



# THE FREEHOLDER

SPRING 2009 **THE OYSTER BAY HISTORICAL SOCIETY** FOUNDED 1960

☞ **MULTIPLE  
FACES OF A  
MANY-SIDED  
BUILDING**

☞ **AN  
AFTERNOON  
SPENT WITH  
TR**

☞ **LONG  
ISLAND'S  
DEAD POET  
SOCIETY,  
PART VIII**

☞ **SOCIETY  
PLANS  
WW II  
EVENTS**

"Davenports" Oyster Bay, L. I. N. Y.



55-49

**THE HISTORY MAGAZINE OF THE TOWN OF OYSTER BAY**

## Editorial

The building on the corner of Spring and West Main Streets in Oyster Bay, known as the Octagon, has had a fascinating history and has entertained an impressive array of dignitaries. It has faced many threats during its 155 years...and survived them all. However it may be facing its most critical test right now.

Richard Winsche details the story of the Octagon, right up to the present,

and it makes fascinating reading!

Robert Harrison continues his series on our Island's poets with a look at those poets who saw the humor in life on Long Island.

We note with sadness the passing of John Cleary, a former trustee and a great supporter of our Society. Our condolences to his wife, Rita, a frequent contributor to these pages, who recently spent a day with TR in her local library and shares it with us.

## THE FREEHOLDER

of the

Oyster Bay Historical Society  
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Purpose: The Oyster Bay Historical Society was founded in 1960 with the express purpose of preserving the history of the Town of Oyster Bay. The Society maintains a museum and research library in the Town-owned c. 1720 Earle-Wightman House, 20 Summit Street, Oyster Bay  
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## THE POST RIDER

To the Editor:

I recently picked up a copy of *The Freeholder* at Old Bethpage Village and came across the reference to Harry and Frank Tappen.

Many years ago (the late '30s and early '40s) the gentleman who was in charge of Belmont Lake State Park was named "Tappen." Would Mr. Winsche know whether or not there is any connection with either of those Tappens?

I found the material about Theodore Roosevelt and his family interesting.

When I was a Boy Scout in Queens from 1937 through 1946 (with time out for military service) I attended four or five of the Scout Pilgrimages to the Oyster Bay gravesite. In some of those years I was privileged to see the Buckskin Boys on the dais as well as Edith Kermit Roosevelt. Attending Scouts were given buttons (badges) that were made to commemorate the occasion.

Thank you.

Dwain Smith

*I will pass your request on to Mr. Winsche. Thanks for taking the time to write to us. Just one question... Who were the Buckskin Boys?*

## ABOUT OUR FRONT COVER

The Octagon Hotel had a succession of owners, many of whom leased the hotel to others to operate. One such person was William J. Davenport, who ran the hotel from 1913 to 1922, and was one of its most popular proprietors. Sadly he was the final one. It became an auto dealership and private home in 1922. Oyster Bay Historical Society's Collections.

To the Editor:

I read somewhere that there is talk of restoring the Octagon Hotel. Please let me know if this is true and if there is someone I may contact to get more information.

Regards,

Eileen Harrigan

*Your letter is timely in that much of this issue is devoted to the history of the Octagon Hotel. The Oyster Bay Main Street Association has been working with the current owners and other interested parties (OBHS among them) to restore the building to its former glory. Keep your fingers crossed!*

## OYSTER BAY'S OCTAGON HOTEL

by Richard A. Winsche

[Ed. Note: The following article originally appeared in the 2008 issue of *The Nassau County Historical Society Journal*. We would like to thank the author, Mr. Winsche, and the *Journal's* Editor, Natalie A. Naylor, Ph.D., for generously allowing us to reprint this article of great local significance, especially at this critical juncture when the future of the venerable Octagon is unclear.]

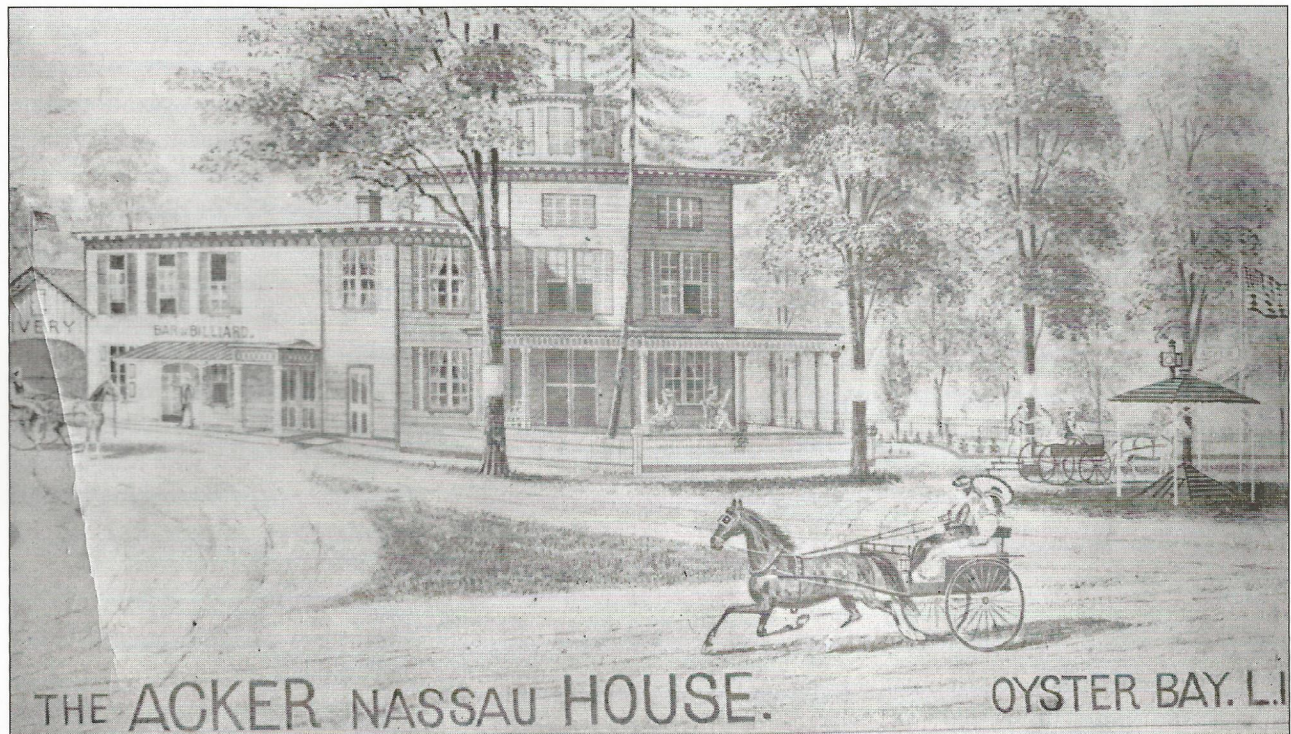
In 1849 Orson Fowler published *A Home For All, Or The Gravel Wall Plan and Octagon Mode of Buildings*, which included floor plans for octagonal structures. Fowler's primary reason for advocating octagon buildings was that no inside space was lost in acute angles, as was the case with rectangular buildings. Therefore,

octagonal structures allowed for an economy of space and movement between rooms. Fowler's book started a fad throughout the country for octagon houses and was so popular that a revised edition was printed in 1853. On Long Island a number of octagon-shaped buildings were constructed, including a schoolhouse and the John Dame house in Brentwood, the Ezra Prime house in Huntington, the John Wells/Andrew Gildersleeve house in Mattituck, and the Suffolk County jail in Riverhead.<sup>1</sup>

At this time, James Monilaws decided to build a hotel in Oyster Bay village and purchased thirty-seven square rods of land at the southwest corner of West Main and Spring Streets on March 23, 1854, for \$500.<sup>2</sup> Apparently

Monilaws had been influenced by Fowler's book since he had his hotel constructed in the popular new octagonal style. At the time it was believed to be the only octagon hotel in the country.

By 1857 Monilaws had leased the hotel to Luther C. Jackson, who advertised it in June 1857 as "Jackson's Octagon Hotel, Oyster Bay, L.I., Luther C. Jackson, Proprietor." (This advertisement has led some to believe that the hotel was actually owned by Jackson.) Less than a year later, however, in March 1858, Jackson was attempting to sell his lease of the Octagon Hotel. He advertised that the hotel was "doing good business, and is, in every respect a first rate place for an enterprising man." Jackson is not listed in the 1860 Queens County census,



*This, the earliest known image of the Octagon Hotel, appears to be an advertising print dating from the period when it was being run by Henry C. Acker, who leased the property between 1883 and 1887.*

*Oyster Bay Historical Society's Collections*

so he must have sold the lease or it had expired.<sup>3</sup>

Possibly Jackson's statement about "doing good business" was an exaggeration, for on January 2, 1861, James Monilaws sold the hotel to Raphael Lewenthal for \$4,250.<sup>4</sup> Lewenthal lived in New York City and is listed in the Oyster Bay Town tax records as a non-resident property owner. It is unknown who managed the hotel for him, but apparently it was a fairly profitable venture as Lewenthal retained ownership for a number of years. On February 18, 1861, a military ball was held at the Octagon Hotel. Although this was several months before the start of the Civil War, President Lincoln had already called for volunteers for the Union forces.<sup>5</sup>

In 1866 the hotel was almost destroyed by a fire. The fire started at about 8 p.m. on March 14, 1866. The *Glen Cove Gazette* reported, "the flames were subdued and finally extinguished by a free use of mud, water and axes. The building was considerably damaged."<sup>6</sup>

It was probably shortly after the fire that Raphael Lewenthal obtained a \$4,000 mortgage on the property from the Jones Fund, probably to repair the fire damage to the hotel. The restoration work on the Octagon Hotel must have been completed fairly rapidly as, on June 9, 1868, a meeting was held there by citizens interested in the route of the North Shore Rail Road to Huntington.<sup>7</sup>

In December 1868, Lewenthal leased the hotel to Albert A. Reed, who "made improvements throughout the building" and changed its name to the Nassau

House. Reed's lease of the property continued to May 1, 1878.<sup>8</sup>

On October 19, 1876, Raphael Lewenthal sold the Octagon Hotel to Morris Lewenthal for \$6,000, subject to the existing mortgage and the lease to Albert A. Reed. Lewenthal, who also lived in New York City, owned the hotel for only a year and a half. During that period he took out a second \$4,000 mortgage payable to Bertha Jacobs. Then, on May 2, 1878, the day after Reed's lease ended, Lewenthal sold the hotel to Samuel Jacobs of New York City for \$8,250.<sup>9</sup>

During the nine years he owned the hotel, Jacobs is known to have leased it to Harvey S. Weed for several years. The *East Norwich Enterprise* stated,

Capt. Harvey S. Weed not only knows how to keep a hotel, but is practically applying his knowledge in that direction. Probably the Octagon is the best kept hotel in this section, its patrons are better accommodated than they have ever been.

