

Tales From The Bank...



In addition to the hazards of eluding the U. S. Coast Guard, rum runners had to avoid stranding on Cape Cod. Courtesy of LARC.

Speakeasy at Sea... Rum-Running on Stellwagen Bank

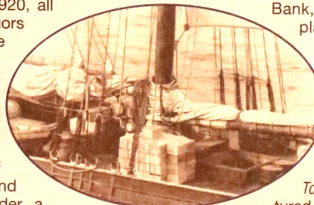
Article contributed by Ben Webster, freelance writer

During Prohibition, the area now designated as the Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary was a battleground in the U.S. government's "rum war" against smugglers. Following the adoption of the 18th Amendment in January 1920, all traffic in intoxicating liquors became illegal in the United States. Almost immediately, a thriving trade in illegal alcohol sprang up to satisfy the country's continuing demand for strong drink. Although the majority of this liquor came overland across the Canadian border, a significant amount was smuggled in by sea, particularly along the East Coast. Rum-running ships converged on large cities like New York and Boston, the most lucrative markets for their product.

To elude the authorities, the smugglers used a two-part strategy. They purchased liquor abroad (Nassau in the Bahamas and the French Islands of Saint Pierre and Miquelon were major points of origin) and then transported it to U.S. coastal waters in fishing vessels, usually schooners. These supply ships would anchor just outside the three-mile limit marking U.S. territory, often in compact groups called "rum rows." The liquor was then transferred to smaller, quicker boats, which ferried it to shore while attempting to avoid the Coast Guard. Stellwagen Bank, with its shallow waters and easy access to the Massachusetts coast, made a perfect rendezvous point for supply ships and inshore boats. According to one source, "on clear days, the rum row between Cape Ann and Cape Cod could be seen from the porch of President Calvin Coolidge's summer White House at Swampscott." From shore, the rum rows looked like enemy armadas poised for an invasion.

One of the smugglers lurking out in open water was the most notorious rumrunner of all, Captain William McCoy. McCoy, a former officer in the merchant marine, had been operating an unsuccessful motorboat service in Florida. Soon after Prohibition began, McCoy learned of the outrageous profits being turned in the rum trade. He purchased a schooner and began running liquor from Nassau to points up and down the East Coast. Because it was alleged he never watered down his product, his liquor became known throughout the country as "the Real McCoy"; the phrase has become a byword for authenticity.

Shortly after entering the trade, McCoy bought the Gloucester schooner *Arethusa* and focused his attention on the New England market. He claimed in his autobiography to have been the first to run rum off Massachusetts. In August 1921, McCoy, pursued by the Coast Guard, ordered his second-in-command to "make a wide circle out to sea, coming in at the end of three days to a point twenty miles southeast of Cape Ann whistling buoy" (Allen, 36). This spot, almost certainly located on Stellwagen Bank, is where McCoy planned to rejoin the



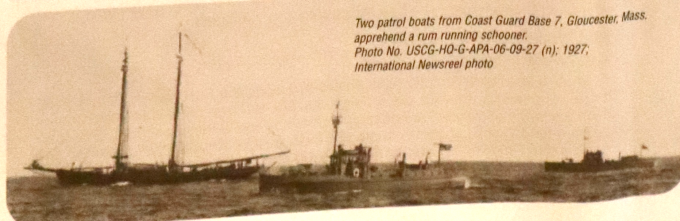
Arethusa after wrapping up shore business. McCoy maintained his lucrative commercial enterprise for several years before the *Arethusa* (by then renamed *Tomoka*) was finally captured in 1923 by the Coast Guard. He served a short stint in prison and then retired from the rum trade.

The Boston-based Coast Guard vessel *Tampa* was a scourge to rumrunners who operated in Massachusetts Bay. In autumn of 1924 this 240-foot steam cutter, along with several smaller patrol boats, launched a major assault on the rum row anchored on Stellwagen Bank. The Coast Guard ships attempted to surround the rum ships, whose captains responded by dumping their liquor overboard and fleeing. Gunfire was exchanged. In the end, the Coast Guard forces captured several vessels and confiscated large quantities of alcohol. In total, 850 cases of brandy, champagne and whiskey were taken from the British schooner *Marjorie E. Bachman* alone. *Tampa* also took part in a number of other notable anti-smuggling actions. In the winter of 1921-22, the cutter apprehended the British rumrunner *Grace & Ruby* off Salem and confiscated \$150,000 worth of whiskey and gin.

The enforcers of Prohibition received a major boost in 1924 when the three-mile territorial limit was extended to twelve miles. In addition, Congress approved about \$14 million in supplemental funding for the Coast Guard, and allocated a number of Navy destroyers for use against the rumrunners.

