

ATLANTIC HERITAGE

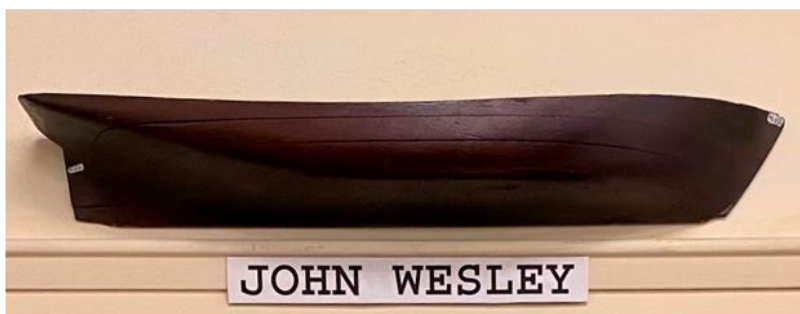
Newsletter of the Atlantic County Historical Society

WINTER 2023

SHIP-BUILDING HALF MODELS

By Michael Connor

Found on the second floor of the Atlantic County Historical Society Library and Museum are various half models that were utilized by Atlantic County shipbuilders. Below are some images from that display. This article will discuss the invention of the shipbuilding half model and how it was and is used.



The half model - correctly called the half block model - originated in the 17th Century. By the 18th Century most shipbuilders utilized a block of pine to carve the intended shape of the vessel being built. Customarily, the starboard side was modeled. The Van Sant half model pictured above is unusual since it is a port side model. Until 1794, American shipbuilders used a skeleton model consisting of the ship's frame, keel, stem and stern post. Lofting from this was not an easy job. Accurately transferring the lines and angles to full size on the lofting floor would take a loftsmen many days. Computer aided design was almost two centuries in the future.

In 1794 Orlando Merrill a Newburyport, Massachusetts shipwright invented what was first called the waterline model and now is called the half block model. Slices of wood whose various thicknesses each represented a specific size in feet were used to shape the vessel's form. Merrill called these "lifts." Dowels or

continued on page 4

Events and Happenings

Program Logistics

RISLEY HOMESTEAD

8 Virginia Avenue
(near 400 block of Shore Rd)
Northfield, NJ



Saturdays & Sundays, 11am – 4pm

Program Description

The [Risley Homestead](#) is one of two 18th century houses in Atlantic County individually listed on the National Register of Historic Places and was home to many generations of Risley oystermen. The ACHS received the Homestead and its furnishings by bequest from Virginia Risley Stout in 1989. The Homestead is open Saturday & Sunday for individual and small group guided tours. Contact ACHS for details about large groups.



HOLIDAY SWEET SALE

Monday
December 18th
2:00 – 5:00pm
@ACHS: 907 Shore Road
Somers Point

Do you eat out often or belong to a group that meets at a restaurant while enjoying a meal? We respectfully request that you consider visiting the Shore Diner, 6710 Tilton Road, in Egg Harbor Township. When customers present the pictured voucher at the time of payment, the diner gives us a donation. It's a win/win situation for all! Thanking you, in advance!



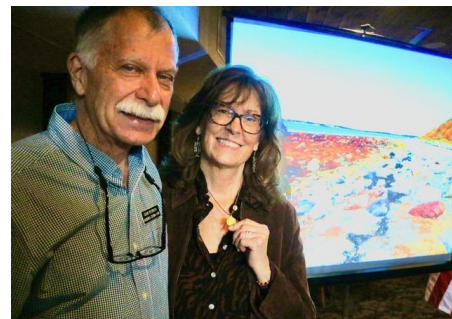
ANNUAL LUNCHEON



Judge Michael Connor swears in officers and trustees who were up for re-election... L-R: Michael Connor: Trustee, Sid Parker: President, Norman Goos: Librarian, Jim Mason: Trustee, Michael O'Brien: Trustee, Kevin Little: Assistant Curator, Babs Perry-Silva: Recording Secretary. (Not present but appointed were: Trustees: Heather Perez, Tom Kinsella, Judy Schwartz and Dana Shupp.)



This year's "Bringing History to Life Award" winner.... Babs Perry-Silva, posing with her award.



Top: Deep Sea Diver Gene Peterson with a power point presentation on "Shipwrecks Along the Jersey Shore". Bottom: Gene's wife shows a necklace made from one of many gold coins recovered from the deep!

Need to Contact Us?

