In 2001, the Bayshore Center at Bivalve purchased six sheds with funds from the Cumberland County Empowerment Zone. One shed was purchased in 1995. By 2011, the sheds had been restored to their 1920s appearance with funds provided by the New Jersey Historic Trust and New Jersey Department of Transportation.

The sheds serve as a “portal of discovery” for the history, culture, and environment of the Delaware Bayshore region; are the home port for New Jersey’s Official Tall Ship, the 1928 schooner A.J. Meerwald; house the Delaware Bay Museum and Folklife Center; and stand as a regional green practices site, showcasing the use of recycled materials, alternative energy sources and other eco-friendly options.

Facility Rental

Plan your meeting or event on the scenic Delaware bayshore in historic Bivalve, NJ. The newly restored Oyster Shipping Sheds offer a unique waterfront venue for your business, organization or personal gathering. Call for information: (856) 785-2060.
Oyster Shipping Sheds in Bivalve, NJ.

How was this place used?

The public's appetite for oysters was the driving force to harvest the oyster. The oyster industry was managed much like farming. Oysters grew naturally in the upper Delaware Bay public seedbeds. In the spring, they were transplanted to the privately leased harvest beds located in the Maurice River Cove. Oystermen grew fatter and tastier in the higher salinity waters and were harvested during the winter season.

The practice of floating oysters was banned around 1927 after an outbreak of typhoid fever was blamed on the Delaware Bay oysters. The practice of shucking (removing oyster from shell) was put in place. An almost exclusively African American migrant work force was imported from the Chesapeake Bay to work as shuckers in the packinghouses.

The workers lived in deplorable conditions in company towns such as Shellpile. They were seasonal workers and returned to their homes along the Chesapeake. Eventually, many workers and their families settled permanently in the Bayshore Region. By 1950, the trucking industry controlled the oyster shipping business and the tracks were removed from Bivalve to Mauriceport. This preceded the oyster blight MSX in 1957 that killed 99% of the oysters and destroyed the regional economy.

Bivalve Shipping Sheds and Wharves were listed on the New Jersey Register of Historic Places in 1995 and on the National Register of Historic Places in 1996.

What makes this place important?

The Oyster Shipping Sheds and Wharves...

- were a central location of oyster packing, one of South Jersey's economic drivers and largest industries in the late 1800s and early 1900s.
- retained much of their historical integrity and remain relevant to the center of Bivalve's working commercial waterfront.
- are a unique example of a marine industrial structure that provided infrastructure for the marketing of oysters, and for all the additional services necessary to have an economically self-sufficient and successful community.
- were standardized and developed along the railroad line, which preceded commercial strip developments along roads that would later become common in the American landscape.
- are the only surviving early 20th century speculative industrial development in the Delaware Bay area, and possibly the country, built by a railroad company.
- represent an early 20th century regional intermodal transportation hub. The wharves accommodated docking for oyster schooners and a ferry, loading of the oysters into freight cars to be transported to market, and a passenger terminal for the railroad and trolley lines bringing large numbers of workers.
- were a very successful enterprise that spurred the development of the village of Bivalve and had beneficial economical influence on the entire South Jersey economy.

By the 1880s, there were buildings of varying sizes and shapes and a railroad platform. In 1879-80, 69,800 sacks of oysters were shipped in their shell with an average of 10 freight cars a day. Prior to 1875, oysters were shipped by boats and a long wharf was built parallel to the river. By the 1880s, there were buildings of varying sizes and shapes and a railroad platform.

In 1879-80, 69,800 sacks of oysters were shipped in their shell with an average of 10 freight cars a day. By the mid-1870s, 55-60 million oysters or 700,000 sacks of oysters were shipped annually with an average of 80 freight cars a day. What was this place?

In 1904, the current structure was constructed. Throughout the years the roof lines over the wharves and building changed. Oystermen and packing companies operated out of here, leasing a two-story office/store front and storeroom, and building changed. What was this place?

Oystermen harvested oysters from lower Delaware Bay by a dredge or tongs.

The oysters were off-loaded from schooners into floats along the banks of the Maurice River where they were left for fattening.

They were then forked from the floats into scows (small boats).

The scows were moved under covered wharves at shipping sheds.

The bushel baskets were consolidated into sacks or barrels.

Finally, the sacks or barrels were wheeled though the alleyway and loaded into the awaiting boxcars.

The workers lived in deplorable conditions in company towns such as Shellpile. They were seasonal workers and returned to their homes along the Chesapeake. Eventually, many workers and their families settled permanently in the Bayshore Region. By 1950, the trucking industry controlled the oyster shipping business and the tracks were removed from Bivalve to Mauriceport. This preceded the oyster blight MSX in 1957 that killed 99% of the oysters and destroyed the regional economy.

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