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## STORIES of New Jersey

For a long time rescues depended on volunteers whose larders were enriched and shacks adorned by gleanings from the frequent wrecks. There are stories of looting cargo and of false lights to lure ships into dangerous waters, but these are only scattered instances in a long saga of lives risked and people saved.

The first step toward organizing a lifesaving service in New Jersey came May 31, 1799, when the legislature authorized the sheriffs of the coastal counties to take charge of wrecks. Nine years later another law directed the County Courts of Common Pleas to appoint Commissioners of Wrecks to supervise lifesaving operations. The salaries of these officials were paid by the insurance companies. When the British ship *Europa* was wrecked off the present Elberon section of Long Branch in 1839 the captain and 108 passengers were "warm in their praise of the inhabitants of Deal and Long Branch for the fearless promptness displayed in saving their lives and the humane manner in which they were sheltered while in extreme distress."

The first successful attempt to rescue persons in groups was made by Wreck Commissioner John S. Foreman in 1838 when the packet *Henry Clay* was wrecked off Mantoloking. The crew got a hawser ashore, where it was set up and equipped with a pulley traveler from which a large tub was suspended. The 270 passengers were removed by twos and threes.

During the same year the sloop *Adelaide* capsized off Long Beach Island. The crew was lost, but the captain's daughter crawled into the hold before the water rose and found enough air to keep alive. The vessel drifted on to the beach. Two men coming near her at low tide heard a sound within the hull. Rushing for axes, they quickly cut a hole through the heavy timbers and took out the girl, who soon recovered. A village near where the rescue occurred is commemoratively called Ship Bottom.

In 1848 Joseph Gaskell, who had a long list of rescues to his credit, saved the entire crew of the schooner *Harriet Fuller*. He made the rescues off Absecon Beach in a small gunning skiff in the dead of night. On a bitter January day the brig *Austros* foundered off Absecon. Some of the crew, working clumsily with numbed fingers, lashed themselves to the rigging of the doomed ship. From the shore seven men, stripped of their outer clothing, drove a little boat into the sea as the icy snow whipped about them. Twice tons of water rolled over the tiny craft. Bailing furiously, they managed to stay afloat, pick ten men from the sea and carry them to safety.

This work was done without thought of reward. In 1861 a wreck commissioner reported that his crews had saved 800 lives altogether and that the only pay offered by any rescued passenger was one gold piece, which was refused.

Many lives were lost in those days because it was impossible to launch a rescue boat in the high seas. Watchers on shore stood helpless while a ship was battered to pieces but a short distance away. A series of experiments by William A. Newell led to the successful use of a mortar discharging a ball to which a line had been secured. Newell was sent to Congress in the hope that he might obtain Federal help. In January 1848 he introduced a resolution asking financial aid for the volunteer lifesavers of New Jersey, and in August, over much opposition, an amendment to the Lighthouse Bill was passed.