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Follow us on Instagram, Facebook or on our website www.AtlanticCountyHistoricalSocietynj.org

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Contributors to this Issue:

Sid Parker, Mike Connor, Diane Miller,
Dale Lonkart & Lynn Wood,

The Atlantic County Historical Society received an operating grant from the Atlantic County Office of Cultural & Heritage Affairs.

Member News



DONATIONS

Friend \$1 - \$49

Dave Pinto, Frances Brewin, Charlene Canale,
Sally Pietrofitta, Charles Birnstiel, Jeannine Ingenito

Patron \$50 - \$249

Carol-Anne Heinisch, Elinor Veit, Dale Lonkart,
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Jeff & Debra MacNeill, Steve Jasiocki
Anne-Marie Glenn, Judy & Gary Newton,
Joan Berkey & Scott Smith,
Michael Morello, *In Honor Of* Sid Parker,
Will & Amy Rozell, *In Memory Of* Pat Parker
Joan Berkey, *In Memory Of* Bill & Ruth Berkey

IN MEMORY OF FREDA HEINTZ

Kathy Fritz, Dale Lonkart, Diane Bassetti
Sid Parker, Cathie Skinner

Sponsor \$250 - \$1000

H. Paxson Keates, Judith LaDrew Bayer

Welcome

New Members

Larry Frankel, *Margate, NJ*
Brian Lefke, *Somers Point, NJ*
Hudson Scattergood, *Linwood, NJ*

IN MEMORIAM



Freda Heintz,
Former Librarian
Suzanne "Sue" Smith

R.I.P. Freda

Freda Heintz, former Society Librarian, passed away on October 23, 2023 while residing at the home of her niece in Mays Landing, NJ.

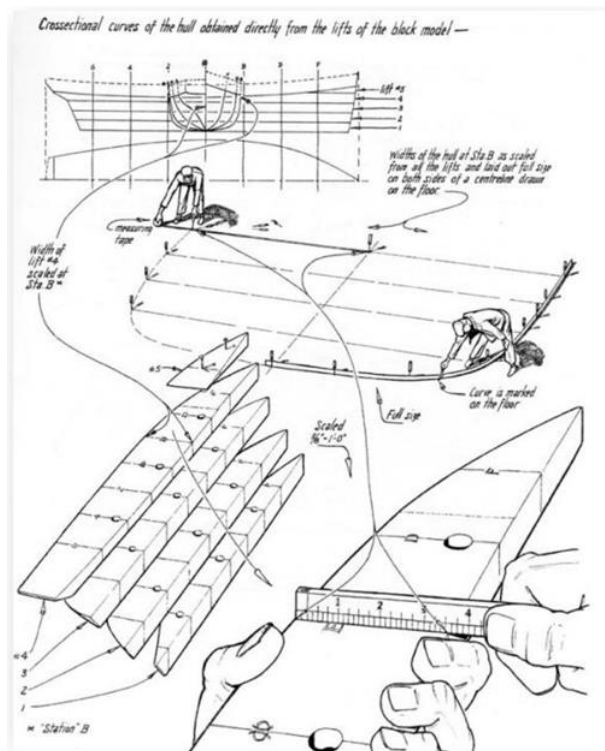
Freda dealt with ever-worsening COPD for many years, struggling even to make her way into the building to her office where she spent many hours working with our PastPerfect software. By her own admission she had a tough childhood, was not a "social" creature and she acknowledged that she was pretty good at ruffling the feathers of her colleagues. But she worked harder than a rented mule for years, putting in many extra hours in the building and also working from home. In her own way, she set a high bar that will be difficult to be leaped.

MARYBETH'S LEGACY

Most of our volunteers, and many of our members, well remember the late MaryBeth Ortzman, former trustee, volunteer and genealogy researcher *par excellence*. California life member, Judy Newton, was the beneficiary of many hours of MaryBeth's labors on Judy's Eldridge family ancestors. Five years later, acknowledging that MaryBeth dug up much of the information, Judy sent us a copy of the Eldridge family tree in full foliage. We hope their combined labors will reward a future researcher.

