

Town of Barnegat
New Jersey Coastal Heritage Trail
Intersection of U.S. Highway 9 and
County Road 554
Barnegat
Ocean County
New Jersey

HABS No. NJ-1025

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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of Interior
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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

TOWN OF BARNEGAT

HABS No. NJ-1025

Location: New Jersey Coastal Heritage Trail, Intersection of U.S. Highway 9 and County Road 554, Barnegat, Ocean County, New Jersey

Significance: Barnegat was first settled in the mid-eighteenth-century by Quakers. Beyond its early religious history, Barnegat is significant as an early bay town, often referred to as the "Barnegat Bay resorts." The villages fronting the bay were established communities relying on the products of forest trade and sea long before the railroad brought resort trade. While rivaling neighboring Forked River and Waretown in fishing and gunning, as well as supported various industries, Barnegat is most renowned for its shipbuilding industry, and production of the "Barnegat sneak-box."

History: The town of Barnegat appropriately takes its name from the bay, christened "Barendegat" or "Breakers Inlet" by 17th century Dutch explorers. Though whalers probably passed through the area earlier, the first permanent residents were Quakers who settled sometime before 1759, when they purchased 500 acres from the proprietors. In 1767 the Quakers built a Friends Meeting house on a portion of the land. The Quakers still meet in the original building on East Bay Avenue, once considered part of the Little Egg Harbor or Tuckerton Meeting. The earliest houses, two-story clapboard saltboxes, were constructed near the church and along and Lower Shore Road. Over the next 100 years, this neighborhood was crowded with vernacular Gothic Revival homes such as those on 595 and 607 East Bay. The interior furnishings of the ca. 1800 Lippincott House and the 1813 Green house, often included ornaments from overseas, bearing witness to the success of sea captains living in the neighborhood.

During the Revolutionary War saltworks were established on bare patches of meadowland and Barnegat lumber could be purchased in New York and the West Indies. Later, salt hay was sold for use as casket stuffing, upholstery filling and insulation. As the shipping trade grew, new roads were built from the port to the pinelands. The first innkeeper to take advantage of the increased traffic was John Oliphant, who built his hotel near the crossing of Main Shore and Bay Avenues in 1820.¹ By 1834, the town consisted of "about fifty dwellings, three taverns, four stores, on a sandy soil surrounded by a pine forest."²

Barnegat experienced a brief burst of activity as a resort town following the Civil War. In his description of Barnegat Bay, Kobbe remarked on the competition between Barnegat, Forked River and Waretown for the title of "sporting headquarters. Despite its "excellent weak fishing ground a short distance from the mouth of Double Creek,"

¹ "Ocean County Historical Sites Survey, Union Township" (Toms River: Ocean Country Cultural and Heritage Commission, 1981), 2.

² Thomas F. Gordon, Gazeteer of the State of New Jersey (Trenton: Daniel Fenton, 1834; reprint, [place...?]: Polyanthos, 1973), 96.

Barnegat was rated more highly as a gunning spot.³ Around 1893, Benjamin Chadwick built the Barnegat Druggist Hollow-Ware Glass Company on Route 9. A local reporter announced that the "pot-type factory with fieldstone tunnels 15 to 16 feet long" would "manufacture Pocket Bottles for Ocean Grove and other temperance resorts."⁴ Bits of blue glass can still be found in the vicinity of the Pampered Pirate, the site of the factory until 1938.

Barnegat's most well-known industry, however, was the production of the "Barnegat sneak-box." Developed around 1836 in West Creek, New Jersey, the sneakbox immediately became popular with local duck hunters. Nathaniel Bishop, who travelled from the Ohio and Mississippi River to the Gulf of Mexico in a sneak-box, described it as "a very home-like boat, which, though only twelve feet long, four feet wide, and thirteen inches deep, was strong, stiff, dry and safe."⁵ By 1879, when Bishop was writing, the sneakbox was the favorite craft of recreational gunners who traveled from inland cities on the New Jersey Southern Railroad. In 1901 J.H. Perrine opened his shop on Bay Street and supplied sportsmen with more than 3,600 Barnegat sneakboxes over the next fifty-five years. Even today, the sturdy little boat is sought after by serious sportsmen and recreational sailors.

Though many commercial and municipal buildings remain in Barnegat, few serve their original functions. The business district developed in the first decades of the twentieth century, mostly along East and West Bay Avenues and Main Shore Road. When the town outgrew its first national bank, the 1907 frame building was moved to Cedar Street and became a private home. A new bank was built on the original site in 1914 and is now an antique store. Both the two-story clapboard postoffice and the brick firehouse, still located on either side of Bay Avenue, have been abandoned for modern facilities. Two other buildings on East Bay, the A & P and the American Stores Company, are preserved as the Barnegat Bazaar and Barnegat Antique Country.⁶

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³ Gustav Kobbe, The New Jersey Coast and Pines (Baltimore: Gateway Press, 1977), 66-68.

⁴ Pauline Miller, "Glassworks Once Stood in Barnegat," Ocean County Observer (Sept. 11, 1985), 7.

⁵ Nathaniel Bishop, Four Months in a Sneak-box (Boston: Lee and Shepard, 1879), 3.

⁶ Out of the Past: A Pictorial History of Barnegat, New Jersey (Barnegat Historical Society, 1981), 1-35.

- Sources: Bishop, Nathaniel, Four Months in a Sneak-box. Boston: Lee and Shepard, 1879.
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- "Ocean County Historic Sites Survey, Union Township." Toms River: Ocean County Cultural and Heritage Commission, 1981.
- "Out of the Past: A Pictorial History of Barnegat." Barnegat Historical Society, 1981.

Project Information:

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