



THE

# FREE-HOLDER

SUMMER 1996

THE OYSTER BAY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

FOUNDED 1960

◆ SEAGOING  
DELICACIES

◆ AN HISTORIC  
ADVERTISEMENT

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THE HISTORY MAGAZINE OF THE TOWN OF OYSTER BAY

## Editorial

This magazine, named, appropriately enough, *The Freeholder*, (after the first settlers of Oyster Bay) will be devoted to researching and publishing articles which illustrate Oyster Bay's history, as well as articles of a general historical nature

which shed light on life as it was lived here over the past 350 years.

We count among our contributors a number of Long Island's most talented historians. I can't wait to read their submissions, and I hope that you'll feel the same. Let us know!

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### Letters to the Editor

To The Editor:

I am seeking information on the Harcourt family of Oyster Bay, especially the following: Benjamin, b.O.B. c. 1659/60; his wife Mercy Dickinson b. Barnstable, MA 23 Feb.1657; their 10 children -

especially sons Nathaniel H b. O.B. c. 1690 & Richard {Robert} H b. O.B. c.1692. I am seeking family information for Richard {Robert} Harcourt b. O.B. c. 1692 who married Esther "Hetty" Townsend c 1710 and their children, especially their son Richard H. b. O.B. c. 1720 who married Mercy Latting. Contact Bob Harcourt, 2980 Viaje Pavo Real, Santa Fe, NM 87505.

**THE FREEHOLDER**  
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#### Editorial Staff

Editor: Thomas A. Kuehhas  
 Contributing Editors: Elliot M. Sayward  
 Charles Reichman  
 Richard Kappeler  
 Rick Robinson

Address Editorial Communications to:  
 Editor, The Freeholder  
 P.O. Box 297  
 Oyster Bay, NY 11771

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### ABOUT OUR FRONT COVER

Shown is the demise of a carriage on South Street, Oyster Bay in June 1904. The horse pulling the carriage was frightened by the noise and appearance of a strange new monster - the automobile! See story on page 15.

*Photo from collections of the  
 Oyster Bay Historical Society*

To The Editor:

When I was trimming "A Minor Christmas Mystery" to fit the space available for it in the Fall *Currents*, I chopped a quotation of Clement Moore's "Pig and Chicken" poem.

The question included a line which did not begin with an anapestic foot and I referred to it in my text. I carelessly left

*continued on p.18*

## SEAGOING DELICACIES: EARLY SAILORS' FARE

By Gus Stahl

The diet of sailors aboard ships of a hundred and fifty years ago and earlier was seldom of epicurean quality and often downright miserable. On the other hand, despite a lack of variety and a limited number of ingredients, few sailors starved. Moreover, the "Doctor", a frequent name for the cook, was often quite skillful and was able, at least occasionally, to provide meals that were somewhat more appetizing, at least to the sailor's rough palate, than a perpetual course of hardtack, a chunk of salt beef or pork, perhaps an occasional indifferent vegetable and strong coffee or tea served in a gallon pot. It is strange to think of a seacook preparing "made" dishes in the manner of Escoffier but on his own level of expertise he did just that. He often demonstrated a degree of ingenuity in coping with missing ingredients that no land based chef would have found necessary. Perhaps the unusual, often extravagant, quality of many of the names given fo'c's'le fare is an indication of the real fondness of the seaman for dishes that would send his landlubber brother from the dining room unfed. Who but a devotee would remain at the table if, for instance, "dunderfunk" were announced?

Dunderfunk, also called "dandyfunk", has no convincing explanation for its name. The basic recipe is sea biscuit, pounded into crumbs, mixed with fat and molasses - sometimes stretched with water - and baked brown. The fat might be that trimmed from salt beef or pork that usually formed the sailor's meat ration or it might be slush, the grease left after frying or skimmed from the

pot in which meat was cooked. The slush barrel stood just outside the galley. Into it was dumped all the leftover grease. This was used to slush, or lubricate the masts. If any remained at voyage-end, it was by tradition the perquisite of the cook who could sell it when the ship came to port. Perhaps it went to the soapmaker. Till then it was



available to supply grease for cooking. We are obviously talking here not just of rough palates but of strong stomachs. All substitutions, however, were not for the worse. One stand-in for molasses in the making of dunderfunk was marmalade.

