Volunteers Aiding Seaport Museum

By JOHN C. DEVLIN

Hard by Sloppy Louie's on South Street, to the cacophony of the East River gulls, there were final severe whackings with a limber rod, in the finest tradition of a Punch and Judy show, on the puppet stage at the South Street Seaport Museum the other day.

The puppet show was ending for the season and Barnacle Bill, that "bun, loafer and rogue," was going back into his box, along with the rest of his crew, till next spring, but not before shouting, laughing and applauding children had paid their last respects of the year.

Most of the children had attended previous shows.

One, Andrew Mertha, 6 years old, of 333 Pearl Street, even showed up with his own pair of puppets, one dressed in white cotton, with beads for teeth and eyes.

Andrew gave an extemporaneous performance at the stage, using a green cotton snake for the villain, while other children applauded a wild wrestling match.

Shout for More

When the snake lost, the spectators yelled for more, just as they had when the villainous alligator of the previous show had been given its comeuppance.

The adult puppeteer was Larry Vede, a one-time actor and now a teacher of speech and English at Sheepshead Bay High School. He is one of 7,000 volunteers who help out at the growing but financially pressed museum.

The Seaport Museum's ships, now under restoration, heave gently in the tide and the wake of passing vessels. They are open and no admission is charged.

The puppet shows are staged on a pier at school-vacation time.

The museum's progress is measured in large part by the volunteers who swab decks, scrape, paint and varnish, help with the rigging, serve as guides, and do almost anything else that other museums pay for.

Typical of the volunteers is a bearded "old salt," Edmund Moran, 55, who for "36 years, man and boy," has been doing, when at sea, what he calls "sailorizing on deep-water voyages." He specializes in rigging.