SHIP-BUILDING HALF MODELS *continued...*

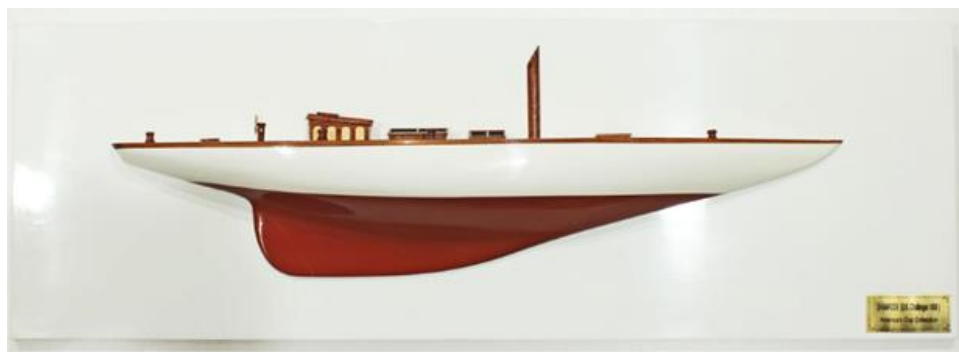
screws held the model together. The model could be taken apart and each “lift” used to create a paper drawing from which full size lines could be created in the loft. Below is a drawing of this process from the collection of author R.O. Neish.



While his invention revolutionized shipbuilding, Orlando Merrill never received compensation for it. He was rewarded with a long life and died in 1855 at the age of ninety-two. His original 1794 model was presented to the New York Historical Society in 1853.

In addition to creating the construction plans, the model had other uses. It was used as a sales tool to show a prospective buyer what the completed vessel would look like. It was also used to calculate the amount of timber and other materials necessary for construction.

When the ship was built the half block model was often mounted for display and kept by either the shipbuilder or presented to the owner. Today the half model continues as an art form.



Atlantic County Historical Society Governing Board

President: Sid Parker

Vice-President: Cindy Mason-Purdie

Recording Secy: Barbara Perry-Silva

Treasurer: Charlene Canale

Asst. Treasurer:

Financial Secretary: Ellen Hyatt

Librarian: Rev. Norman Goos

Assistant Librarian: Kathy Fritz

Curator: Joan Frankel

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Megan Ernst, Tom Kinsella,

James H. Mason, V, Mike O'Brien,

Heather Perez, Will Rozell,

Judith Schwartz, Dana Shupp,

Lynn Wood

Looking Back through the Files.....

Transcribed by Diane J. Miller

Somers Mansion Somers Point, New Jersey

Editor's Note: Laura Gaskill Hagerⁱ who lived in the Somers Mansion as a child in the late 1920s, wrote the following article in response to a request by ACHS museum curator, Fred Ehrhardt. In a letter dated March 15, 1991, he asked her to share her recollections of living in the oldest house in Atlantic County. Mrs. Hager was a resident of New Britain, PA, at the time. Upon her deathⁱⁱ she remembered the Atlantic County Historical Society with a generous bequest. She had no children.

The typescript and curator's letter are filed in ACHS Vertical File, Somers Family. The original has been shortened slightly for space considerations.

The Somers Mansion in the late 1920's did not look as it does now [1991]. I have only been in it once since it was restored. I prefer to remember it as it was in my childhood. At that time it was a house of sixteen rooms. When we first moved in, boxwood grew along the front retaining wall and along the two walks that went from the steps in that wall in the form of a V to the front porch. They were greatly overgrown and it was fun for a child to play up and down the paths. My father removed them early on...I remember on a cold January day walking along the top of the wall and saying to myself, "I am five years old." How grown up I was.

There were porches on both the first and second floor that wrapped around the front and northeast side of the house. They were a delight in the summer time, with a nice view of all that was going on in the vicinity. I recall several things regarding that front porch. A man taking motion pictures of a woman, in the flapper dress of the day, walking up and down the walk. They just stopped in and asked if they could take pictures. Another time there was a car accident and the people from the car sat on our porch until things were taken care of. They had a baby with them that had whopping (sic) cough. Of course I came down with whopping (sic) cough a few days later. I remember my mother and I rocking on the porch one afternoon when a man came up and said "bar". Mother, who was a staunch temperance advocate said "You do not want this house but the one down at the foot of the hill." Bay Shore.

Before we moved to the mansion, the Hadays [Haydays] who were moving out, had a sale. My mother, with me in tow, went over and bought many things to help fill up the place. After all we were moving from a seven room house to a sixteen room one. I remember iron and brass bed steeds (sic), wash stands with bowls (sic) and pitchers, a black horsehair sofa... pictures and many things that I wish I had today.

