

AQUANEWS

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A MYSTERY RESURFACES

Chest may come from disastrous 1854 wreck off Shore

BY MARYANN SPOTO

It was one of the worst maritime disasters in New Jersey history: the majestic clipper New Era run aground off Asbury Park, just far enough off shore to make rescue impossible.

Nearly 300 German immigrants bound for New York lost their lives in that 1854 wreck. As time passed, however, more spectacular shipwrecks claimed the limelight and the New Era faded into history.

Now, 152 years later, a modest wooden trunk donated to the Ocean Township Historical Museum by an 83-year-old local machinist has revived interest in the New Era.

"My immediate reaction was, 'I don't believe it. It's too good to be true. How can you, 152 years later, all of a sudden produce this trunk?'" said James Foley, a historian from Deal. "I was skeptical at first."

But an examination of the 4-by-2 1/2-foot wooden box, combined with research he had done earlier about the wreck, convinced Foley it was the real deal. Part of the trunk's allure also had to do with tales of lost fortunes.

It wasn't unusual for wealthy immigrants to convert their European holdings to gold and jewels and sew them into their clothes for safety. With the discovery of the trunk come new speculation about what was lost on the New Era.

And what might have been found.

"That's why this chest is so important; it goes along with the lore," said Richard Fernicola, a local historian and diver who helped raise the New Era's anchor in 1999.

"The reverence and care that (the donating) family showed for the chest is the same kind of reverence and perhaps regard we should apply to the New Era itself."

The three-mast clipper was returning from her maiden voyage to Bremen, Germany, with 427 onboard, including 11 first- and second-class passengers, when disaster struck on Nov. 13, 1854.

According to an article in the Monthly Nautical Magazine that following spring, the 1,328-ton vessel ran into breakers in a heavy fog, swung broadsides and stuck hard, waves crashing over the bow.

The scandal of the time was the report that the captain and crew escaped ashore in one lifeboat that was too damaged to return. The passengers, none of whom spoke English, were stranded aboard the doomed ship.

Over the next several hours, would-be rescuers watched helplessly as passengers attempted to swim ashore in high seas. Nearly 300 people died. All but one of them were passengers.

Rumors of great wealth have always surrounded the New Era, ever since a boy on the beach that day reportedly found a handful of diamonds in the pocket of one of the victims washed ashore.

For years after the sinking, it wasn't unusual to find gold coins washed up on shore. Even the graves of the victims have been dug up at the Old First Methodist Church in West Long Branch to get to the coins presumed sewn in the lining of their clothes.

One of the most enduring legends is about a chest full of gold coins found -- according to a 1912 newspaper article -- by a man named Borden Jeffrey when he dug under the fireplace of his grandfather's house in Ocean Township. Everyone at the time presumed the money was from the New Era, but Jeffrey never let anyone look at it -- partly

(Continued on page 2)

AQUANEWS

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A MYSTERY RESURFACES

(continued from page 1)

out of fear of being robbed -- so the story was never verified, Foley said. That was the last known mention of the chest and its contents, until now. Kenneth Wright, the machinist who donated the trunk to the small Ocean County museum last month, is a descendant of Jeffrey. Wright said he knew little about the trunk, except that he inherited it 33 years ago from his aunt. She had kept it in her bedroom and painted it pink, but there were no markings on it, Wright said. He gave it a coat of dark varnish, added a number of ship decals and a brass plaque and used it as storage in his study. He said family legend had it that the chest came from the New Era, but no one ever said how, and he was never curious enough to find out. Fernicola speculates that Wright's trunk is the one dug up by Borden Jeffrey, but Wright has his doubts. Even so, Fernicola has theorized publicly that fortunes from the New Era or other shipwrecks may still be buried under the fireplaces of old homes in the area.

"It's a mystery, it's alluring, but it's certainly possible," said Fernicola, a pain management physician from Allenhurst. "There's something special about that chest beyond the fact that it's a chest and it came from the New Era."

He even went so far as to suggest to his friend, Joseph Hornick, who owns a 19th-century house in West Long Branch, that he may be sitting on a fortune.

Hornick, whose house abuts the cemetery where the New Era victims are buried, said Fernicola has intrigued him about the possibility of valuables secreted under the giant fireplace in his dining room, but he's not about to rip up the bricks without more solid evidence.

"There's no doubt in my mind there's buried treasure all over the state of New Jersey," said Hornick, who helped Fernicola raise the New Era's anchor, which is now on display outside the Church of St. Andrew by the Sea in Allenhurst. "It's like finding a needle in a haystack. If I really thought there was, I'd probably be digging there myself."

There's also no doubt that those who see the trunk are left wondering about the original owner. It could have belonged to any of the 29 crewmen on board. It could have contained all the possessions of any of the immigrants drowned before getting to start their new life. It could have been left behind by one of the 40 disease-stricken passengers buried at sea earlier in the monthlong voyage from Bremen.

