



THE FREE-HOLDER

WINTER 2000 THE OYSTER BAY HISTORICAL SOCIETY FOUNDED 1960

- ♦ LI'S OWN MOTOR PARKWAY
- ♦ OYSTER BAY'S SCHOOL DAYS
- ♦ A PREHISTORIC MASSAPEQUA VISIT
- ♦ SOCIETY PLANS OYSTERING TRIBUTE



THE HISTORY MAGAZINE OF THE TOWN OF OYSTER BAY

Editorial

Here it is, the year 2000, and the Oyster Bay Historical Society is celebrating its 40th Anniversary! We are busy planning a special commemorative issue of *The Freeholder*, which we hope to have ready in time for the Society's planned celebration on June 5.

Many of our readers have been members for much of that time and therefore are very familiar with the Society's history. I need to hear from you!

We desperately need for you to share your photographs and/or memories with us in order to make this issue a success. Please contact us!

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THE POST RIDER

To the Editor:

Philip Blocklyn's review of Rita Cleary's novel, *Spies and Tories*, (Freeholder, Fall 1999), is flawed. Mr. Blocklyn lumps Cleary's novel into the discredited category (according to Mr. Blocklyn) of "all historical novels." He

questions "Did any of this really happen?"

I have read *Spies and Tories*, have lived in Oyster Bay all my life, am familiar with its history and acquainted with the descendants of some of Mrs. Cleary's characters. My answer to Mr. Blocklyn is yes, some of this did really happen. Mrs. Cleary has woven carefully-researched events, people and places into a compelling and inspiring story.

I enjoy historical fiction. I enjoy the works of Patrick O'Brian, Margaret Mitchell, John Jakes and James Fenimore

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of the

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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.

Call (516) 922-5032 for more information.

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ABOUT OUR FRONT COVER

Car Number 8 makes the turn at East Norwich in the 1906 Vanderbilt Cup Race. The death of two spectators, killed by a car which failed to negotiate the turn, convinced Vanderbilt that future races would require a closed course. See related story on page 3.

Photo from John Hammond's
Crossroads: A History of East Norwich.

Cooper and Cleary's work ranks right up there. I thoroughly enjoyed Rita Cleary's *Spies and Tories*. Its characters are powerful. Its story is a page-turner. I have recommended it to friends. I recommend it to readers of *The Freeholder*. It made me understand a little more about my town's origins and the sacrifices of its citizens. It made me proud to live in Oyster Bay.

Rosemary Bourne

THE LONG ISLAND MOTOR PARKWAY

by S. (Sam) Berliner, III

The year was 1906 and William K(issam) Vanderbilt, II was at the top of the heap. He was only 28, yet had beautiful homes all over the place; including Manhattan, Lake Success (Deepdale), and out in Suffolk. So did many of his friends. He was an early automobilist, quite the scorcher, with many speeding summonses, and had sponsored the famous Vanderbilt Cup auto races for several years. Unfortunately, a spectator at the third Vanderbilt Cup race (in 1906) had been killed by a race car which slammed into the crowd. Vanderbilt was deeply ashamed, even though unruly spectators crowded up against, and onto, the course (as can be clearly seen in contemporary photos), and he

and his sportsman friends, including Ralph Peters, President of the LIRR, Harry Payne Whitney, August Belmont, President of the IRT, Frederick Bourne, President of the Singer Sewing Machine Co., and John Jacob Astor, meeting at the elegant, old Garden City Hotel, decided to build a private road for auto racing, which they started planning in 1906. One of their first ideas was to build a 35-mile long private racing road from Floral Park to Riverhead, with high-speed turning loops at Hicksville and Riverhead. Actual construction, of the eleven miles between Garden City and Bethpage, started with 2,000 men on June 6, 1907 (or 1908, depending on whose authority you accept) in a barren field just

off Jerusalem Avenue, in what later became Levittown. The groundbreaking ceremony for the Long Island Motor Parkway took place at Central Park (now Bethpage) on June 6. Just four months later, ten miles of parkway were readied in time for the Fall Cup Race.

The 16'-wide (it was later widened to 22') road was opened virtually its full length in 1911. Vanderbilt Cup races had been run on that route in 1908, 1909, and 1910, and new models of autos were tested (for a healthy fee, of course) on the road. Tolls were originally \$2, then, briefly, \$1.50, and mostly \$1, until they were dropped to 40¢ in 1935 after Robert Moses' Northern State Parkway, part of his great parkway system begun in 1929, opened in 1933. The original plan to run on out to the Suffolk County seat in Riverhead, an additional 23 miles, was shelved when the land required could not be acquired.

Those three Vanderbilt Cup races were run, both on the incomplete road and the nearly-finished road, but, when four spectators were killed and over twenty injured in 1910, racers refused to use the course. That refusal, auto manufacturers moving to the Detroit area and testing their cars out in the Midwest, and the competition of the Moses parkway, were its death knell and the Motor Parkway finally closed on Easter Sunday in 1938.

In lieu of payment of back taxes amounting to some \$80,000 to \$90,000, the right-of-way was deeded to the counties through which it passed in 1938. Much of the



*Vanderbilt Cup Race, c. 1905.
Collection of Nassau County Museums, L.I. Studies Institute*

right-of-way in Queens County is now a bicycle and hiking path, while that in Nassau County and in western Suffolk County was (and is) used for a high-tension line right-of-way by LILCO (Long Island Lighting Company), now LIPA (LI Power Authority).

The Long Island Motor Parkway may or may not have been the world's first limited-access auto parkway; it depends on who you read and when you consider - there was an older road in Rio de Janeiro and the Bronx River Parkway also was built about the same time. In any case, it was certainly one of the very first. The Bronx River Parkway actually opened three years after the Motor Parkway did.

The Motor Parkway was also noted for its twelve unique little toll houses, termed "toll lodges," which were two-story architectural gems and included rather nice living quarters, with two bedrooms for the toll takers and their families. The original toll house from the Garden City (Clinton Street/Glen Cove Road/Guinea Woods Road) entry is preserved in Garden City (on Seventh Street, across from the AAA/ACNY office) as the headquarters of the Garden City Chamber of Commerce. It was moved to its present location in 1989 and was designed by John Russell Pope, who also did Manhattan's American Museum of Natural History, Baltimore's Museum of Art, and Washington's National Gallery, National Archives, and Constitution Hall (DAR). When the Parkway closed in 1938, the lodges were offered to the tollkeepers for \$500 each.

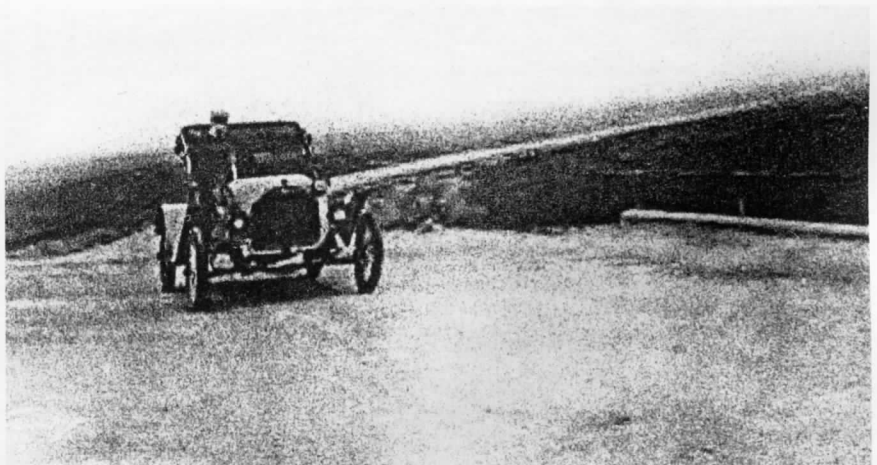
The parkway had a unique guard rail system, with three-sided (sometimes four-sided) concrete posts which held two (or more) strands of twisted iron ribbon (some of which are still in place at Garden City and elsewhere). There were also posts with large (2" x 4") rectangular openings, which must have been for wood rails; these are visible in Queens, Nassau, and Suffolk.

At the eastern end, on the northwestern shore of Lake Ronkonkoma, Vanderbilt built a grand restaurant in the style of the famous Parisian restaurant of the same name, the "Petit Trianon Inn." Opened in 1910, it offered boating, bathing, picnics, snooker, tennis, and hunting and, in winter, skating, ice-boating, and tobogganing, as well as sumptuous repasts.

An early ad for the Petit Trianon boasted 45 miles of Parkway at 40 miles per hour with "no police traps, no dust!" Maximum traffic on the Motor Parkway was reported at 190,000 cars in its peak year; by way of comparison, the Long Island

Expressway already carried 750,000 cars per day in 1987!