By 1883 the Octagon Hotel was being run by Henry C. Acker, who leased the property to April 1, 1887.<sup>10</sup>

Possibly because Acker's lease was about to expire, on February 1, 1887 Samuel Jacobs sold the hotel to Philip Lavelle for \$6,750. Lavelle, who had previously run a hotel at Hicksville, was experienced in the management of an establishment of this type and was the first owner not to lease the hotel to others. Philip Lavelle was described as being a well-liked and genial person. He was to run the hotel with his wife, Mary Lavelle, for the next two years. But then, for some reason,

he sold it to his wife on August 24, 1889, for \$6,750, the exact amount he had paid when purchasing it from Samuel Jacobs.<sup>11</sup>

Possibly the reason Philip Lavelle sold the hotel to his wife was because they were having marital problems. The next year the local newspaper reported that

The Octagon Hotel, of this village has changed hands, and Mrs. Philip Lavelle the wife of the proprietor, has left the village and her liege lord behind. It is not an elopement case as readers might surmise, but a seeming desertion by a wife of her husband. There has been for some time a breach of some kind between man and wife, but what the real cause of their infelicity is not known. She has skipped and taken with her numerous articles of furniture.<sup>12</sup>

Mary Lavelle moved to Williamsburg, Brooklyn, where she conducted a boarding house, and leased the Octagon Hotel to Jacob Zweck. Zweck was also familiar with the operation of a hotel, as his father owned a hotel in Bay Shore. On June 29, 1893, Zweck purchased the hotel from Mary Lavelle for \$12,000 and she gave him a mortgage for part of that amount. Apparently, Zweck defaulted on the mortgage and Mary Lavelle sued him in the Supreme Court in Brooklyn. That court ordered the sale of the hotel to settle the mortgage and appointed J. Stewart Ross to act as referee. On May 18, 1895, a public auction was held at the front door of the Octagon Hotel and Mary Lavelle's bid of \$5,000 was the highest offer. On June 1, 1895, the property was officially deeded over to Mary Lavelle.<sup>13</sup>

Lavelle moved back to Oyster

Bay, made a number of improvements to the building, and changed its name from the Nassau House back to the Octagon Hotel. On the evening of September 19, 1895, the hotel was reopened to the public in what was described as a gala occasion. The newspaper reported that

the hostess was everywhere greeting her guests. The large hall at the back of the house had been thoroughly overhauled . . . covers were laid for one hundred persons and the tables showed to advantage under the hands of caterer and decorator. . . . It was a grand night indeed for Oyster Bay.<sup>14</sup>

In November 1896, the McKinley and Hobart Club of Queens County held a political meeting in Oyster Bay. Guests came from all parts of the county and they were treated to fireworks and a band. One hundred and fifty members had dinner at the Octagon. The newspapers reported little about activities at the Octagon Hotel during the next few years. They did mention that Mrs. Lavelle had planted two large fir trees in front of the hotel and that she had been injured by a fall. She also sponsored a contest to guess the weight of a hog.<sup>15</sup>

In May 1900, Mary Lavelle had a telephone exchange installed at the Octagon Hotel. Although there was another exchange in the village, it was only open to subscribers. The new telephone at the hotel was thought to be a great convenience as "the Octagon Hotel is kept open to a late hour and parties wishing to telephone New York will be able to do so."<sup>16</sup>

In the summer of 1900, the hotel was booked to capacity.



*The Octagon as it appeared under Mary Lavelle's ownership, c. 1900.  
Oyster Bay Historical Society's Collections.*

Mary Lavelle rented rooms in the Ludlum Building in Oyster Bay for herself, her son Richard, her mother Frieda Schuler, two servants, a bartender, and a waiter.<sup>17</sup>

On February 27, 1901, Mary Lavelle died from pneumonia and heart disease at the age of forty-two years. According to her obituary, after returning to the Octagon Hotel in 1895,

She went to work with an indomitable will and soon made the place what it is. Night and day she was always to be found, almost omnipresent, looking after the interest and comfort of her guests and her merry laugh resounded from every part of the house. . . . She was taken down on Friday night with the house filled to overflowing which fact rendered her illness of a shorter duration as she kept about too.

Lavelle left the Octagon Hotel to her son, Richard, and other relatives. Her mother, Frieda Schuler, initially took charge of the establishment. Soon after, she hired

Peter Nibbe, who had a hotel at Bethpage, who briefly managed the Octagon Hotel.<sup>18</sup>

In April 1901, Frederick D. Kellum, president of the Oyster Bay Lumber Company and town tax collector, purchased the hotel for \$8,000 and leased it to Charles Weeks. Weeks was a well-known hotel manager who had operated the Seawanhaka Hotel in Oyster Bay until it was destroyed by fire on March 4, 1901.<sup>19</sup>

Weeks apparently agreed to the lease with the understanding that Kellum would make improvements to the Octagon Hotel. The hotel was painted both inside and out. A kitchen was added at the rear of the building and the stables rebuilt. He also had pastoral scenes painted on the interior walls. In the dining room these paintings depicted a family of deer by a lake and a country church in winter surrounded by trees with two children trudging through the snow. In the bar room

there were two more paintings, one of which showed Ship Point looking down to Cove Neck. Weeks also purchased a number of seats for use at the hotel at an auction at the old school building.<sup>20</sup>

Although everything seemed to be progressing smoothly, the Jones Fund, which had held a mortgage on the property since the 1860s, now brought suit at a special term of the Nassau County Court to negate the sale of the Octagon Hotel to Kellum. Apparently, they had never received payment of the interest or the principal of the mortgage, and Henry M. W. Eastman was appointed as referee to resell the property. The money Kellum had paid in April 1901 must have been returned to him, but by now he had spent a considerable sum in restoring the hotel. On Febru-

ary 1, 1902, a public auction was held at the Nassau County Court House in Mineola. By making the highest bid, of \$7,800, Frederick Kellum again became the owner of the Octagon Hotel.<sup>21</sup>

During the next few years there were a number of references in newspapers to the hotel, including Weeks sponsoring a number of trotting races on West Main Street, which ended in front of the hotel. Probably the most noteworthy event, however, was the June 7, 1905, visit by Seth Low, who stopped to have lunch at the hotel. Low, who had been mayor of both Brooklyn and New York City, came to Oyster Bay looking for a summer home in the vicinity of Sagamore Hill. Another person who wished to be near Sagamore Hill was arrested later that year at the Octagon Hotel and charged with annoying President

Roosevelt and taken to Mineola for mental examination.<sup>22</sup>

The Oyster Bay Matinecock Masonic Lodge No. 806 made it a practice to hold their dinners at the Octagon Hotel. At the dinner held there on March 19, 1908, Theodore Roosevelt was among those who had "one of Charlie Weeks' famous feeds to which all did full justice, especially the loquacious brother from Sagamore Hill." Theodore Roosevelt had become a member of the lodge on April 24, 1901, and retained his membership for the rest of his life.<sup>23</sup>

In addition to managing the Octagon Hotel, Charles Weeks had a number of other interests. He ran another hotel in Glen Cove and had some political aspirations. After managing the Octagon Hotel for eight years and making it famous for its cuisine,



*Octagon Hotel, c. 1915.  
Photograph from Oyster Bay Historical Society's Collections.*

Weeks moved to Norwalk, Connecticut. In anticipation of a new proprietor running the hotel, Frederick D. Kellum began receiving bids for repainting the building.<sup>24</sup>

On November 6, 1908, Mrs. E. J. Nute, of the partnership of Nute & McCann, took over the management of the Octagon Hotel. While Mrs. Nute had charge of running the hotel, Mr. McCann handled the catering and he was reported to be a food "connoisseur."<sup>25</sup>

In January 1909, it was announced that its owner, Frederick D. Kellum, was arranging for the installation of a steam heating plant in the Octagon Hotel. According to the local newspaper, it was "a great improvement in the place and will be appreciated by the traveling public which patronize it." In addition, a new bar with complete fixtures was to be installed.<sup>26</sup>

During their proprietorship Nute & McCann totally renovated the building and instituted weekly hops (dances), which were very popular. In December 1911, Mrs. Nute left the hotel business and moved to Larchmont, New York, where her husband was running an inn.<sup>27</sup>

