

# SCUTTLEBUTT

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**Our Mission**

The Ocean City Museum Society, Inc. is a non-profit organization dedicated to preserving and interpreting the rich cultural and natural heritage of our coastal community through collecting, exhibits, educational programs and research. By operating the Ocean City Life-Saving Station Museum, the Society emphasizes the history of the United States Life-Saving Service on the Delmarva Peninsula and the past culture and lifestyle of the Town of Ocean City, Maryland.

## AN OCEAN CITY MEMORY

### BEING A TEENAGER DURING WORLD WAR II AT OCEAN CITY, MARYLAND BY ART DAVIS

During my early teenage years growing up in Ocean City our country entered into World War II. The closest the conflict came to Ocean City was when a German submarine torpedoed a merchant ship just off our coast. If I recall correctly, it was the freighter David H. Atwater that was torpedoed by the notorious U-boat 552 about ten miles off the coast. The survivors of the Atwater were machine gunned to death in their life rafts by the Germans. The life rafts were picked up by a U.S. Coast Guard patrol and brought into Ocean City where their bodies were laid out on the Coast Guard dock at South Division Street and the bay. Everything was very secretive during the war and the retrieval of these bodies was done under the cloak of night and the news was not announced until the next day. A renewed effort was made by the townspeople to enforce the blackouts along the length of the beach.

This event really brought the war home to us. Of course food and gas were rationed. Everyone in town collected cans, tinfoil, lard and other items that were needed to help the war effort.



Art Davis on the Ocean City Boardwalk with his grandfather, Thomas Cropper, in 1930.

I remember that my mother, Violet, also had a victory garden.

We quickly lost many of our teachers who went off to fight the war. Those teachers left at home taught what they knew, mostly business courses, typing, and such, but there was one course that was particularly useful to us during the war. The Aircraft Identification course, where we learned to identify German, Japanese and American airplanes from silhouette flash cards.

The U.S. Army came into town and built machine gun emplacements on the beach and along the western shore of the Sinepuxent Bay. These were beehive shaped structures made from sand bags stacked much like ice blocks were for igloos. Lookout towers were built only along the beaches. The tower was a small room about 6 by 6 feet and were located every so many half-miles along the beachfront. Kids my age, who were about thirteen, were recruited to man the towers

along the beach to spot invading planes. We (my partner in the lookout was Sally Cropper) were provided with binoculars and a phone that rang directly to the coastal defense forces. When we saw a plane we identified it and called

*Continued on page 3*

## WE NEED YOUR OCEAN CITY MEMORIES

The Museum is in the process of building a new web site to accommodate the 2.5 million Internet viewers we have had to our site in the past several years. We need your help to do it. It is our plan to have numerous **Ocean City Memories** pages that will be supported with photographs and artifacts and through which we will tell the history of Ocean City. We are asking that you pause for an hour or two, or longer and write down your favorite Ocean City memory or experience. You can go whichever way you want with the memories. We believe that our readership is very interested in what you have to say and in hearing about Ocean

City and its people, both past and present.

Please write your story as if you were telling it to a friend as in a letter (Dear Sue,). Your story is extremely important to the history of the town, so I hope you will take the time, to jot that memory down. Please do not worry about spelling, grammar or punctuation. Our computers will do that for you. You can submit the story via email as an attachment or the good old-fashioned paper and pencil way. Email: [curator@ocmuseum.org](mailto:curator@ocmuseum.org) or write Suzanne Hurley, Curator, P.O. Box 603, Ocean City, MD 21843

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## RARE LIFE-SAVING SERVICE APPARATUS DONATED BY GEORGE HURLEY

During the early part of this summer of 2006 the Ocean City Life-Saving Station Museum was able to complete still another display pertaining to our theme room; namely the Boat Room. In June we acquired, through a donation, a very rare apparatus known as a Manby mortar.

The Hamilton Gale family of Annapolis, MD had most of the apparatus on display in their front yard for many years. They had thought that it was a miniature cannon from the War of 1812. Ms. Cara Roviella Fama, M.A. representing the Anne Arundel County Lost Towns Project contacted our Museum on behalf of Mr. Hamilton Gale, and reported that Mr. Gale would be making the mortar available to our Museum as a gift. It completes a display in our boat room and was donated by that group in memory of the Hamilton Gale Family. We sincerely thank them.

The following account is an explanation and history of the mortar including its invention, and how chance played a part in making it available to our Museum.

In 1791, because of the appalling loss of life due to shipwrecks along the English coasts a Sergeant, John Bell of the British Royal Artillery suggested attaching a line to a mortar ball (cannon ball), and then firing it towards the wrecked ship offshore in order to have a means to pull people to the shore and safety. Although he earned a promotion because of his idea, it proved to be impractical because of its great weight and inaccuracy.

