

May - October 2012

Oshawa Museum

THE SEA SHANTY EXHIBIT

EXPLORING OSHAWAS RELATIONSHIP WITH LAKE ONTARIO

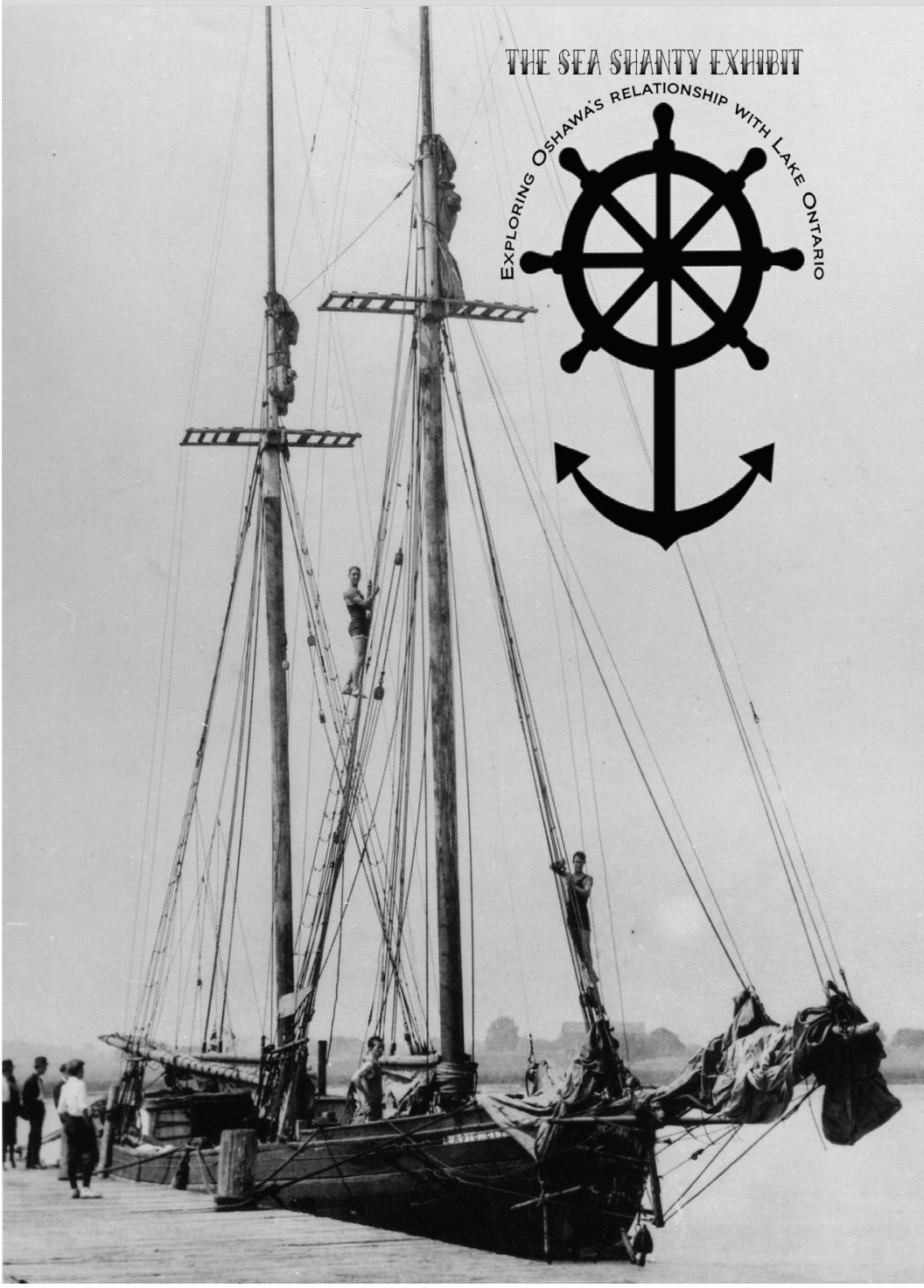


Exhibit Sponsors and Partners



Thank you to the following individuals:

Linda Bazowsky

Mr. Eric Glenholmes



WHY ARE SHIPS CALLED 'SHE'?