The next person to manage the Octagon Hotel was John H. McKenney, a former baseball pitcher from Oyster Bay who had been signed by the New York Giants and played in the minor leagues. McKenney took possession on December 6, 1911. The local newspaper reported that he "is new to the hotel business, but he is popular and knows how a hotel should be run, he will undoubtedly make a success of the venture."<sup>28</sup>

McKenney ran the Octagon Hotel for only a little more than a year. During that period, his wife moved into a house on Florence

Avenue, as she was "not particularly pleased with life in a hotel." His wife's dissatisfaction may have been the reason McKenney sold his lease of the hotel to William J. Davenport, who took possession on February 21, 1913.<sup>29</sup>

Davenport had been keeping a hotel in Brooklyn prior to moving to Oyster Bay. He was said to be a "noted hotel man of experience" and, along with Mary Lavelle and Charles Weeks, was one of the most popular proprietors of the Octagon Hotel. By May 1913, Davenport had begun improving the appearance of the exterior of the hotel. He placed flowerpots at intervals in front of the building and graded the grounds to create a mound on which the words "Davenport's Hotel" were written with large white stones. According to the local newspaper, the grounds around the hotel were "objects of beauty and of great attraction to his many guests."<sup>30</sup>

In 1916 and 1917, both Davenport and Kellum made additional unspecified improvements to the hotel. Then, in 1918, Davenport hired a quartet of musicians and vocalists and used the large dining room for dancing.<sup>31</sup>

The Octagon Hotel was closed during the winters of 1920 to 1922, reopening in April of those years. This was done because business was very slow during the winter months. During those years a Mrs. Elizabeth had been acting as assistant manager of the hotel.<sup>32</sup>

The last year the Octagon Hotel served its original purpose was 1922, a year when it entertained one last famous guest, General



*Edward J. Fisher's Ford dealership, c. 1927.  
Oyster Bay Historical Society's Collections.*

John J. "Black Jack" Pershing, commander of the American Expeditionary Force in World War I. On Sunday, May 28, 1922, the *Oyster Bay Guardian* reported that

General Pershing with a party of friends were guests at Davenport's. They came unannounced and were given a private dining room on the second floor, as the general was particularly anxious that his identity should remain unknown. After the dinner was over the party very quickly loaded into their car without even hinting as to the route they were following.<sup>33</sup>

### Epilogue

On September 7, 1922, Frederick D. Kellum sold the hotel property to Edward J. Fisher, for an undisclosed amount.<sup>34</sup> Fisher had become an agent of the Ford Motor Company in 1911. The *Oyster Bay Guardian* reported his purchase of the Octagon Hotel property and his plans to convert the octagon part of the building into a home for himself and the balance into an automobile showroom and garage. In the fall of 1922, Fisher moved his Ford agency from Audrey Avenue to his new show room on the Octagon property, which was a one-story wooden structure, which ran the length of the property along West Main Street. It was said to be "one of the finest show rooms in Oyster Bay" and by 1924, Fisher was selling four hundred cars a year and employed eighteen men. He retired from business around May of 1927, but continued to live in the octagon structure.<sup>35</sup>

Since late 1940, an arsonist had been setting fires in the village of

Oyster Bay. On February 3, 1941, an attempt was made to burn down the octagon building. The fire department was able to extinguish the flames with damage to the structure estimated at only \$300.<sup>36</sup>

Emil Bulck purchased the property from Fisher, on October 25, 1946.<sup>37</sup> Bulck had owned the Oyster Bay Garage since at least 1928, and was in several different locations before he acquired the octagon building. He demolished the two-story kitchen and dining room section that Kellum had added to the main building in 1901. He also demolished the automobile showroom section and started work on completing the garage at the front of the property. On March 27, 1947, Mr. and Mrs. Emil Bulck moved into their octagon building.<sup>38</sup>

Bulck became an authorized dealer for Austin automobiles and his newspaper advertisements read "The Oyster Bay Garage at the Octagon." He also became involved in civic affairs and was to serve two terms as president of the Oyster Bay Chamber of Commerce.<sup>39</sup>

Eventually Bulck turned the operation of the Oyster Bay Garage over to his son William and then, on December 31, 1964, leased the property to him for a period of twenty-five years. On April 9, 1970, Emil and his wife Mary Joan Bulck placed the ownership of the property under the control of Bulck Trust, with themselves as trustees.<sup>40</sup>

During the years that William Bulck ran the Oyster Bay Garage, he began selling Datsuns, listing his business as "Long Island's Oldest Datsun Dealer." Eventually,

ly, he became a Nissan dealer and renamed the business Oyster Bay Nissan. William Bulck retired shortly before his lease on the Octagon Hotel property expired and moved to Myrtle Beach, South Carolina in 1989.<sup>41</sup>

In May 1989, the property was leased to John Keeling and Saban Akyildiz who began an automobile detail restoration shop they called Octagon Autohaus. In addition to detailing cars, they ran a shop selling sound units, cellular phones, and alarm systems.<sup>42</sup>

On April 3, 1991, Emil Bulck died in Cape Coral, Florida, at the age of eighty-six years and six years later, his son, William Bulck died. Emil's widow, Mary Jane Bulck, decided to sell the property. As one of the trustees of the Bulck Trust, she terminated the still existing lease to the Oyster Bay Garage and sold the property to John Volpe and Salvatore Esposito for \$250,000 on August 25, 1993. This ended a forty-seven year ownership by the Bulck family. Volpe and Esposito used the property as an automotive and boat detailing center. Later they added automobile repairs to their business and continued at that location until 2007. On March 16, 2007, they sold the property to the Bevola Realty Corporation of Levittown, New York, for \$800,000.<sup>43</sup>

The present owner is Bevola Realty Corporation. One of the owners, Domenico Belcastro, initially had stated that they had intended to restore the Octagon Hotel to the way it looked about 1900. Now, however, he feels that it has deteriorated to such an extent that this is no longer possi-

ble. His plan, as of this writing, is to demolish the building and replace it with a replica. He did not think there was anything in the building that could be saved. An article written in 1973, however, noted that the original banister, newel post, and half of the molding still remained. The author of that article also believed that the murals on the walls of the former bar and dining rooms were still there, but covered over by plasterboard.<sup>44</sup> Possibly there is much more left of the original building which would make it worthy of restoration.

It seems unfortunate that having survived two fires and many changes during its more than one hundred and fifty years that the Octagon Hotel may not survive much longer. It is the only surviving octagon building in Nassau County. With its demise Long Island will lose one of its most unique historic structures.<sup>45</sup>

Maple Hill Press, 2005), pp. 91-92. The 1853 edition was reprinted under the title *The Octagon House, A Home for All* with a new introduction by Madeline B. Stern and new photographs (New York: Dover Publications, 1973).

The octagon jail in Riverhead was torn down in 1911. The octagon house in Brentwood is now Christ Church Rectory. Three of Long Island's octagonal structures are on the National Register of Historic Places: the Modern Times schoolhouse in Brentwood (moved to 2nd Street and 5th Avenue), the Prime House in Huntington (35 Prime Avenue), and the octagon building in Matituck (Main Road and Love Lane).

2. Monilaws bought the property from Elizabeth Wooden who had inherited it from her brother, Solomon Wooden. Queens County Deeds, Liber 126, pp. 389-390.  
3. *Glen Cove Gazette*, June 27, 1857 and March 6, 1858; 1860

manuscript census.

4. Queens County Deeds, Liber 184, pp. 410-11.

5. *Nassau County Star*, September 19, 1932. Unfortunately, nothing further was mentioned regarding activities at the Octagon Hotel during the Civil War years.

6. *Glen Cove Gazette*, March 17, 1866. See also *Queens County Sentinel*, March 22, 1866; *Long-Islander*, March 23, 1866.

7. Queens County Deeds, Liber 494, pp. 260-63; *Long-Islander*, June 15, 1866.

8. *Hempstead Inquirer*, December 11, 1868; "Nassau House" is the name on F. W. Beers, *Atlas of Long Island, N.Y.* (Beers, Comstock & Cline, 1873), plate no. 126. After leaving the Octagon Hotel, Reed moved to Rockaway where he took over management of the Sea Side House.

*continued on p. 16*

## Notes

I wish to thank Thomas A. Kuehhas, director of the Oyster Bay Historical Society for providing materials used in the writing of this article.

1. Orson S. Fowler, *A Home For All, Or The Gravel Wall Plan and Octagon Mode of Buildings* (New York: Fowler & Wells, 1853); Verne Dyson, *A Century of Brentwood* (Brentwood: Brentwood Village Press, 1950), pp. 61, 95; Thomas M. Stark, *Riverhead: The Halcyon Years 1861-1919* (Huntington:



Oyster Bay Garage, c. 1965. Note that the octagon building has lost its cupola.  
Photograph courtesy Oyster Bay Historical Society

## THE ARCHIVIST'S ANGLE

by Philip Blocklyn

In the spring of 1941, the United States Army Air Corps formed the Ferrying Command to transport military aircraft from domestic manufacturing facilities to delivery sites in Great Britain. By America's entry into the war seven months later, the command had delivered well over one thousand airplanes. The mission quickly expanded to include the transport of personnel, war materiel, and mail for delivery to military installations across the world. The Air Transport Command, as it soon became known, served as the lifeline of the Air Corps throughout the Second World War.

One member of the ATC was Captain Cletus Keating of Locust Valley, whose military papers and other service effects form the basis of the Oyster Bay Historical Society's Keating Collection. Accessioned by the Society in 2000, the collection consists of War Department orders, flight training examinations, and field manuals, along with artifactual materials such as flight suits and flight bags, ATC pins and patches, overcoats, and gloves. Of particular interest is a scrapbook covering Keating's ATC missions of 1945 and 1946, one of which involved Secretary of State James F. Byrnes' Big Three trip to Moscow in December 1945.

