On August 3 and September 20th Long Island Traditions will sponsor its annual Bay House Tour in the Town of Hempstead. Don’t miss this opportunity to visit these reminders of Long Island’s nautical past that are still used today by the area’s baymen. A comfortable passenger boat will leave from Freeport for the 1½ hour trips to the houses. Tours will depart at 10am and 12pm on August 3rd and 10:30am and 12:30 pm on September 20th. The tour will be led by LI Traditions director Nancy Solomon. Those on board will be treated to a brief history of the bay houses, the first of which were built in the 1700s. Bay houses were traditionally used by fishermen who harvested clams, oysters, crabs and other species from local waters. The surviving houses date from the period between 1870 and 1950. Each tour will visit two bay houses including the Remsen house, celebrating its 50th birthday, and the Braunlich bay house. The boat will then proceed to other nearby bay houses.

For an excellent preview of the bay houses and their environs, visit the Long Island Marine Education Center, 202 Woodcleft Avenue (Nautical Mile) in Freeport, where a diorama by Jeff Blossom is on permanent exhibit. The center’s number is (516) 771-0399. You can also buy or read at your local library On The Bay written by Nancy Solomon which document the history of the bay houses in the Town of Hempstead. **Reservations are required** (sorry, but this trip cannot accommodate children under the age of 10.) Tickets cost $40 per person and $75 per couple. Members of Long Island Traditions will receive a $5 discount. For more information call Long Island Traditions at (516) 767-8803.

**Wanted: Long Island Maritime Films**

Long Island Traditions is sponsoring its first Maritime Film Festival on November 9th at SUNY at Stony Brook. The festival will show documentaries and feature films followed by panel discussions with local tradition bearers and fishers on the issues raised by the programs. In our efforts to show a broad array of films that relate to Long Island’s occupational and recreational heritage, we are turning to you our readers for suggestions. Among the films to be show will be Glenn Gebhard’s “Baymen.” In the meantime save the date!

**Fishers and the Future**

By Nancy Solomon

In recent months there has been a growing awareness of how regulations and environmental changes have affected both recreational and commercial fishers on Long Island and in other regions of the country. It is now common to read about baymen who leave Long Island in the hopes of making a living elsewhere, how certain fish species may be endangered, and how the ordinary recreational fishermen can no longer keep the fish he or she catches.

During the past year I have attended meetings of the Marine Resources Advisory Council for New York State, in order to learn how regulations are made, who they will impact, and whether they will reach their goals. While this may sound simple and straightforward, it is anything but, as various political forces align themselves to suit their own interests. Environmental organizations raise the specter of disappearing species while government data show that stocks are rebounding; recreational organizations accuse commercial fishers of overharvesting, despite data that shows the sportsmen grossly outnumber commercial harvesters; and no one is examining how global warming may affect species migration and their habitat.

See Fishers and the Future on page 2

The E.T. is owned by fisherman Tony Sougstad.
Fishers and the Future continued from page 1

As a small non-profit organization, it is impossible for us to provide answers to these complex questions. However we can share with you the impacts these movements and assumptions have on local tradition bearers. In this our first article in a year-long series, we will examine the issues faced by Long Island fishers, based on our interviews and observations. We invite you to share your thoughts and opinions.

In 1976 Congress enacted the Magnuson Stevens Act, whose goal was to protect the domestic fisheries so that future generations of commercial and recreational fishermen could continue to harvest diverse species in state and federal waters. As stated in its original legislation: “A national program for the conservation and management of the fishery resources of the United States is necessary to prevent overfishing, to rebuild overfished stocks, to insure conservation, to facilitate long-term protection of essential fish habitats, and to realize the full potential of the Nation’s fishery resources. A national program for the development of fisheries which are underutilized or not utilized by the United States fishing industry, including bottom fish off Alaska, is necessary to assure that our citizens benefit from the employment, food supply, and revenue which could be generated thereby.”

To address this situation various regulations were implemented for both commercial and recreational fishermen, targeting “sustainable yield” goals for numerous species found in the offshore waters controlled by the federal government. This article will focus on commercial fishermen from Long Island, at one time one of the nation’s highest producing and harvesting areas for shellfish and finfish. With the passage of the Magnuson Stevens Act, captains and other users were required to report their catch yields, so that the fisheries managers could examine trends in commercial fishing activities and reform their regulations in order to reach the “optimal” level of fish.

