

**Lifesaving Benevolent Association of New York Records
Special Collections & Archives Benjamin S. Rosenthal Library Queens
College, City University of New York Flushing, NY**

**Lifesaving Benevolent Association of New York Records
(1849-2008)**

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Summary

Title: Life Saving Benevolent Association of New York Records

Creator: Life Saving Benevolent Association of New York

Date: 1849-2008

Extent: 6.25 linear feet

Access and Use

Restrictions:

Citation: [after identification of items and series], Life Saving Benevolent Association of New York Records, Seamen's Church Institute of New York and New Jersey, Queens College Special Collections and Archives, Queens College, City University of New York, Flushing, NY

Historical Note

The Life Saving Benevolent Association of New York (LSBA) was founded in 1849 by a group of private citizens including merchants, ship-owners, and underwriters who were dedicated to saving lives from coastal shipwrecks and rewarding acts of heroism in saving lives at sea. The first board meeting was held in 1849 at the office of the Atlantic Mutual Insurance company at the merchant's exchange on Wall Street. LSBA's original charter stated that the purpose of the Association was to "recognize and reward courage, skill and seamanship in the rescue of human life on the sea or any navigable waters (or lakes connected therewith), and to award medals, medal pins, and sums of money for life-saving; to encourage training in seamanship, lifeboat work, methods of rescue in the water, and the resuscitation of victims of submersion, and to perform such other services of benevolent, charitable, and educational nature as are authorized by its Act of Incorporation or the General Laws of the State of New York."

The unprotected and unguarded shores of New York Harbor resulted in many shipwrecks and crew casualties: between 1839 and 1848 there were 338 shipwrecks on the coasts of New Jersey and Long Island.

The United States Congress appropriated funds for lifesaving equipment, including surf boats, rockets, and carronades (cannons). LSBA established twenty-six lifesaving stations in the New York area. Volunteer rescue teams, comprised mostly of fishermen and their families, staffed the units along with a station keeper who was paid 40 dollars a month. Crews of six to twelve were on emergency call. LSBA furnished each station with equipment to aid in saving lives from shipwrecks, including a galvanized iron Francis lifeboat trailed by an eleven-foot 225 pound life-car. The system, pioneered by Joseph Francis, was responsible for saving 2,150 lives during the first three years of the station.

The life-car used to rescue the stranded British ship *Ayrshire* on January 12, 1850 is now on display at the Smithsonian Institute's National Museum of American History. The *Ayrshire*, most likely carrying Irish immigrants fleeing the potato famine, ran aground on a sand bar off the New Jersey shore at Squan Beach, (now known as Manasquan), during a

snow storm. All but one of the 166 passengers 36 crewmembers from the *Ayrshire* were saved.

Private citizens who lived along the shore often volunteered to shelter survivors of shipwrecks in their homes. A women's group, whose president was Lucy Hayes, wife of President Rutherford B. Hayes, also offered support. Congress later doubled its appropriations to LSBA and authorized life saving stations to be built every five miles from Montauk to Cape May.

The United States government took over the operations of the life saving stations during World War I as the stations were absorbed into what became the United States Coast Guard. The life saving stations now stretch along both coasts of the United States, the Great Lakes, and the Mississippi. LSBA continued its involvement with the life-saving stations and gave gifts including radios and books to the stations' crews.

LSBA recognizes people who exhibit meritorious conduct in rescues by granting rewards, donations and premiums in money, medals, diplomas and letters of thanks and commendations. Today, LSBA continues to reward individuals involved in lifesaving water rescues.