Keating was First Pilot on that mission, which encountered blizzard conditions on its last leg, as Keating ferried the State Department contingent from Tempelhof Airport in Occupied Berlin to Moscow's Central Airdrome. News reports implied that mem-

bers of the party, including Byrnes himself, were less than thrilled by the experience. Last word of their discontent reach ATC officials and cause any political embarrassment, Byrnes apologized to Captain Keating in a signed letter dated 29 December 1945 and typed on State Department stationery. The letter, mounted to folio 10 of the scrapbook, indicates that "if it had not been for your skill we would not have found Moscow but would have had to return to Berlin."

### Sources:

Atkinson, Brooks. "Byrnes in Moscow After Pilot Fights Blizzard For Hour." *New York Times*.

December 15, 1945. *New York Times* (1857-Current file), p. 1. Retrieved January 16, 2009, from ProQuest Historical Newspapers *The New York Times* (1851 - 2005) database. (Document ID: 103607512).

National Museum of the United States Air Force. "Fact Sheet: Air Transport Command." Retrieved January 16, 2009, from National Museum of the USAF website. <http://www.nationalmuseum.af.mil/factsheets/factsheet.asp?id=1331>

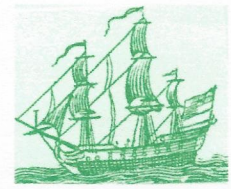
Oyster Bay Historical Society. Cletus Keating Collection 00.172. Scrapbook 00.172.315.



*Captain Cletus Keating*



## CURRENTS OF THE BAY



*This section focuses on the doings of local historical societies, museums, and communities in the Town of Oyster Bay and its neighbors. Upcoming special events, exhibits, lectures and tours are featured, so send your submissions to the Editor if you would like to see your events covered in **The Freeholder**.*

### THE CURATOR'S CORNER

by Yvonne Noonan-Cifarelli, Curator

On April 8th the North Country Garden Club attended a Curator's Behind-the-Scenes Tour of the Oyster Bay Historical Society's Spring exhibition "Dearest Jane... Love L." The exhibition honors the career and legacy of Jane Bush Francke, a renowned gardener and early proponent of responsible land use on Long Island and across the nation. After Mrs. Francke's death in 1953, her daughter Ada Whitaker donated four acres of her family's estate in Brookville as a bird sanctuary, maintained by Garden Club volunteers.

The North Country Garden Club has maintained the Society's 18th-century garden for over thirty years. The garden serves as a sanctuary from 21st-century stress and noise while providing Society visitors with a historically accurate presentation of how such a garden would have looked over two hundred years ago. Society members are grateful for the Club's continuing dedication to this distinctive garden.

Archivist Philip Blocklyn led the tour of the exhibition and provided background to the lives of Jane Francke and her husband Luis. Club members expressed their appreciation for the Society's determination to honor and preserve the memory of Mrs. Francke's dedication to beautiful gardens and environmental responsibility. During lunch, many members enjoyed meeting

with Mrs. Francke's granddaughter Ellen Curtis, who donated her family's collection of photographs, correspondence, and documents which form the Society's Jane Bush Francke Papers. The Society's administrative assistant, Milicent Pittis, coordinated the morning's tour and afternoon luncheon.

At the tour's conclusion, Director Tom Kuehhas spoke about the Society's mission to preserve and display its important collections documenting the rich history of Oyster Bay. In view of this mission, the Society has committed itself to a capital campaign for the construction of an archival repository and research center. Those who wish to contribute to the building fund and the preser-

vation of Oyster Bay's history should contact the Society's headquarters at 516-922-5032 or [tk@oysterbayhistory.org](mailto:tk@oysterbayhistory.org).

### SOCIETY MOURNS PASSING OF JOHN CLEARY

The Officers, Trustees, and staff of the Oyster Bay Historical Society were deeply saddened to hear of the passing of former trustee, John Cleary, on Sunday, February 1, 2009.

John served on the Society's Board of Trustees from 1993 through 1998 and remained a staunch supporter of the Society's activities, including taking a leading role on the Oyster Bay Historical Society's Building Fund Committee, to which he



*The Curtis family poses in the Earle-Wightman House Garden, maintained by the members of the North Country Garden Club.*



*Rita and John Cleary attended the kickoff event for the Society's Building Fund, held at the home of John and Lola Grace.*

made a significant contribution.

Society Director Tom Kuehhas stated, "John's input was always of great value. He did not mince words and pulled no punches, but said what needed to be said, regardless of the consequences. Even if it wasn't exactly what one wanted to hear at that moment, time always proved John right! He will be sorely missed."

Our condolences to John's family, including his wife, Rita, two sons, Mark and James, and daughter, Sharon, as well as eight

brothers and sisters and their children.

### **SAGAMORE HILL NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE**

The final lecture of the Friends of Sagamore Hill's 2009 John A. Gable Lecture Series will take place on Tuesday, May 12, and will feature Franklin H. Perrell, Chief Curator of the Nassau County Museum of Art, speaking on "TR and the Art of His Time."

The first two lectures featured Charles Markis, Chief of Inter-

pretation at Sagamore Hill, and Commander Henry J. Hendrix II.

Doors open at 7pm; programs begin at 7:30; and will be held at the newly-renovated Christ Church Parish Hall, 61 East Main Street, in Oyster Bay. Following the lecture and a brief discussion, light refreshments will be served and the public can meet with the speakers in an informal setting.

### **FARMINGDALE-BETHPAGE HISTORICAL SOCIETY**

The FBHS has a new website at [www.fbhsli.org](http://www.fbhsli.org). Additional information may be found at: [info@fbhsli.org](mailto:info@fbhsli.org).

The cooperative Grumman program, presented jointly with the Central Park Historical Society, was a great success. Longtime member and trustee Eric Goldschrafe displayed two of his model Grumman aircraft at the January meeting.

On February 15, historian and author Gene Horton appeared as "William Floyd, Long Island's Signer of the Declaration of Independence." This presentation attracted a sizeable audience.

On Sunday, March 8, David Morrison presented an overview of the history of the Long Island Rail Road at the Farmingdale Public Library. Mr. Morrison is a leading rail historian and author and former president of the LIRR Historical Society.

On Sunday, May 3, there will be a tour of the Dominican Heritage Center at 2 pm.

On Sunday, May 17, there will be a bus tour of Civil War Veteran's Gravesites.

Watch for special events, to be announced later, scheduled for

### **OYSTER BAY HISTORICAL SOCIETY**

#### **Categories of Membership**

Individual	\$ 35	Business	\$ 75
Family	\$ 45	Business Sponsor	\$ 100
Contributing	\$ 75	Business Friend	\$ 300
Sponsor	\$ 100	Business Patron	\$ 500+
Sustaining	\$ 250	Benefactor	\$ 1000+
Patron	\$ 500		

Member Benefits: Quarterly Magazine, Members' Party, Invitations to Exhibition Previews and Special Events, 10% Discount on Publications and Workshops. Call (516) 922-5032 for more information on joining the Society.

**Visit the Oyster Bay  
Historical Society's  
NEW website!  
[www.oysterbayhistory.org](http://www.oysterbayhistory.org)**

Memorial Day on May 25.

Check the Society's new website for up-to-date information.

### **CENTRAL PARK HISTORICAL SOCIETY**

Many attended the January 11th presentation of "Grumman, a Historical and Personal Look Back" given by Lois Lovisolo, co-hosted with the Farmingdale-Bethpage Historical Society. The company, founded in a Baldwin garage by Leroy Grumman in 1929, then moving to Bethpage in 1936, was a vital part of the com-

munity in peace and war.

### **LOCUST VALLEY HISTORICAL SOCIETY**

The Society now has its collection formatted in a searchable directory. The directory may be viewed at [www.locustvalleylibrary@yahoo.com](http://www.locustvalleylibrary@yahoo.com). For more details contact the library at 671-1837. Their postcard collection has been scanned onto a website co-hosted by the Locust Valley Library and the Long Island Library Resource Council and is viewable via <http://www.nassaulibrary.org/locustv/> and go to "Locust Valley History OnLine."

### **SPLIA**

The Annual Preservation Awards Ceremony took place on Sunday, May 3, 2009, at the Soci-

Many thanks to Harry L. Dickran of Levon Graphics Corp., Route 109, East Farmingdale, for printing *The Freeholder* for the Society.

His generosity allows the magazine to reach a much wider audience than was heretofore possible. Please patronize our sponsors!

ety's Headquarters located at 161 Main St., Cold Spring Harbor. This year's honorees were Mr. Richard Weiss, The Historic Preservation Commission of Great Neck Plaza and the Mill Neck Family of Organizations.

### **LONG ISLAND SUNRISE TRAIL - (LIST)**

The month of April marked the celebration of the 175th Anniversary of the Long Island Rail



### ***Rye-Oyster Bay Bridge Exhibition***

*Do you remember when you heard that Robert Moses and Nelson Rockefeller wanted to construct a bridge through Oyster Bay? To mark the 40th Anniversary of the Oyster Bay Wildlife Refuge and the "Bridge Fight" from 1964 to 1973, the Oyster Bay Historical Society and Friends of the Bay will display artifacts which relate to the battle for Oyster Bay Harbor.*

*The exhibition is an offshoot of a program presented by Joshua Reyes, a ranger at Sagamore Hill, to Friends of the Bay on February 4, 2009. A few of the letters discussed in the program will be on display along with other interesting artifacts related to the "Bridge Fight." The hope is that the exhibition will spark new local interest in the topic, and encourage Oyster Bay residents to come forward and share their stories along with mementos related to the event. The exhibition will last from the middle of May until the middle of June.*

The Society now has available a "1900 View of Oyster Bay," which shows every building in existence at that time and includes a list of businesses and prominent residences. Eminently suitable for framing, this print is a great bargain at \$25 plus shipping. Contact the Society at (516) 922-5032 to order yours today!

