James Thompson, Jr.

Born: June 15, 1847, in County Monaghan, Ireland
Died: May 27, 1908, in Oyster Bay, NY
Married: Elizabeth Hendrickson of Upper Brookfield, NY (born June 21, 1857)

James Thompson was the third child and oldest boy born to James Thompson, Sr., and Martha White. As his mother Martha was born in Drumgavny, Monaghan, Ireland, his parents married in the Tullycorbet Parish church, and his father at that time worked in Carrickmacross as a constable, James Junior was very probably born in that area. His obituary below makes proud mention of having been born in Monaghan which is confirmed by the journal of his first cousin William H Jackson, who wrote years later:

“James Thompson son of James Thompson and Martha White was educated and brought up in the County Monaghan. He came to Dublin 5 April, 1861 and went to Jacksons (a large grocery store) of North East Street on the 8 April to serve three years to the grocery business. Left Jacksons 25 Dec. 1862. Went to Cherry & Shields, 40 Upper Sackville Street, 22 August, 1864.”
James eventually left Dublin and emigrated from Ireland to the US, where several Uncles, Great Uncles, and cousins were already established. The Whites had come to America as early as 1824 and according to the 1900 Federal Census, James arrived in 1866. In 1874 he married Elizabeth Hendrickson, a native of Brookville, Long Island. But James must have seen opportunity in the rich supplies of shellfish in the bays and hamlets of Long Island. So he went back across the Atlantic, to London, for a few years to build an import-export business. Eventually, bushels of Long Island oysters were shipped to the UK where they were sold. James was very successful at it.

This census below is from 1881 and shows James and Elizabeth Thompson (first two rows) living in London in the St. Pancras area; that was originally a parish around Oxford Street. In 1900 it became a borough which is now called Camden. In 1881 the Thompsons lived in a flat or row house on Camden Road.

1881 London Census, St. Pancras Parish, 3A Camden Road: James and Elizabeth Thompson
Continuation of 1881 London Census, Thompsons in first two rows. James Thompson is listed as an oyster merchant who was born in County Monaghan, Ireland, and Elizabeth in New York.

In 1881, James and Elizabeth were in London setting up their business. Then they returned to Long Island and James began shipping oysters to Europe. When he bought a home in Oyster Bay ten years later in 1891, the survey stated that James was living in College Point, NY, at the time. In the northern part of Queens and on Long Island Sound, College Point was close to the oyster suppliers there.

But James was buying oysters from growers in Oyster Bay as early as 1886, something that we know from the newspaper clippings in the next pages. He did want to expand his business by opening an oyster opening plant in Oyster Bay; perhaps that explains why he moved to Oyster Bay in 1891. Or it may have been the ups and downs of oyster growing and ecosystems in the Sound that forced him to leave College Point.
The red dot on the left in this map is College Point and the other red dot is Oyster Bay. You can see that they are both on the sound and not too far from each other, especially by water.

James and Elizabeth Thompson bought the home of Richard Sammis in Oyster Bay at 58-64 Anstice Street. The home was built in 1875 by Mr. Sammis and the design was described as 19th century Italianate, but changed during construction as the French Second Empire style became popular.
Below: 1906 Nassau County Map from Oyster Bay Historical Society, Oyster Bay Detail – James Thompson house (pink)

Below: Oyster Bay today. The George Thompson house (no relation) is number 27 on map.

1906 – Note George Thompson property top right corner
It’s interesting also to note the George Thompson property in the upper right corner of the larger Oyster Bay map. This George Thompson (no relation to our family) rented his home out in the summer of 1906 to the Warrens of New York. Unfortunately, they brought a cook too, Mary Mallon, the infamous Typhoid Mary, so called because of the disease that she carried. She is said to have infected 51 people, three of whom died. Mary was there the summer of 1906 during James Thompson’s time in Oyster Bay, working a couple of blocks away from his own home on Anstice Street.
The photos of the Sammis/Thompson house in 1900 and in 2000, seen on previous pages, come from the Oyster Bay Historical Society. They tell us that James Thompson used the honorific title of “Captain” and was known as “The Seafood King.” And it’s no wonder; he had multiple local suppliers, was very well known as an exporter of oysters to Europe, and employed men in his oyster opening plant in Oyster Bay. James and Elizabeth moved to the house on Anstice Street in Oyster Bay in 1891, but the dates on some of these newspaper clippings show that he had partnered with Oyster Bay growers for several years before that.
THE BROOKLYN DAILY EAGLE—SUNDAY, JUNE 7, 1896.

