



Promotional Images
Photo Credit: Jersey Outlaws

Wood and Power on Barnegat Bay: The Ocean County Garvey and the Jersey Outlaws

Adapted from materials supplied by Jersey Outlaws

The Ocean County garvey is one of the boats indigenous to the New Jersey Shore. Two others are the Barnegat Bay Sneak Box and the Sea Bright Skiff. All three boats have played a central role in the history and culture of Ocean County.

The Jersey Outlaws is a non-profit racing organization dedicated to "Keeping the Heritage Alive." They have attempted to re-ignite the feeling of pride, family and great racing that the founders of the garvey and skiff racing felt in the 1950s.

The garvey is a slow moving work boat, sometimes called the pickup truck of Barnegat Bay, powered by wind, oars or poling evolved into the fast paced speed boats of today. Some speculate that the baymen would race to the docks to sell their clams for a slightly higher rate or maybe because they just wanted to get home on a cold day or have a party on a warm one. Others contend that the regional boat builders who made the rum runner boats of prohibition had some influence. In any event, good natured competition became a formal race.

As nearly as can be determined, the first formal racing of the garvey began in 1934. Almost every family at the time owned a garvey of one type or another. The heavy work boats of the time had top speeds of about 35 miles per hour and were propelled by in-board automobile motors up to 150 HP. Down through the years the pastime of designing, building and racing modified garveys became very popular. Little remains of the original work design in these racing garveys, except the rounded bow and the flat bottom stern. One of the few constants is the love of the wooden boats by their owners, drivers and fans.



Garvey Racing on Barnegat Bay in 1961.
Photo Credit: Don Salmons

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The object of scholarly research including the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, DC, the garvey is still a common sight along the inland water-ways of our state. Few people may know that it originated in a small town in Ocean



Garvey Racing on Barnegat Bay in 1961.
Photo Credit: Don Salmons

County, on the Jersey Shore. Jarvis Pharo is credited with “inventing” this very shallow draft, flat-bottomed boat, similar to a scow, but with much more graceful lines. The first recorded settler in West Creek, Ocean County, Jarvis (or Gervas) was born in Lincolnshire, England, and came to America in 1678 on the ship Shields. Jarvis came to Westecunk, the Lenape name for West Creek. In 1705, he built a mill on the creek. For a while the place was called Pharo's Mill. Then the Indian name was adopted and Anglicized to "West Creek."

In response to the early settlers dependence on the various products of the bay for their work and their very sustenance, "Garvey" Pharo designed and built the first of these crafts that became indispensable for the baymen to hunt fish, and obtain clams, oysters, mussels and other shellfish.

The garvey has proven to be a perfect answer for all sorts of bay travel needs and is still in wide use today. Seemingly endless variations of this early design can be found along the Ocean County waterfront. Through the centuries, the garvey has had sails, poles, oars, motors ranging from single cylinder to giant inboards to outboards of various sizes including the historic “row back,” various rudders and tillers and tiller lines, fresh and salt water cooling systems and a virtual catalog of cabins and spray shields. Some made of wood but most of fiberglass, the racing garvey of today is light and graceful, beautiful to watch in motion.

The Jersey Outlaws preserve and promote the heritage of the Barnegat Bay through a series of summer time racing events. Members consist of men and women from both a new generation of racers and those who have been racing for a long time. The race events take place on Sundays between 12 and 4 during the summer. The events are a free family style festival with exciting boat races starting with garveys followed by NJ Speed Skiffs, Ski Boats and now an outboard class. Some of the boats can now move at upwards of 90 miles per hour. The events take place near public docks and parks throughout Ocean County.

For more information please visit the clubs website at Jerseyoutlaws.com or contact Kathleen@jerseyoutlaws.com.



Captain Fred Kalm.
Photo Credit: Tuckerton Seaport