In the front parlor was the fireplace and the old boxed in stairs, the same as now. I remember when some of the bricks of the fireplace fell in and left a hole that went down into the cellar. How frightened I was to walk by it...There used to be wooden folding doors at the northeast part of that room. In cold weather they helped to retain the heat of the fireplace in the main part of the room.

I will always remember a Christmas there in the front parlor. The day before the holiday, my father put up the tree by the fireplace and I handed him the ornaments one by one...How important I felt. My mother's half brother, Jesse Barrett from Bivalve, N.J. came that evening to spend the holidays with us. Christmas day my mother set up the large oak library table...as a festive board. We were joined by her two other half brothers, Aaron Barrett from Sea Isle City and Jacob Barrett from just over on Anne Ave., in Somers Point.

Down about three or so steps at the back of the old parlor was a central hall with an open oak stairs to the second floor. At the end of the hall was a door that lead to a small porch and an outside covered well. The room on the northeast side of the hall was our setting room. In winter we had a cast iron coal heater in use there. When I think of that room, I think of music – my piano and the old gramophone. There were a number of church socials held in that room during the winters.

Across the hall was the dining room and winter kitchen. What luxury. It had a hand pump right there so you did not have to go outside for water. Off of that room to the southeast was the summer kitchen. It was a square rather dark room but it had two lovely old corner cupboards. A door from that room lead to the side yard, where there was an old wooden fence with a gate in it. The gate opened to the lot next door where my father raised flowers.

Continued on page 6

Looking Back through the Files.....continued

In summer, what a lovely breeze there would be through the old house, from the front door through the hall to what we called the side door at the end of the hall. Up the hall stairs, there were four cheery bedrooms in the new part. This part had gas lights, which my mother was deathly afraid of. There must have been some electricity, for I remember having wiring done so we would not have to use the gas lights in the bed rooms. From the hall and up a step or two was the old section containing a bedroom and sitting room with a fireplace. These two rooms we never used but rented them in the summer. One year, to Mr. and Mrs. J.B. Collier, old and dear friends of my mother. They were from Philadelphia but had candy stores on the Boardwalk in Ocean City. Another summer Charles and Lena Huff and their little white dog stayed with us. I remember the dog as he bit me. Lena Huff was a sister of Celia Champion, a well known personage in Somers Point. The Champion house was about where the Atlantic County Historical Society building now stand[s]. The Huffs rented their home in Ventnor for the summer and stayed in those two upstairs rooms. There was a door from these rooms to the upstairs porches.

At the end of the second floor hall was another door that led to a small square porch over the side door down below. Another open stairs in this hall went up to the third floor. These were the stairs that we used, as the old boxed in stairs by [the] fireplace were in bad repair. On the third floor were four sunny bedrooms which were fully furnished. When we had guests, what a job it was to carry water up there for bathing. Then again, as on the second floor, up two or three steps to the old section. The room on the right was used for trunk storage, but that room on the left – it was my play room. What fun to be up so high, look out over the bay and call down to someone from my lofty perch. I remember other little girls in the neighborhood sharing it with me.

In summer sometimes the house would be full. I do not know where they all came from. I know some were old friends of my mother's from when she worked in Tacoma Park, Maryland. Some were church dignitaries on vacation. I remember one gentleman, who I was told was a great scholar, sitting by the library table in the parlor reading by lamp light. I had to tip toe around and be quiet while he studied. I think some who stayed with us, were guests of friends whose houses were full. I have a feeling that my mother welcomed some of these people and resented others. After Labor Day things quieted down, vacationers went home, my father's flower business slowed down, the girl who looked after me and did some housework of mornings left and we had the house to ourselves again.

I must include in my reminiscing, the little three holer out back with lilac bushes in front of it. Of a summer morning, when the house was full, there was usually a line of cheery people, waiting their turn. It was a pleasant, quiet time, with many little childhood memories...I would not have missed that part of my life for the world.

Then depression days came and we moved to a smaller house around the corner.ⁱⁱⁱ

Laura Gaskill-Hager

ⁱ Laura May Gaskill, daughter of John Quincy Adams Gaskill and Mary E. Barrett, was born January 22, 1923 in Somers Point. She married Donald E. Hager on May 15, 1954. More information on the Gaskill and Barrett families can be found in *My Gaskill Ancestors*, ACHS Call No. P220 Gas, and *Elijah Barrett of Southern New Jersey and Some of His Descendants*, ACHS Call No. P229 Bar. Both books were written by Laura Gaskill Hager.

