

NJ Shipwreck Museum**Curator: New Jersey Historical Diver's Association****Open 2008- Present (Permanent Exhibit)****InfoAge Science/History Center, 2201 Marconi Road in Wall, New Jersey****DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.14713/njs.v4i2.139>**

The New Jersey Historical Diver's Association (NJHDA)'s *NJ Shipwreck Museum* showcases the history of shipwrecks off the New Jersey Coast. The non-profit, volunteer-run museum is located at the InfoAge Science and History Museum in Wall Township, and draws not just from the findings of NJHDA divers, but also other divers and groups.

The NJHDA has been the first organization to uncover many of New Jersey's unidentified shipwrecks, and their 1200 square foot *NJ Shipwreck Museum* is where the public can see all manner of artifacts such as cannons, portholes, and even a divers' suit from the 1800s. This small collection of artifacts contributes to the general public's understanding of New Jersey's maritime history, and will capture the attention of individuals interested in the day-to-day life of passengers, and crew, as well as in conservation, engineering, diving, technology, transportation, and warfare. Visitors will marvel at the sheer number of shipwrecks that occurred off the NJ coast in the very same ocean that they enjoy summer after summer.

Upon entering the *NJ Shipwreck Museum*, there are several exhibit cases and free-standing artifacts around the perimeter of the room. Attached to the walls are framed newspaper articles about New Jersey shipwrecks, photographs, and examples of how various maritime artifacts were used by common people during day-to-day life aboard a ship. The first case holds artifacts recovered from two different shipwrecks: the 1824 wreck of the ship *Amity*, and the *Chauncy Jerome Jr.*, which sunk sometime between 1852 and 1854. These artifacts include a variety of dishes, padlocks, shoemaking tools, keys, coat buttons and barbering brushes and explore what life was like on the high seas during the mid-1800s. Visitors might bemoan a paucity of artifacts

labels and the museum would do well to include these down the road. Volunteers, however, are prepared to identify items and to describe the noteworthy preservation processes of the different artifacts.

Another shipwreck highlighted in the museum is the *Morro Castle*. Inside the case dedicated to the *Morro Castle* is a life vest and a discussion of its background. This ship and 137 passengers met its fate during a hurricane when a fire broke out on the ship. Around the case are framed newspaper articles reporting on the shipwreck, the survivors, and the fatalities, many of whose bodies washed up along Point Pleasant, Belmar, Asbury, and Sea Girt beaches. It would be nice if the museum included a comprehensive list of those lost in the tragedy. Other artifacts in this case are photographs of the ship, crew members, an unidentified object, and what looks like a piece of wood onto which “Morro Castle” is printed. After this case, and along the far end of the room are large, free-standing artifacts such as a capstan, cannon, and a wooden “knee,” arranged in no particular order.

The final cases display a series of artifacts from known and unknown shipwrecks, which some might perceive as a bit disorganized. There are too many artifacts to list here, but some of them that can be seen in these cases are a soda bottle from the 1870 shipwreck, *Brunette*; a deck prism from the 1888 *Iberia* steamer shipwreck; and a glass block from an unidentified shipwreck. The cases in the middle of the room display the maritime magazine, *Collier's*, dated September 1956; and most notably, models of ships involved in shipwrecks such as the *Stockholm* and the famous *Moby Dick*.

The NJ Shipwreck Museum offers plenty to look at and visitors are sure to learn something new. While it has a bit of a “cabinet of curiosities” feel, and the lack of exhibit labels and contextualizing interpretive panels might have some thirsting for more info, docents are friendly

and knowledgeable. It almost seems that the NJ Shipwreck Museum is incomplete, and I for one absolutely look forward to seeing it grow in the future as it continues to fulfill its mission of educating the public on this unique piece of NJ History. For more on the Museums' background and history, see <http://www.njhda.org/museumpage.html>.

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