

Bivalve Oyster Shipping Sheds and Wharves

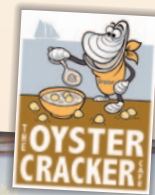
...Today

In 2001, the Bayshore Center at Bivalve purchased six sheds with funds from the Cumberland County Empowerment Zone. One shed was purchased in 1995. By 2011, the sheds had been restored to their 1920s appearance with funds provided by the New Jersey Historic Trust and New Jersey Department of Transportation.

The sheds serve as a “portal of discovery” for the history, culture, and environment of the Delaware Bayshore region; are the home port for New Jersey’s Official Tall Ship, the 1928 schooner *A.J. Meerwald*; house the Delaware Bay Museum; and stand as a regional green practices site, showcasing the use of recycled materials, alternative energy sources and other eco-friendly options.



See the many historic Bivalve Shipping Sheds displays.



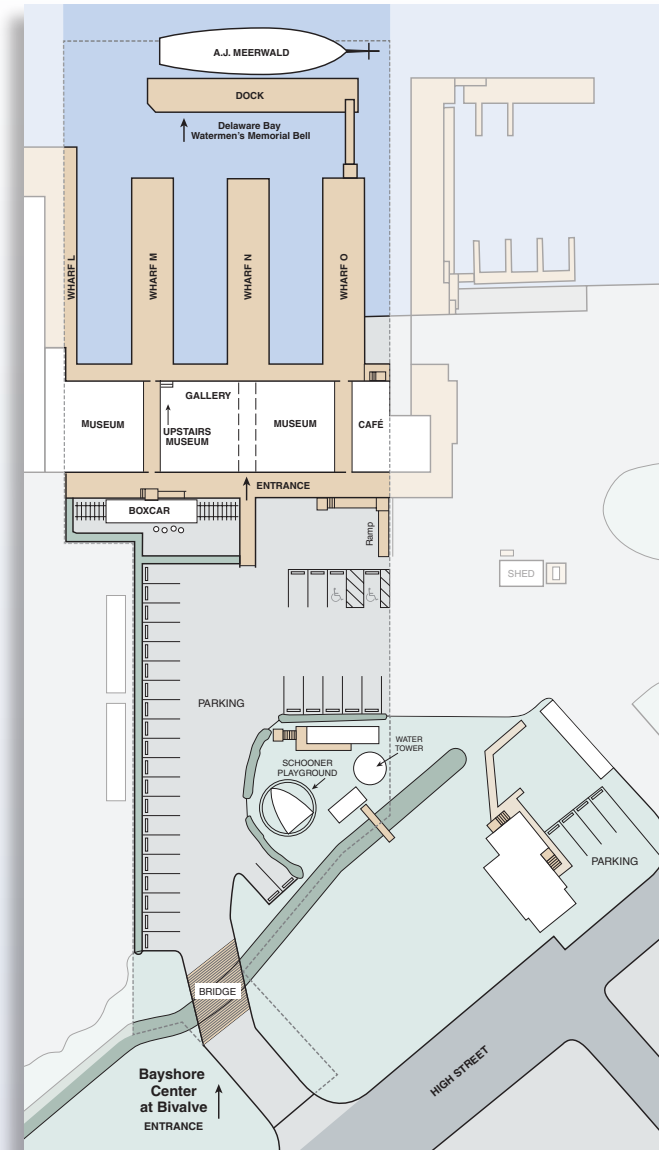
When visiting the Bayshore Center be sure to grab a delicious bite to eat at the Oyster Cracker Cafe. Open seasonally.



The *A.J. Meerwald* sets sail from many ports throughout the region from April through October.

Facility Rental: Plan your meeting or event on the scenic Delaware bayshore in historic Bivalve, NJ. The Oyster Shipping Sheds offer a unique waterfront venue for your business, organization or personal gathering. Call for information: (856) 785-2060.

The mission of the Bayshore Center at Bivalve is to advance the understanding of the human impact on New Jersey’s aquatic environment through education, advocacy, and programming.



WHERE HISTORY AND THE ENVIRONMENT MEET

Bayshore Center at Bivalve

2800 High Street (Bivalve)
Port Norris, New Jersey 08349
(856) 785-2060

www.bayshorecenter.org



Funding for this brochure was made possible with a grant from the Garden State Historic Preservation Trust administered by the New Jersey Historic Trust.