There are numerous species currently regulated by the National Marine Fisheries Service, including fluke, also known as summer flounder, cod, striped bass, herring, dogfish and bluefish, to name a few. While some of these species have little commercial value, others have been harvested by commercial fishermen for generations. It is important to note that many ethnographers have found, as I have, that fishers are generally conscientious when it comes to the resource. One of these prized species is fluke, a highly migratory species that has provided a living throughout the Mid Atlantic region for small and large-scale fishermen as well as foreign trawlers. After a precipitous drop in landings, as seen in the accompanying chart, in 1996 the National Marine Fisheries Service targeted fluke as being an overharvested species, and imposed regulatory quotas on each state including New York.

Tony Sougstad was one of approximately 12 commercial fishermen in Freeport who harvested this fish primarily in the spring and early summer. Like many traditional fishermen, Tony learned by working with other Freeport-based fishermen included Frank Cona, whose family immigrated from Italy in the early 1900s, Charlie Wertz, a native of Long
herring, fluke and flounder. When the new mesh size regulations and
of species throughout the year, in order to work year round, today they only
target their intended catch more carefully. Where they once caught a variety
in the community. However he also notes that the retrofitting required by
would be larger fish the following season. "Nets allow short fish to come
mesh sizes that allowed smaller fish to escape, in order to ensure that there
mid 1980s fishermen could use any mesh size that they felt was appropriate
their own nets, mending and repairing them as the need arises.  Prior to the
doesn't spawn on Long Island. "
amount of fish they were allowed to catch. " Well, he was wrong. When fluke restrictions
more money for their fish. " Well, he was wrong. When fluke restrictions
took effect, guys who had the boats couldn’t afford to go out for the amount of fish they were
expected to be fully rebuilt by 2013. But they also say that
overfishing is occurring and the stocks are currently overfished, and
management measures, which include harvesting date
restrictions, quotas and size limits, are increasing population size. Biomass indices declined through the late 1970s into the
early 1990s, but increased during the early 1990s and are
are currently at about the level of the mid-1970s. Since 1990, the
age structure of the population has expanded to approximate
that observed in the mid-1970s.”

It is important to note that the statistics show that more
fluke are being caught, by both commercial and recreational
fishermen, revealing that fish stocks are rebounding. The National
Coalition for Marine Conservation, an advocate for the current
fisheries regulation, states “Summer flounder fishing, according
to many anglers, has never been better.” The National Marine
Fisheries Service also asserts “Populations are rebuilding and
states, while local NY fishermen
could not. To compound matters
New York State eventually raised
the minimum size to 18 inches.

When Tony began fishing in the early 1980s, he remembers that a
“Good day was 2000 lbs of 14-inch fluke.” Like other trawler fishermen,
he was used to travelling 70 miles to
nearby Hudson Canyon, where fluke,
whiting and squid were found in abundance. Today he says “it doesn’t
pay to go there anymore because there’s nothing left to catch.” When the
restrictions were first implemented, I was told by NYS DEC that they were
“going to ram down these laws down your throat” but that there would be
more money for their fish.” Well, he was wrong. When fluke restrictions
took effect, guys who had the boats couldn’t afford to go out for the amount of fish they were allowed to catch.

When asked what a typical season is, he responded that “things have
changed from the old days. You lose 20 days for yellow tail spawning
season between March 1st and March 21st, even though the yellow tail
doesn’t spawn on Long Island.”

Another important regulatory measure instituted were the mesh sizes
of their nets. Most traditional and small boat fishermen typically purchase
their own nets, mending and repairing them as the need arises. Prior to the
mid 1980s fishermen could use any mesh size that they felt was appropriate
for the targeted species. Small family fishermen like Tony generally used
mesh sizes that allowed smaller fish to escape, in order to ensure that there
would be larger fish the following season. “Nets allow short fish to come
into the bay. They go through our meshes…..” This practice was common in the community. However he also notes that the retrofitting required by
the new regulations was extremely expensive, forcing many fishermen to
target their intended catch more carefully. Where they once caught a variety
of species throughout the year, in order to work year round, today they only
fish for particular types due to the cost of the nets now required.

In a 1987 interview Tony stated that he harvested whiting, squid,
herring, fluke and flounder. When the new mesh size regulations and
limits were scrutinized at the numerous public meetings, Tony
and other fishermen were told by fisheries managers “if you
couldn’t make a living fishing you should work in the motels
changing sheets.”