Sound Oyster Planters Make Answer to Captain Pratt,

AND GIVE HIM SOME ADVICE.

They Defend the Native Bivalve and Say Captain Pratt Knows Very Little About the Subject—The Export of Oysters to England—How They Are Planted, Cared For and Protected Against Their Natural Enemies.

(Special to the Eagle.)

Oyster Bay, L. I., June 6—The opinion of Captain Robert E. Pratt of the United States navy, detailed to do duty with the United States fish commission, which was published in the Eagle of May 26, and in which he declared the oysters of Long Island sound as unfit for food, has aroused considerable indignation about here. He has struck a blow at one of the most important business interests on Long Island or on the Connecticut shore. Such an attack is thought by our oystermen to be entirely unwarranted. An Eagle representative, while talking yesterday with James Thompson, one of the largest oyster growers in America, who operates from fifteen to twenty vessels and to whose opinions drawn from long experience all people in this section defer, elicited the following:

"The man who wrote that knows very little about it. The students might have died from a number of other causes than from the effects of eating oysters. It is quite possible they had been eating too much, and contracted disease as a result. The idea of oysters hurting them is simply preposterous. I ship from fifty to seventy-five thousand bushels yearly. Daniel Velcor, Charles H. Baylis and Henry A. Townsend ship nearly as many, and not one of us has ever received a word about a diseased oyster. Although an oyster is very delicate, you have no idea how hard it is to injure it. This is not because of the hardiness of the oyster, but on account of the purifying qualities of the salt water. It is quite as possible to poison an oyster as any other living thing, but it would take some considerable quantity of poison to hurt the waters of Long Island sound. Poison that did not kill an oyster outright would not render it unfit for market consumption. The prejudices against oysters and hints about disease being carried by them was first started in England, where many people are set against anything foreign.

"We plant shells for the young oyster to cling to. As it floats through the water it is attracted by anything bright and shells make the best bottom ground because they reflect the light fully. When they have a good hold on the shells they are transplanted to our regular beds. When we plant and raise in this manner hundreds of thousands of bushels each year, it is ridiculous to talk of disease affecting these oysters. If they were to be injured at all, isn't it reasonable that they would receive the injury while young with a soft shell? The only enemies the oysters have are the borer and the starfish. The first bores through the young oyster's shell and the starfish sucks it out of its shell. There is what is called a winter killed oyster. Perhaps those students have it.

"It is a dead bivalve and would be injurious to a person's health just the same as any other dead meat. An expert can tell a winter killed oyster when he sees it and any can detect it as soon as he gets it on his tongue. If by chance one should be swallowed, an emetic should be taken—as if it were a piece of putrid beef—it is a thing to get rid of at once. Let people be careful where they get their oysters and they will have no trouble with winter killed ones. During March and April 10,000 barrels a week were shipped to England and Germany. I have recently received letters from customers there that they had never received any oysters in better condition. If any of those had been diseased it would have been pronounced enough by the time those oysters reached Europe to have killed many people. The talk of disease is foolish, I cannot be emphatic enough.
A FLOURISHING OYSTER BUSINESS — The Oyster Bay correspondent of the Long-Islander writes: "As the season advances the business at James Thompson's oyster house increases. All visitors to this establishment are favorably impressed with one of the first sights that meets their attention. Around the room are seated several men, all busily engaged at their work of opening the bivalves. At the end of the row of openers is seated the younger of the group. He is thirteen years of age, and apparently the opened oysters leave his hands as rapidly as they do those of his older companions. This is not the case, however, for among his fellow workmen are some expert openers. Still, it was ascertained upon inquiry, that the boy had opened sixteen bushels of oysters during a single day, which, his employer casually remarked, at twenty cents a bushel was a good day's work for a boy thirteen years old. Mr. Thompson's foreign trade necessitates the opening of something over two thousand bushels of oysters a week, and he is constantly in need of good workmen. What a contrast between this young man who can earn his $3.20 a day and the young man who whiles away his time in idleness."

Brooklyn Daily Eagle 1899

Oyster Bay's Expected Yield.
(Special to the Eagle.)

