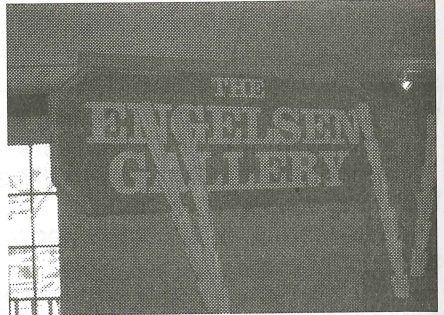


Cathleen Engelsen's Scenes Preserve Historic Moments

"**A**t first, I painted just to keep ice cream coming in, and I sold the little things," Cathleen Engelsen explained as she unloaded pieces of her artwork from her van – full of supplies, portfolios, boxes of prints and larger framed originals.

She shows and sells her work at the Tuckerton Emporium, where she has a designated corner gallery space decorated with nautical flair with help from her daughter Sidney Caruso, whose own artwork – a line of funky cigar-box pocketbooks with twisted copper wire handles – is mixed in with Engelsen's. The Engelsen gallery has been a permanent fixture at the Emporium, owned by John and Rosemary Kumpel, for the past five years.



The Engelsen Gallery at the Tuckerton Emporium

Before the Surf City artist became widely known and sought after throughout the state of New Jersey for her paintings of historic buildings and landmarks, folklore, coastal scenes and wildlife, she was raising her four daughters and painting mostly for pleasure. Engelsen studied art at the Samuel S. Fleisher Art Memorial in Philadelphia, Philadelphia College of Art (now part of the University of the Arts) and Richard Stockton College of New Jersey in Pomona.

Sometime in the 1970s, she received an offer to create paintings that depicted pieces of local history to hang in McDonald's restaurants, and things just progressed from there, she said.

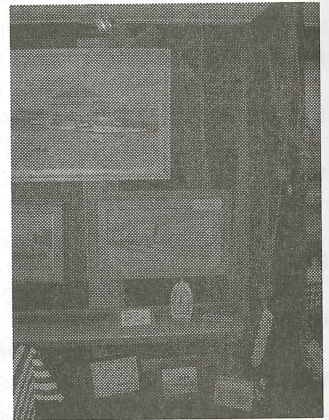
Some 30 years later, in Ocean County the name Engelsen is synonymous with scenes that bespeak the past. Currently her work hangs in several area McDonald's restaurants, in addition to government and public buildings, businesses and too many private residences to number.

The research, she says, is part of the fun.

"I talk to all the old-timers, and I talk to anyone who knows about the history of the area," she said. Often she goes to a place and takes photographs to use for reference – whatever helps to reproduce, in oils, acrylics or watercolor, not only buildings, structures and objects but also "to capture a feeling of an old time."

Working in oil, acrylic and watercolor, Engelsen said she likes to add as much personality as possible to the scenes.

"You have to get it all in," she said. "Like Grandma Moses. ... You have to put all the pieces together."



Engelsen's paintings on display at the Tuckerton Emporium

Her paintings come in all sizes, and not all of them are so busy with detail. Some are of watery marshlands with a single heron in the foreground, or a golden retriever splashing happily in the bay; a sandy expanse dotted with shorebirds, or waves crashing on the beach, or a fishing vessel heading into the dock.

"I love to do old boats," she said. One piece she plans to do soon is the Beaton Boat Works in Mantoloking.

She also sells "little affordable prints," matted 8 by 10 inches, for \$12 apiece, and "people just scarf them up," she said. They are like snapshots (for many of them she used actual snapshots as a guide) of familiar, meaningful sights: the rides at Fantasy Island Amusement Park in Beach Haven, the old Esso station in Manahawkin, the Barnegat Lighthouse, the old fish factory on Mystic Island ("the stinkhouse," she called it), the Holiday Snack Bar in Beach Haven, the beloved and dilapidated clam shack just south of the Route 72 Causeway.

They are all particularly meaningful to Engelsen, whose roots in the southern Ocean County area run deep. Her grandparents lived in Tuckerton around the turn of the 20th century and are depicted in one of Engelsen's larger paintings of a garvey boat and sneakbox. Some of her grandfather's old photos are framed and hanging at the Emporium. The one of Engelsen's own pieces she has kept hanging in her home is a 24-by-38-inch called "Barnegat Bay Sneakboxes" – it was her mom's favorite, she said.

"My work has taken me all over the state," she said, naming Trenton, Toms River, Perth Amboy, Newark, the Twin Lights in Sandy Hook, the Lakehurst Naval Air Station and Monmouth Park Racetrack in Oceanport. Her paintings of the Essex and Sussex Hotel and the Monmouth Hotel both hang in the Spring Lake municipal building. The Lakewood Historical Society commissioned about 15 large paintings of all its old hotels, the Harrison building and an old castle. Most recently she completed a painting of the inside of the Strand Theater.


An original 5-by-7-foot painting of a bustling Washington Street in Toms River as it looked in 1905 hangs in the Ocean County Courthouse. Another popular one is Toms River's "Admiral Farragut Academy." With many of her pieces she includes a written description of the subject matter and a brief explanation of its historical significance: the Tuckerton Wireless, which stood 820 feet tall; the Akron Airship passing over Barnegat Inlet; the Jersey Central Railroad Station in Forked River.

Engelsen has found, in the five years she has been exhibiting at the Emporium, that a lot of people from Toms River and Atlantic City stop in on their way through the small towns up and down the coast, so she displays paintings in those places that might be of interest to them.

Through all her travels through time and space to bring history and culture to life on canvas, Engelsen remains a beach girl who calls Long Beach Island home.

"It's frustrating for me not to be able to paint in the summer, when there are so many other things (to do) ... and the beach is calling, and in your heart you know you're not going to start that painting at night."

When fall returns, however, Engelsen will again be busy with painting and preparing for shows – the Ocean County Decoy and Gunning Show in Tuckerton and the Christmas show and sale at St. Francis Community Center in Brant Beach.

Visit www.cathleenengelsen.com to view samples of her work. 

- Victoria Ford



Ms. Engelsen refers to her work