In the Town of Oyster Bay the right-of-way runs just north of Hempstead Turnpike and so is at the narrow part of the Town, running from Route 107 in Plainedge, between Avoca Avenue on the north and Martin Road N. on the south, then easterly a short distance to just west of the Seaford- Oyster Bay Expressway (Route 135), where it curves sharply northward and then eastward again, popping up at Central Avenue at Parma Drive across from the LIRR Central Branch. Next, it runs up to Bethpage State Park, where it is the western access road off Plainview Road, and then curves northeasterly, crossing Round Swamp Road and then along inside the southern boundary of Old Bethpage Village Restoration, at which point it passes into Suffolk County, then across Route 110 and off to the LIE again and the present day Motor Parkway/ Vanderbilt Parkway stretch through Dix Hills and off to Ronkonkoma.



*Motoring on the early Motor Parkway.
From author's website.*

Now, the really interesting part for ToBay residents is that there is an intact LI Motor Parkway bridge on the OBVR grounds! Last October (1999), I went back there (with permission) and braved a severe tick infestation and encephalitis-carrying mosquitoes and rose thorns to get to the bridge at the south end of the preserve. The preserve's garbage dump was just north of the bridge the last time I was in there and the bridge was heavily overgrown with foliage. Now it is still accessible at the south end of the dump but - oh, wow!

To climb up on the bridge meant bushwhacking without a bushwhacker! I wore heavy boots and pants and an old windbreaker; I should have had on chapaderos, leather pants and jacket, gauntlets and a full-face mask!

Things are sort of odd under the bridge; there is almost no junk and a concrete wall across the north of the right-of-way of whatever road went under the Motor Parkway there, perhaps ten feet north of the bridge, and it is below grade about six feet and the Parkway above on an embankment.

The Restoration seems to have little funding to speak of; certainly not for digging out and restoring an old bridge lost in heavy brush, but those of us who care might be able to get permission to clear a path under and over the bridge; it would take a front end loader and several dump trucks to clear the debris from both sides of the bridge and under it. Only the most dedicated crew would ever be able to whack down the brush on the right-of-way on the bridge itself,

and on and around either end of the bridge to get access to it.

The Motor Parkway Panel, convened with some of the most knowledgeable historians of the LI Motor Parkway, hopes to be able to clear and monument this great relic (and most of the remanent Parkway). The Motor Parkway Panel (and the author) may be reached at P. O. Box 183, Glen Head, New York 11545 (516-759-7360).

[A note on nomenclature - The official name of this pioneer highway was the Long Island

Motor Parkway, not the Vanderbilt Motor Parkway; the surviving active thirteen-mile right-of-way in Suffolk County is now used as public roads, named variously "Motor Parkway" and "Vanderbilt Parkway".]

Much more about the Parkway and the Panel is available on the Internet at "<http://home.att.net/~berliner-ultrasonics/limtrpwy.html>", et seq., and "<http://home.att.net/~berliner-ultrasonics/limpanel.html>", and there are links there to many other sources and a bibliography.



The Long Island Motor Parkway bridge on the grounds of Old Bethpage Village Restoration, October 1999. From author's website.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF OYSTER BAY SCHOOLS

by John E. Hammond

The earliest record of any school or teacher in the Oyster Bay village area was in 1677, 24 years after the purchase of the town spot. Thomas Webb was recorded in the Oyster Bay Town Records as schoolmaster when he was chosen as Town Clerk to supplement his wages of £10 per year as teacher. Schoolmasters in the early colonial period seldom had a school building within which they could conduct classes, however; usually they would make periodic visits to the homes of the residents who desired to have their children receive schooling. Schooling was very basic and was heavily slanted toward the development of reading skills to enable the child to read the Bible and study the catechism. Schoolmasters were frequently only paid in meals, lodging, or whatever services a family might be able to offer the schoolmaster in exchange for schooling of the children.

In the same year that a schoolmaster was named, 1677, a portion of land was set aside for a Town Common which was to be located on the north side of East Main Street, running from the present White Street to Florence Avenue. The Town Common contained a Town House which was to be set aside for all types of public meetings. There is no record that it was used as a school in the very early days, however, that was one of its intended uses. This was the building that later became the first one used by the early Christ Church.

In 1726 the Church of England hired Daniel Denton as a teacher in Oyster Bay; he was given a house to use as a school and in

1728 had 29 students. Although no record seems to remain as to which house Denton was given, this was perhaps Oyster Bay's first school building. A later schoolmaster in Oyster Bay was Thomas Kemble, who left in 1748 due to a mental breakdown; kids must have been difficult back then, too! There was no instruction following Kemble's departure until Samuel Seabury reopened the school in 1749. Some of the earliest formal education in the village was that offered by the Reverend Samuel Seabury, father of the first American Bishop. Rev. Seabury offered training in reading so that the congregation could learn their catechism and participate more fully in church services.

Zachariah Weekes served as the schoolmaster from 1758 until his death in 1772. Weekes kept a diary for those years and recorded how he instructed so many of the children of local families: the Townsends,

Underhills, Weekes, Youngs, McCouns, Lattens, and others. Zachariah Weekes took regular lodging in the Underhill house in the Cove, which stood between Cove Road and Tiffany Road. The early records of the Town of Oyster Bay contain a reference to a schoolhouse located on Cove Hill in 1793; this was the schoolhouse built and owned by Thomas Youngs (1717-1797). There is no closer identification other than, "Begining a Little to the Southard of Jotham Weeks Dwelling House, and Running Nearly Parallel with the other Highway up Cove hill, near the School House, the Monuments of the Bounder a Stake at each end." (OBTR Book I, page 132). Daniel Kelsey Youngs, in his history of the Youngs family, tells us that the school was moved to the east side of the Cove Road in 1802 and converted into tenements after the Oyster Bay Academy was opened. The old schoolhouse



The Oyster Bay Academy began in 1802 in the center building which is now the Christ Church Rectory. This photo was taken in 1912. (Author)

later became the Ryerson home and survived until the late 1940s, when it was demolished.

During the eighteenth century there also appears to have been an informal school run by some of the ladies of the village. The purpose of this effort was to enable the distaff side to gain some understanding of the written word; regular schooling was for the boys only. Girls were expected to stay at home and learn their letters and numbers while they also learned sewing by completing their samplers. It was within such an informal school that Mary Cooper, the local diarist, may have received her schooling. Her writing clearly shows much more command of language than would be learned through a sampler.

There was no school nor schoolmaster on Lloyd's Neck where America's first published black poet lived. Presumably he was taught to read and write at the Lloyd Manor. When New York State organized the system of school districts in 1814, Lloyd Neck was identified as District No. 1 in the Town of Oyster Bay but still had no school; later in the nineteenth century Lloyd's Neck became part of Suffolk County.

The need for more formalized schooling in the village of Oyster Bay was recognized by some concerned citizens led by James Farley. They enlisted the support of James Townsend, who had been on the Board of Regents of Columbia College in 1784-1787. In 1802 the group petitioned in Town Meeting to have a one and one half acre plot where the old Town House stood, set aside for

use as a "Seminary of Learning."

Elias Hicks made a survey of the site and on its certification he wrote, "where the old Episcopal Meeting house now stands." This was the second Town House on the spot and had been used both as a

Town meeting place and as a church by the Episcopal congregation. This was the building that had been ransacked by the occupying British forces during the Revolutionary War. The building was blown down in a windstorm in 1805 and the remains sold for \$67. The funds were then put in the hands of the Overseers of the Poor, which was the custom then for all incidental funds.

James Farley and his supporters each purchased shares (at \$72.50) in the new academy, some buying several shares. From this group, twenty five trustees were appointed, as well as an executive committee of three. The grounds were then fenced, trees planted, and the academy built. The academy building still survives, although somewhat altered, as the Christ Church rectory. Part of the original academy building was reserved for church services as there was



The 1872 schoolhouse from which School Street takes its name; it stood on the site where the St. Dominic Grade School is at present. (Author)

no Christ Church building at the time.

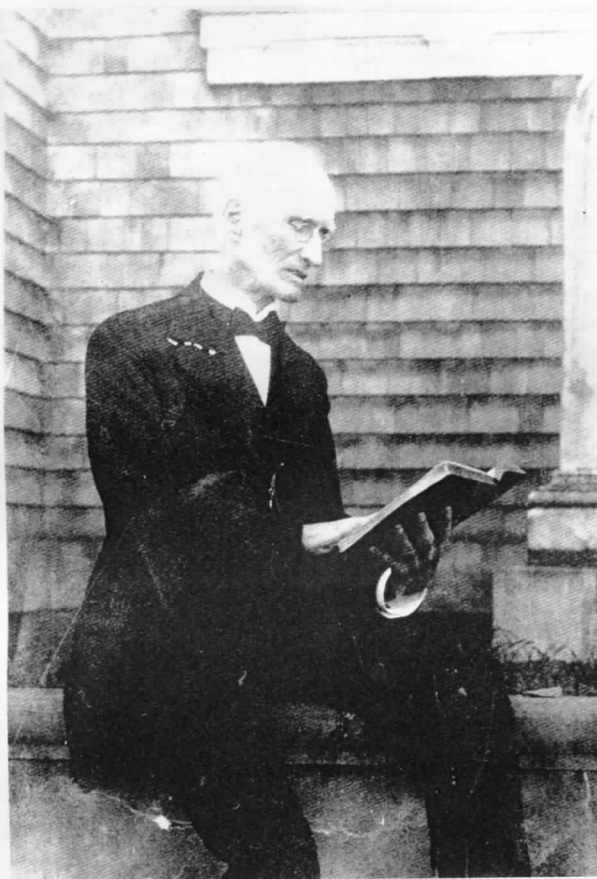
Shortly after the academy building was completed in April 1802, the trustees hired a Baptist pastor from Stamford, Connecticut, the Reverend Marmaduke Earle, as the first Principal for the academy. Rev. Earle was born in 1769 and graduated from Columbia College in 1790. Rev. Earle was assisted in his teaching duties by the Rev. Benjamin Coles, who had studied foreign languages under Samuel Seabury at Hempstead. Rev. Earle also took on the position of preacher at the Baptist Church on West Main Street with the elderly Rev. Coles continuing the pastoral duties. In 1803 the academy registered with, and began receiving financial support from, Columbia College (later Columbia University). The academy began receiving state aid in 1814, although it was still a private institution. With the formation of the New York State Public

School System and Oyster Bay School District No. 2 in 1823, the local voters passed a law allowing the trustees of the academy to continue in a similar capacity as public school trustees. Without the income from the academy the Episcopal congregation ceased activity.