Today he harvests a limited amount of fluke and whiting, because “When fluke restrictions took effect, guys who had the
boats couldn’t afford to go out for the amount of fish they were
allowed to catch. The boats were tied up, sold back or wrecked.
You couldn’t keep a crew. The guys that hung on had to target
other species – squid and whiting. Went to Hudson canyon and
further, they found a small stock of whiting from the southern
biomass that was decimated – there was nothing closer to shore
the following spring. Price went from 8¢ a lb to almost a dollar
a pound because there aren’t any.”

It is important to note that various scholars have questioned
whether the data on which the management plans are based are
reliable. As Juan Freire & Antonio García-Allut of the Universidade
da Coruña assert: “The fisheries crisis of the last decades and the
overexploitation of a great number of stocks have revealed that the scientific knowledge available about the dynamics of the
marine ecosystems needed for the management of the fisheries is
inadequate. This problem is critical when the management of
coastal ecosystems and artisanal fisheries is involved.” US- based
social science analysts working for the Atlantic States Marine
Fisheries Commission are also concerned about the regulatory
impact, stating in 2005 that “General consensus is that fishing
communities are affected by fishery regulatory actions.” However,
they caution, “It is simplistic to assume all social or economic change, positive or negative, occurring in fishing communities is
related to regulatory actions, or fishing activity, in general.”

As a result of this situation most fishermen in Freeport
including Tony now work part time, hoping to retire with
some savings. Out of the more than 12 offshore fishermen
who were working in Freeport in the 1980s, today there are 3.
Yet Tony and other Long Island fishers continue in the hopes
that they will be recognized as conservationists, as other
ethnographers have found. As Tony states, I was happy when
limits were set. If they could equalize the fishing throughout the
year – there would be a steady supply going to NY. We would
know what we’re going to earn and they would know what
they’re going to get. If they only did that I would be a very
happy man. Then I could maintain the boat.”
### Events of Interest

**PLEASE NOTE:** If you have a Long Island concert or program that focuses on some aspect of traditional culture, drop us a line and we’ll put it in our “Events of Interest” column. The deadline is the 1st of June, September, December and March.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>May 31</td>
<td>Young Indian Culture Group Presents “Mangala: The Arts of India” 2 - 4.30 pm. Herricks Middle School, 7 Hilldale Drive, Albertson. Workshops In Rangoli, Mehendi, Bharatanatyam, Odissi, Bollywood Dance, Tabla, Yoga, Indian Folk Tales, Family Ramayana Bingo and Vedic Mathematics. $5 per person. For information call (516) 739-1575</td>
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<td>June 1</td>
<td>Strike the Bell will be performing “Pirates, Parrots &amp; Patches,” a one-hour program of sea chanteys, nautical lore, and stories of pirates. 2 pm at the Bayport-Blue Point Public Library, 203 Blue Point Ave., Blue Point. For information call (631) 363-6133.</td>
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<td>June 9</td>
<td>Bay Houses and Rum Runners. Lecture by Nancy Solomon. Freeport Historical Society annual meeting. 7 pm at the Freeport Memorial Library, Merrick Road and Ocean Avenue, Freeport. Admission free. For more information call (516) 379-3274.</td>
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<td>June 15</td>
<td>Performance presentation by Satya Pradeep and the Nritya Saagaram Dance Academy. “TRIYEE” – the Lord Dattatreya, who represents the primordial functions of creation, preservation and destruction. The 3 components are basic to all religions and symbolically represented in this production. 3 pm. Mineola High School, 10 Armstrong Road, Garden City Park, NY. Tickets are $15/$25. For more information call (516) 681-2048.</td>
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<td>June 22</td>
<td>Strike the Bell, the sea chantey duo made up of Judith Zweiman and Stuart Markus, will perform from 3-4 p.m. at the Fire Island Lighthouse.</td>
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<tr>
<td>August 3</td>
<td>Bay House Tour. See article for information.</td>
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<tr>
<td>August 23</td>
<td>Scottish Games at Old Westbury gardens. Featuring traditional Scottish music, food, crafts, competitions and children's activities. 8am – 5pm. For information call (516) 333-0048 or visit <a href="http://www.oldwestburygardens.org">www.oldwestburygardens.org</a></td>
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Long Island Traditions  
382 Main Street  
Port Washington, NY 11050