Ships are referred to as a 'She' or a female name because of the Romans. Ships have a feminine possession and it is thought that this is where the term comes from as all Roman ships were a 'she'.





Curator's Remarks by *Melissa Cole*, Curator

The mainstay of research is obtaining source information that can be verified. When researching 19th century shipping there is an abundance of source data. This includes newspapers of the day such as the *Toronto Telegram*, *Oshawa Vindicator*, and *The Kingston News*. There are *Great Lakes Vessel Registries*, *Inland Lloyds Lake Vessel Registry* and *Great Lakes Database*, many of these resources can be viewed directly online! Through my own research and research of others including Ken Crichton, student volunteer Shawn Perron and Robert Stephenson - who was an Oshawa Diver and amateur ship-wreck researcher. Mr Stephenson spent much of his time diving in the Great Lakes seeking out the next ship wreck. All of this research has been compiled to create the exhibit, *The Sea Shanty: Exploring Oshawa's Relationship with Lake Ontario*.

More than a half-century before the advent of the automobile, sailors on the Great Lakes already knew Oshawa had a nickname. It was dubbed the "Manchester of Canada". As a growing centre of industry and commerce, it was essential that its manufactured goods would quickly be transported to markets elsewhere. Elsewhere meaning population centres on both sides of Lake Ontario. Prior to railroads and good roads that meant sailing ships!

That is why more than 150 years ago the Village that would become Oshawa had an enviable reputation for building ships and vessels that could carry the area's produce and goods to market. Nature left a perfect place to build sailing ships – that place was the natural bay at the mouth of the Oshawa Creek that was simply known as "The Harbour".

The Oshawa Waterfront and harbour in particular have always been, and continue, to be significant for the community of Oshawa.



A SUBAQUEOUS CEMETERY

“In perfect preservation today are the many ships which have gone down and rest upon the bottom; very probably too, the bodies of passengers upon these ships, confined within the hulls so as to prevent them rising to the surface and thus getting air, are there yet, and in perfect preservation for the waters in the depths are always cool and preservative..... were some expert diver yet to go ghost like among these cabins, his nerves would be upset with the evidence of human tragedies there to be seen so vividly before him.”

The extract above was taken from Thomas Conant's book entitled, ***Life in Canada***. The quote above refers to Lake Ontario - one of the vessels Thomas Conant had in mind was the loss of the Gunboat SPEEDY in Lake Ontario.



Provincial Plaque, County of Northumberland, Located in Presqu'île Provincial Park



Artifacts on display in the section, *A Subaqueous Cemetery*, of the exhibit were recovered by Robert Stephenson, an amateur shipwreck researcher and Lake Ontario diver. While in the RCAF in England during the Second World War, Mr. Stephenson did some experimental diving as a hobby. Ship wreck material were not the only items he recovered from Lake Ontario shoreline around Oshawa/Whitby, he discovered rifles, safes, cars and the *Hon. Gordon D. Conant Plaque* that had been stolen in August of 1966 from Lakeview Park. He found it a week later in 26 feet of water in the Oshawa Harbour.

Robert Stephenson lived in Oshawa on Stone Street where he had a small museum that he called *The Sea Shanty Museum*. This is where he showcased the many treasures (ship wreck material) that he discovered along the shores of Lake Ontario in Oshawa. Once he decided to close his *Sea Shanty Museum* - which our exhibition is named after - the artifacts were donated to the *Oshawa Community Museum* and the *Bruce County Museum & Archives* in Southampton, Ontario.





A SUBAQUEOUS CEMETERY



During HELEN's stone-hooking days, her side-pivoting centre board allowed her to operate in shallow waters along the Lake Ontario shoreline. With this advantage she was able to retrieve larger boulders by moving closer to them and hooking them with her **stone tongs** which resemble ice-tongs.



Part of a clay pipe that was used by Captain Goldring.

“Records indicated that Captain John Goldring was a clay pipe smoker”.