Tuition rates at the private academy had been on a quarterly basis, by subject. Reading and writing were \$1.75 per quarter, English grammar \$2.25, mathematics \$3.50, and French, dead languages, moral philosophy or natural philosophy \$4.00 per quarter. These rates were rather high in comparison to other teachers in the area at the time. Lot Cornelius submitted a bill to Oliver Tilly of Matinecock for the tuition of his sons George and Charles; the total for all subjects for the two boys together was \$3.75 per quarter.

The Oyster Bay school district voters decided on June 21, 1849, to separate themselves completely from the academy. The district then elected its first School Board Trustees: Allen Hawxhurst, Samuel S. Summers, and Henry B. Wilson. John R. Kane served as clerk, John T. Hamilton as collector, and John Wood as librarian. The new trustees purchased a lot on South

Street from Thomas Cheshire for \$175 and contracted with Samuel Underhill for \$700 to construct a building 25 by 44 feet. This was to become Oyster Bay's first



Rev. Charles S. Wightman

public schoolhouse. The schoolhouse site was later owned by Mrs. Lena Cocks and subsequently was the site of Dr. Peter Y. Frye's home. The site is presently occupied by the State Bank of Long Island. In 1850 this school on South Street had 116 students, 103 of whom were reported as being able to read. The total school budget in 1850 was \$297.

The district was changed to District No. 9 in 1864, and became the Union Free School District Number 9 on February 9,

1866. The Board of Education was then expanded to nine members: Solomon Townsend, Edwin Griffin, Dr. Peter Y. Frye, Charles L. Brown, Valentine Bayles, Samuel Y. Ludlam, Henry Bayles, Moses Anstice, and Charles H. Burtis. The newly reformed district purchased land from one of the trustees, Charles H. Burtis, for \$1500. This was on the corner of what is now Weeks Avenue and School Street and is currently the location of the St. Dominic Elementary School. On the site, a two-story school building was built by John D. Velsor for the contracted price of \$9,950. This costly project resulted in considerable heated discussion amongst the trustees, which prompted trustee Samuel Ludlam to propose a resolution that was unanimously adopted by the board that, "any member of

this board guilty of using profane language during the meetings shall be fined \$1." There had been a great deal of heated discussion regarding the site chosen and the size of the new building. The other site under consideration were the lots on East Main Street donated a few years later by the DeForrest family for the building of the new First Presbyterian Church in 1873. The lot on the corner of School Street and Weeks Avenue

was offered for \$1500 less than the East Main Street lot.

The new schoolhouse was dedicated on Wednesday, December 27, 1872. Almost 1000 people from the village turned out for the ceremonies. Rev. Charles Wightman pronounced the Invocation and gave a short address. The principle speaker was 86 year old Chancellor William McCoun who related how his education had begun in the old Oyster Bay Academy and how Rev. Wightman's father in law, Marmaduke Earle, had been his instructor. McCoun also stated in his remarks that Marmaduke Earle accepted no salary for his teaching services at the academy, his only income was from the fees he received performing marriages. William McCoun had gone on to study law and became head of the state court system. In 1852 Chancellor McCoun was chosen as the first chairman at the very first convention of the newly-formed Republican Party in New York State.

The new school principal, M. A. MacDonald, gave a rendering of the poem "Nothing To Wear" in what was reported as "Graphic Style" at the dedication ceremony. He was assisted by Miss Julia Thurston and Miss Laura Betts who had also prepared several students for special presentations. Some offered dramatic scenes, others read dialogues or sang songs. Julia Thurston later became the Preceptress of the Oyster Bay Schools and continued teaching until 1924 when she moved to Baltimore. At all graduations of Oyster Bay High School the

annual Julia Thurston Award is presented in her honor.

The new frame school building included a sizable belfry on the roof which held a large bronze bell cast in Philadelphia. The new school resulted in a tax rate of 72 cents per \$100 of assessment, but it quickly became a center of activity for the community. The first year the school combined with the community to hold regular "entertainments." These were led by the school staff, headed by Mr. M.A. MacDonald, principal; Miss Julia L. Thurston, first assistant principal; Miss Edna Dodd, second assistant principal; Miss Susie Downing, principal of the primary school; and Miss Laura Betts, assistant.

A later principal of the school, Sidney B. Covey, caused somewhat of a local flap in 1892 when he backed out of his intended marriage to Miss Anna E. Cheshire. Mr. Covey was born on November 9, 1853, in Parishville, New York. He came to Oyster Bay in 1888 and met Miss Cheshire at a festival at the old Methodist Church on Orchard Street. They began seeing each other regularly and in December 1891 announced their engagement, setting a wedding date of July 6, 1892. The intended bride's dress was made and invitations were sent out to relatives and friends. A week before the wedding Mr. Covey

sent a note to Mr. Cheshire saying that he could not marry Anna, giving no further explanation. Mr. Cheshire immediately informed his daughter who, naturally, was devastated by the news. She remained bedridden for over a week. The reaction in the community was one of condemnation. There was one group that swore that Covey would be "Tarred and Feathered" if he showed his face in the village. There was strong sentiment to force him out of his position as principal and to run him out of town. Mr. Cheshire sought out Mr. Covey and had a meeting with him, wherein Mr. Covey was reported to have stated that he had found that he simply was not in love with Anna. Mr. Cheshire did not pursue the matter any further, saying, "I want to let the matter drop; I am only too glad that my daughter was saved in time from marrying the man." Mr. Covey left Oyster Bay by the beginning of the next school term. He took the position of principal of Public School No. 19 in Utica, New York. Covey died on February 8, 1902, of typhoid fever.

**TO BE CONTINUED IN THE
NEXT ISSUE OF
THE FREEHOLDER.**





ASK UNCLE PELEG

Dear Uncle Peleg:

As you are certainly aware, four hundred and fifty years ago, give or take a couple of decades, Thomas Tusser, first published the calendar of farming activities and advice about their performance that eventually became *The Five Hundred Points of Good Husbandry*.

I have been thinking about the agriculture practiced in Oyster Bay at the time of the settlements and shortly thereafter and I remembered a suggestion I heard or read several years ago that Tusser's great work would provide an accurate picture of farming practices and equipment brought here by the early settlers.

Many of Tusser's descriptions use words and spellings still reasonably common in English and even when strange to us, to be found in a good dictionary. There are quite a few, however, that are not in home dictionaries. Many of the uncommon bits of Tusser's vocabulary have been glossed by the editors of various reprintings of *The Five Hundred Points*, but

their notions are sometimes questionable and occasionally recognizably wrong.

Here are several words that I had difficulty with. Can you explicate for me the underlined items?

1. wimble, with percer and pod
2. roule for a sawpit
3. a hod or a traie

As far as my reading provides me with a basis, I agree with you that the editors' notes concerning the items you question can be challenged. However, we are dealing with opinions and there will probably always be room for argument. With that in mind, let's look at the words you asked about.



"Wimble, with percer and pod" In one of its several meanings "wimble" denominates the woodworker's bit stock or "crank brace." It is quite clear that Tusser's brace was supplied with parts called "percer" and "pod" not accompanied by separate tools. Percer, which can also mean a complete boring tool of several kinds is an earlier spelling or "piercer" and in this case refers only to the part of a boring apparatus we would call the "bit." "Pod," also known in the form "pad" is a permanent holder for the bit. It sockets into the wimble and with other pod/percer combinations permits it to be used to bore holes in a range of diameters.

"Roule" is a tough one. It may mean a rolling support, placed across the sawpit to allow the

timber to be moved. Thus enabling the sawyer to divide the full length. I think this most likely but the word might simply be our word rule in antique costume. A ten foot rule would be useful for marking the saw kerf without having to set up a chalk line for every cut.

