

## NJS Presents

## Research Notes

*The Mary Murray—New Jersey’s Iconic Ferry: Her Story Continues*

By David Moskowitz, PhD

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.14713/njs.v9i1.315>

“Research Notes” allows scholars to share their works in progress (or update prior works) and solicit feedback from others in the New Jersey history community. All are welcome to contribute—simply send submissions for inclusion in future issues to the editor, Melissa Ziobro, at [mziobro@monmouth.edu](mailto:mziobro@monmouth.edu).

The *Mary Murray* is arguably New Jersey’s most famous ferry, despite never carrying any passengers during her 25 years in the state. The *Mary Murray* was the passion of George Searle, who bought her at an auction in 1976 with grand plans to convert her to a floating restaurant. Searle had her towed to a marina in East Brunswick, New Jersey, where she would sit for decades grounded at the edge of a marsh, visible to countless drivers along the New Jersey Turnpike as they drove north of Exit 9.<sup>1</sup> Ultimately, with costs and regulatory hurdles too burdensome, she would be scrapped in 2008.<sup>2</sup> Long thought to be just a memory after being scrapped and salvaged, it was recently discovered—after a full-length article appeared in the summer 2020 edition of *NJ Studies*—that her two iconic pilothouses have survived and are still sitting in the same marina. One sits on a flatbed and the other on the ground, the *Mary Murray* still emblazoned across their front.

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<sup>1</sup> David Moskowitz, “The History of the Ferryboat *Mary Murray*: The Staten Island Ferry That Became a NJ Turnpike Landmark,” *New Jersey Studies*: 6 (2): 23–55.

<sup>2</sup> Patti Sapone, “Old Ferry Headed for Scrap Heap After Decades of Delayed Plans and Decay,” *Star Ledger*, April 15, 2008.

In a 1983 television interview from the pilothouse on top of the ferry, with the wind blowing his hair through the broken windows, Searle seemed to have no regrets, telling the reporter: “I’m sure somebody who’s out there is going to come along and really do a job with me here. And if not, that’s okay, I’ll just pull right in a little and we’ll use her as a shop and maybe we’ll end up with a pizza parlor. I don’t know, it’s just maybe not as elaborate as I really want it but it’s okay with me. It’s a great thing in fact, maybe I’ll just move on it and spend the rest of my life up in the pilothouse, you know. So either way, it’s okay with me.”<sup>3</sup>

The two pilothouses, now decaying but no less iconic, still retain the essence of their former glory as a workhorse of the Staten Island ferry system and as New Jersey’s most famous ferry. Hopefully, the pilothouses can be repurposed and give the *Mary Murray* another life and George Searle’s dream can still come true.



**The iconic *Mary Murray* ferry pilothouses saved from the ship’s salvage. Courtesy of the author.**

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<sup>3</sup> *New Jersey Nightly News* episode from 07/15/1983, accessed May 8, 2020, [https://americanarchive.org/catalog/cpb-aacip\\_259-cj87kw5s](https://americanarchive.org/catalog/cpb-aacip_259-cj87kw5s).



The *Mary Murray* on her first day of service, February 28, 1938. Her pilothouse with her name clearly seen against the New York City skyline. Reprinted with permission of the Mariners' Museum.



The *Mary Murray* with passengers and cars heading to dock a few years before being taken out of service, October 1971. Her pilothouses emblazoned with *Mary Murray*. Reprinted courtesy of the Steamship Historical Society of America.

*David Moskowitz, PhD, holds a BA in environmental studies from the George Washington University, an MS in environmental policy studies from the New Jersey Institute of Technology, and a PhD in entomology from Rutgers University. He is Senior Vice President with EcolSciences, Inc. in Rockaway, New Jersey, and has been with the company for 36 years. He can be contacted at [dmoskowitz@ecolsciences.com](mailto:dmoskowitz@ecolsciences.com).*