- *Robert Stephenson, Goldring Files*



Driven by a crude **cast iron propellor**, 22" in diameter, the HELEN could operate effectively during rough conditions on the lake, while her counterparts anchored off-shore riding out a blow. It was HELEN's versatility that ensured her historical distinction of being the last stone hooker to operate on the Great Lakes.

The Search for HELEN

In the spring of 1964, diver Robert Stephenson began his search for the HELEN. A massive, legendary boulder, sitting on the Darlington shoal, about 300 yards from the shore was his focal point of the search. In 1964, when diving in this area, in 18 feet of water, Mr. Stephenson could sit and rest on this boulder with all his upper body out of the water.

At the base of the boulder, bits and pieces of marine hardware were found, as well as parts of present day motorboats and fittings from old steam vessels. A long trail of heavy items was located by Bob, leading into deeper water in a south westerly direction. There were splicing thimbles, iron spikes, stud-link chain, and one piece of iron on which was an encouraging message...the word "SUCCESS".

Years passed...he found he had spent over 200 hours underwater searching. Finally one day a length of wire was located on the bottom, again leading to the south west. It crossed a channel that was 10 feet wide and about 6 feet deep. Wallowing under 3 feet of algae Bob found a small "Belaying pin", a wooden "Sheave", several large unidentified fittings and finally a wire led through a collection of "mast hoops" and other rigging parts to the edge of a 20 foot drop. Peering through the dark water below was a number of massive timbers pointing up through the green gloom. It was the HELEN!!!!



*Robert Stephenson with
Helen's centre board.
Oshawa Community Archives
File 2504*



Oliver Mowat

The three masted schooner Oliver Mowat was built in 1873 at Mill Haven, Ontario. She was 116 feet in length. She was used for coal transportation. The Oliver Mowat hauled coal to Oshawa for many years. This image shows the horse drawn coal cars, the freight shed and ticket office are also seen in this early image of Oshawa's harbour



The three-masted schooner OLIVER MOWAT, coal laden, from Oswego for Bowmanville, is hard ashore about a mile and a half east of Oshawa harbor, the east side of Bluff Point. She went

aground in a blinding snowstorm and was first noticed by a Grand Trunk train crew. The upper portion of her deck is above water and the seas are washing over her. The crew sent a note ashore in a bottle saying that they were lashed to the rigging and in imminent danger and asking for help. Mayor Fowke telephoned to Toronto for a lifesaving crew to go out to the stranded vessel. The storm has ceased and the seas are going down. The OLIVER MOWAT is owned and sailed by Capt. George Robertson, of Port Hope. The mayor wired for a special train from Port Hope to bring the lifesaving crew from there. The Port Hope crew finally rescued all on board.

- Detroit Free Press, November 29, 1905

The Oliver Mowat eventually sunk at Duck Island on September 1, 1921 after colliding with the steamer Key West.



Bringing the Ships from shore to the Lake

The large anchor that sits at the entrance of the *Whitby Yacht Club* was donated to them by the *Oshawa Yacht Club* when they dissolved. It was discovered off Oshawa in August of 1934, a year when Lake Ontario had gone down further than it had ever dropped before.

It has been said that the anchor may have been used as a draw-anchor or great kedge for heaving vessels off at Oshawa. The anchor had been permanently placed at a distance from the old pier, so that any vessel caught with the wind on-shore could run a line to it, heave it off the pier or it may have been used for the purpose of getting ships off the beach and into the water during Oshawa's vessel building era.

The vessels built on the Oshawa lakefront had to be launched into the open lake. Skids would be built down to the water's edge and continued out for a short distance and well greased. Then lines would be carried from the windlass and capstan of the newly built vessel to the Big Anchor (or maybe numerous smaller ones). With wedges and pries she would be inched down the sloping ways until she struck the waters edge. Then, with vast heaving and grunting of crews on capstan bars and more men hauling tackles made fast to the hawsers leading to the anchors, the vessel would be warped off the ways and out of the mooring.

Whether it was used as a kedge anchor or to launch new vessels, this anchor is an important artifact to remind us of our community's significant marine heritage.