"Traie;" Tusser is using our word "tray" but not in its common current meaning. A tray in Tusser's time was a vessel excavated from a solid chunk of wood in which various articles could be carried. Butchers used them for meat. The mason carried bricks or mortar in them. He loaded his tray on a "standard," a structure that enabled him to take the tray on his shoulder without a rupture-inducing lift. The "hod" was a box-like container with flaring sides. One end and the top were open. A stout stick projected from the hod and allowed the carrier to control the load without reaching upward. I believe Tusser is distinguishing between two alternative vessels for carrying daub or plaster used to seal walls. Although commentators have identified the tray as a hod because it did the same job, its one piece, bowl-like construction differentiates it from the carpentry of the hod.





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 by *The Freeholder*.

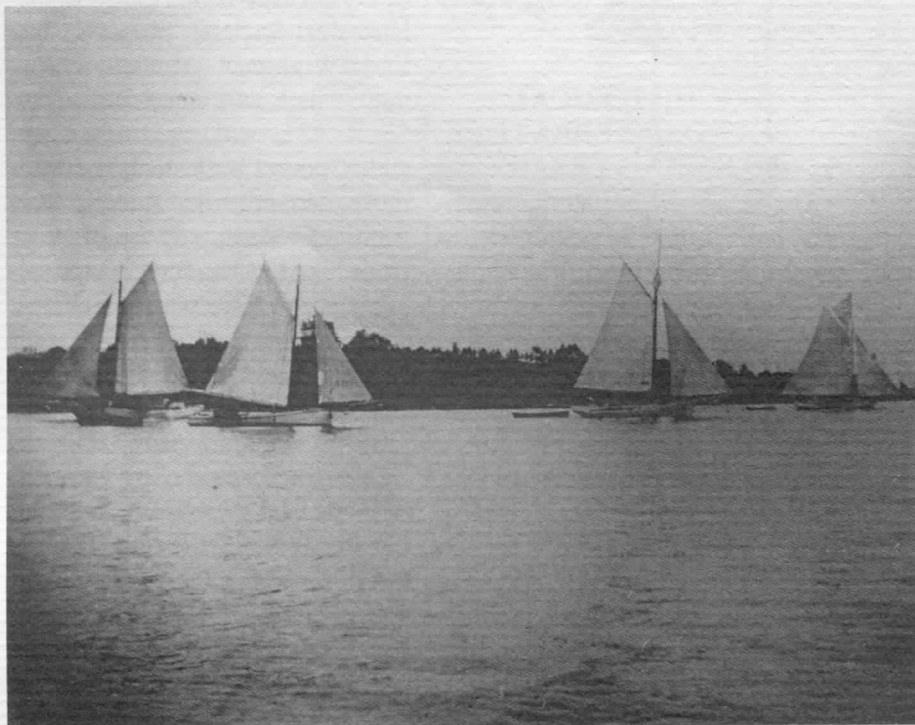
SOCIETY TO COMPLETE OYSTERING PROJECT FOR LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

The Oyster Bay Historical Society has undertaken a project for the Library of Congress' Local Legacies program. The Society will be documenting, via videotape, digital images, and audiotape, the history of the oystering industry in Oyster Bay. The information-gathering phase will culminate in a roundtable discussion to take place on Tuesday, March 21 at 8 p.m. at the Masonic Lodge. Past and current participants in the oystering industry will serve as panel members.

The Local Legacies program was brought to the attention of Society Director Tom Kuehhas by Congressman Peter King's office. "This project has really brought together the talents of many people as well as the active participation of many who have been involved in oystering in Oyster Bay their whole lives. Supervisor Venditto kindly offered the services of the Town's

The new, updated, handsomely-bound edition of the popular Society publication *Walls Have Tongues: Oyster Bay Buildings and Their Stories* is now available. Pick up a copy of this unique publication today for only \$35!

Members receive a 10% discount!



Oyster boats out on the harbor. Collection of John Hammond

Public Information Office's Audiovisual Department, and private individuals and Society trustees have come forward to offer their assistance as well," Kuehhas stated.

HISTORICAL SOCIETY TO PHOTO-DOCUMENT OYSTER BAY IN THE YEAR 2000

Director Tom Kuehhas announced the inauguration of another project for the current year: a photographic inventory of every building in Oyster Bay in the course of the year 2000. Said Kuehhas, "We have a very good idea of what Oyster Bay looked

like around 1900, because of TR's celebrity at that time. I want to make sure that researchers a hundred or two hundred years in the future will have the same opportunity to see what this town looked like." Intrigued by the possibilities of this project, and seeing an obvious need down the road, Society trustee Fritz Coudert donated a top-of-the-line digital camera to the Historical Society for use in the completion of the photographic inventory.

The Society is looking for volunteers with some photography experience to assist with this project. Ideally, the Society is

looking for volunteers who would be willing to photograph the buildings within a few square blocks of their homes. If you are interested in becoming involved in the photo-documentation of Oyster Bay, please call Director Kuehhas at 922-5032.

O.B. HISTORICAL SET TO CELEBRATE 40TH ANNIVERSARY

The Oyster Bay Historical Society has formed a committee to plan a birthday bash to celebrate the Society's 40th. The committee, consisting of trustees Dr. Maureen Monck, Prof. Susan Peterson, and Rick Robinson, have planned a soiree for June 4, 2000, at the elegant deSeversky Center on Northern Boulevard. The Society also plans a special commemorative issue of The Freeholder in which we hope to chronicle the organization's first forty years. In order to do so, we need the assistance of you, our loyal members. If you have photographs, documents, or memories that you would like to share with us, please contact Society Director Tom Kuehhas at 922-5032.

GENEROSITY UNBOUNDED!

Harry L. Dickran of Levon Graphics has announced plans to print a full-size reproduction of the original 1900 birdseye view of Oyster Bay which hangs in the Historical Society's library in the Earle-Wightman House. The map, which will measure roughly 28 x 22", will be printed on eighty pound buff stock and will most certainly be suitable for framing. Maps may be ordered from the Oyster Bay Historical Society for \$20, which includes shipping.

CENTRAL PARK HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Lois Lovisolo gave a very interesting demonstration back in January that showed the Internet potential of the Encyclopedia of the Unincorporated Village of Bethpage. She showed how a website can be created for the society on the Internet, plus the endless possibilities of linking up with existing web pages. The society plans to meet on the third Wednesday of every month in the Bethpage Library to gather, write and document information for the Encyclopedia. Anyone interested in this project can call our

Visit the Oyster Bay Historical Society's website!
<http://members.aol.com/OBHistory>

President Lenny Mulqueen at 935-2674 or Ann Albertson (Treasurer) at 933-1795.

FARMINGDALE-BETHPAGE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

The cars and trucks of Farmingdale were the subject of a lecture by noted automotive historian Walter E. Gosden on Sunday, Feb. 27th. The slide lecture dealt with the Victor Page automobiles and Fulton trucks, both built in Farmingdale in the early 1920's. Mr. Gosden is a third-generation resident of Floral Park and wrote the history of that village for its 75th Anniversary in 1983. Last year he was appointed village historian for his hometown. Coming up on Sunday, March 19th at the Farmingdale Public Library at 2 P.M., Tom Kuehhas, Director of the Oyster Bay Historical Society, will present a comparative slide lecture: "Oyster Bay: Then and Now."

OYSTER BAY HISTORICAL SOCIETY Categories of Membership

Individual	\$ 20	Business	\$ 50
Family	\$ 30	Business Sponsor	\$ 100
Contributing	\$ 50	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 922-5032 for more information on joining the Society.

HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF THE MASSAPEQUAS

The annual Antique Show is scheduled for 10 A.M. to 5 P.M. on Sunday, March 26th at Massapequa High School on Merrick Road. From jewelry to china, newspapers, magazines, postcards, old toys and tools, furniture, etc. come stroll the aisles and visit with their many vendors. Refreshments are provided by the Society and all proceeds go to

and benefit the organization. Also, mark your calendars now for the Annual Strawberry Festival on Saturday, June 17th.

AMITYVILLE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

At the Society's annual meeting in October, Jacqueline Herzog was elected to the presidency as the fifteenth person to hold that office. Previously she had served as vice president under Vincent Ricciuti, Jr. and as chairman of the Heritage Fair. Also, a Hewlett-Packard computer, scanner and printer has been installed in the museum's office. The purchase of this equipment was made possible in part by a grant from the County of Suffolk. Bruce MacGill, vice president, purchased and set up all of the equipment. Along with this project, the secretary's section of the office has been upgraded and remodeled.

"THE ART OF JAPAN FROM THE MARY GRIGGS BURKE COLLECTION"

Review of the exhibition at
The Tisch Galleries
The Metropolitan Museum of Art
30 March-25 June 2000
by Noelle O'Connor

Long Island's North Shore has been home to several noted collectors of Asian Art, among whom was Louis Comfort Tiffany, more widely known as an artist and designer in his own right. His stained glass window "View of Oyster Bay" reflects the influence of Japan in its composition. Further into the past, Chinese export porcelains, Japanese lacquers and other objects from East Asia found their way into Long

Island homes as adjuncts of the shipping trades, and, if it is to be admitted, other marine activities not quite as reputable.