The trunk is being kept in storage until the museum moves to a new location in about a year. During that time, Richmond said, they'll decide whether to restore its original finish and maybe learn more about its history.

Rockland Aquanauts Organization Inc.
Mission Statement:

To provide, promote, and advance environmental protection, care, and voluntary clean-up of waterways by any and all lawful means; to promote the importance and care in every manner possible by environmental awareness and otherwise; to purchase, print, publish, and circulate literature to promote the importance and care of the waterways and the work of the Corporation. To perform all acts the Corporation may deem appropriate or advisable in such operation; to establish, provide, and voluntary clean-up waterways, to encourage, support and subsidize the cleaning and protection from pollution.

Annual Dinner 2006

The Rockland Aquanauts are going to have their Annual Dinner on Sunday, April 9nd, 2006. The Dinner will be held at Arthur's Tavern, 214 Kinderkamack Road, Emerson, New Jersey, 07630. Their phone number is 1-201-265-5180.

Appetizers will be served from 4:00 pm until 5:00 pm and dinner will be served from 5:00 pm until 8:00 pm.

There shall be door prizes as well as awards. Don't forget to get your log books over to Allan Block for bottom time rewards. The date for this has been extended until the first week in March.

They must be sent to Allan before the first week in March. Contact Allan for more details at allanblock@yahoo.com

The cost of the Dinner and appetizers shall be 17.00 for Members and 27.00 for the first Guest.

Please send your checks to the treasure as follows;

The Rockland Aquanauts
c/o Paul Galeazzi Jr.
4 Greensward Drive
Valley Cottage N.Y.

Blackbeards Wreck

RALEIGH, N.C. - Authorities are resorting to a risky new method aimed at helping preserve what is believed to be the sunken flagship of the pirate Blackbeard.

The Army Corps of Engineers is creating an underwater sand dune to shelter the Queen Anne's Revenge, which sits about 26 feet underwater off the North Carolina coast.

The untried method could potentially damage the ship, which sank in 1718. But if it works, experts said it could be a model for protecting other underwater archaeological finds.

"We don't really know what it's going to do," said Bill Adams, a biologist with the Corps.

The idea of burying the wreck in sand was suggested in the state's plan for managing the site after it was discovered in 1996.

Project archaeologist Chris Southerly said the burial was made possible because the corps was dredging near the site and had a ready supply of sand. Dredging began Wednesday.

The dumped sand will create a slope on the ocean floor that's about 600 feet long, 200 feet wide and 6 feet tall.

Experts hope ocean currents will carry sand toward the ship, replenishing the protective covering it once had.

Archeologists have been retrieving artifacts from the wreck for years and haven't stopped diving on the site. But exposure of cannons, anchors, and other artifacts is now at a "critical point," Southerly said.

Organic material like wood are especially at risk of rapid deterioration with the loss of the preserving cover of sand, he said.

Blackbeard, whose real name was widely believed to be Edward Teach or Thatch, was tracked down at Ocracoke Inlet by volunteers from the Royal Navy and killed in a battle on Nov. 22, 1718.

Some scientists, including a pair of professors who published an article last year, have questioned whether the wreck is the Queen Anne's Revenge. They suggest the vessel is more likely a mid-18th century merchant ship than a pirate's boat.

But Southerly, who's been studying the Queen Anne's Revenge since 2000, said research supports his view that the ship, discovered in 1996, belonged to Blackbeard.

"The Queen Anne's Revenge is the only candidate that fits, that is documented in Beaufort Inlet," he said.

Queen Anne's Revenge Shipwreck Project: <http://www.qaronline.org>

Diver deprived of air
By John Sullivan
Sent in by: Mike Hatala

Chester – Commercial diver Anthony Guarascio climbed down a ladder off a pier in Camden, N.J., in a heated dive suit and diving helmet to chip away at underwater piles of cement with a jackhammer.

As he entered the water, he was leaving his life in the hands of two co-workers who would monitor his air tanks and his progress from a two-way communication box on the pier.

Before submerging, Guarascio might have glanced across the water at the glittering Philadelphia skyline to consider, if only for a moment, his good fortune.

After a rough but not so regrettable start out of college, the 24-year-old had a good-paying job, a beautiful fiancée, and a 19-month-old son waiting for him at home in Chester in Orange County.

There was little to indicate that his luck might change as he entered the waters of the Delaware River, a 40-pound weight belt pushing him 35 feet to the bottom on that late February day.

What went wrong almost three hours later is still being investigated by federal officials, as well as family members who suspect negligence on the part of the diving company Guarascio worked for.

