

JOE SPRAGUE

Joe Sprague is the oldest living native of Beach Haven today, born in 1901 on Second Street.

Joe learned the bay from his dad, Jed, and his two older brothers, Chris and Edward. Joe's dad had the Little Island Gun Club off Beach Haven where they did a lot of hunting together. Jed, Chris and Edward guided hunting parties; Joe guided a few. Chris was also a decoy carver. Lou Broome of Beach Haven also taught Joe a lot about the bay.

At 10 and 11 years old, Joe would go down to the bayfront after school and look for the crippled ducks that the hunters couldn't find along the many islands around Beach Haven. Sometimes he found many ducks this way.

When Joe got older, he was able to go with his family out to Little Island by rowing his sneakbox from Beach Haven. They would hunt for brant, broadbills and black ducks.

Joe had a sneakbox that was built by Alex Parker of Parkertown in about 1940, which he said was "the best sneakbox I have ever had." His favorite shotgun is a 12-gauge Browning semiautomatic.

In Joe's younger years, summertime meant that baseball season was here. Joe pitched for the Beach Haven team and was known as the "Iron Man." At the age of 25, Joe pitched two complete games and won two days in a row; he still batted over .300 for the season. He also played professional baseball in Virginia and West Virginia.

Joe went into the restaurant business right after the war, when he purchased the diner at the Beach Haven docks. In 1949, he built a new and bigger diner there. In 1959, he built one in Barnegat Light and then sold the business in 1962.

Now Joe enjoys going scratch raking for clams with his nephew Jim at the Goose Bar, "just to catch a few for my friends and neighbors." You might also run into Joe at the Long Beach Island Historical Museum at Engleside and Beach avenues on Monday nights during the summer, talking about the history that he knows of Long Beach Island and telling his favorite jokes.