Yet in our present era, few collectors can compare with Mary Griggs Burke, whose discerning taste and judicious erudition have made her collection celebrated. Mrs. Burke herself is a treasure, having been awarded the "Order of the Sacred Treasure, with the Order of Merit 2nd class, and Gold and Silver Stars" by Emperor Hirohito of Japan in 1987.

Mrs. Burke is a longtime resident of Centre Island where in 1954 she and her late husband, Jackson Burke, built a home designed by the architect Ben Thompson in conjunction with T.A.C. (The Architects Collaborative) under the leadership of Walter Gropius. The resulting home incorporates elements of traditional Japanese design with modern amenities and materials. Mrs. Burke began collecting Japanese art together with her husband in the 1960s. They were fortunate enough to be able to purchase objects of great rarity and value at a time when few other bona fide collectors were active in the field. Over the years, Mrs. Burke has continued collecting and now owns what is considered to be one of the finest collections of Japanese art outside Japan itself. Her deep appreciation for the culture and artistic traditions of Japan have



Shibata Zeshin (1807-1891)

Ibaraki

Meiji Period (1868-1912), 1882

Pair of two-panel folding screens; ink, color and gold on paper; 168.6 x 166cm

Mary and Jackson Burke Foundation

resulted in a collection which is unequaled in its rarity. "The collection of Mary Griggs Burke has long been recognized as one of the finest assemblages of Japanese art in private hands," commented Phillippe de Montebello, Director of the Metropolitan Museum of Art. "It is the only American collection ever to be shown at the Tokyo National Museum, a testament to its sensitivity and appreciation of Japanese aesthetics."

Paintings of birds and flowers, Buddhist deities and monks, poets, courtesans, figures from mythology, landscapes, even demons are on view in the exhibition of the Mary Griggs Burke collection opening at the Metropolitan Museum of Art on 30

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!

March 2000. Sculptures, ceramics and lacquers add to this visual panorama of Japanese art history, ranging from approximately 3000 BCE to the Edo period (1615-1867). An elegant and lavishly illustrated catalogue entitled "Bridge of Dreams: The Mary Griggs Burke Collection" written by Miyeko Murase, Atsumi Professor Emerita of Columbia University and Research Curator in the Metropolitan Museum of Art accompanies the exhibition. An international symposium on issues in Japanese art history will be held at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in conjunction with the exhibition on April 29 & 30, 2000. Additional events include a Noh performance, films, lectures, events for families and students and teacher training.

Over two hundred objects are arranged to give the visitor a chronological view of Japanese artistic traditions. An early haniwa of a young woman opens the exhibition. Zen Buddhism is represented in part by "The Ten Oxherding Songs," a handscroll dated 1278 in which a young herdsman and his ox become a metaphor for the quest for enlightenment. Sections of the Tale of Genji (written ca. 1000 by Lady Murasaki) are illustrated in several media, including an elegantly lacquered box.

Collaborative works such as that of Tawaraya Sotatsu (d. 1640) and Hon'ami Koetsu (1558-1637) reveal the delicate aesthetic of the 17th c.

A dramatic pair of screens in the exhibition are the Ibaraki screens, painted by Shibata Zeshin (1807-1891), a talented artist who created both paintings, lacquers (his jubako, or food box, decorated with taro plants and chrysanthemum flowers in sprinkled gold and silver is in the exhibition) and works in other media.

Ibaraki refers to the story of a demon who haunted the Rashomon gate, the southern gate of Kyoto. This restless demon made himself a nuisance and a danger to terrorized passersby and even animals who ventured across his path. A famous warrior, Watanabe no Tsuna, was given the task of ridding the gate of this monster. The warrior and the demon engaged in a fierce battle. Despite Watanabe's skill he was only able to cut off one of the demon's arms. Watanabe presented the arm to his lord, Minamoto no Raiko, who locked it in a casket and arranged to have Buddhist sutras (sacred texts) recited over it for a week in order to render it harmless. Six days later, Minamoto's aged aunt came to see him, having heard about the event, and cajoled him into letting her see the severed limb. He agreed reluctantly, and the aunt, who was the demon in disguise, seized the arm and flew away. The story became popular and was made into a Kabuki play entitled "Ibaraki," from which comes the title of this illustration. The demon is seen in the disguise of the aunt (with a most unladylike

expression) clutches the severed arm and dashes away, one clawed foot visible under his billowing robes.

An elegant recent acquisition, "Women Contemplating Floating Fans," a six-fold screen, early 17th c., is another important work, and is the cover illustration for the catalogue. Eighteen young women and their four attendants stand or sit upon a curved bridge, gently tossing their fans onto the flowing waters beneath their feet. The subtle yet elegant patterns of the women's costumes and the painted decorations of the fans balance the bold curve of the bridge's arch, and the adjacent foliage. The screen has a lyric quality about it which is in keeping with the Japanese appreciation of transitory beauty. Viewing both this screen and the other artworks on display enable the visitor to experience the richly resonant Japanese artistic sensibility which forms the core of the exhibition.

"As I walk across the bridge

That spans the Ford of Yume

I see that this world of ours too
is like a floating bridge of
dreams

* p. 127, Morris, Ivan. The World of the Shining Prince: Court Life in Ancient Japan, Penguin Books, 1979.

Interested in a map of Oyster Bay in 1833, or a map of the Gold Coast Estates c. 1920? Well, you're in luck! The Oyster Bay Historical Society has what you're looking for! The Oyster Bay map is available for \$5, while the Gold Coast map is \$7.50; shipping is additional.

YESTERDAY IN OYSTER BAY

The Agricultural Society

In 1762, Long Island suffered one of the most remarkable droughts ever known in this country. It caused great distress, not only upon this island, but also throughout the province of New York. Long Island at that time produced more food than all the rest of the province put together and this unlooked-for event probably gave birth to the first association established in the colony for improving its agriculture. A society mainly for that purpose, but also embracing industry and manufacturing within its scope, was formed in the city of New York the following year. Its members included the most talented and distinguished men of the community. At a meeting of this society on the 21st of December, 1767, ten pounds premium was awarded to Thomas Youngs of Oyster Bay for his nursery of 27,123 apple trees.

From Gabriel Furman's
Antiquities of Long Island



"Diamond Dick"

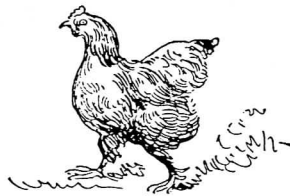
In Oyster Bay back in 1904, "Diamond Dick" a short stocky hod carrier was famous for his dressy clothes and cane. On Sunday mornings when Theodore Roosevelt came to Christ Church, Diamond Dick would stand on a high bank nearby wearing a Prince Albert coat, a beaver hat and his cane. He would give a military salute to Mr. Roosevelt, who would respond with a hearty "Hi Neighbor!"

When Mr. Roosevelt was to be installed as President, Diamond Dick planned to go to Washington. To get the funds he decided to hold up Dr. Kiser's

Drug Store. One night he rang the night bell there with a hatchet stuffed under his coat. He told Dr. Kiser that his little girl was ill and he wanted some pills. Dr. Kiser got up on a ladder with his back to the would-be robber, but luckily saw in a mirror that Dick had produced a hatchet.

There was a scuffle, but Diamond Dick ended up in Sing Sing, whilst his neighbor Teddy Roosevelt occupied the White House.

Benjamin T. Ebbets
Long Island Forum, June 1961



President Roosevelt has been admiring a new addition to the Sagamore Hill poultry yard. It is a handsome big rooster, which arrived by express one evening and was taken from its crate in the President's barnyard. The fowl, which is of very large size, came from George Tracy of Hattboro, Pa., where it had been on exhibition at the county fair. By vote it was awarded to the most popular man in the United States and this man was Theodore Roosevelt. It is a proud bird and rules the President's farm yard without dispute from the other older inhabitants.

East Norwich Enterprise,
August 8, 1908.

President's Home in Danger

President Roosevelt's house at Sagamore Hill narrowly escaped being destroyed by a forest fire Tuesday night. The danger was



first made known by Captain Wm. Bingham of Cold Spring Harbor, across the bay, who telephoned Noah Seaman, the President's superintendent, and informed him that the woods at Cooper's Bluff, on property owned by W. Emlen Roosevelt, a cousin of the President, was all ablaze.

The flames were rapidly spreading over about five acres of woodland and resembled a prairie fire...The onrushing flames were nearing the President's house, and it was only owing to the fact that the fire was burning against the wind that they were able to beat down the flames and prevent the destruction of Sagamore Hill and perhaps other places in the vicinity.

Superintendent Seaman says that but for the timely alarm of Captain Bingham it is probable that they would have been unable to have stopped the progress of the fire.

How the blaze originated is not known, but it is thought some gunners passing through that section accidentally dropped sparks from a pipe or cigar in the dried leaves and underbrush, which the wind ignited and caused what might have proven a serious loss.

East Norwich Enterprise,
December 1, 1906.

[For more on Noah Seaman, see the Winter 1998 issue of *The Freeholder*.]



THE GATHERING PLACE



"The Gathering Place" is the department of the magazine housing contributions of an historical slant but 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.