Port Oshawa: Ship to Shore

In 1840, the first efforts were made to develop the Oshawa Harbour when the pier and break waters were constructed by the Sydenham Harbour Company. The Harbour Masters at this time were George A. Mothersill, the first Harbour Master (1841-1848), Joseph Wood (1849), and Thomas (Elder) Henry (1849-1854). Mr. Henry was also one of the founders and a President of the Harbour Company.

Exports between the years 1844 and 1850 were flour, pork, ashes, oatmeal, whiskey and many other items, including lumber from the saw mill operated by Daniel Conant and David Annis. Shipbuilding was being done on the east side of the harbour, by David Annis, Daniel Conant and James and Abram Farewell. These men are said to have built and launched several ships, namely the ALLIES, LORD DURHAM, CALEDONIA and PAROGON at the Oshawa Harbour.

Some of the residents who lived in Oshawa were also Captains, who sailed out of the harbour, including: Joseph Moore, Daniel Conant, and James and Abram Farewell. By 1853, Port Oshawa (the Oshawa Harbour) was established as a clearing and warehousing port by an Order-in Council. In 1878, the Sydenham Harbour Company became the Oshawa Harbour Company with a capital stock of \$50,000.

*CURATORS NOTE: As you tour through the **Port Oshawa: Ship to Shore** section of the exhibit - there is a description of each vessel that includes Class. On the following page (9) you will find the system that was used to classify the vessels.*

Source: 1897 Inland Lloyds Lake Vessel Register



MEMORIES OF CAPTAIN GEORGE FAREWELL AND HIS SHIP THE “MAGDALA”

Acheus Moody Farewell, fourth child and namesake of the original settler of 1800, married Wealthy Shipman and had a family of six, of whom the eldest son, George, is best known by Oshawa people. George was the owner and captain of many vessels that did noble service on the Great Lakes. The story of the MAGDALA is probably the most noteworthy. My husband and I visited George's son George, nicknamed "Cap", who lived on Harmony Road S. He was at the time in his nineties, tall and straight and slim. He told us about the MAGDALA. When we children were very young and taken down to Oshawa Harbour for a picnic,



we often played on the bare ribs of an old wreck which was beached in seasons of low water levels. Inquiring at home, I was told by my mother that it was a Farewell boat that was wrecked in a storm off Guy's Point and had washed ashore. Of that storm and wreck, "Cap" George said that it was a terrible night, they had a full load of coal for Oshawa from Cleveland, the wind tore everything loose - even the light on the point - and she grounded. No one was lost. Yes, "Cap" was one of the crew and his father, the Captain, was at the wheel. He added that his father never sailed again. ".....the old man was ready for retirement but twas a sad way to end such a successfully long life on the water".

- *Farewells of East Whitby,
By Llewella Bray, 1978*
Photo centre: "Cap" circa 1950



TALES OF BURIED TREASURE, 1812 ARMY CHEST & POTS OF GOLD IN OLD PORT OSHAWA!

Oshawa's mysterious treasure ship was the British Sloop MARY ANN. During the War of 1812, the MARY ANN was transferring the military paychest from Kingston to York at the head of Lake Ontario where a post was maintained at Burlington Heights. It was pursued by American vessels, and, being unable to fight them, put into the pond west of the present-day Oshawa Water Pumping station. Here, the MARY ANN was grounded and the crew carried the paychest ashore and buried it. The Americans followed the vessel and burned it, but the paychest was never recovered.

CURATORS NOTE: Some believe that the strong box was dropped overboard into the shoreline shallows or murky waters of the marsh. A popular theory after World War I was - by hiding the Sloop behind the tall trees fringing the marsh the MARY ANN's crew managed to evade their pursuers. It was discovered the following day the vessel became hopelessly marsh bound, the hull having blocked the out-flow of water from the marsh, thus creating waves and the beach channel was filled with shifting sand! The strong box was then buried in the vicinity of the marsh to be retrieved later.

CAN YOU TELL ME WHERE TO BUY SHINGLES?