ⁱⁱ Laura Gaskill Hager died April 26, 2017 at the age of 94 in Bucks County, PA. Find a Grave, accessed Nov. 2, 2023.

ⁱⁱⁱ The 1930 U.S. Census shows the Gaskill family renting a house at 33 Broadway in Somers Point: John, age 56, an unemployed landscape gardener; Mary E., age 47, an unemployed private teacher, and Laura, age 7. It is interesting to note that some of the people mentioned in Laura's article appear on the same census page. The other half of the home at 33 Broadway was rented by Charles L. and Ellena [Lena] Huff. Three dwellings away, Otto and Celia Champion owned a home at 909 Shore Road. Of all the employable adults among the three households, the only one listed as employed was Daniel Gudgeon who lived with the Champion family. He was a servant who worked as a laborer doing odd jobs, and he was 100 years old! Ancestry.com, accessed Nov. 2, 2023.



Left: Somers Mansion c. 1900 – This image of the house and property, with its porches, boxwood and front retaining wall and steps, is probably close to the way it looked while the Gaskills lived here.

ACHS photo file #324c.

Right: Dedication of Somers Mansion, Sept. 26, 1942, after its restoration. Laura Gaskill Hager preferred to remember it as it looked in her childhood. *ACHS photo file #692a.*

SCHOOL DAYS

by Dale Lonkart

Sunday, October 15th, the Atlantic County Roundtable of Historical Organizations presented “Schools in Early Atlantic County” in our auditorium. The Roundtable is an informal group that meets in our library three or four times a year. We discuss our successes, problems, upcoming events, and anything of interest to the members. The same program was presented one week later, October 22nd, at the Canoe Club in Hammonton, hosted by the Historical Society of Hammonton. After the program, some of us were treated to a tour of the Historical Society of Hammonton’s nearby museum. What a gem - they have done a wonderful job there!



Before COVID, we had an annual joint program. This was the first since then, and the first time we met in another part of the county. It was a great experience to meet the people who attended in Hammonton. The joint programs are usually held in the fall, so watch for it next year!

Left to right: Deborah White- Historical Society of Hammonton,
Mary Sue Lovett- Longport Historical Society
Dale Lonkart- Atlantic County Historical Society
Judy Branin- Linwood Historical Society
Lynn Wood- Egg Harbor Township Historical Society
Jim Foreman- Somers Point Historical Society
Not pictured: Norm Goos, ACHS & Cathie Skinner, Historical Society of Hamilton Twp.

Then & Now!

Then & Now is a regular feature in our Newsletter, showcasing some of the photos in the ACHS collection.

This early wooden Scullville School was built circa 1860. It was located next to the brick school on today’s Somers Point Mays Landing Road. The building was no longer used as a school around the mid-1940s, and was soon renovated into an apartment building. In 1964, Richard Collins moved the building back onto his property when he opened “Uncle Dick’s Museum”. It housed antiques from the Ryon family, and lots of player pianos and calliopes. Later he built additions on the building for antique cars and wagons.

Today the building is used as the Youth Center for Green Tree Church.



Early wooden Scullville School built circa 1860.
(Photo courtesy Great Egg Harbour Twp Historical Society)



Used as a music room in Uncle Dick’s Museum
(Picture courtesy Carol Jo Collins Martin)



Today, the Youth Center for Green Tree Church
(Photo courtesy Lynn Wood)



COURTHOUSE EXHIBIT

In October, a new exhibit was installed in our three cases at the Atlantic County Courthouse. “Things That Aren’t Here Anymore – Gone, But Not Forgotten” presents places such as Captain Starn’s, Hackney’s, Adventure Village, The Log Restaurant, Somers Roundabout, Zaberer’s, Pleasantville Speedway, Atlantic City Speedway, Belcoville, Amatol, and others. Pictured at left is volunteer Carol Zepfel.

The Atlantic County Historical Society will be closed from December 21st to January 3rd.

Re-Opening January 4th.

OUR REGULAR HOURS:
Thursday – Saturday:
10:00 – 3:30pm

**ATLANTIC COUNTY
HISTORICAL
SOCIETY**



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**HAVE YOU
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**ATLANTIC COUNTY
HISTORICAL
SOCIETY**



Where Atlantic County History Comes to Life



Our Mission:

- To collect and preserve historical materials exemplifying the events, places, and lifestyles of the people of Atlantic County and southern New Jersey.
- To encourage the study of history and genealogy.
- To provide historical and genealogical information to our membership and the general public.