The Dutch Next Door

by Lee Myles

When we speak of the Dutch Next Door we generally refer to those settled to the west of the lands of the Oyster Bay founders. But we intend that the reader should remember that the Dutch also lived next door to the English in their respective homelands across the English Channel and the North Sea from each other. The current of influences that flowed from the Netherlands to the English and which played a major part in transforming England from a backward island

into one of the most important nations in the world began long before the settlement of our island off the coast of the United States.



The streams of influence originated in every aspect of human life and were both trivial and profound and of all the shades between. To realize how strong these westward surging influences were consider the field of painting and the allied arts. It has been said that during the first three quarters of the sixteenth century a native English painter would have been hard to find. The condition was not much diminished for a hundred years afterward. Painting and its sister arts were largely in the hands of the Netherlands. Much of their work was imported but Dutch

TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

Consumers of most products were not far from their manufacturer at the time of the settlement of Oyster Bay. Frequently the same person filled both roles. The manufacture of textiles for clothing is a case in point. The average person at the time was therefore familiar with the parlance of the weaving room. Is the average of today similarly familiar? Test yourself by matching our list of terms to their jumbled definition.

- | | |
|-------------------------|--|
| A. sley or reed | 1. The name of the wooden cross piece on which the warp is wound at the back of the loom or that on which the cloth is wound in front. |
| B. shed | 2. The yarns or threads that form the long dimension of the fabric and are its foundation. |
| C. heddle | 3. The rack on which are mounted the holders on which the warp is wound prior to winding it on the loom. |
| D. quill(s) | 4. A part (there are at least two) of the harness that, activated by a treadle raises a group of warp threads. |
| E. skarne | 5. A stretcher that holds newly woven cloth in the loom to an even width. |
| F. batten, lay or lathe | 6. A bobbin, originally made from the hollow backbone of a feather, used to windweft thread. |
| G. spool(s) | 7. The device like a giant comb by which each succeeding weft thread is pushed tight against its predecessor. |
| H. temple | 8. A heavy wooden bar that carries the sley back and forth. |
| I. warp | 9. The space between one set of threads and another when part of the warp is raised. |
| J. beam | 10. The reels on which yarn is wound before mounting in the skarne. |

Answers will be found on p. 23.

and Flemish artists came to work on English soil and not a few of them for long periods or for life.

The growth of English art vocabulary was one of the effects of the Lowlander's exploitation of the English art market. Many words current in English can be traced to the art world of the Low Countries, some of them native others imported by the Lowlanders from France or Germany. But, wherever they came from, they were part of the mix brought to the English by their next door neighbors, a mix of influence that helped left the English into pre-eminence in the world of painting. The gift of a specialized vocabulary is not, of course, a major one but its acceptance demonstrates how importantly the neighbors affected the developing English creativity in art.

A few examples will illustrate the debt our language owes to the world of the Netherlands.

English/Netherlandish

easel/ezel; originally the Dutch word for donkey and applied by them to the stand on which the painter's canvas was supported

palette/palet; although the spelling of our word appears to be French it did not appear in our language until the early 17th c. and was spelt in a variety of forms in the early years. Its appearance corresponds with the period of Dutch influence.

stipple/ stippen

standpoint/standpunt; here's a word that acquired connotations beyond its use in art

landscape painter/Landshapschilder; "schilder" is the Dutch word for "painter"

pencil/penseel; our earliest meaning of pencil is paint brush

still life/stilleven; "leven" translates to the English "life"

British Dirigible R-34 Accomplished First Two-Way Atlantic Crossing by Rick Robinson

Although Charles Lindbergh gained immortality with the first solo crossing of the Atlantic Ocean in a single-engine aircraft, his memorable accomplishment was preceded by two earlier flights.

On June 14, 1919, Captain John Alcock and his American navigator, Lieutenant Arthur Whitten Brown, both of the Royal Air Force, took off from a muddy airfield near St. John's, Newfoundland. The duo were

aboard a World War I twin-engine Vickers-Vimy bomber, which airship historian John To-land was later to describe as "a plane that no one in his right mind would now fly from Newark Airport to LaGuardia Field."

Nevertheless, sixteen and one-half hours later Alcock and Brown landed nose down in an Irish bog. It was hardly the New York to Paris route of Lindbergh's 1927 flight, but it was a legitimate trans-Atlantic crossing.

The British were not done that year, however, as the airship R-34 prepared to depart from East Fortune, Scotland, on July 2nd. The 642-foot dirigible was under the command of Major G.H. Scott and planned to make the first east-west crossing, ultimately landing at Roosevelt Field on Long Island.

Unfavorable winds and a fuel shortage, due to an unexpected high-altitude episode early in the flight, caused the great ship to travel considerably north of its destination. The R-34 finally managed to pass over Montauk Point on July 6th, where a



The American airship Shenandoah, very similar in construction to the British R-34.

ground crew had rushed from Roosevelt Field. To their dismay, the airship cruised serenely on towards Mineola and was hauled in after 108 hours, 12 minutes in the air -- a new endurance record.

The airship's crew numbered thirty men, and one of its eight officers, Major J.E.M. Pritchard, parachuted on to Roosevelt Field to help organize the ground crew. His feat was the first such leap from a dirigible. He was also the first airborne person from Europe to set foot on American soil.

Within a few days, the ship was refueled and regassed, as needed with hydrogen, for its return trip to Pulham, England, where it arrived in just 74 hours and 56 minutes, covering a distance of approximately 3,200 miles.

In addition to the round-trip feat, another "first" for the R-34 was the discovery of a stowaway. A British airman and his dog had hidden aboard the airship when it departed from Scotland and were not discovered until the triumphal arrival at Roosevelt. General E.M. Maitland, head of the British Balloon Forces, was on board and used his influence to protect the young man from any severe punishment.

As most readers know, the majestic airships of England, the United States and Germany suffered one disaster after another in the 1920s and '30s -- culminating in the explosion of the hydrogen-laden *Hindenburg* at Lakehurst, New Jersey on May 6th, 1937.

The non-flammable gas, helium, was found only in North America and had to be "refined." That is, it was not readily accessible as a natural gas and therefore was very costly to produce. Nor did

it possess the lifting power of hydrogen.

Regardless of which gas was used, the giant dirigibles were fragile aircraft that, in spite of their rigid framework, were highly susceptible to strong winds and sudden storms. Three of America's airships, the *Shenandoah*, the *Akron* and the *Macon*, all crashed with considerable loss of life and, needless to say, a rapid loss of confidence in the future of the lighter-than-air industry.

Non-rigid helium airships (known as "blimps") were used during World War II for ocean surveillance, and their modern counterparts continue to serve as advertising venues and airborne television sports coverage. The most famous of these are the Goodyear, Fuji and Met Life blimps.

In closing, the Long Island Airship Historians is a small, informal group of dirigible enthusiasts who welcome new members. Contact the author of this article at (516) 922-5032.

A Stone to Remember by Elliot Sayward

Perhaps you are old enough to remember the griddles of stone upon which the queen of the kitchen cooked such appetizing items of yesterday's menu as breakfast pancakes. You may even be lucky enough to own, or know somebody who owns, such a griddle. Or at least occasionally enjoy the product of its employment.

Maybe not. Maybe, however, you remember, no less pleasantly, the laundry tubs of grey-green stone that, with the horrible monster called a scrubbing board, used to dominate the American

household every Monday morning.

The griddles and the tubs, along with many other products no longer to be found, were made from soapstone, more formally called steatite. By either name we are talking about a petrified mineral deposit composed largely of talc and chlorite and sometimes containing magnetite. Found in the United States, Canada, and Norway in significant quantities, steatite still has industrial applications, but it is no longer to be noticed in the American home except as a relic of the past. Soapstone is history.

Once upon a time, though, small soapstone quarries were to be found in many locations in the United States. Their output was manufactured into a myriad of products for markets everywhere. Soft enough in its native state to be easily sawed or carved into useful shapes, resistant to acids, and retentive of heat, soapstone was converted into ornaments, building blocks, stair treads, bowls, wainscoting, floor tiles, furnace linings, sinks, laboratory equipment, aquariums and much more, as well as the griddles and laundry tubs already mentioned.

While easy to quarry and cut, soapstone grows harder after being worked and its products are strong, not easily damaged, and resistant to weathering. Called soapstone because of its soapy "feel," it is inert to many chemicals and does not absorb dampness readily. Perhaps its most important use today is as an ingredient of electrical insulating materials.

Although you may not find many soapstone objects exposed for sale these days, there are still

occasionally offered in antique shops and country auctions one which was much appreciated by its users for the comfort it gave in a cold buggy or an unheated church. The soapstone foot warmer was a rectangular chunk of varying size, but usually around 8" x 6" x 2." Heated in the kitchen stove, supplied with a wire bale for handling, and wrapped in a towel, the highly caloric object was placed beneath the feet, where it provided a gentle warmth for a substantial period (see the related article on the "Stoof" in the Fall 1998 issue of *The Freeholder*).

Look for one. It will serve to remind you of a time when technology had not converted so many of our environments to a state of monotony.