Spanish milled dollars and Mexican dollars were general currency in Canada at the time of the War of 1812 and it is possible that a hoard of these had been buried in Dunbar's Hill. New England counterfeiters came over after the War of 1812 and set up their 'mints' in the dense woods of Lower Canada, making counterfeit Mexican Dollars. Supposively, a Montreal Bank accepted \$4000 of the "queer". For years after strangers would come to the Oshawa area on the hunt for left-over coins. Their password was, *Can you tell me where to buy shingles?* - *Schooner Days CCLXX, C.H.J. SNIDER*



Important Ports for Oshawa

Kingston:

One of the oldest cities in Upper Canada began as a French fort in 1673 and was later given to the British. Ships were made and repaired here and exports included metal items for the railway industry and small textiles. The Rideau Canal to Ottawa was completed in 1832 and products like flour, textiles and lumber travelled back and forth to provide for the people.

Oswego:

Located on the South shore of Lake Ontario and was settled in 1722 by fur traders. Fort Ontario was constructed for the American Revolution. The Oswego branch of the Erie Canal opened in 1829 and from the 1830s to the 1870s, Oswego grew. Items shipped included flour, grain, iron, salt, and cornstarch. They accepted peas, barley and hops from Oshawa for use in the local distilleries.

Rochester:

This was also located on a section of the Erie Canal and items would arrive in the Port and would be moved by teams of oxen or by barge into the city. In 1838 Rochester was the world's largest producer of flour and the locals traded for items like lumber as well as barley and butter.

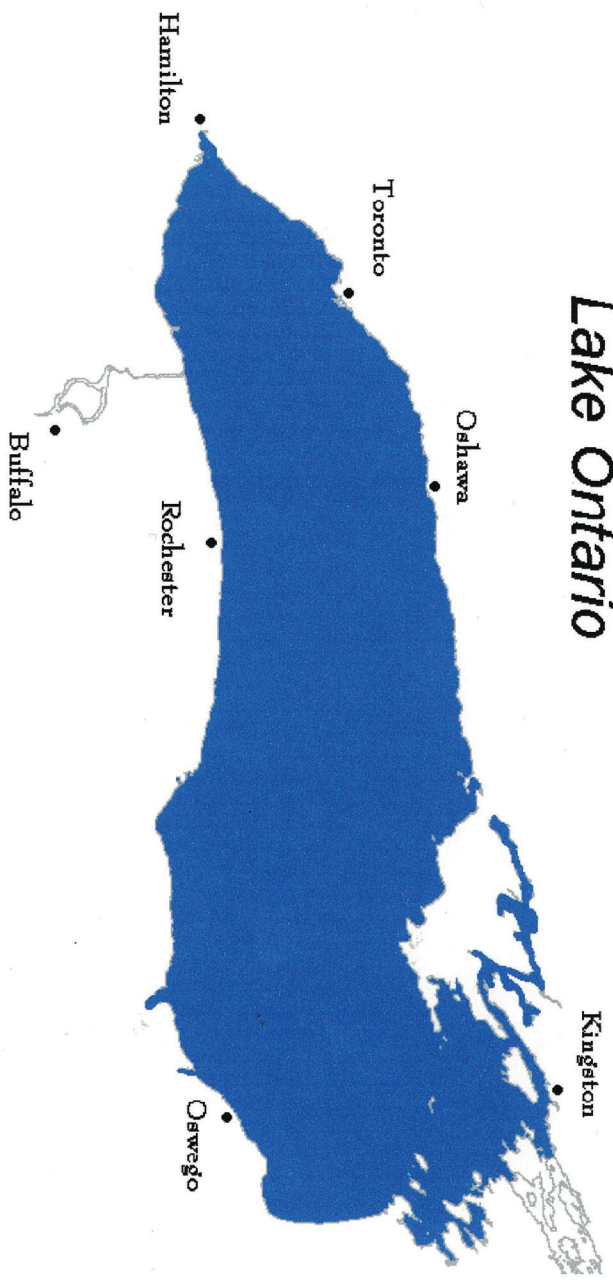
Buffalo:

Buffalo lies at the eastern end of Lake Erie near the mouth of the Niagara River, which connects to Lake Ontario. It was first settled in the late-18th century. Growth was slow until the city became the western terminus of the Erie Canal some forty years later. Buffalo became important for its grain and its industrial products. Items that were imported included lumber, flour and luxury products from large Lake towns.

