



Film on Amagansett Life-Saving Station Featured on Treasures of New York

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by Pat Rogers

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AMAGANSETT, NY

A little bit of the Hamptons history will be revealed when a documentary airs on television today. *Ocean Keeper* premieres on WLIW21 tonight (Sat) at 9:30 p.m. It premiered on THIRTEEN on Nov 1. It will be rebroadcast today on THIRTEEN at 1:30 p.m. *Ocean Keeper* will rebroadcast on WLIW21 on Nov 13 at 2:30 a.m., on Nov 20 at 10:30 p.m. and on Nov 24 at 3:30 a.m., according to www.thirteen.org.

The documentary tells the three-part story of the Amagansett building that was constructed in 1902 as a Life-Saving Service Station. In those days, oceans and waters were watched from a network of buildings and lighthouses set alongside the coasts and waterways. In 1915, the U.S. Coast Guard took over the Life-Saving Service Stations. During its 44 years, thousands of people were saved by those working from the Amagansett-based station. In 1944, it was decommissioned and left abandoned for 22 years.



Photo by Pure Newt L.L.C.

In 1966, the house itself was in need of rescue from impending demolition. Help arrived when writer Joel Carmichael purchased the house for a dollar, moved it a few blocks away and transformed the building into a private residence, according to a film release.

The house became a forum for the Carmichael family in summers spent in Amagansett. Carmichael and his first and second wives were each steeped in the cultural communities in New York City, said his daughter Isabel Carmichael. She was one of the producers of the film and also appears in the film during an interview.

Visitors to the Amagansett house included art critic Harold Rosenberg, artists Willem de Kooning and Costantino Nivola, cartoonist Saul Steinberg and writer Dwight Macdonald, according to a film release.

It was a natural that writers and artists would visit and spend time at the house as they were part of the wide circle of friends surrounding Joel Carmichael, she said.

“My father was extremely charming, educated, handsome and adorable,” she said. “He was impossible, too. He drew people to him. He was a writer and he knew writers and artists from New York. When they came here, they came by and spent time at the house.”

Tea at 5 p.m. was a beloved tradition in the summer, said Carmichael, who was a teenager at the time. Friends would routinely stop by for tea, conversation and sometimes challenging intellectual discourse, she recalled.

In 2006, the house was donated to the East Hampton Historical Society after Joel Carmichael’s death. Its current incarnation aims to preserve and present its historic role as life savers for those in peril on the ocean. The house has been moved back to its original location.

Ocean Keeper premiered at the Hamptons International Film Festival on Oct 7, 2012. The documentary was accepted to become part of the Treasures of New York series produced by WNET, the parent company of THIRTEEN and WLIW21. The film is a good match for the Treasures of New York series, said Diane Masciale, Executive Producer, Local Programming for WLIW 21 / WNET.

Each documentary in the Treasures of New York portrays the life swirling about a specific location and its transformation through history. Each building or cultural location is selected because of its impact on the culture and and community in the New York Metropolitan area, said Masciale.

There are currently 13 segments in the Treasures of New York series, said Masciale. Films spotlight The Roosevelt House, Lincoln Center, Park Avenue Armory, Pratt Institute, art in the New York City subway station, five iconic city parks and more.

Ocean Keeper is first Long Island building to be included in the series. To see a trailer, click play. The running time is 26.30 minutes.

If Masciale has her druthers, Long Island locations could rival the number of New York City buildings. Her picks would include the Art Barge, the Parrish Art Museum, Usdan Center for the Creative & Performing Arts, Old Westbury Gardens, The Cradle of Aviation Museum, the Planting Fields Arboretum State Historic Park and others.

Each film mixes historical footage, interviews with experts and those who have experienced the location. The documentaries often surprise those who know the location but aren’t aware of the rich stories and history that flow from the single locations.



Photo by Pure Newt, L.L.C.

“The response has been positive to the series,” said Masciale. “People love it.”

Isabel Carmichael said *Ocean Keeper* received a positive response when it premiered at the Hamptons International Film Festival. She hopes that the film will generate interest and donations to restore the building to its historic past.

This summer, their first fundraiser featured an enactment of one of the historic legends revealed in

Ocean Keeper: The evening when four Nazi saboteurs were discovered by coastguardsman John Cullen during a nightly patrol in front of the station in 1942.

“The rumor is that they knew at the train station that day that the men weren’t from around here,” said Carmichael. “They supposedly asked when the trains were running. Everyone from Amagansett would have know that and wouldn’t have to had asked. There was also something about them that raised suspicion that there weren’t nice people. I don’t know if this is true but that’s the story that went around.”

The dramatic reenactment prompted builder Ben Krupinski to donate windows and the labor to install them for the restoration project, said Carmichael. The restoration project is currently under the auspices of the East Hampton Historical Society. For details or donations, visit www.easthamptonhistory.org

BASIC FACTS: *Ocean Keeper* was directed by Eileen Olivieri Torpey. The film was produced by Deborah Carmichael, Isabel Carmichael and Eileen Olivieri Torpey. *Ocean Keeper* is part of the Treasures of New York series produced by WNET.

For details, visit www.oceankeeperthemovie.com or www.thirteen.org/programs/treasures-of-new-york.

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The Amagansett Life-Saving Station is located at 160 Atlantic Avenue, Amagansett, NY 11930.

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