Another special occasion dish was a pudding, not the sort marketed under the Royal or Jell-O labels but the kind that's boiled in a bag at Christmas time. On shipboard it was not reserved for Christmas but appeared whenever a festivity appeared and the galley stores provided the ingredients. It was called plum duff and was the seagoing cousin of plum pudding. Duff is a dialect pronunciation of dough. In its simplest state it is made of flour and

water. Add plums to it, an unlikely occurrence on shipboard, and it becomes plum duff. Dried plums, prunes to you and me, were available however, as were raisins, and sometimes dried apples. Any of these added to duff created a delicacy announced as plum duff and never challenged by the consumer. On some ships plum duff was so highly regarded - by the owners - that it was served in place of the meat ration every Thursday, a cheap treat instead of meat. Jack Tar probably appreciated something sweet instead of salty, anyway.

Perhaps even more outlandish sounding than dunderfunk was lobscouse. It was also called cracker hash which sounds a bit less exotic to shore-based ears. The cook started by breaking up hardtack, the hard baked ship's biscuit that was the usual shipboard substitute before the mast for the landsman's white loaf bread. Aft the mast in the officers' quarters something very like what comes to tables ashore but called soft tack or soft tommy was served. For lobscouse the fragments of hardtack were soaked in water till softened, then mixed with minced salt beef or pork, singly or in combination. If potatoes or onions were available, they were chopped and added to the mixture. Baked until little moisture remained and the top was crisp, lobscouse was highly regarded except by newcomers with queasy stomachs.

Aboard ship the salt meat was often termed salt horse or salt junk. These names were deliberate aspersions on its quality. Junk in sailor's talk was old cable. The term doubtless implies

that the meat was tough, stringy, and generously impregnated with salt. Salt horse was an insulting disparagement of the ethics of the dealer who packed and sold the meat. On its way to table, salt meat from the great three-hundred-pound barrels in which it was packed stopped for a day or two in the harness cask, a staved vessel wider at the bottom than the top. Filled with salt water not so concentrated as the brine that had been used to preserve the meat, the harness cask was used to soak out as much of the salt as possible. Perhaps the harness in the term was an allusion to the salt horse the cask contained.

Having named two containers commonly found on deck, we mustn't forget an important third, a cask called the scuttle butt which contained drinking water. Called that because it was a butt or staved container and had in its head a scuttle or trap door, the scuttle butt was a place of resort for idlers who gathered around it to exchange gossip or rumor. The name has entered the language of landsmen as a synonym for rumor and its maritime origin has been largely forgotten.

Better than a trip to the scuttle butt, the seaman liked a mug-up, a piece of ship's bread with coffee. Often the "coffee" had never seen Brazil. Called Scotch coffee, it was concocted of burnt bread boiled in water and sweetened with sorghum molasses.

Burgoon was an early landsman's term for porridge before it went to sea. Ashore it eventually became a stew but on board ship it remained porridge. Made of oatmeal or corn meal cooked in water, it was hot and filling and

sustained the sailor against hard work in the wet and cold.

The sailor's word for stew was slumgullion, often abbreviated to slum. Basically composed of meat and vegetables, but at sea improvised of whatever the Doctor had available, slumgullion came ashore and found its way into the vocabulary of tramps who compounded it of whatever ingredients they could beg or steal and often called it slumgudgeon.

Something more of a treat than slum was sea pie. Into a baking dish the cook placed layers of meat or fish and vegetables alternating with layers of pastry. Baked and served piping hot, it was a dish to help Jack Tar forget the hardships of his environment.

Cooked in a kettle was chowder and that's how it got its name. The French word for kettle or boiler, chaudiere, was altered in English mouths to chowder a long time ago. To make a chowder, fish was needed so they were more common among the fishermen than with other seamen but chowders were made whenever fish were available. Recipes for chowders eaten ashore have ingredients like milk not to be had at sea in early days. What the sea cooks used is a question to which no answer has been found.