Historic Oyster Shipping Sheds and Wharves at Bivalve, New Jersey

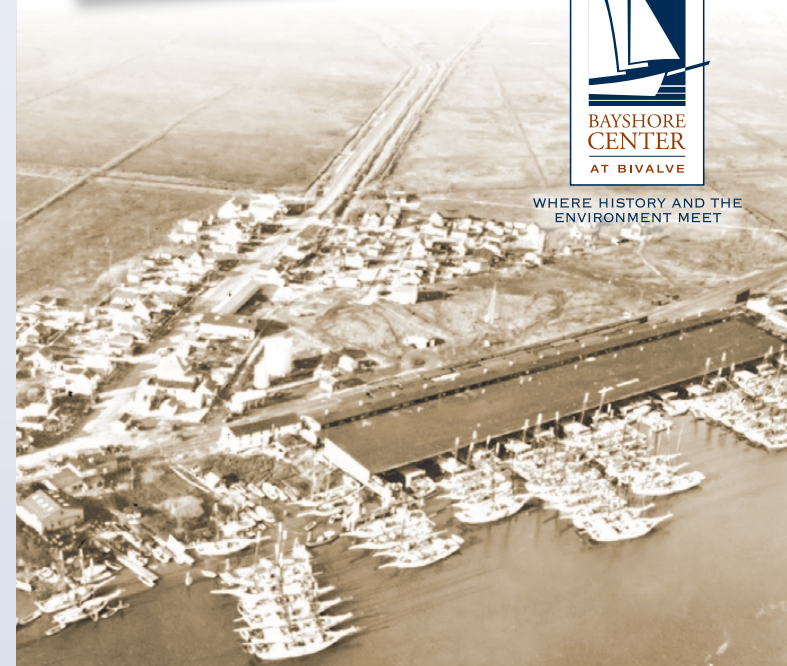
Then...



and now



WHERE HISTORY AND THE ENVIRONMENT MEET



What was this place?

The Central Railroad of New Jersey built this long complex of 30 sheds in 1904 to process oysters that were harvested from the Delaware Bay. The railroad knew that they would reap the monetary rewards of building an infrastructure to move oysters efficiently from the water to the plate. The sheds housed numerous oyster-related businesses and served as a “main street” for the community.

Prior to 1875, oysters were shipped by boats and a long wharf was built parallel to the river. By the 1880s, there were buildings of varying sizes and shapes and a railroad platform.



Oyster Shipping Sheds in Bivalve, NJ.

In 1904, the current structure was constructed.

Throughout the years the roof lines over the wharves and building changed.

Oystermen and packing companies operated out of here, leasing a two-story office/store front and storeroom, half an alleyway, half a wharf and half a boat slip. Other businesses that supported the oyster industry, such as chandleries, meat markets, post office and lumber yards, helped fuel the region’s growth and development.

In 1879-80, 69,800 sacks of oysters were shipped in their shell with an average of 10 freight cars a day. By the mid 1920s, 55-60 million oysters or 700,000 sacks of oysters were shipped annually with an average of 80 freight cars a day.



Oyster Shipping Sheds located in Bivalve, NJ. Buildings to left and railroad tracks are no longer there.

How was this place used?

The public’s appetite for oysters was the driving force to harvest the oyster. The oyster industry was managed much like farming. Oysters grew naturally in the upper Delaware Bay public seedbeds. In the spring, they were transplanted to the privately leased harvest grounds located in the Maurice River Cove. Oysters grew fatter and tastier in the higher salinity waters and were harvested during the winter season.

The practice of floating oysters was banned around 1927 after an outbreak of typhoid fever was blamed on the Delaware Bay oysters. The practice of shucking (removing oyster from shell) was put in place. An almost exclusively African American migrant work force was brought from the Chesapeake Bay to work as shuckers in the packinghouses.

The workers lived in deplorable conditions in company towns such as Shellpile. They were seasonal workers and returned to their homes along the Chesapeake. Eventually, many workers and their families settled permanently in the Bayshore Region. By 1950, the trucking industry controlled the oyster shipping business and the tracks were removed from Bivalve to Mauricetown. This preceded the oyster blight MSX in 1957 that killed 99% of the oysters and destroyed the regional economy.

Left panel: Delaware Bay Museum, gift of Bill Biggs

1. Delaware Bay Museum, gift of Jeanette Higbee Dougherty

2. Delaware Bay Museum, gift of Joseph O. Vanaman

3-7. Photos by Harvey W. Porch, courtesy of the Cumberland County Historical Society

Right panel: Delaware Bay Museum, donor unknown

The Bivalve Shipping Sheds and Wharves were listed on the New Jersey Register of Historic Places in 1995 and on the National Register of Historic Places in 1996.



Oystermen harvested oysters from lower Delaware Bay by a dredge or tongs.



The oysters were off-loaded from schooners into floats along the banks of the Maurice River where they were left for fattening.



They were then forked from the floats into scows (small boats).



The scows were moved under covered wharves at the Shipping Sheds.



Next the oysters were counted into bushel baskets.



The bushel baskets were consolidated into sacks or barrels.



Finally, the sacks or barrels were wheeled though the alleyway and loaded into the awaiting boxcars.

What makes this place important?

The Oyster Shipping Sheds and Wharves...

- were a central location of oyster packing, one of South Jersey’s economic drivers and largest industries in the late 1800s and early 1900s.
- retained much of their historical integrity and remain relevant to the center of Bivalve’s working commercial waterfront.
- are a unique example of a marine industrial structure that provided infrastructure for the marketing of oysters, and for all the additional services necessary to have an economically self-sufficient and successful community.
- were standardized and developed along the railroad line, which preceded commercial strip developments along roads that would later become common in the American landscape.
- are the only surviving early 20th century speculative industrial development in the Delaware Bay area, and possibly the country, built by a railroad company.
- represent an early 20th century regional intermodal transportation hub. The wharves accommodated docking for oyster schooners and a ferry, loading of the oysters into freight cars to be transported to market, and a passenger terminal for the railroad and trolley lines bringing large numbers of workers.
- were a very successful enterprise that spurred the development of the village of Bivalve and had beneficial economical influence on the entire South Jersey economy.

