



The Society Scroll

Newsletter of
The Ocean County Historical Society
26 Hadley Avenue
Toms River, NJ 08753
Phone: 732 341-1880 FAX: 732 341-4372

"Telling The Stories Of Ocean County"

On-Line Extra - February 2011

"A Living From The Sea"

by M. Peryl King

from Tales of Ocean County, Martha T. Smith, Editor

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The first three miles of ocean are considered a sanctuary area where schools of fish move freely up or down the coast. In 1888 when the railroad came to South Seaside Park the fish were not as free as before due to the installation of four fish pounds from which the daily catch could be shipped that same day to the city.

A pound consisted of 30-40 hickory poles brought by rail from North Carolina, lines of rope, bolts of fish netting and chains for weighting it. A line approximately 1600 feet long of jetted poles 80-100 feet in length and one hundred feet apart extended out into the ocean from about a thousand feet off shore. They were jetted into the ocean bottom ten to twelve feet

with eight to ten feet showing above the surface. To these poles were fastened ropes to which a series of weighted nets were tied. This was called a leader line providing a barrier fence through which the larger fish could not pass. As they turned out to sea the fish swam into a pair of heart shaped nets called forebays which forced them to loop around and approach the opening of a net funnel. This led them to a fifty square foot net pound fastened to the remaining poles.

The fishermen began working on the nets early in March, shaping new ones from bolts of netting and repairing the old ones. To preserve them they were dipped into large pots of paint. From these they were tossed over wooden frames to drip but not to dry. Still wet the nets were taken out to the poles and attached. During the fishing season they were brought in for the removal of seaweed and the repairing of holes. This was done two or three times, if necessary.

Most of the fishermen were Scandinavian, primarily Norwegian. Jonas Endreson came over from Christianson, Norway in 1912 at the age of fifteen. While he was skipper on an Erie railroad tugboat, he was recruited to work at a pound in Ocean County. His son, Bill, who is the source of this article went to sea with his father at the age of six whenever it didn't interfere with his schooling.



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The boats used by the pound fishermen were 32 feet long and were manned by a crew of eight. Crew members were paid \$30.00 a month plus room and board. They lived on the pound compound in a bunk house which had sleeping quarters upstairs. The cook's quarters, kitchen, mess hall and stable were on the lower level.

Many of the seamen had nicknames and some that Bill recalled were "Vanderbilt Jack" who owned a diamond stickpin, "Fat Hans", "Ole Mahogge" meaning Ole with the jaw, "Newspaper Jack" who kept them aware of the news and "Bootleg Charlie", an honest to goodness bootlegger who made his own corn liquor. Once he threw some corn mash into his backyard where his neighbor's chickens found it. The neighbor was Bill's aunt who told him they were a staggering sight.

Breakfast for the crew was at 4:30 AM and consisted of hot cereal, eggs, pancakes, sausage, bacon and coffee. Dinner was at three with fish certain to be part of the menu. In the evening the cook put out a variety of food for sandwiches plus coffee. Each man was also responsible for his own laundry and used many a bar of Octagon soap.

At the crack of dawn the crew was down on the beach helping guide their boat out over the sandbar. A one and a half inch bar line fastened to a pole on the beach and extending 200 feet out over the bar enabled them to pull themselves out hand over hand. Once out to the pound they pulled up their nets and emptied them into the boat. On a good day they could be standing knee deep in thousands of pounds of fish. While still at sea the fish were sorted and undesirable ones were thrown back.

When the boat hit the beach the bowman leaning over the bow would jump off with a bow painter, a steel cable fastened to the keelson and extending through the bow. This was a one inch cable twenty-five feet long with a 16 foot eye on its free end. This he would hook to the hook of a block and tackle to which a team of horses was already attached and waiting. Once hooked he signaled the driver to move ahead until the boat was securely beached. Then the remaining crew members jumped onto the beach placing waiting gumwood planks and rollers under the boat so it could be rolled up to where it was high and dry. Once done the whole crew went to the kitchen to "mug up" (finish any leftovers from breakfast) after which they unloaded, boxed and iced the fish in preparation for shipping.

The first catch at the end of March was shad and herring. Bill said the herring were so plentiful that they could be caught in the streams feeding into Toms River. In late April through early May mackerel was plentiful with some cod and some shad. By the end of May the weakfish were running and during the summer came the flounder, fluke,



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bonita, mackerel, tropical fish, tuna (up to 1500 lbs.), albacore and sharks. In the fall the bluefish, fluke, butterfish and whiting were running, and in November it was cod, herring and shad. There were also blue claw crabs in the fall.

Bill said he remembered catching a sea turtle so big he could walk on it and a 17 foot mako shark with a huge set of teeth. Once they caught a 26 foot whiptail shark with 11 babies inside her. He also spoke of the porpoises who would cry like babies and had almost human skin. They, of course, were released.

The era of pound fisheries ended in the mid-fifties along our coastline in Ocean County, but there are many people living here who well remember it. Many of them were part of it. Many used to watch the boats come in and found it an exciting experience. Thanks to Bill Endreson of South Seaside Park it has become a part of history recorded.