Also available are an 1833 map of Oyster Bay (\$10) and a map of Gold Coast estates c. 1920 (\$17). Shipping is additional.

Road, which was chartered in 1834. It is the oldest railroad in the United States still operating under its original name. On Saturday, April 25, a symposium was held at the Hicksville Middle School to mark the occasion. See their website at [www.nrhs-list.org](http://www.nrhs-list.org) for more information.

## O.B. HISTORICAL SOCIETY HONORS

### WWII VETS ON "D-DAY!"

To honor all our brave Service Men and Women – past & present – the Oyster Bay Historical Society is presenting a three-part celebration to pay them tribute on the 65th Anniversary of "D-Day!" Part I is an Authentic Canteen Dinner Dance to be held at East Woods School on June 6, 2009, from 6 to 11pm.

Bob Merrill and his "GI Jive Swing Cats" will be jiving to the music of WWII...all the great sounds of the '40s that brought joy and comfort to our Boys & Girls at the USO Canteens. There will be live entertainment throughout the evening, including Fran Biondi, Joel Fairman, Deborah Held, Bob Lindsay, Rosemary Miller, Shekinah MacMillan, Bill Sheeline, and a

special performance by the Chorus of the Long Island Harmonizers! Attendees will also have an opportunity to bring "needed items" which will then be sent to our men and women serving in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Part II & III of the celebration will be a Roundtable Discussion & Exhibit documenting the memorable experiences of the WWII vets that call Oyster Bay their "Home Town." To honor their service, the Society will present a remarkable exhibition and a lively "round table" discussion called "Oyster Bay Goes to War." Both events will include interviews with Oyster Bay Veterans who served during those incredible

years. The exhibit will be filled with dramatic and nostalgic photographs of those challenging times, and will make you proud to be a citizen of Oyster Bay! This is a wonderful opportunity to show your support for those who have served our Great Country, past and present! This event will take place at 2pm on June 28th, 2009, at the Oyster Bay Community Center, and will continue at the Earle-Wightman House at 20 Summit Street.

For tickets to the events or more information, call the Oyster Bay Historical Society at 516-922-5032, or e-mail to [OBHISTORY@AOL.COM](mailto:OBHISTORY@AOL.COM).



*The "Oyster Bay Goes To War" Canteen Dance Committee:*

*Front Row: Milicent Pittis, Stefanie Leone, Fran Leone.*

*Second Row: Maureen Monck, Nick DeSantis, Yvonne Noonan-Cifarelli.*

*Third Row: Barrie Curtis Spies, Philip Blocklyn, Tom Kuehhas, Frank Leone. Not pictured: Bea Cook and John LoRusso.*



## THE GATHERING PLACE



*"The Gathering Place" is the department of the magazine housing contributions of an historical slant but of short length that might otherwise be lost among the longer pieces. To our members who are not ready to attempt long or deeply researched articles, this is the place for your notions and comments, however brief.*

### An Afternoon with T.R.

by Rita Cleary

Recently, I sat for an afternoon in the archives of my public library reading *Hunting Adventures in the West*, by Theodore Roosevelt, one of the greatest eastern westerners. It was a wonderful afternoon that I'd like to share.

Roosevelt grew up in downtown New York. He was a highly intelligent, asthmatic, city child. He knew sorrow. Alice, his beloved first wife died young. Nearly simultaneously, his mother died. To ease his grief, he went west, to Medora, North Dakota, "to the eastern border of the cattle country where the Little Missouri flows through the heart of the Bad Lands," a place "where the unfit are weeded out by a very rapid process of natural selection." He loved the "rosy buttes lit by the level rays of the summer sun" where the only company was a magpie perched on a buffalo skull. These western Bad Lands restored him physically and mentally.

For a New Yorker, it was not an easy life. Wolves howled nightly near the house and often carried off a sheep or goat. Coyotes and badgers were never far away. T.R. never stepped off the porch without his gun. His favorite was an "accurate, durable" .45-75 half magazine Winchester, custom stocked and sighted. He carried as well a Colt .45 and a sharp knife. He rode a horse named Manitou, "stout and strong"

enough to carry game plus a rider for miles at a lope. Manitou was steady under fire and ignored the smell of blood.

Roosevelt did all kinds of hunting. He knew his game birds: pintail, teal, shoveler and widgeon. He knew where to find them in summer "in coulees or creekbeds after rain," and hunted them with a double barreled 16-gauge shotgun. He hunted winter and summer. For larger game he used everything from his Winchester to a heavy .40-90 Sharps rifle. Weather never bothered him: hunting in light snow made tracking easier. He went after a whitetail deer one evening in the snow, shortly before dark. The

buck jumped before he could get a standing shot and he wounded it in the foot. He pursued it for two miles across a river until darkness fell and he couldn't see. The next morning he came back and when the buck raised his head and antlers above the brush, T.R. shot at thirty yards. The bullet entered the throat and broke the buck's neck. It fell in its tracks without a kick. Roosevelt dragged it by the antlers over crusted snow back to the ranch. The temperature was 50 below zero.

One hot June morning, T.R. packed his blanket, cup, looking glass, tea, salt pork, beans, potatoes and a book, saddled up and went out for antelope. He liked



*TR in the Bad Lands, 1885*

to hunt antelope because they run with an even gait in a straight line over open country and provide a good running target. Through a simmering summer haze, T.R. spotted his prey. He dismounted about a mile away, stalked the antelope on foot to within a half-mile then, concealed in a creekbed and baked by the sun, crawled on his belly the last thirsty, dusty half-mile. With his cheek to the earth so as not to alert the antelope, he heard the familiar whirr of a rattlesnake. T.R. turned back only briefly, followed another track and finally shot, breaking the antelope's neck from 300 yards. He returned to kill the rattler. Exhausted, he cut out only the hams, carried them back to the horse, turned the horse to graze and lay face to the ground to cool his overheated body and regain his strength because there was no shade.

Roosevelt describes only one buffalo hunt. The buff bull charged his horse on rough ground. He shot and hit the bull in the face. The bullet bounced off but deterred the animal's charge. T.R. pursued and after a long chase, the bull outran his horse. He ended up with an exhausted horse in a desolate place where horse thieves ranged. He couldn't make it back home to the ranch that night. He spread his blanket on the ground with an oilskin over it, tied his horse to the saddle horn to keep it near, and fell asleep. At 3 A.M., a storm hit. The horse galloped off, saddle and all. Roosevelt tracked it through the rain in the middle of the night. He didn't regret losing the buffalo. He was a frequent rider through the country

around Big Sandy and O'Fallon Creeks where bleached buffalo skulls littered the landscape. The extermination of the buffalo filled him with sorrow. He called it "a veritable tragedy of the animal world."

Roosevelt gained back his health and spirit from his Western experiences. He learned patience, perseverance, and respect for the beauty and power of nature. He developed that indomitable endurance and energy for which he is so admired; energy that created the Forest Service, founded eighteen national monuments, fought a war, organized the building of the Panama Canal and created the Museum of Natural History in New York City. And of course he became a great conservationist, Police Commissioner, Secretary of the Navy, Governor of New York, U.S. Vice President, and finally President and world leader. He did it without Stairmasters and exercise classes. He did it outside in the wild lands that God made.

But his wasn't all physical effort. A book went with T.R. wherever he went, even on a hunting trip. He had no television, no computer. He had a pen and pad and a pragmatic, inquisitive intelligence honed by the challenges that the wilderness hurled at him.

I think Theodore Roosevelt hardly ever spent an entire afternoon sitting in a chair, like I did in the library. But that afternoon, passed reading his exploits, made me want to breathe fresh air. I got up and went for a swift, invigorating walk.

## Octagon Hotel

*continued from p. 9*

9. Queens County Deeds, Liber 523, pp. 416-19. Of the \$8,250 total, \$4,000 was to be in repayment of the mortgage made by Bertha Jacobs, the wife of Samuel Jacobs.

10. *East Norwich Enterprise*, Aug. 20, 1881; Queens County Deeds, Liber 698, pp. 198-201; *East Norwich Enterprise*, June 23, 1883.

11. Queens County Deeds, Liber 698, pp. 198-201; Queens County Deeds, Liber 790, pp. 241-44.

12. *East Norwich Enterprise*, August 9, 1890.

13. *Oyster Bay Guardian*, March 1, 1901; Queens County Deeds, Liber 983, pp. 27-29; Queens County Deeds, Liber 1076, pp. 249-52.

14. *East Norwich Enterprise*, September 21, 1895.

15. Garret Hobart was William McKinley's vice presidential running mate in the 1896 election. "Do You Remember," *Oyster Bay Guardian*, August 8, 1897; *East Norwich Enterprise*, June 6, 1898; *Oyster Bay Guardian*, April 14, 1899.

16. *Oyster Bay Guardian*, May 25, 1900.

17. *Oyster Bay Guardian*, June 22, 1900; 1900 Oyster Bay Town Census, p. 198A.

18. The Rev. A. G. Russell officiated at Mary Lavelle's funeral, which was well attended, and interment was made at the family burial grounds at Bethpage. *Oyster Bay Guardian*, March 1, 1901, March 8, 1901, and March 9, 1956.

19. *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, April 12, 1901; *Oyster Bay Guardian*, April 12, 1901 and March 8,

1901.