Steamtown

by Walter Karppi

One may ask what possible connection Oyster Bay could have with Steamtown, located in the city of Scranton, Pennsylvania? The answer is that, as a National Historic Site, created by the U.S. Congress in 1986, it is a vast repository of information and experience on the restoration of steam locomotives. Besides being an operating tourist railroad and museum, it is an extensive, well equipped shop complex capable of repairing and recreating all of the myriad parts of the engines from the most minute, weighing but a few ounces, to gargantuan sheets of steel weighing many tons. In anticipation of the forthcoming move of Number 35 from Mitchel Field to Oyster Bay a visit was

planned to see and learn from the competent, skilled craftsmen of Steamtown.

The Locomotive #35 Restoration Committee joined a contingent from the Railroad Museum of Long Island on Sunday, February 13, for a chartered bus trip. Our destination was the Steamtown National Park. The #35 group assembled at their Mitchel Field work site for the arrival of the bus scheduled for 9:00 AM. Some of the members had arrived early, opened their trailer and had hot coffee and doughnuts on hand, which were more than welcome on a cold, clear morning.

After loading passengers the bus proceeded to Scranton and, in less than three hours, arrived at our destination. The good news

continued on p.21



The turntable at Steamtown. Oyster Bay's railroad yard is similarly equipped. Photo courtesy of the author.

A VISITOR TO MASSAPEQUA IN 435 B.C.

by Arlene Goodenough

In 435 B.C., an American Indian set out to visit what is now called Long Island, New York. He lived in a part of the country where a good grade of the mineral jasper was found. He, perhaps with the help of others, had made approximately 235 blades out of the jasper, painstakingly chipping the edges. They were not finished tools, but could easily be made into knives, drills or projectile points. He would have shaped them to make them more valuable as items of trade, and to make them easier to carry. He was going to have a very long walk, because he was coming from perhaps Pennsylvania, or Ohio or Geneseo, New York. There is no way to know for sure exactly where his home was. His blades would have been worth a lot to the inhabitants of Long Island, who only had quartz out of which to make tools. Jasper has a much finer grain and is much easier to work with.

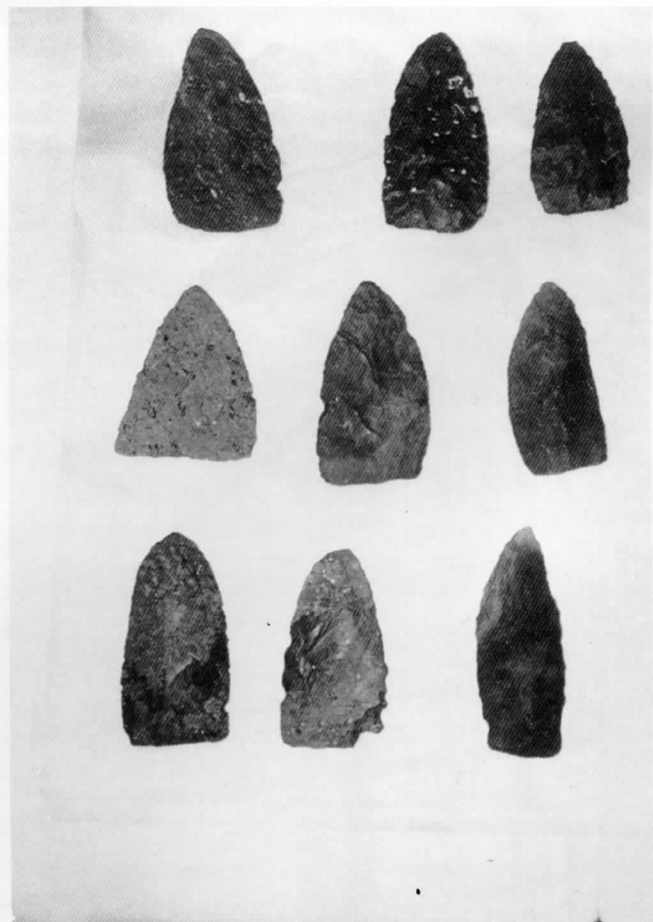
Off he set on his journey. Perhaps he had a companion. How did he even know where Long Island was? Did he know about the ocean? Carbon dating of shell mounds in the Massapequa area indicate that human beings lived there six thousand years ago. So presumably there would have been ample time for brave explorers to find the L.I. natives. Or perhaps the Long Islanders did the exploring. In any case, the hero of this story must have expected to have some worthwhile trades, or he wouldn't have gone to so much trouble. Was he after dried clams or other shellfish as some have suggested? Or was he after

wampum? The Massapequa Indians were expert wampum makers in colonial days. When did they start making it?

Some time after arriving at what we presume was his intended destination, he did an interesting thing. He buried all the blades. He very carefully lined them up and buried them, perhaps in some kind of animal skin purse. He picked a well thought out location, that would have been fairly easy to find. He buried them near the intersection of a good sized southerly flowing

stream, Massapequa Creek, and what was very probably an important east-west trail. The stream met what is now Merrick Road. Was he keeping them safe while he shopped around for a good trade?

Had something frightened him? Was he concerned for their safety? Had he hidden them temporarily, just carrying some samples to show? Had he come all that way to be killed by a wolf or bear or in a fight with someone?



Examples of the jasper blades uncovered in Massapequa.

It has been suggested that the blades might have had a ceremonial purpose. Similar caches were found in Rockville Centre, Peconic, Mattituck, Baldwin and Southold.

Carbon dating of the peat layer that the blades were found in proved that the minimum date of burial would have been 435 B.C. Therefore, the blades lay undisturbed for at least 2,400 years until they were discovered by the Nassau County Department of Public Works in 1969. The Nassau County Department of Health had decided to drain Massapequa Lake to determine whether the lake was causing pollution at nearby Alhambra Beach. To do this, a 3 ½ foot concrete pipe was installed. It was at this time that the alert workmen discovered the blades. Fortunately for anyone interested in Long Island history, they realized that they had uncovered something important. Archeologists from the Nassau County Museum at Garvies Point were called, and one can imagine the excitement such an alert caused.

It took until March 1970, to make all the necessary preparations for the proper and orderly removal of the blades. In the end, 184 complete blades and some fragments were recovered. Only 57 blades were undisturbed. The rest were donated by the workmen who had picked them out of the muck. It is estimated that 50 more blades exist and are in the hands of people who found them by raking through the backfill.

Now the archeologists had their work cut out for them: cleaning the blades, measuring

each one and trying to determine where they came from. They are made from yellow and brown jasper, but of course after lying in the ground for over two millenniums the color has changed on the surface. They have an average maximum length of 3 ¼ inches, and an average width of one and five eighths inches. This would be a very practical size for a variety of tasks that the Indians would have performed every day.

Some years ago, Ron Wyatt, curator at Garvies Point, lent about 20 of the blades to the Historical Society of the Massapequas for an exhibition. This author was privileged to handle the blades which had a very pleasant feel to them, cool and smooth. What a wonderful link with the past they make. Where will they be 2,000 years from now? Still carefully preserved by whoever is running what we now call Nassau County, we trust.

Gathering Place

continued from p. 19

/bad news was that there were no trains in operation (bad) but the entire six hours could be devoted to seeing and learning from the shops and their personnel (good). There was a feeling of camaraderie and cooperation between the three involved groups: Steamtown, Locomotive #35 and the Riverhead Museum, that seemed to say "We're all after the common goal of steam preservation - let's work together to reach it"!

Our shop tour was conducted by Chris Ahrens whose official title is Supervising Exhibition Specialist (in Federal speak) but

prefers the more accurate and descriptive Chief Mechanical Officer. He gave a couple of insights into the background of why so many locomotives were in such poor condition when made available to various preservation groups, museums, tourist lines, etc.

First, when it was clear that the diesel engine was going to replace steam no Master Mechanic worth his salt was going to do any more work than the barest minimum needed to keep a steam engine operating safely. Second, the larger roads had many, sometimes hundreds, of engines available. So rather than perform an expensive overhaul it made more sense to replace an ailing unit with a functioning one. There were many available surplus steam units that had been replaced by diesels. Operators of preserved locomotives on the other hand usually have but one, or two if they're lucky, steam engines available with a possible diesel backup for emergencies.

Acting as co-guide with Chris was Jeff Miller, an outside contractor experienced in locomotive restoration, who resides in the Midwest but spends much of his time working in Scranton.

Both men emphasized the different safety aspects of museum versus railroad maintenance procedures. On a railroad a locomotive may be inspected and serviced in as short a period as a week, or less depending upon the miles or days operated. Most tourist lines operate over relatively short distances and are rarely open on a

continued on p. 24

Blocklyn's Books



Book Reviews by Philip Blocklyn

***Of Cabbages and Kings County: Agriculture and the Formation of Modern Brooklyn.* By Marc Linder and Lawrence S. Zacharias. University of Iowa Press., 1999. 478 pp. Illustrations, bibliography and index. \$32.95**

***Awakening the Past: The East Hampton 350th Anniversary Lecture Series, 1998.* Edited by Tom Twomey. Newmarket Press, 1999. 465 pp. Illustrations, bibliography and index. \$39.95**

What do Brooklyn and East Hampton have in common? They share an island, albeit on opposite ends, ends opposed in so many ways. But that cannot be our final answer, as we would be forgetting the Bensons, or to be exact, the heirs of Egbert and Arthur Benson. These are the children who in 1887 and 1893 respectively sold off 1) the square mile of New Utrecht farmland destined for the glorious suburban development of Bensonhurst, and 2) the right-of-way bringing the Long Island Railroad and its attendant terrors of tourists and bohemian *artistes* to the East End. Now how did that happen?