In the 1850's fishermen of the Bay of Fundy were eating smotherers, duff and jo-floggers. These were explained as pot-pie of seabirds, pudding and pan cakes. Other sources suggest somewhat different meanings for the first and last items. In 1874 a smother was said to contain mutton while in 1826 a smotheration, surely the same, was a sailor's dish of

beef and pork smothered in potatoes. The basic dish seems to have been of fowl or flesh with a lid of either pastry or potatoes.

Both jo-floggers and Joe Froggers appear in reminiscences of sea life. They seem to have been the same word to which different meanings were attached. One story has it that Joe Frogger was a black baker in Marblehead whose specialty was large, round, hardbaked, ginger cookies that the fishermen took to sea by the keg. Another report has Joe-Floggers represented by a sort of peculiar pancake stuffed with plums (doubtless prunes). We can probably assume that all varieties shared roundness as to shape.

No doubt the sailor's diet was less rich and varied than was his vocabulary but he seems to have found his food interesting and sustaining. Although most accounts of fo'c's'le food describe it in rather disparaging terms, sailors did not stop going to sea because they felt they were badly fed. The dainty appetite of the landsman reader to the contrary, the fo'c's'le favorites were not regarded by the sailor as abominations. Abominations could not have lasted over the years without mutiny and they certainly would not have inspired the affectionate, if outlandish names recounted here.



# THE OYSTER BAY CONNECTION: THE FIRST AMERICAN NEWSPAPER ADVERTISEMENT OFFERING ITEMS FOR SALE

by Elliot M. Sayward

## Part I

**A**T Oysterbay on Long-Island in the Province of N. York, There is a very good Fulling-Mill, to be Let or Sold, as also a Plantation, having on it a large new Brick house, and another good house by it for a Kitchin, & work house, with a Barn, Stable, &c. a young Orchard, and 30 Acres clear Land. The Mill is to be Let with or without the Plantation: Enquire of Mr. William Bradford Printer in N. York, and know further.

A copy of the newspaper advertisement shown above was dug out of the Society's files by Director Tom Kuehhas. He recognized that, while a piece of history itself, it also furnished a window on a plethora of fascinating subjects having to do with the early days of Oyster Bay and other parts of the original colonies.

The advertisement appeared in the *Boston News-Letter* of May 8, 1704. It is an historic milestone. Appearing early in the paper's first year of publication, it is thought to be the first newspaper advertisement announcing something for sale published in this country. Of course, Boston was the seed bed of newspaper publishing on this side of the Atlantic. Not only was the first newspaper published there but so was the second, *The New-England Courant* which was launched by James Franklin, elder brother of Benjamin Franklin. Benjamin Franklin will make another appearance in this account so it is germane to mention that, when material printed by his brother gave offense to the Assembly and he was prohibited from publishing, the paper appeared for a time under the name of the seventeen year old Benjamin who had already displayed considerable promise as a journalist.

The close ties of the residents of Oyster Bay with New England may have had something to do with the placement of the advertisement but it is more likely that "Mr. William Bradford printer in N. York" had become aware through the brotherhood of the press of the intention of the *News-Letter* to accept advertisements and had recognized that such a notice would reach a larger than usual group of prospective buyers for a productive farm and a going business. How did it happen that Bradford of New York City was attempting to dispose of property in Oyster Bay?

The deceased owner of the property, John Dewsbury, had been in debt to William Bradford who was not only a printer in New York but, as William S. Pelletreau tells us in his *A History of Long Island*, was also "a merchant of Oyster Bay", a description which he gave of himself in deeds prior to 1703. We don't know what brought Dewsbury into debt to Bradford; it may be that he borrowed money for the improvement of his business, the fulling mill, or for his "large new Brick house." Whatever the reason for the debt, the General Assembly of the Colony of New York passed an act "to Enable the S[ai]d William Bradford of the City of Newyorke printer to Sell

and dispose of the Real Estate of John Dewsbury, late of Oysterbay inn Queens County within the Colony Deceased for the payment of debts.. ."