20. *Oyster Bay Guardian*, April 12, 1901, May 10, 1901, May 17, 1901, May 24, 1901, and April 27, 1901. (Today's Ships Point Lane is east of the Oyster Bay business district.)

21. Nassau County Deeds, Liber 26, pp. 243-45.

22. *Oyster Bay Guardian*, April 11, 1902, June 10, 1905, September 16, 1960.

23. *East Norwich Enterprise*, March 21, 1908; *Oyster Bay Guardian*, June 19, 1992.

24. *Oyster Bay Guardian*, March 5, 1907, April 27, 1907, April 26, 1909, and May 22, 1953.

25. In addition to managing the Octagon Hotel, Nute & McCann also ran the Inside Inn in Oyster Bay. *Oyster Bay Guardian*, November 13, 1908, May 14, 1909, and May 21, 1909.

26. *Oyster Bay Guardian*, January 29, 1909 and June 19, 1959.

27. *Oyster Bay Guardian*, December 8, 1911.

28. Ibid.

29. *Oyster Bay Guardian*, December 20, 1912 and February 28, 1913.

30. *Oyster Bay Guardian*, March 15, 1913, May 30, 1913, and July 12, 1913.

31. *Oyster Bay Guardian*, October 19, 1951 and April 19, 1918.

32. *Oyster Bay Guardian*, November 3, 1922.

33. *Oyster Bay Guardian*, June 2, 1972.

34. Nassau County Deeds, Liber 739, pp. 83-84. On November 27, 1935, Frederick D. Kellum died at the age of seventy-three. He had owned the Octagon Hotel from 1901 to 1922 and had been responsible for many of the improvements made to that struc-

ture. William J. Davenport, who had been the last proprietor of the hotel died on December 26, 1936, at the age of seventy-one. (*Oyster Bay Guardian*, November 29, 1935, December 25, 1936.)

35. *Oyster Bay Guardian*, September 15, 1922; Henry Isham Hazelton, *The Boroughs of Brooklyn and Queens Counties, Long Island, New York, 1609-1924*, 6 vols. (New York: Lewis Historical Publishing Company, 1925), 5:142; *Oyster Bay Guardian*, November 24, 1922, August 8, 1997, and December 1, 1950.

36. Fisher was wintering in Florida and the building was under the protection of a caretaker. This was the second time that a fire could have destroyed the octagon structure. *Oyster Bay Guardian*, February 7, 1941.

37. Nassau County Deeds, Liber 3521, pp. 79-81. Unfortunately, the deed does not give the amount he paid. Following the sale of the hotel, Fisher continued returning to Oyster Bay each summer and living at the Matinecock Inn. On November 30, 1950, he died at his winter home in Miami, Florida; *Oyster Bay Guardian*, December 1, 1950, November 4, 1946.

38. *Oyster Bay Guardian*, November 4, 1946 and April 4, 1947. Soon after, Mrs. Olive Bulck began classes at Columbia University's School of General Studies and graduated with a bachelor of science degree in 1951. She entered the Women's Medical College of Pennsylvania and four years later graduated as a medical doctor. After interning

*continued on p. 22*



*View of the octagon building's north façade from West Main Street in 2009.*

Poets usually rewrite and revise their poems many times before being satisfied with the final copy. Walt Whitman, among others, wrote and rewrote his poems until he was content with the final outcome.

Most members of the Long Island Dead Poets' Society also followed this guideline in their poetry. One poem, in fact, took two centuries to be completed before it reached its final rendition. This poem "Stones That Mark The Bones,"<sup>1</sup> was written by the Oyster Bay resident, Samuel Youngs, in the nineteenth century. In his poem, Youngs was perhaps inspired by a visit to a local cemetery in search of a departed relative. His completed poem at that time read like this:

Stones That Mark The Bones  
Where are the stones  
That mark the bones  
Of those who die in Oyster Bay?  
There are no stones  
To mark the bones  
Of those who die in Oyster Bay.



*Stones mark the bones in Oyster Bay.*

On Clams and such nutritious food,  
They live till resurrection day.

This poem was read decades later by Peter L. Van Santvoord (1938-1967), the City of Glen Cove historian. Van Santvoord attended Friend's Academy and graduated from Hofstra University, winning the President's Award. He thought Youngs' poem could be added on to. In 1962, inspired by Youngs' original verse, Van Santvoord incorporated his lines to form the second stanza of "Stones That Mark The Bones:"

Here are the stones  
That mark the bones  
Of those who die in Oyster Bay.  
Imposing monuments mark the bones  
Of those who die in Oyster Bay.  
Beneath these silent bits of stone,  
They sleep till resurrection day.

Again in 1962, Herbert Hale (1893-1968), Oyster Bay Town Historian and a friend of Van Santvoord, also added his verses to this poem which was first written in the prior century. Hale's lines project his thoughts about those stones that mark the bones and give his version of how the poem should end:

These are the stones  
That mark the bones  
Of those who died in Oyster Bay.  
Historical stones that mark the bones  
Of those who died in Oyster Bay.  
Peacefully they sleep  
beneath the stones  
Until the dawn of judgment day.

This poem written by three Oyster Bay men may be one of the oldest re-written poems on Long Island. Each poet added their insight to Youngs'<sup>2</sup> inspired thought of where the stones are until the last poet, Hale, sums it all up by finding the bones and proclaiming what will happen to the buried dead.

### The Humorist Poets

Humor has always been a mainstay of the members of the Long Island Poets' Society. Their wit and satire has shone repeatedly since the first members began to write their verse on Long Island. The poet, Philip Freneau, injected his wit in some early verse and William Cullen Bryant wrote the humorist poem, "The Mosquito." From the nineteenth century forward a few more poets joined this exclusive humor poetry club and some would gain great fame for the cunning use of wit in their prose.

When the Reverend Edward Hooper died in 1888, a memorial service was held for him in Sag Harbor. Reverend Hooper was the former pastor of the Presbyterian Church there for eleven years (1852-1863). During his tenure as a preacher in Sag Harbor, Hooper met with great resistance to him holding on to his pastoral duties.

After finally leaving his post and becoming a pastor in New York City, Hooper used his skills as a poet to write a satire called, "The Old Gray Horse." This long poem referred to the elders that opposed him at his former church, using different names to poke fun at them. After its publication it has been said that most

of the Sag Harbor copies of this book were burned.<sup>3</sup>

Sag Harbor has always been a poetic spot for our masters of verse. The poet/journalist Selleck Osborn lived there briefly. The poets George Sterling and Prentice Mulford were born there and the poet R.H. Stoddard is buried there.<sup>4</sup>

### Those Brooklyn Wits

One of the most well known humor poets was John G. Saxe (1817-1887). Saxe was born in Vermont and was a lawyer by trade before turning his attention to verse. During his lifetime his wit and funny verses were carried by the major newspapers and book publishers in America. Saxe lived in Brooklyn for a period of time with his family and gave lectures throughout the city which featured his wit and funny verses. His most famous poem was "The Blind Men and the Elephant." In eight stanzas, Saxe goes on to tell how six men of Indostan, who are blind, touch an elephant in different parts of his body and each one comes out with a different description of what an elephant looks like. In the first lines of his poem, "Wishing," Saxe writes:

Of all the amusements of the mind  
From logic to fishing,  
There isn't one that you can find  
So cheap as wishing.

Saxe's other poems, "Sonnet to a Clam," and "How Cyrus Laid the Cable" were also funny and popular in their time. The first line from his poem, "Early Rising," said, "God bless the man who first invented sleep."

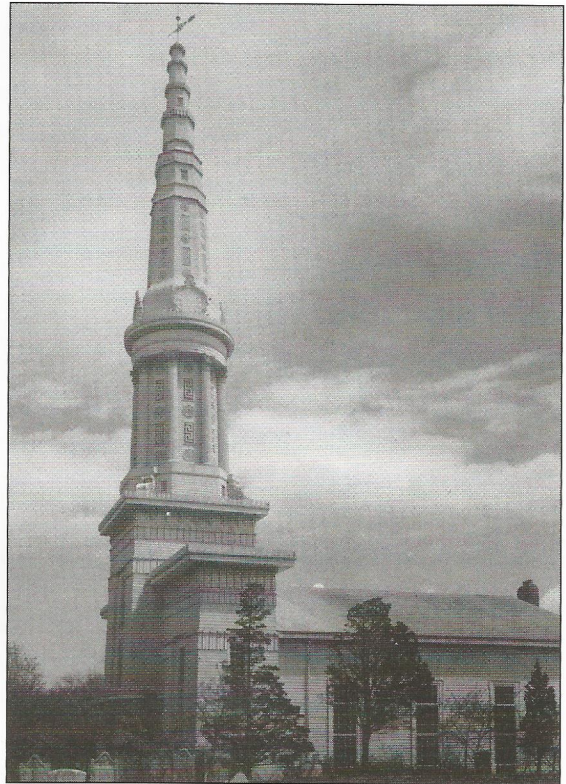
Besides poetry, Saxe could

make up observations that were popular with the masses. His observations on the making of laws were often quoted, "Laws, like sausages, cease to inspire respect in proportion as we know how they are made."

Some of Saxe's poetry including, "The Blind Men and the Elephant," was taught well into the 1950s in Long Island grade schools, until the use of poetry in education slowly disappeared.

Our second wit from Brooklyn is John Alden (1861-1934). Alden was born in Hoosick Falls, N.Y., and received his college degrees from Rutgers College in New Jersey. Alden was always proud of the fact that he was a direct descendant of John and Priscilla Alden of *Mayflower* fame. Alden did not start out as a poet but rather as a journalist, serving on the staff of several newspapers including the *Troy Press*, *New York Times*, and *New York World* before finally joining the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* in 1903.