In 1897 another Englishman began experimenting with Bell's idea. His name was Captain G. W. Manby, a merchant marine master. He was able to design a much smaller and lighter mortar that when using a heavier powder charge proved to be quite accurate. Because of the great muzzle velocity, the line almost always broke when the apparatus was fired. He designed a carefully plaited leather pendant which was attached to a recessed groove in the ball to keep the line from parting. The apparatus proved to be so successful and consistent that the English Parliament rewarded him and placed the apparatus which was cast of brass, at several coastal stations. Because of his efforts Royals Life Saving Stations grew in great numbers along the English coasts.

Manby reportedly later died in poverty with even a mortgage on his tombstone.

In 1849 Captain Douglas Ottinger of the U.S. Revenue Marine, (there was no Life-Saving Service until 1878) referred to cast iron mortars as part of the inventory at federally maintained volunteer life-saving stations. These mortars (Manby mortars) were used by the Life-Saving Service until the invention of the more accurate brass Lyle Gun which is also on display in our Museum. He also later called them eprouvettes.

The Manby mortars were still very heavy...(It is all that two grown men can do to lift the one on display in Ocean City). When used at the scene of a wreck the directions called for the sand to be leveled for the mortar base which automatically gave the mortar twenty degrees of elevation which was considered ideal for the 320 yards distance that it was capable of. Captain Ottinger had some improvements made including replacing the leather pendant with a spiraled spring which would allow the whip line to better withstand the shock of the firing.

It is interesting to include here how our Museum acquired its Manby mortars. While vacationing in 1981 in North Carolina, former director and president, Bill Wimbrow came across an old "out of business" tourist cottage complex near Manteo, NC. In the overgrown front yard lay the nearly completely rotted remains of a former life saving service boat wagon, but with all of its hardware intact. Additionally, hanging between two pine trees with the name of the cottages painted on it, was a complete metal surf car. At the old office entrance door there were two Manby mortars embedded in concrete steps as decorations (we didn't know what they were at the time). Trees with a diameter of four inches were growing through the spokes of the wagon. The vacation day trip would prove to be a lucky day for the Ocean City Museum Society.

After locating the owner of the property Bill determined that the elderly gentleman was willing to sell all of the life-saving service artifacts for the sum of \$800.

*Continued on Page 3*



**George Hurley (left) and Bill Wimbrow  
Deliver the surf car and Manby mortars in 1981**

This was the amount that he needed to make it possible for his grand daughter to accompany her school mates on a class trip to France. Bill called me and advised me.....whereupon a hurried directors meeting was held resulting in a check in that amount being written with Museum Society funds.

Next, we persuaded the City Manager of the Town of Ocean City to allow us the use of a flatbed truck equipped with a mechanical arm for the trip to North Carolina. Armed with sledge hammers and chain saws we were off the very next morning.

With the assistance of a very talented wagon maker from Lancaster, PA, the wagon, the surf car, and the Manby mortar have been on display for many years in the "Boat Room" of the Museum. There was just one problem. We have never been able to locate the specialized ball with the line attachment that was used in the mortar. Then, in May of 2006, Ms Fama called the Museum, as previously mentioned, inquiring if we wanted this donation.



Manby Line Throwing Gun on display in the Boat Room of the Museum

She even delivered it in person while visiting Ocean City over Memorial Day weekend. How very fortunate we have been!

In closing it is perhaps noteworthy to cite at least one outstanding instance where the Manby mortar made a difference in history. In January of 1850, the British sailing bark *Ayrshire* bound for New York with 202 Irish immigrants went aground on a sandbar off Squan Beach, New Jersey during a severe north-east storm. With the assistance of the Manby mortar and the new invention, the surf car, 201 persons were saved. The only fatality was a gentleman that was traveling with his sister and her three daughters.

There being no room inside the surf car for all of them, he attempted to cling to the outside of the craft on its ride to the beach and was swept off by the breaking surf and drowned.



## ART DAVIS' MEMORIES...CONTINUED

in the direction it was flying, the altitude, and the number of engines the plane had. The station that Sally and I manned was located about a mile or so north of the town. Mrs. Annie Pruitt Quillen, the wife of Coast Guardsman Samuel Quillen would pick us up at sunrise and deliver us to the lookout and return to get us before school started.