Who was this William Bradford? Very likely you already know of him as an important American printer of the 17th and 18th centuries. He was born in Leicestershire, England in 1663. He served his apprenticeship to a London printer and on completion thereof he emigrated to Philadelphia in 1685. Another account says he came with William Penn in 1682. In Philadelphia he set up the first printing press in Pennsylvania, as Benjamin Franklin who met him tells us. In 1688 he established a bookstore, perhaps his first venture as a merchant. Surely most of his stock must have been imported from abroad preparing him for later mercantile operations in Oyster Bay and New York City. Bradford also joined the Dutch Rittenhouse brothers to found a papermill, the product of which would have been important to his printing house.

However, shortly thereafter he printed the Pennsylvania charter for which act he found himself in trouble with the authorities. Deciding that the climate of Pennsylvania was not healthy for printers, Bradford removed in 1689 to the city of New York.

There he became the royal printer serving the administrators of the colony. It was a profitable connection but he had plenty of time for his own work. It is known that he issued some 400 publications including the first American *Book of Common Prayer* and pamphlets, almanacs and political writings. In 1725 he began the publication of the *New-York Gazette*, the first newspaper in that city.

One of Bradford's apprentices was John Peter Zenger who was to become famous in part because he thought Bradford's political writings "dry, senseless and fulsome panegyrics" and did something about it. He also thought that Bradford's ties with the government and his paper's role as mouthpiece for the administration should be challenged. As part of Bradford's bread and butter resulted from his connection with the government he was apparently loath to challenge his friends on issues important to Zenger who left him in 1733 and founded the *Weekly Journal* in opposition to the *Gazette* and the government. Zenger scathingly attacked the administration and its partisans, for which he went to jail. It took a Philadelphia lawyer, Alexander Hamilton, to get him out. Zenger's stand and eventual victory were major foundation stones in the developing idea of freedom of the press. It should not be thought that Bradford was without principle because of his adherence to constituted authority and his own best interests. He had already been through a freedom of the press controversy in Philadelphia.

In New York he had much earlier demonstrated his willingness to stand against wrong when he issued in 1693 the first published American attack on slavery, George Keith's *An Exhortation and Caution to Friends Concerning Buying or Keeping Negroes*. (The author wishes to thank Mildred DeRiggi, Ph.D. of the L.I. Studies Institute for bringing this piece to his attention.)

When Ben Franklin left Boston after a quarrel with his brother he went to New York seeking work. There he talked to Bradford who had nothing for him but sent him to Philadelphia to his son, also a printer, who had lost his chief assistant. This came to nothing although Franklin did get work with another printer, beginning his long Pennsylvania career. In Philadelphia he again met Bradford who had come to visit his son. Franklin watched Bradford pry business information out of a competitor. He assessed him "as a crafty old sophister".

Bradford seems to have had Quaker connections even before he arrived in Philadelphia. He arrived there just three years after the proprietor of the colony, the Quaker William Penn, if not earlier. Another Quaker, George Fox, the founder of the Society of Friends was the means of his introduction to Oyster Bay. Merle-Smith tells us that "a letter from George Fox to one of the Wrights of Oyster Bay introduced Bradford giving him his first contact with the village." He sets the date about 1685 which would have put Bradford in touch with Oyster Bay from the time of his arrival

in America.

Fox, who came from Leicester as did Bradford, had preached to the inhabitants of Oyster Bay during his visit to America. While in this country, Fox journeyed from North Carolina to New England, calling on Quakers and Quaker congregations and preaching whenever opportunity arose. Pelletreau tells us that he "preached in the woods with a rock for a pulpit because there was no house in the place large enough to accommodate his auditors." Later that year Anthony Wright gave land to the Society of Friends for a meeting house and burial plot. Anthony Wright appears to have been a leader among the Quakers and may have been the Wright to whom George Fox wrote introducing Bradford.

Bradford engaged in real estate purchases in Oyster Bay until at least 1703. On one piece of land he bought he built the first bolting mill in the town. A bolting mill is a grist mill equipped with a machine that sifts ground grain into various grades or products suitable for different uses, as bran, coarse meal, flour, etc.. Prior to the introduction of bolting machines the job had to be done with a hand sieve.

Another of the properties Bradford purchased was a house and lot where he may have stayed while in town looking after his business interests or relaxing from his city labors. How extensive Bradford's connection with the town was is not clear. Considering what we know of his property purchases, his transactions with Dewsbury and his bolting mill it would seem he was a