Although better equipped, the Coast Guard still struggled to hold back the tide of illegal liquor flowing into the country. Adapting to stronger law enforcement, the smugglers devised new and ingenious means to deliver their wares. The rum war continued without pause for another ten years, until Prohibition came to a close in 1933 with the repeal of the 18th Amendment. The "noble experiment" in temperance and the chaos it initiated comprise a fascinating chapter in American history and in the history of Stellwagen Bank.

Photo above: Rum-runner sloop Kirk and Sweeney, loaded with cases and barrels of alcohol, was seized by the U. S. Coast Guard about January 13, 1924. Photo No. G-APA-01-13-24 (02) G.F.; 1924



Two patrol boats from Coast Guard Base 7, Gloucester, Mass. apprehend a rum running schooner. Photo No. USCG-HQ-G-APA-06-09-27 (n); 1927; International Newsreel photo

Sanctuary Exhibits

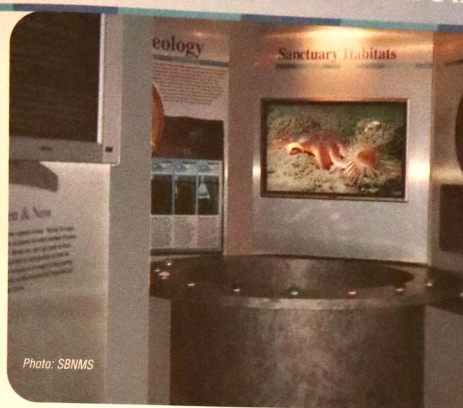


Photo: SBNMS

Sanctuary Showcased in Gloucester

Exhibit at the Gloucester Maritime Heritage Center

The sanctuary's exciting and information packed exhibit focuses on both cultural and natural resources. Components include touchscreen kiosks on whale watching and maritime history as well as video theater presentations on the ocean floor, ani-

mal populations, shipwreck geology. A three-dimensional graphical model of the sea floor serves as a centerpiece exhibit. There is a small admission to the newly expanded Gloucester Maritime Heritage Center located on Harbor Loop. Open from Memorial Day weekend to the summer. Call 978-281-047

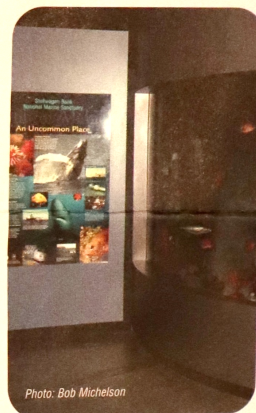


Photo: Bob Michelson

NE Aquarium Displays Sanctuary Habitats

Boulder Reef and Sandy Bank Feature in Gulf of Maine Gal

The New England Aquarium's Maine gallery includes two special water tanks that highlight important sanctuary habitats - a deep boulder reef and a sandy bank. Each tank holds representative fish and invertebrates. Associated exhibits explain resource protection issues that affect the sanctuary. There is a fee for admission. The New England Aquarium is located at 1 Wharf on the Boston waterfront, open year-round. Call 617-973-52 for more information.

Other Sanctuary Exhibits and Displays

Cape Cod Museum of Natural History (Route 6A, Brewster, MA)

A corner of the museum is devoted to the living resources of the Stellwagen Bank region, including endangered whales. There is an admission charge for the museum. The museum and sanctuary have teamed up for educational programs during the school year. Phone number is 508-896-3867.

Scituate Maritime and Irish Mossing Museum (The Driftway, Scituate, MA)

The museum features an excellent exhibit on the Portland Gale of 1891 as well as a special section on shipwrecks in the Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary. Stateroom doors and a life vest from the *Portland* are on display. There is an admission charge for this museum, which is open on Sundays, 1:00 to 4:00 p.m. Phone number is 781-545-5565.

Woods Hole Aquarium (Water St., Woods Hole, MA)

The aquarium, run by NOAA Fisheries, showcases Stellwagen Bank sanctuaries in several tanks. Cod, haddock, sea raven, ocean pout, wolfish, species are some of the animals on display. Exhibit panels provide fun information about the sanctuary. The aquarium is free and open Tuesday through Saturday, 11:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. in the summer. Call 508-495-2

Cape Cod National Seashore (Province Lands Visitor Center, Provincetown, MA)

Exhibit panels in the auditorium portray the sanctuary's food web and biodiversity. The visitor center is open seven days a week during the summer. Call 508-487-1256 for hours and the schedule of public talks.

Exhibits in Development

A new exhibit focusing on the US Coast Guard's Automatic Ship Identification System, its use for whale protection, the sanctuary is in development and slated for summer installation at the Cape Cod National Seashore, Provincetown, MA Visitor Center and at Hal Point State Park in Rockport.



Artist rendering: Dennis Huston