According to Chris Drake, the owner of Drake Associates, who was the supervisor of the dive that day, “something” caused a critical valve to shut off on the air tanks he was monitoring for Guarascio. Drake estimates Guarascio went without air for five to 10 minutes, during which time the diver either clawed his way up one of the large underwater cement piles he was working on or used the umbilical tube feeding him air and hot water for his suit as a rope to get to the surface.

Seeing Guarascio’s body come up, Drake and another worker turned on the backup air tank to no avail. They pulled Guarascio in, using a forklift to heave his suited body by its umbilical tube to the pier 10 feet above.

Co-workers administered CPR, which restored his breathing before medics arrived to take him to Camden’s Cooper University Medical Center.

When the ambulance left, Drake examined the tank valves to find the problem. He guessed that Guarascio’s umbilical tube hit the valve at some point during the dive.

A former Navy diver and U.S. Naval Academy at Annapolis graduate, Drake said he plans to add secondary locks to his equipment to ensure such an accident doesn’t happen again.

There are no standards requiring such safety features be used, he said.

“It was a terrible, terrible, freak accident that just shouldn’t have happened,” he said.

Guarascio’s family believes the accident could have been avoided.

Anthony’s younger brother, Joe Guarascio, who also works for Drake Associates, said Drake should have detected his older brother in distress over the communication box.

“There’s always supposed to be someone on the com box and watching the pressure gauges,” the younger brother said. “If someone’s in the water and they’re in distress, you would know it and pull him up right away.”

Drake said he was standing near the communication box but that it was a windy day, making it possible for him not to hear distress calls if they were made.

Officials from the federal Occupational Safety and Health Administration are investigating. Calls to their Camden office were not returned.

Guarascio is sedated and in a medically-induced coma at Helen Hayes Hospital in Rockland County. Doctors at the hospital won’t know until he wakes the extent of his brain damage or his chances of recovery, family members said.

Had the accident occurred the way Drake described it, Guarascio would have had time to think, even panic, as he sucked the remnants of oxygen from his air tank.

Through his mind might have floated thoughts of a June marriage to Christine Wile, his fiancée, playing with their infant son, Michael, or joking with brothers, Joey and John, and their large group of friends.

“I miss him so much,” said Wile, the 22-year-old mother and bride-to-be. “I just can’t wait for him to say something, anything, to me.”

Stingray Divers

Dive

best-rated live-aboard, Odyssey Adventures to see the “ghost fleet” of Truk Lagoon, unquestionably the world's best shipwreck diving destination. The number, variety, and size of the wrecks and the spectacular marine life that grows on them are unequalled. In February of 1944, the US Task Force 58 attacked Japan's fortress of Truk Lagoon. More than 400 Japanese planes were wiped out and some 50-60 ships were believed sunk in this Micronesian lagoon (one hour flight from Guam).

Boat departs

9/10/06

To

9/17/06



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Contact: www.stingraydivers.com
Email: info@stingraydivers.com
762 Grand Street, Brooklyn, New York, 11211

Phone 718-384-1280

Fax 718-302-0465

Approved Dive schedule
For
Hessian Lake, Lake Sebago, Lake Welch

Hessian Lake

Saturday June 3rd 2006 at 9:00 AM
Sunday July 9th 2006 at 9:00 AM
Saturday August 5th 2006 at 9:00 AM
Sunday September 10th 2006 at 9:00 AM
Saturday September 30th at 10:00 AM
Sunday October 8th at 10:00 AM
Saturday October 14th at 10:00 AM

Lake Sebago

Saturday June 24th at 9:00 AM
Sunday July 23rd at 9:00 AM
Saturday August 26th at 9:00 AM

Lake Welch

Sunday September 17th at 10:00 AM

ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP FEES ARE DUE

Rockland Aquanauts Organization 2006 Dues

I guess it is that time of the year again, Membership Dues are due.
Last year all our members received much more than they gave out to the
Organization.

As usual you will be receiving a tax donation for the first \$25.00. All members
who attended the Annual Dinner not only received money off their own dinner
but they also received money off theirs guests dinner. Everyone whom
attended also received prizes, some worth many times the cost of their Dues.
Don't forget the Annual Picnic as well as all the BBQ lunch's after the Lake
Dives.

So please send in your \$42 dues early to;

Rockland Aquanauts Organization
c/o
Paul Galeazzi Jr.
4 Greensward Drive.
Valley Cottage New York
10989



**Rockland Aquanauts
Post Office Box 387
New City, NY
10956**

April 2006

A Mystery Resurfaces, Blackbeard's Wreck, Dive Schedule, 2006 Dues, Annual Dinner

****Annual Dinner April 9th 2006****

**Arthur's Tavern
214 Kinderkamack Road,
Emerson, New Jersey, 07630.**

**Their phone number is 1-201-265-5180.
More details Inside**
