

The Dispatch



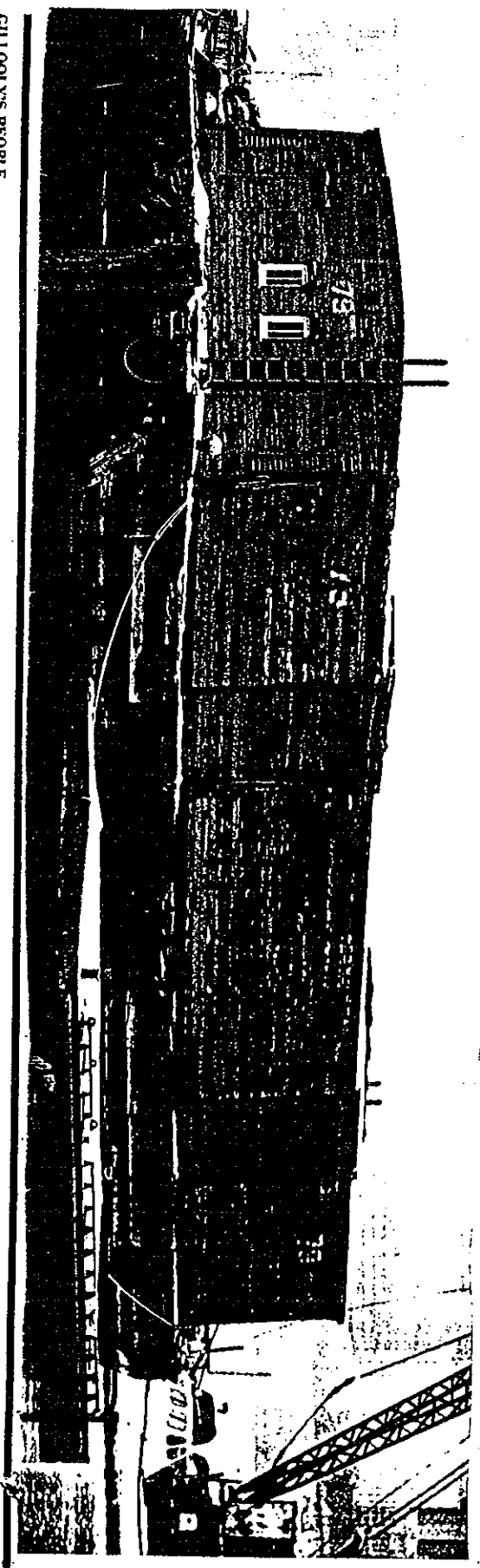
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GILLDOOLY'S PEOPLE

He's in love with a decrepit old Hudson River barge

David Sharps from West New York, has embarked on a labor of love so capricious that he now spends most of his days knee-deep in mud. When not hauling silt from the Hudson, he works as a professional juggler and clown earning a living from appearances in such showplaces as Trump's Palace in Atlantic City.

The 30-year-old Sharps has spent eight years living on or close to waterways, some as near as the Hudson River and others as distant as the Mediterranean and Aegean seas, and the rivers of Paris.

His love affair is with an over-70-year-old barge once used by the Lehigh Valley Railroad, but now hired in silt at the river's shore in Edgewater. This is where he spends his days.



FRANK GILLOOLY

that, along with others of his kind, was once a part of what had been a river life teeming with commerce.

Time and neglect destroyed most of the others, but, like a medical team nursing an invalid gasping for life, Sharps — along with other members of a non-profit corpo-

front Museum — persevere to save this one.

He estimates that it'll cost nearly \$23,000 just to get the nearly 30-foot-wide, 100-foot-long wooden barge afloat. Only then can other major replacements of the rotted framing around the cargo hatches begin.

Like most lovers blinded by infatuation, Sharps, when asked about the total expense for the entire restoration, said he is uncertain about the final cost.

He said that the barge's bottom, now encased in the river's muddy flats, is its best-preserved part since the saltwater has sweetened the bottom planks' caulking and thus prevented damage.

Rainwater, for decades forming

of the twin cargo cabins, has caused the most decay. Sharps was evasive when asked about the price he paid for an opportunity to spend the next few months hauling mud. My guess is that it wasn't much — perhaps just the promise to move the barge from its present location within a year. Among his future headaches is the need to find a permanent dock once the barge eventually floats.

"Anywhere from Jersey City to Edgewater would do," Sharps said. "This is a relatively long stretch of shoreline, but he's also aware that any location has to have some special features."

The Hudson Waterfront Museum's board of directors is seeking a site that is accessible to

once restored, can house exhibits and host recreational and educational programs focusing on the river's past and future.

According to the board's list of goals, "Our primary concern is to develop a series of exhibitions related to Hudson River heritage. While we feel that it should be within our scope to cover, not only the history of the waterfront of 300 years ago, but also the story of ongoing waterfront development, we plan to specialize in an era dating from the 1860s, when wooden barges first were used on the river, up to World War II, when the river had its last peak commercially."

The proposed exhibits will present programs on a wide range of

Hudson," and "Chiffrangers: The Film Industry in New Jersey."

The group has begun to collect artifacts and data.

What it needs most of all right now is a municipality to adopt the barge and assist the museum's Board of Directors to acquire federal, state and county funding.

Unfortunately, the visionaries who conceive such civilized, humane ventures often have to scrap to survive odds heavily stacked against them. Some place along that shoreline there should be a spot to preserve a bit of historic richness.

Otherwise, what's left to discover but a monotonously same history.