Oyster Bay, L. I., September 1—For prime oysters and big yields Oyster Bay, as its name implies, once took the lead in the oyster industry. Last year it regained some of its old time prestige, owing to the absence of the dreaded star fish, which has been a terrible foe to the oystermen. Not even an expert can predict what the outcome of the present season will be, as one planter exclaimed.

"It's like playing dice. The prospects, however, are good, and a few oysters opened at random are A1. In previous years local planters have been very much discouraged, and met with heavy losses, which they have yet to make up in better seasons. Their minds go back to 1872 and 1873, when Oyster Bay had the lead and was in the full tide of its success. There are over one thousand acres of leased oyster ground at present. An average of about two bushels of oyster to one of seed is secured in good season. Among the planters in this section are:


The oldest planter in this section is Captain Valentine Bayles, now retired. Captain Alfred Ludlam, William Townsend, Henry Townsend, Jr., C. H. Bayles and Daniel Smith are the next oldest. A big fleet of oyster boats is employed in the business and all oystermen look forward to a big, lucrative yield this season.

Long Islander 1901

James Thompson, our principal oyster shipper has commenced sending oysters to Europe. He is now sending about seventy-five barrels per week. The season has only just commenced. Last winter he shipped as high as twelve car loads per week. On one particular day he shipped six car loads. The European demand is much better than a few years ago. There are quite a number of vessels in our harbor buying oysters now and our oystermen are expecting good times this year.
A person who had visited the waterfront of Oyster Bay Harbor ten years ago and had not seen it since, would be surprised, upon visiting it now, at the great improvements that have been made. The two commodious docks built by the Oystermen's Association in 1880 are used not only by that Association, but also by a landing place for steamboats, the supplies that are used by the stores of the village. Besides the large building belonging to the Oyster Bay Traders Company and large coal packets, there are also the stores of Mr. J. H. Johnson for the purposes of his sailing vessels. All of the docks have been put up within the past two years, and are now occupied by James Thompson for the purpose of fattening oysters. Mr. Thompson has a secret process by which thousands of oysters can be fattened within a short time.

The slip between these two docks is one of the busiest spots on the north side of Oyster Bay Harbor. The slip is only 250 feet long, but it is plenty large enough to accommodate the large number of oysters that can be fattened there. The blacksmith shop erected by the Company is occupied by Henry MacKaye, a well-known blacksmith, and by Messrs. Gunderman & Van Valkenburg, the enterprising builders. The slip between these two docks is one of the busiest spots on the north side of the harbor when it is open, and it is almost impossible for a boat to make its way up between the rows of sloops and other craft.
The oyster opening contest at Fleet's Hall, at Oystercatchers' Bay, attracted a goodly crowd of spectators on Saturday evening. The contestants were Michael Foley, of New Haven, Conn., and William G. Fraser, both employed in the oyster establishment of James Thompson of Oyster Bay. The match was for $25 a side, and the man to open 1,000 oysters in the least time was to take the money. The men started with 500 oysters by the side of their benches, and when the word was given, shells flew in a way astonishing to the spectators. When Fraser turned out the last oyster of his 500 pile, the Connecticut man had but one left. Each had to get the remaining 500 in shape to open, and Foley began to swing his knife a little in advance of his competitor, gaining a lead which he held throughout the contest, winning the match by eighteen oysters. About an hour and twenty minutes was consumed in the work, Foley used a hammer for chilling his oysters, while Fraser did all of his work with a knife.

James Thompson has several men employed at the Oysterman's Dock in taking out oysters. Mr. Thompson takes out several hundred bushels of oysters in a week and ships them to Chicago. He has built up quite a business in this line and well deserves the success he is having.

The Oyster Bay oyster opening business of James Thompson is to be extended. An addition will probably be built on the building occupied by him on Oysterman's Dock, making the building 100x25. Delicate action will be taken at a meeting of the Oysterman's Dock company to be called sometime in March. Mr. Thompson expects when the new structure is completed to keep fifty men employed from August 15th to May of the following year.
After building his seafood export business in London and College Point, James and Elizabeth purchased the home of Richard Sammis on Anstice Street, Oyster Bay, NY in 1891. We find them there in the 1900 census in rows 20 and 21. James told us that he was born in 1847 in Ireland and came to the US in 1866. He called himself an oyster dealer.

1900 Federal Census, Oyster Bay, Anstice St.; James and Elizabeth Thompson. There are no house numbers here, only family and dwelling number in order visited.