Alden started his poetry career using his wit and humor in the editorial page of the *Eagle*. Alden thought he would elicit more of a response from his readers if he presented his views in poetry. So on March 6, 1904, Alden wrote and printed his first brief poem in the *Eagle*. Thirty years later Alden had delighted his readers by having some



*The Sag Harbor Presbyterian Church.*

10,928 consecutive poems printed with his viewpoint on the day's news.<sup>5</sup> When he died in 1934, the *Eagle* had to reprint, for the first time, one of his poems on the editorial page. Many of Alden's poems were short and funny and his total number of verses printed may never be matched by any members of The Long Island Dead Poets' Society.

Our third Brooklyn poet is Robert Dunn (1977-2008). Dunn was born in Brooklyn and viewed the realities of the world around him in his humorous verse. Dunn graduated from the School of Visual Arts (B.F.A.) and later earned a Masters in English from Queens College. Dunn, a pioneer in advancing the spread and understanding of poetry in the media, hosted a cable television show called "Poet to Poet" for many years in the New York City

area.

Before his sudden death from a heart attack in 2008, Dunn had established himself as a witty and funny bard with a following that transcended the city's borders. During his short lifetime Dunn gave many readings and produced a number of publications that included such titles as *One Hand Squashes the Other*, *Love Bonkers All, Not a Happy Camper*, *Zen Yentas in Bondage*, *Guilty as Charged*, *Playing in Traffic* and *Horse Latitudes*. The following lines from his 1999 poetry book, *Guilty as Charged*, reveal his insights and humor that made him a popular poet in his time.

"Oscar Night 1995" (inspired by Jambalaya)

Just this night we got no fight  
with street buskers.

We got ourselves engraved  
invites to the Oscars.

Seeing stars, producvars, studio  
hustlers.

Son of a gun! We have big fun at  
the Oscars.

"Desk Fever"

I must go down again, where my  
Paperwork cascades  
And turns radioactive from the  
fallout from

Aborted corporate raids.

And all I ask is not getting caught  
Photocopying resumes

'Till I land myself a better job-  
Preferably one that pays.<sup>6</sup>

### The Poet Lariat

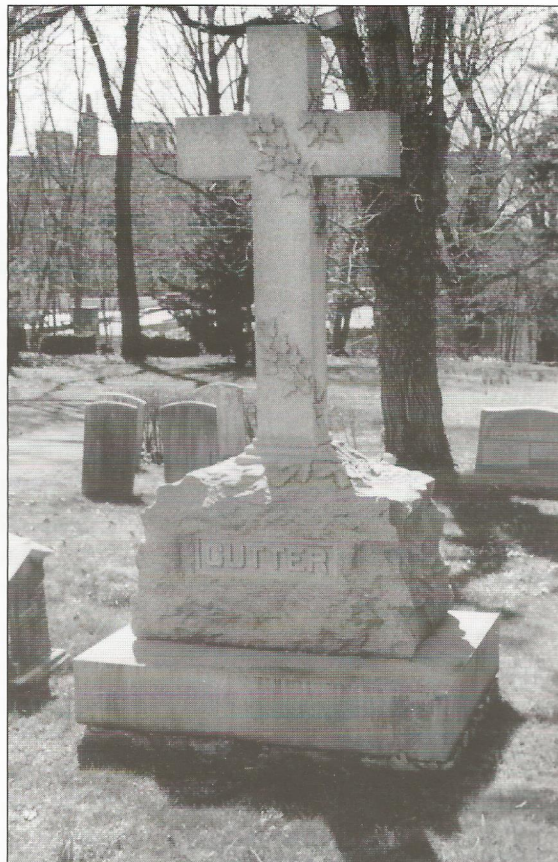
The farmer poet Bloodgood Haviland Cutter (1817-1906), wrote what some called "doggerel verse" in an age of serious poetry writers. Cutter was born near Great Neck; his only education was some grade school and

readings from the Bible.<sup>7</sup>

At the age of 23, Cutter married 16 year old Emmaline Allen, who became his lifetime mate. During the 1840s Cutter inherited more than one hundred acres of farm land. This later grew to hundreds of acres, which today would comprise the Village of Plandome Heights.

By the 1850s Cutter had started calling himself the "Long Island Farmer Poet." He wrote and handed out his poetry to anyone he met. Because of his farmer's clothing, unusual character and spontaneous poetry, Cutter became a minor celebrity across Long Island. But it was not until 1867, when he met the author Mark Twain on a cruise to the Holy Land and Europe, that Cutter's fame would rise to new heights. While Cutter was on board the ship *Quaker City* with Twain, he declared himself the ship's poet laureate and wrote a poem on every event that occurred during their voyage together. Twain was so amused by Cutter's verses and shameless promotions that he dubbed Cutter "The Poet Lariat."<sup>8</sup> Cutter forevermore proclaimed himself as Twain's friend.

Cutter's "doggerel" was now being published in the newspapers more frequently. Some samples from his poems during this time period-



Bloodgood Cutter's gravesite.

Photo by Robert L. Harrison.

On road and railroad expansion:

Come out! My friends, and now  
Subscribe

To build a road on the North  
Side;

If each one will only do in part,  
We soon will see the railroad  
start.

On smoking in the Queens Court  
room:

They do not seem to think or care  
How much they putrify the air;  
A man's lungs must be very  
strong

To breathe this bad air very long.

From An Ode to Glen Island:

Ye mountains on whose awful  
height

The wicked gnat does savage  
bite;

Ye thickets in whose tangled  
mazes

The dire mosquito stings like blazes.

In 1886, Cutter paid for the publication of his only book entitled, *The Long Island Farmer's Poems*. Over 500 pages long, it contained everything from his voyage poems with Twain to his observations on the Long Island Fair. For the next ten years, Cutter's antics and verses were ripe for newspaper coverage.<sup>9</sup> Even when he celebrated his eighty-eighth birthday, Cutter wrote a poem about it which was published.

Bloodgood Cutter is eighty-eight,  
Obeying God and defying Fate.  
He lives in Great Neck town,  
His age goes up and won't go down.<sup>10</sup>

Cutter lived on another year and when he died his estate was worth close to a million dollars.

### The Historian

Paul Bailey (1885-1962), was born in Blue Point and attended school in Patchogue. He is considered one of Long Island's true original wits and humorist poets. Bailey began writing early in life and produced short stories, novels, historic summaries and poetry throughout his lifetime. When Bailey later moved to Amityville he founded a newspaper, *The Long Island Sun*. Soon after he married the love of his life, Miss Florence Wyckoff, a local school teacher.

Bailey was later elected to the New York State Assembly, became a justice of the peace and the Amityville postmaster. When Bailey was in his fifties he began publication of the *Long Island Forum*, a magazine that explored the rich and colorful past of our

Island.

Because of his knowledge of Long Island's history and his many lectures on it, Bailey became the official historian of Suffolk County. It is Bailey's poetry about Long Island history and folklore that still is worth reading today.<sup>11</sup> His poem "Treading Clams," was admired by another of this Island's celebrated poets, Christopher Morley. The first lines from that classic poem reveal the skills of a master humorous poet:

There's an old belief that a Mass-  
apeag chief  
First introduced the role  
Of treading clams, that sport of  
hams  
Who seek a cleaner sole  
And who know the savage thrill  
of it,  
The aboriginal skill of it-  
To tramp around the bottom mud  
Telling the real clam from the  
dud.

Bailey loved poking fun at the myths and stories about Long Island's past. In his poem "Findings Keeping," he deals with the subject of a woman's misplaced grave and the consequences of it.

When Miss Jemima Jones  
expired,  
So crowded was the family plot  
They buried her across the road  
In Uncle Harvey's timber lot.

And then for years she slept in  
peace  
Forgotten by descendants Jones  
Until an archaeologist  
Discovered Miss Jemima's  
bones.

Now Miss Jemima's on display  
With wampum, arrowheads and  
rocks  
Collected by a student of

Long Island's proud  
Matinecocks.<sup>12</sup>

### The Poet Laureate of Sea Cliff

Thomas Canning (1925-2003), was a long time Sea Cliff resident. During this bard's life there, Canning commuted to work in Manhattan and raised a family with his wife Marge. This was nothing unusual for Long Islanders, except Canning loved to write humorous verse in his spare time. In the tradition of past humor bards, Canning would write about family members, the events in his life and about his friends.

After his death, Canning's immediate family gathered up their favorite poems of his and published a book called, *Verses in a Paper Dummy and other Selected Writings*.<sup>13</sup> Canning is a member of the Long Island Dead Poets' Society because he wrote poetry that was felt by the people around him and in turn they honored him by publishing those poems they connected with.

### The Farmer's Son

Below Huntington is a hilly landscape called the West Hills, where Walt Whitman was born and Djuna Barnes spent her teenage years. In 1901, Daniel M. Peters (1874-?), a farmer's son from the hills, wrote his poetry book, *Songs from Nature*, which was extensively reviewed by the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*.

The *Eagle* wrote favorably about this love poem saga and gave Peters high marks on his humorous observations. Peter's thoughts on the weather and farming reflect the *Eagle's* comments.

The farmer had some fertile land,  
And had money, too, on hand;  
He was a surly, crabbed man  
Who never fancied nature's plan.  
If it was cold, he'd have it warm,  
If it was fair he'd have it storm,  
If it was wet he'd have it dry,  
If he could rule both earth and sky.