The first LSBA award was given to Benjamin Downing for his August 25, 1850 rescue of a man. He found two men clinging to a capsized schooner off the coast of Eaton's Neck, Long Island. Downing, who had only one arm, and his sixteen-year-old son used two yoke of oxen to draw the lifeboat to shore, and was able to save one of the men. He was awarded 50 dollars and a medal. Ida Lewis-Wilson received several awards for her 18 rescues in Lime Rock, Rhode Island. She made the last recorded rescue when she was 63 years old. Wayne Saulnier, who had received four previous LSBA awards, and William J. Landon of the New York Police Department are recent award recipients. They received awards at a 1999 ceremony for their October 1998 rescue of a windsurfer off Plum Beach in Brooklyn. The man was too exhausted to paddle ashore so Landon and Saulnier towed him in on jet skis. John Cummings of the NYPD was presented with an award for his role in a December 1997 rescue of two members of the crew of the cruise ship *Edinburgh Castle*. The crewmembers were on a lifeboat that overturned during a training exercise in 40-degree water. Officers in scuba gear located a crewman who, panicked and cold, refused to swim ashore with them. Cummings coordinated the cutting of a hole through the boat's overturned hull to remove him. Many of the precipitating causes of rescues in the early years of LSBA, including suicide attempts and swimmers with cramps, are still occurring in the twenty-first century.

Since LSBA began issuing commendations, it has honored the lifesaving efforts of more than 1,000 police officers, firefighters, and civilians. LSBA continues to accept applications for awards throughout the year.

LSBA has also contributed towards lodging and feeding unemployed seamen in the New York area. In 1932 LSBA created a scholarship fund for the N.Y. Merchant Marine Academy to offer loans for tuition and expenses. In addition, LSBA contributes to

nonprofit organizations that promote maritime safety. Recipients of LSBA donations have included the New York Maritime College, the Maine Maritime Academy, and the Seamen's Church Institute.

The original charter stipulated that an annual meeting be held on the second Wednesday of January to report on the affairs of the corporation. The Association has held a meeting every year at the time specified in the charter. In addition, meetings are help by special committees.

The trademark of LSBA was made by marine artist Gordon Grant. It is a sketch of a man in oilskin, poised with a life preserver.

In January 2009 the Seamen's Church Institute (SCI) assumed the administration of the LSBA from the Atlantic Mutual Insurance Company. Atlantic Mutual was one of the first members of the LSBA. The LSBA has had close ties with SCI for years and held its annual ceremonies at the SCI headquarters. LSBA remains independent, and SCI administers the clerical and organizational responsibilities for the LSBA Board. SCI processes and validates the applications the LSBA receives, coordinates meetings of the Board, and assists the Board in determining the reward recipients. The Reverend David Rider, President and Executive Director of SCI commented on the new partnership that, "The water can be a dangerous place, and the Association has encouraged training in seamanship and water rescue—something to which SCI is deeply committed. The Life Saving Benevolent Association honors those who have—in the face of danger—shown extraordinary bravery, and we are proud to help them as they recognize these heroic men and women."

Scope and Content Note

The collection consists of the records of the Life Saving Benevolent Association of New York from 1849-2008. Records include LSBA's acts of incorporation, charter, and bylaws. Materials also include correspondence, financial ledgers, meeting minutes, and a subscriber list.

Much of the material consists of lists of LSBA award winners that document maritime rescues and the amount of LSBA awards. Other records include LSBA Annual Statements, historical pamphlets, and statements of awards made. The collection includes press releases announcing award recipients, photographs from award ceremonies, and congratulatory letters from Mayor Michael Bloomberg.

The collection also comprises material from insurance companies including charters and bylaws and a pamphlet entitled Suggestions for Masters of Vessels.

Arrangement Note

The collection is arranged into 5 series: Series 1: Administration; Series 2: Award Winners; Series 3: Reports; Series 4: LSBA Award Ceremonies Series 5: Insurance Companies

Series 1: Administration, 1849-1976, 1.25 liner feet

Scope and content

Administrative records consist of acts of incorporation, bylaws, charters, correspondence, financial ledgers, meeting minutes, and a subscriber list.

Arrangement Note

Arranged in alphabetical order by item type and chronologically within each item type.

Inventory

Box	Folder	Contents
1	1	Copies of the LSBA Acts of Incorporation, and charter and bylaws, 1849, historical outline of the LSBA, undated
	2	LSBA Charter and Bylaws, 1959, 1968, 1969, 1976
	3	Correspondence, 1849-1893
	4	Correspondence, 1890-1896
	5	Financial Ledger, 1858-1888
	6	Meeting minutes, 1849-1911
	7	Meeting minutes, 1849-1935
	8	Meeting minutes, 1936-1974
	9	Subscribers, 1849-1853

Series 2: Award winners, 1858- 1936, 2.5 liner feet

Scope and content

This series consists of lists of LSBA award winners, the amount they were awarded, descriptions of maritime rescues, and press clippings about rescues.

