

Historic Preservation Award: LBI Historical Association Fisherman's Cottage

By Maria Scandale

Meticulous renovation of the Fisherman's Cottage in Beach Haven has earned the Long Beach Island Historical Association the 2023 Ocean County Historic Preservation Award. The project was a concerted multi-year effort by local historians, builders, and interested members of the community.

Museum narrative says the cottage is exemplary of a home of the "Baymen," "who played an integral part in the early development of Long Beach Island."

"Their knowledge of our local waters learned as fishermen, crabbers and oystermen made them ideal workers for the US Lifesaving Service, captains of our charter boats, market gunners and duck hunting guides. With no bridges to the mainland, they were responsible for transporting all the materials used for the early houses and hotels and the gravel and straw for the streets. They then branched out and became the labor to build the houses and streets and to dig artesian wells to bring LBI its fresh water. 'The 'Baymen' are to be admired not only for their diversity of skills but also for their keen sense of ingenuity which they used to support their families when living on the island year-round was a challenge."

The Cottage, now at 136 Center Street, journeyed from its original lot on 220 Second Street in 2008 when the Historical Association agreed to relocate it to a rear lot behind the museum and restore it, to save it from demolition.

Association President Ron Marr added that the primary motivation for saving the house was that its historic type that has nearly completely disappeared from the island, as a result of extensive remodeling and teardowns.

"You can't rebuild a house without a community."

The Cottage was owned since the early 2000s by the late Julius Robinson, a lawyer in Beach Haven, and one of the founders of the Historical Association. With his death, it was offered to the Long Beach Island Historical Association by his son Jody.

Originally built around 1880 as a 1.5 story two-room house, it was enlarged in about the year 1923 by a two story addition with porches, electricity, running water, and a bathroom. The house is typical of a "vernacular" or workingman's house of the period 1910-1930, after the addition of indoor plumbing and electricity in 1923. It had never been significantly modernized since.



Fisherman's Cottage exterior after renovations.

Photo credit: Long Beach Island Historical Association.

From the beginning, donations of time and money from the community were integral to restoring the cottage. Continued, dedicated support through challenges proved that the project was embraced by the community.

Fisherman's Cottage continued....

"We had, between cash donations and donations-in-kind, well over \$300,000 put into the Fisherman's Cottage by over 300 or 400 different people," thanked Marr. "Almost every major contractor that worked with us either gave us the work at cost or at a deep discount, so there is a lot of hidden value built in."

The historical association president went so far as to say that the restoration couldn't have been done without the support of the contractors and the community of Long Beach Island. "You can't rebuild a house without a community."

"Like Odysseus' journey home, the cottage restoration was repeatedly interrupted by lack of time, lack of money, and the weather – Superstorm Sandy," the Association accounts. "Sandy caused no damage in the cottage, which had been placed on a new, raised foundation; but did divert attention and resources to restoring Long Beach Island and individuals' houses. The historic LBI Museum building at 129 Engleside Avenue suffered more than \$120,000 of damage from Sandy."

By 2018, the exterior of the cottage had been completely restored and landscaped. The interior work started in 2020 and was fully completed by the spring of 2022. In the fall of 2021 the interior of the Cottage was set up as an exhibit.

The last owners in the 1950s-60s before Julius Robinson were the Dolans. Their children visited the Cottage on Saturday, Nov. 27, 2021 when the Cottage was opened to the public for the first time.

Renovations between 2008 and its opening were extensive. There were structurally unsound portions - front porch, rear kitchen, bathroom - that had to be removed.

Footings were poured for a new foundation matching the footprint of the old one. The new front porch was constructed using specially cut rafters to match the original. Old shingles and clapboard were replaced with plywood sheathing and cedar shingles. New custom windows, a new roof, repaired and capped chimneys, and modern utilities are on the list of many more repairs that were seen through.

Marr chronicled, "Three people were the main coordinators of various stages. Jeannette Lloyd and the historic community in Beach Haven identified that the house was available and got the Robinsons to donate it to us, and that was followed by Jamie Ciardelli, cabinet maker and contractor who was President of the historical association at that time. With his contacts in the construction industry, he served as general contractor for the entire project. At that time I was vice president. Superstorm Sandy hit not too long after we started this project. Jamie's house and business being flooded, I took over as President and administrator coordinator."

The historic attraction is open to the museum's Walking Tours Tuesdays and Fridays from end of June until Labor Day, and open at other times for groups by appointment, and special events celebrating the season.

Fisherman's Cottage interior exhibit after renovations.
Photo credit: Long Beach Island Historical Association.