Elizabeth’s mother, Annie M Hendrickson, was living with the Thompsons in 1900. She was a widow at this time, and although it’s hard to read in the census, it tells us that Annie’s father was born in Newfoundland, Canada, an area with a long history of cod fishing by the English and Europeans, but Annie’s mother was born in New York. Annie herself married, had two children and ended up in Brookville, Long Island. She died November 26, 1904, and is buried in Brookville Cemetery, Nassau County, with her daughter Elizabeth and James Thompson.
Oyster Bay 1900: the James Thompson oyster business is number 35 in the detail map below.

Detail

28 - Oyster Bay and Cold Spring Trans'n Co. Steamer Wharf
35 - A. J. & E. H. Hutchinson - Coal, Groceries, Hardware
35 - James Thompson - Oyster Shpper and Dealer
39 - E. H. Kirby - Sail and Zooming Maker
41 - W. W. Simms - Carriage and General Painting
40 - P. N. Layton - General Blacksmithing and Carriage Work
46 - Fausel & Son - Machine Shop
27 - Franklin Hotel
36 - Frank Bayles - Insurance, Coal and Wood
29 - F. D. Spight - Oyster Bay Station and and L.I. Express Agent
15 - Casino (really!)
2 - (Oyster Bay Station)
Teddy Roosevelt in Oyster Bay

To Theodore Roosevelt, 26th President of the United States, the Oyster Bay area was home. He and his wife Edith and six children frequented their Victorian cottage, Sagamore Hill, in the summertime so that it served as an unofficial “White House” during the years of his Presidency 1902 – 1908. It just happened that that was the same time James Thompson lived in Oyster Bay, so James would have seen the President out and about in town.

Some Washington politicians disliked the fact that so much business was carried on at Sagamore during the summer months, and the Puck cartoon in the next pages suggests and mocks ways Teddy could settle international disputes by inviting world leaders to Sagamore Hill. But the people of Oyster Bay loved the excitement.
PRINCE SEES PRESIDENT.

CHEN AND HIS SUITE TAKE LUNCHEON AT OYSTER BAY.

[BY TELEGRAPH TO THE TRIBUNE.]

Oyster Bay, Long Island, Aug. 11.—Prince Tsai Chen, the representative of the Chinese Imperial family, accompanied by H. H. D. Peirce, Third Assistant Secretary of State; Wu-Ting-fang, the retiring Chinese Minister, and a suite of five Chinese subjects, took luncheon with the President and Mrs. Roosevelt at Sagamore Hill to-day. Although it could not be arranged to receive formal guests at the President’s summer home on Sunday, the postponement did not interfere with the perfection of the visit.

Prince Chen was manifestly delighted by the fact that he was taken to Oyster Bay from New York in a government vessel. The reception of this royal visitor, who expressed to the President the great goodwill of the Chinese empire to the United States, is regarded as another case of hands stretched across the sea, and was recognized appreciation to-day of the fact that America’s friendship alone was responsible in a large measure for the present satisfactory situation in China, which otherwise might have been turned into a condition of universal and disastrous disaster as a result of the crisis in 1900.

When the prince was put ashore the water in the bay was calm. A carriage awaited his coming at the top of a hill beyond the J. West Roosevelt pier. President Roosevelt stood on his veranda to meet the visitors. The prince wore his yellow jacket and purple skirt and red cap with a black rim. Minister Wu, who has always been an admirer of the President, acted as interpreter after the formal presentation. The Chinamen walked about on the President’s lawn and with native curiosity expressed their admiration for the beauty and quaintness of Sagamore Hill.

Prince Chen, of the royal house of China, resplendent in his royal jacket of yellow and wearing three black peacock plumes, that bobbed against the umbrella held over his head by a faithful attendant, arrived in New York on the steamship St. Paul at noon to-day and is now quartered in a magnificent suite on the second floor of the Waldorf-Astoria.

With the Prince was Sir Chen Tung Liang Cheng, K. C. M. G., the new Ambassador to the United States, who will assume his duties next January, and the Prince’s suite, which consists of many Chinamen prominent in their own country.