The *Eagle*, at the end of their review, left their readers with Peter's final lines from his book of verse:

Some fairies in the peach tree hid,  
Talked loudly of what Katie did.  
She leaned her head against his breast,  
He kissed her and-you know the rest.<sup>14</sup>

### Notes

1. Thomas A. Kuehhas, director of the Oyster Bay Historical Society, brought this poem from the Society's files to my attention. Further research came from the obituaries of Herbert Hale in *Newsday*, 03/29/68 and of Peter Van Santvoord, in the *Glen Cove Record-Pilot*, 06/15/67. Both men played key roles in the early years of the Oyster Bay Historical Society.
2. The surname "Youngs," is an old Long Island family name going back to the seventeenth century on the East End. Thomas Youngs settled in Oyster Bay in 1676. Offshoots of this family may be found in the poets Dr. Benjamin Youngs Prime (1733-91) who lived in Huntington, and Mary Fanny Youngs (1880-1962), who was a children's poet and lived in Oyster Bay and Garden City.
3. Ball, Marie E., "Island Poets of

the Past." *Long Island Forum*, September 1939. In her article Ball states that a copy of this book exists that has on its flyleaf secret information revealing the real names of the Sag Harbor Elders who had opposed Reverend Hooper.

4. The list includes James Fenimore Cooper, who outfitted a whaling ship there, and John Steinbeck as a resident. The poet Mary L. Gardiner grew up in Sag Harbor and even Herman Melville mentioned Sag Harbor in his famous book, *Moby Dick*.

5. *The New York Times*, "John Alden Dead; Editor and Poet." 03/05/1934, p 15.

6. Printed by permission of Stanley H. Barkan, Editor-Publisher, Cross-Cultural Communications, Merrick, NY.

7. For a more extensive understanding of Cutter's life and times read, "The Long Island Farmer Poet," by Richard A. Winsche, in Vol. 45 of the *Nassau County Historical Society Journal*, 1990.

8. Mark Twain describes Cutter as "the Poet Lariat," in his book *Innocents Abroad*.

9. Some of the *New York Times* and *Eagle* bylines were, "Utter's Gray Hairs," "Long Island Farmer Poet", "Cutter Rises to the Occasion," "Mr. Cutter's Generosity," and "Sale of Cutter Curios."

10. *New York Times*, "Bloodgood Cutter Dead." 09/27/1906, p 1.

11. Bailey's *Long Island Forum* magazine can be found in the special collections section of many of Long Island's universities and public libraries. A collection that contains some of his best verse *Treading Clams*, Paul Bailey's *Verses of Long Island* first

came out three years after his death and has been reprinted since then.

12. McDermott, Charles J. "History in Verse for Better or Worse." *New York Times*, 11/21/1976, p 444.

13. Rhoda Amon of *Newsday* wrote an article about Thomas Canning entitled "Dad Liked to Rhyme in His Spare Time." *Newsday*, 06/11/06.

14. *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*. "A Long Island Poet's Story," 07/27/1901, p 6.

### Octagon Hotel

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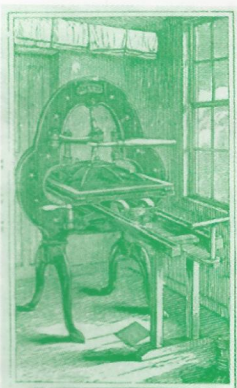
at Meadowbrook Hospital, she opened her practice in Oyster Bay. (*Oyster Bay Guardian*, June 6, 1947, June 2, 1950, and June 18, 1954.)

39. *Oyster Bay Guardian*, January 13, 1950, February 17, 1950. Although it was not reported in the newspapers, Emil and Olive Bulck divorced sometime in 1956 or 1957. Emil remarried in 1957 and Olive married Adrian Jan Kooyman of The Hague, in the Netherlands (*Oyster Bay Guardian*, January 17, 1958). After her marriage, Dr. Olive Kooyman continued to live in the Octagon Hotel building for some time, while Emil Bulck was residing on Hill Drive.

40. Nassau County Deeds, Liber 7359, pp. 343-45; Liber 8414, pp. 298-99.

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## Blocklyn's Books



Book Reviews by Philip Blocklyn

***Long Island: A Guide to New York's Nassau and Suffolk Counties.*** Spinzia, Raymond Edward, Judith Ader Spinzia, and Kathryn Spinzia Rayne. Third Edition. New York: Hippocrene Books, 2009. 408 pages. Maps, appendices, and index. \$24.95

Among the many things about to disappear is the travel guidebook, at least in its print format. As a book it has many disadvantages. It requires people to read (always a sticky point). It adds bulk and weight to stylish travel bags. And it's not particularly conducive to revision and interaction. A guidebook can make many cogent recommendations for the inexperienced traveler. But such tips can go quickly out of date, and meanwhile, there's no allowance for whiny, barbarically written "comments" from "readers," such as we are so lucky to find today on the Internet.

Still, both tourists and hopeful residents of Long Island should carry the Spinzias' newly revised guide to Nassau and Suffolk Counties when they step out to see what's out there to do besides traffic jams in the Hamptons and

multiplex-hopping among the countless malls. For one thing, the book, unlike most travel websites, offers a clean and rigorous presentation, organized alphabetically by town, with subdivisions for individual villages and hamlets. Readers can read a town map, scan a list of parks, preserves, arboretums, and gardens, or study detailed entries on nature conservancies, archaeological and historic sites, and museums. Whenever possible, the authors make a point of beginning each site's travel directions from an exit off the Long Island Expressway, although readers will still probably default slavishly to their various gps devices. When the LIE won't do, directions follow from the closest, quaintly anachronistic "village green." Site entries include the usual contact data, along with informative cross references to places of related interest, and notes of warning on issues of dependable hours (CALL AHEAD) and access (open with prior permission or not open to the public).

Five appendices provide listings for 1) catering in Gold Coast mansions, 2) visiting in Gold Coast mansions, 3) sightings of Tiffany windows, 4) correlations of Long Island municipalities to their county and town, and 5) wineries. Mansion listings provide the estate's name, original owner, and location, but travelers will want to consult, far in advance of a visit, the Spinzias' books on Long Island estates (see below). New to this edition are the entries for eighty-eight Tiffany stained-glass windows, mostly found in churches with no regular visiting hours beyond

those devoted to worship. The authors clearly indicate which windows are unsigned or remain undocumented.

Those among us afflicted with America's bizarre passion for celebrity can fashion several "tours of the stars" from these pages. Kings Point in North Hempstead, for instance, features the homes of George M. Cohan, Martha Raye, Oscar Hammerstein II, P.G. Wodehouse, and Ring Lardner. These people are, however, all dead, and their homes are pointedly not open to the public. Tourists may have better luck at the cemeteries, where they can visit the graves of Maude Adams [actress, Peter Pan] in Lake Ronkonkoma, Checkers [dog, President Nixon] in Wantagh, Philippe Regis Denis de Keredern de Trobriand [general, U.S. Army] in Sayville and, once again, P.G. Wodehouse [writer, *Jeeves*] in Remsenburg. These luminaries are dead, too, but their final resting places are accessible, though you may have to call ahead.

Then there are the Island's many, many niche attractions that can so often deliver such great satisfaction to a traveler of broad enthusiasms. Hicksville boasts a replica of Ghiberti's Gates of Paradise from the east door of the Baptistery in Florence. Southold is home to the Custer Institute, where "no area of the human experience is exempt from discussion." And Commack offers the Jewish Sports Hall of Fame, featuring material relating to the broadcast career of Warner Wolf.

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## Octagon Hotel

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41. *Oyster Bay Guardian*, November 22, 1974 and April 18, 1997.

42. It is not known how long the Octagon Autohaus business remained in existence. *Oyster Bay Guardian*, June 2, 1989.

43. *Oyster Bay Guardian*, April 19, 1991, April 18, 1997; Nassau County Deeds, Liber 10357, pp. 604-8, Liber 12254, pp. 174-77.

44. *Oyster Bay Guardian*, January 19, 1973.

45. The Oyster Bay Main Street Association commissioned a study of the Octagon Hotel by Stephen Tilly, Architect to assess its "current state and to review the current plans for its restoration and rehabilitation." The architects submitted a forty-nine page report on November 9, 2008, which discusses "the feasibility and the benefits of retaining the original historic fabric" of the building. (Stephen Tilly, Architect, *Preserving the Octagon Hotel*, pp. 3, 4.) Editor's note.

THE OYSTER BAY HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
20 SUMMIT STREET, P.O. BOX 297  
OYSTER BAY, N.Y. 11771-0297



The Oyster Bay Historical Society Wants You...  
To Join Us at the World War II Canteen  
Dinner Dance on June 6th!

**THE FREEHOLDER** SPRING 2009

## MARK YOUR CALENDAR FOR THESE UPCOMING EVENTS!

### JUNE

Saturday, June 6, 6-11 p.m.

#### WW II Era Canteen Dance

East Woods School

Comfort food, live '40s music & dancing, and a whole slew of live entertainment! Help us pay tribute to our WW II veterans on the 65th Anniversary of "D-Day! See p. 14 for more information.

Sunday, June 28, 2 p.m.

#### Roundtable Discussion & Exhibition Opening

Oyster Bay Community Center/Earle-Wightman House

To honor the service of our WWII vets the Society will present a remarkable exhibition and a lively "round table" discussion called "Oyster Bay Goes to War." Both events will include interviews with Oyster Bay veterans who served during those incredible years. The exhibit will be filled with dramatic and nostalgic photographs of those challenging times. Join us in thanking our veterans for their service. See page 14 for more information.

### Blocklyn's Books

*continued from p. 23*

"Afoot and light-hearted, I take to the open road, healthy, free, the world before me..."

Note: Raymond and Judith Spinzia are authors of the two-volume *Long Island's Prominent North Shore Families: Their Estates and Their Country Homes* and the companion volume *Long Island's Prominent South Shore Families*.

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