video, taking photographs, obtaining accurate measurements, and recovering artifacts. The museum includes a time line of wrecks that are significant to New Jersey maritime history. Hands-on exhibits that teach aspects of science as they relate to shipwrecks and artifact recovery are also on display. Available for researchers are books, maps, plans, records, and photographs of shipwrecks. Open Wed., Sat., and Sun. 12:00 PM - 5:00 PM. Admission to InfoAge is \$12. (ages 13 and up); \$8. (ages 4-12); younger children are free.



courtesy Steve Nagiewicz

Steve Nagiewicz, professor of Marine Archaeology and Maritime History at Stockton University, stands behind a Francis Life-Car at the Squan Beach Life Saving Station in Manasquan.

SQUAN BEACH LIFE SAVING STATION

124 Ocean Avenue, Manasquan
(732) 447-6419

www.squan-lss.org

Established in 1902, the Squan Beach Life Saving Station is located about 1,000 feet from the Atlantic Ocean in Manasquan. This Duluth-style facility served to house volunteers and equipment used to save victims of shipwrecks off the Manasquan area coast. Today, the restored station serves as a museum and contains artifacts recovered by the New Jersey Historic Divers Association from shipwrecks along the New Jersey and Atlantic coasts as well as artifacts used in the U.S. Life-Saving Service and U.S. Coast Guard Rescue Operations, including a Francis Life-Car. Admission is free. Hours: May - September: Thurs. 4:00 PM - 6:00 PM; Sun. 2:00 PM - 4:00 PM.