Hamilton:

In 1827 a channel was cut to link Burlington Bay with Lake Ontario; this improved its marine transportation giving it direct access to the Lake. Tobacco, beer, textiles and iron products were exported to markets along the St. Lawrence Seaway and its strategic centre between York and Niagara-on-the-Lake (Newark, once the capital of Upper Canada.)

Lake Ontario





Oshawa-on-the-Lake

Lakeview Park was a popular location for the citizens of Oshawa to spend a summer's day. Many families would come and relax along the sandy beach and others rented cottages during the summer months. A lot of people who rented these cottages made them their homes year round and they formed part of the community that lived along the lakefront and many referred to the area as Oshawa-on-the-Lake. Other landmarks in the area included Barnharts, where canoes and rowboats were rented, the Ocean Wave, the Buffalo, the Jube, and the many concession stands that were open along the beach.



Oshawa-on-the-Lake Postcard, *Oshawa Community Archives Post Card Collection*

Photographs in this area of the exhibit are from collection of the Oshawa Community Archives. The recent photographs of Lakeview Park were taken by a past resident of Oshawa-on-the-Lake, *Linda (Cory) Bazowsky*.



Final Remarks

Oshawa has a marine heritage in this community that we can be proud of. Oshawa possessed men with vision that felt shipping was a viable enterprise at the Oshawa Harbour, both in the 1830s and the 1850s. The ships they built were sturdy and well built and they were an active part of the commerce of that period. One of the questions I asked myself while doing the research for this exhibit is, with an early start to shipbuilding on the north shore with vessels that would appear to be reliable, why did this industry not really develop? Was it due to the railway and better roads? What do you think?

If you wish to share your thoughts you can do so in the exhibition in the space dedicated to memory sharing in the **Oshawa-On-The-Lake** section.



Oshawa Harbour, west wharf with storage elevators in the background.

Circa 1917

Photo Credit: *Oshawa Times*



Resources and Additional reading

1860 Lake Vessel Register, Marine Museum of the Great Lakes at Kingston

1895 Department of Marine and Fisheries, List of Vessels

1897 Inland Lloyds Lake Vessel Register

Oshawa Community Archives, Oshawa Harbour Files

Oshawa Community Archives, Port Oshawa Files

Oshawa Community Archives, Shipping Files

Oshawa Port Authority, Harbour Photos

Oshawa Vindicator June 10, 1871,

Oshawa Vindicator May 8, 1874,

Oshawa Vindicator October 13-November 4, 1885

R.L. Polk & Co's Marine Directory of the Great Lakes

Sessional Papers, Department of Marine, 1887

Tales from the Great Lakes, based on C.H.J. Snider's "Schooner days", Edited By: Charles Henry Jeremiah Snider, Robert B. Townsend, 1995

Whitby Chronicle September 15, 1881

The Farewells of East Whitby, by Llewella Bray, 1978

The Pedlar Papers, Oshawa Community Archives

The Whitby Yacht Club Anchor, Robert Townsend



Beyond the Exhibit

May 20, 2012

Sea Shanty Exhibit Officially Opens

Tours available from 12pm - 4pm

June 10, 2012

Pioneer Cemetery & Harbour Walking Tour

Meet at Guy House

Admission \$5 includes a tour of the Sea Shanty Exhibit

October 23, 2012

Oshawa Historical Society Speaker Series

Guest Speaker: Ed Burtt, President of Ocean Scan Systems

Topic: *The Discovery of HMS Speedy*

GROUP TOURS

By appointment (evenings and weekends as well, tours must be booked two weeks in advance)

Contact the programming department at 905.436.7624 ext 106 if you are interested in bringing a group for a tour of the

Sea Shanty Exhibition

OUTREACH COMMUNITY PRESENTATIONS

The Oshawa Harbour:

A Historical Look at Ship Building and Shipping Personalities

YOUTUBE

The Installation of the Sea Shanty Exhibit

www.youtube.com/oshawamuseum

THE SEA SHANTY EXHIBIT



— Home to our History —

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