Arrangement

Items are arranged chronologically within each box

Inventory

Box	Folder	Contents
2	1	Press clippings of maritime rescues, 1858-1884
	2	Award winners, 1878-1888
	3	Award winners, 1889-1903

	4	Award winners, 1903-1914
	5	Award winners, 1915-1935
	6	Award winners, 1936-1978
Box	Folder	Contents
3	1	Award winners, 1898-1901
	2	Award winners, 1902-1905
	3	Award winners, 1905-1909
	4	Award winners, 1909-1913
	5	Award winners, 1913-1917
	6	Award winners, 1917-1923
	7	Award winners, 1924-1931
	8	Award winners, 1931-1936

Series 3: Reports, 1883-2008, 1.25 liner feet and 10 folders

Scope and content

This series consists of LSBA reports including annual reports, historical pamphlets and statements of awards made.

Arrangement

Reports are arranged alphabetically by report type and then chronologically within each report type.

Inventory

Box	Folder	Contents
4	1	Annual Report, 1883
	2	Annual Report, 1891
	3	Annual Report, 1896
	4	Annual Report, 1900
	5	Annual Report, 1902
	6	Annual Report, 1909
	7	Annual Report, 1914
	8	Annual Report, 1921
	9	Annual Report, 1932
	10	Annual Report, 1933
	11	Annual Report, 1934
	12-63	Annual Report, 1936-1987
	64-78	Annual Report, 1989-2003
	79-83	Annual Report, 2005-2008
5	1	Historical Pamphlet: The LSBA of NY, 1957
	2	Historical Pamphlet: The LSBA of NY, 1997
	3	Statement of Awards Made, 1921
	4	Statement of Awards Made, 1926

5	Statement of Awards Made, 1927
6	Statement of Awards Made, 1928
7	Statement of Awards Made, 1929
8	Statement of Awards Made, 1927-1929
9	Statement of Awards Made, 1930
10	Statement of Awards Made, 1931

Series 4: LSBA Awards Ceremonies, 1997-2008, 10 folders

Scope and content

This series consists of items relating to LSBA Award Ceremonies for maritime rescues. It includes photographs, press releases and congratulatory letters from the New York City Mayor, Michael Bloomberg.

Arrangement

This series is arranged chronologically.

Inventory

Box	Folder	Contents
5	11-12	LSBA Award Ceremony photographs, undated
	13-14	LSBA Award Ceremony photographs, 1998
	15	LSBA Press Releases with photographs, 1999
	16-17	LSBA Award Ceremony candid photographs, 1999
	18	LSBA Award Ceremony, 1997, 1999-2003, Group photographs
	19	LSBA Award Ceremony photographs, 2004-2008, Group photos
	20	LSBA congratulatory letter from Mayor Bloomberg, 2006, 2008

Series 5: Insurance Companies, 1874-1995, 7 folders

Scope and content

This series consists of items from insurance companies. It consists of bylaws, charters, and a pamphlet by the Board of Underwriters of NY titled "Suggestions to Masters of Vessels and Lists of Agents, for Vessels and Cargoes in Distress".

Arrangement

This series is arranged alphabetically by insurance company.

Inventory

Box	Folder	Contents
5	21	Atlantic Mutual Insurance Company, Charter, 1949, 1985, 1995
	22	Atlantic Mutual Insurance Company, Bylaws, 1952, 1985, 1989
	23	Board of Underwriters, NY, Suggestions to masters of vessels pamphlet, 1874, 1877
	24	Board of Underwriters, NY, Suggestions to masters of vessels pamphlet, 1880

25	Centennial Insurance Company, Charter, 1949,1981,1995
26	Centennial Insurance Company, Bylaws, 1951, 1989