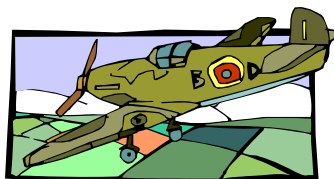
We also served as Junior Air-Raid wardens. When a drill was held, the fire whistle blew and we jumped on our bikes, wearing armbands for ID and carrying a flashlight and a whistle. Our job was to see that everybody got off the streets and that no lights were showing from homes, hotels and businesses. If lights were seen we would blow a whistle to let them know. The coast was kept very dark so that the lights would not guide invaders. Car headlights were painted black except for a narrow slit. The boardwalk shops had no outside lights and you had to enter through a maze of plywood boards that kept the interior lights from showing.

Almost all of the volunteer firemen were off fighting the war. A few older men who were assisted by the Coast Guardsmen, who ran from their station house to the firehouse when the alarm sounded, manned the trucks. My friend, Fish Powell, and I lived close to the firehouse so

we would run to jump on the back of a truck. No one objected and they were glad to have us pull hose and reload it after a fire. I guess you could say that we were the first fire cadets of the Ocean City Volunteer Fire Company.

The older teens were organized into a "minute man" group and trained with wooden rifles to be a defense against invasion. One time our Boy Scout troop was recruited to assist in their training. Our job was to plant a bomb under the old bridge that entered town at Worcester Street. We painted sections of broomsticks red and tied them together to simulate a bomb. We made it to the bridge but the "minute men" found us and chased us all over town.

Fortunately there was never an invasion on this beach.



*The President and Board of Directors take great pleasure in welcoming the following new members:*

### Surfman 2

*Carolynne H. Dorsey*

*Cockeysville, MD*

*Mary N. Revels*

*Dover, DE*

### Surfman 3

*Glenn Brown*

*Berlin, MD*

*James Femdryk*

*Baltimore, MD*

*Todd Waters*

*Glen Burnie, MD*

### Surfman 5

*Geralynn Ocler*

*Selbyville, DE*

### Surfman 6

*Dana Lawman*

*Gambrills, MD*

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## Ocean City Life-Saving Station Museum

Boardwalk at the Inlet  
P. O. Box 603  
Ocean City, MD 21843

Phone: 410-289-4991  
Email: [Sandy@ocmuseum.org](mailto:Sandy@ocmuseum.org)

Email Stories to:  
[Curator@ocmuseum.org](mailto:Curator@ocmuseum.org)

**We're on the Web!**  
[www.ocmuseum.org](http://www.ocmuseum.org)

*Showplace of Ocean City, Maryland*

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## SUMMER PROGRAMS 2006~THANK YOU VOLUNTEERS!

The Ocean City Life-Saving Station Museum's Free Summer Programs will be continuing through the greater part of August, so if you haven't had the chance to participate it is not too late. The programs are held on the Boardwalk outside the Museum at 10:30 a.m. every morning, except Sunday, and will conclude on Friday, August 25th. Our thanks to the dedicated volunteers that have made this popular program such a success.

Members of the Ocean City Beach Patrol are on hand Mondays to provide information on "**Beach Safety**" and to display the newest equipment used in their life-saving profession.

Bob Stevens hosts "**O.C.B.C**" (**Ocean City Before Condominiums**) on Tuesday mornings. Bob shares stories of the history of Ocean City, with a special focus on the women that had a hand in shaping the town. The title of this program was first conceived many years ago by Dot Mumford, a former Ocean City school teacher and Museum Society board member.

Don Schaefer and Joe Britvch of the U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary were kind enough to return again this summer for "Knot Tying", held on Wednesday mornings. Participants in this program are given poles and ropes in order to learn how to tie nautical knots.

Thursday mornings, Sandy Hurley hosts "**All About Sharks**" which features facts on what sets sharks apart from other fish in the sea.

New this year on Friday mornings is "**Storm Warriors**", which is geared for children ages 8 to 14. Tom Wimbrow tells the gripping tale of a young man from Taylorville, Maryland by the name of Thomas Parsons, who in the 1878 decides to leave the family farming business and apply for a job as a surfman at the new Ocean City Life-Saving Station. After hearing what it was like to serve in the Life-Saving Service participants are invited into the Museum to see the rare artifacts that were used by these men. If they feel that they have the right stuff, the youngsters may apply to become a "**Junior Surfman**" and earn a certificate and patch.

Saturdays visitors are invited into the "Aquarium Room" to learn about the critters as they are fed their morning meal.



Don Schaefer with help from Joe Britvch, conducts Knot Tying class for local Cub Scout Troop #261

Mark your calendars...you don't want to miss this! On Thursday, August 24th, in place of "All About Sharks" Environmental Educator, Lois Auer will be hosting "Birds of Prey". She will be bringing 6 non-releasable birds to use in a general raptor ecology lecture.