It's the question at the heart of Linder and Zacharias's book,

which traces Kings County's transformation from garden farm to residential suburb. Was this transformation inevitably the result of "market forces" sweeping like cold fronts across the western end of Long Island, turning vegetable lots into subdivisions? To the authors' credit, they reject the knee-jerk assignment of "market forces" as the prime mover in this story. In fact, there was nothing inevitable about it. Farming as late as the Benson sale of 1887 was still a profitable concern in the yet-rural towns of Kings County. Local produce was still competitive in price and quality with foods shipped in from the South. Taxes remained low enough to keep farmers on their land. So how was it that within the first thirty years following the Civil War, agriculture fell into full retreat before the spreading Brooklyn Grid?

It all came about, it seems, for lack of any better idea. New York of the 1880s had no organizing principles of city planning beyond the "territorial self-aggrandizement of market-oriented modernizers." What little opposition existed to the ethic of urban sprawl was strictly ad hoc and badly organized. Those in Kings County who had the most at stake -- the old-time Dutch farming families -- were as often as not less than ardent in their own defense. Gertrude Lefferts Vanderbilt serves as a case in point. In 1880 her book *The Social History of Flatbush* bemoans the loss of her patrimony's pastoral pleasures. Apparently, she had forgotten that in 1875 she petitioned the Flatbush Board of Improvements to extend East New York Avenue directly through her noble hickories and oaks. *Sic transit gloria Flatbush*, as the town's farmers "converted the last cabbage fields into suburban real estate."

The essays collected in the East Hampton Lecture Series follow the development of East Hampton from its founding settlers (proud, strong-willed, independent) to its present-day denizens (proud, strong-willed, independent). In between, there is a lot of ground covered. To be recommended especially is T.H. Breen's treatment of East Hampton's "curious" commercial origins (they are that), as well as the essays by Dean Failey and Charles Hummel dealing with East Hampton crafts in general and the Dominy Workshop in particular. There are inevitably a few clunkers in the collection, of mere sounding brass and tinkling cymbal, but they will go unnamed as they will be readily apparent in the reading.

Now to return to the business of the Benson right-of-way ... As Paul Goldberger's concluding essay makes clear, East Hampton still faces many of the same pressures it faced one hundred years earlier from the spreading arms of Austin Corbin. So what else is new? Actually, what's new is his response, subtle and deeply felt, to that pressure. For him, preservation of the past has no point if it condemns a town to the embalming of its history, as in Williamsburg. Rather, preservation should serve as prelude to a town's future, so that history in East Hampton can become not a suffocating "continued presence but a series of passionate interludes."

These essays, capturing as they do the passionate interludes of East Hampton's history, bear our reading.



AUNT EEK



Olde Things: Advice on the Care & Feeding of Antiques

Dear Aunt Eek,

I have an oil painting that has been in my family for over 100 years. It is a portrait of a man wearing a brimmed hat and a dark coat with a wide white collar; it measures approximately 5 x 8". The frame is very ornate with a band of wavy carving around the outer edge and another band of detailed carving at the inner edge, next to the board on which the painting is done. This board is held into the frame with small nails at the top and the bottom of the main frame which is overall about 3" wide. The frame is in nice condition but the painting is so dark that you hardly see the man's face. How can I clean this painting and what is it worth? We may want to sell it so we want it to look as good as possible when we show it to buyers. Thank you for your help; we enjoy your column and hope you are well so that you can continue helping people like me.

Mary Schmidt

Dear Mary,

Thank you for your concern for my health. Although I am

olde and sometimes feeble I hope to be answering queries to the **Freeholder** for many days to come. It is nice to get some positive encouragement from the readers as one cannot receive too much praise. We certainly have had our share of critics and naysayers, so thanks again for your genuine encouragement.

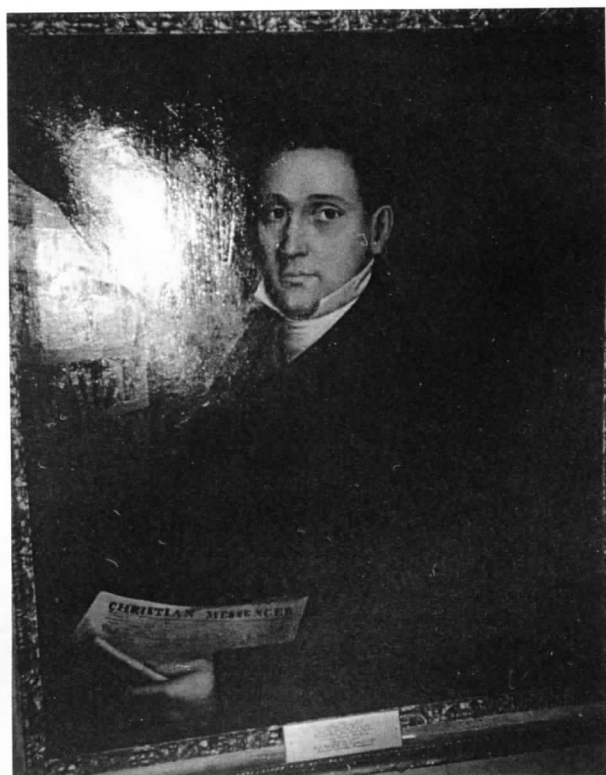
The description of your oil on wood painting is very complete and well detailed. Unfortunately, without actually seeing the painting, any appraisal of its value (which we do not deal with ordinarily in this column) would be impossible. What you have described sounds as though it might be a Dutch style portrait in what may be a Dutch style frame. Based on your report we would encourage you to get a proper written appraisal from a qualified art expert who will advise first hand as to your next step, which may be cleaning and conserving. Under no circumstances should you attempt any restorative measures yourself. Any effort to improve will likely have a deleterious effect and may well ruin any hope of a proper sale. The idea that the painting should "look good" is a notion that should be abandoned by you and by all owners of collectibles, as this is a subjective point that cannot be achieved without giving careful consideration as to just what "looking good" means.

You may locate an appraiser through your "Yellow Pages" directory or contact your local historical society director or curator, who would be happy to recommend competent assistance from qualified experts.

Good Luck!

Answers to Test Your Knowledge, p.16

- A: 7
- B: 9
- C: 4
- D: 6
- E: 3
- F: 8
- G: 10
- H: 5
- I: 2
- J: 1



Portrait of Alfred Underhill of Oyster Bay, c. 1830.
Collection of SPLIA.

MARK YOUR CALENDAR FOR THESE UPCOMING EVENTS!

MARCH

Tues., March 21, 8 p.m.

20/20 Lecture

Join us for a roundtable discussion on oystering in Oyster Bay. Participants in the industry's past and present will take part in the discussion, which will become part of the Local Legacies Project for the Library of Congress. [See related story on p. 11]

APRIL

Tues., April 11, 8 p.m.

20/20 Lecture

How and when were the incorporated villages on Long Island's North Shore formed? Find out by attending this informative lecture which will be given by one of Newsday's team of researchers who compiled the recent publication on the Island's home towns.

MAY

Tues., May 9, 8 p.m.

20/20 Lecture

Ever envied the craftsmen who were able to create beautiful furniture with seeming ease? Well here is your chance to find out how to do it yourself! Join Historical Society member Ken Gambone as he shows us how to make an 18th century tilt-top table.

daily basis. Therefore, not only must the restoration result in a product that, in many cases, is better than new, but also the inspection, servicing, and maintenance is crucial in the interests of dependability and safety. These higher standards pay off in customer satisfaction, increased revenues, decreased accidents and breakdowns.

Chris made the suggestion that rather than trying to do each and every bit of a restoration it was sometimes better to have certain portions of the work contracted out. An evaluation would have to be made on a case by case basis considering time, cost, safety, and expediency.

All present were aware that steam acting through the cylinders and pistons was what made an engine move, but some were amazed to find what other chores this force performs. It powers a turbine which turns a generator

furnishing direct current electricity for the cab instruments, headlight and markers; it runs the injector which pumps water from the tender tank to the locomotive boiler; it powers the automatic stoker which brings coal from the tender bunker to the locomotive's firebox; and, last but not perhaps most importantly, it runs the compressor which provides a supply of air for both the engine and train braking systems.

All in attendance were impressed with the ongoing work being done at Steamtown and the formidable challenges facing the groups involved in locomotive restoration. Perhaps more impressive was the cooperative, helpful attitude expressed by Chris and Jeff. All returned tired but excited as the day of Locomotive #35's move to Oyster Bay draws nearer - hopefully, before New Year's Eve, 2000.

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