When the steamer arrived at quarantine she was met by the Revenue Cutter Hudson. On board the Hudson was Minister Wu Ting-fang, J. B. Reynolds, Mayor Low’s secretary; H. H. D. Peirce, assistant Secretary of State; the Chinese Consul General and vice consul. It had been arranged to receive the Prince on board the cutter, at quarantine, and take him to the foot of West Thirty-fourth street, but it was found that his highness would have to climb a ladder several feet long, something which Minister Wu said would not be quite practical. Minister Wu himself, however, and the others on the cutter, made the climb to the ship without mishap and were ushered into the drawing room on the ship, where his highness was awaiting them.
James Thompson, Jr., was definitely acquainted with President Roosevelt, and one of James’ obituaries even calls them friends. Certainly James knew the President’s staff very well. He rented them rooms regularly and fed them too throughout those years of Roosevelt’s presidency, until James’ illness and death in 1908. The 1903 articles below describe a cosy scene during a storm when James was almost hit by lightning in the “Thompson cottage” while chatting with them.

**OYSTER BAY STORM SWEPT.**
Rain Fell in Torrents and There Were Hail Stones as Large as Peas.

Oyster Bay, L.I., July 15—A miniature tornado swept over this place just before 6 o’clock last night. The rain came down in torrents and small stones as big as peas fell in sheets. The wind in its fury laid low trees, smashed in windows and played queer pranks with every loose obstacle. Many of the fine equipages of the summer residents that were at the depot to meet the 5:10 train were caught in the terrific storm and were nearly overturned. Lightning struck the Thompson cottage, where B. F. Barnes, the assistant secretary to the President, is staying, and James Thompson, the owner, who is a well-known European oyster shipper and a member of the Board of Education, narrowly escaped instant death from a bolt of lightning which followed a tin leader pipe down the outside of the house, crashed through the brick work over the kitchen and knocked Mr. Thompson to the floor senseless. He was standing with his back to the sink as the bolt entered the house, only a few inches from his body, following an iron pipe into a well.

The storm was the most severe known for years in Oyster Bay. An Italian who was working in the trenches of the Water Company was knocked senseless by a lighting shock, and huge trees were laid low. A big tree in front of the Sumner homestead was struck by lightning and a big piece of the trunk was hurled in the teeth of the wind several blocks away, landing on Harry Sumner’s milk house.

**HIT COTTAGE WHERE BARNES STAYS.**
Lightning Knocked Owner Down—President’s Assistant Secretary Was at Office.

Oyster Bay, Long Island, July 14—A severe electrical storm, accompanied by hail, wind and rain, passed through this village early this evening. Lightning struck in a number of places, but trees suffered the most. Hailstones averaging the size of peas fell in such a shower as to make it impossible to see across the street. One bolt of lightning hit the Thompson cottage, where Assistant Secretary Barnes is staying. Mr. Barnes was at his office at the time. James Thompson, the owner of the cottage, who is a well-to-do oyster shipper, was standing in the kitchen with his back against the sink when the bolt hit. The charge flowed down a leader and then tore a hole through the brick back of the sink. It then leaped to the pipe leading to the eaves. Mr. Thompson was knocked down andazed by the bolt. He has revived.
President Roosevelt Will Receive No Visitors at Sagamore Hill Unless Engagement is Made in Advance, and Then Only on Business of the Utmost Importance.

Oyster Bay, June 29.—The new executive offices were opened for business by Secretary Loeb at 8:30 this morning. The secretary and Assistant Secretary Barnes drove down from their lodgings in the Thompson cottage in the midst of a driving rain storm. Stenographers Latta and and Himann and messenger Lightfoot were already on hand, and without any formalities the summer capital was opened. Lightfoot had already visited the postoffice and returned with a big pouch of mail.

The secretaries sorted the letters, official and private, the newspapers and departmental documents. Such as could be attended to on the spot were handed to Assistant Secretary Barnes. Those communications that required the personal attention of the president were bundled up and taken to Sagamore Hill by Secretary Loeb.

The president had finished his breakfast and was waiting for the secretary in the big library, so no time was lost in getting to work. The president places the president about the room, or lounges in one of the easy chairs while dictating his correspondence and the secretary works at the flat top desk upon which the long distance telephone receiver stands. The president can sit at his desk, and talk with his subordinates in Washington or carry on a conversation with a friend in Denver.

The rain prevented the president from playing tennis with his children this morning, but probably will not interfere with their horseback ride later in the day. An ordinary rain does not dampen the Roosevelt ardor for a horseback ride.

Secretary Loeb announces very emphatically that the president will receive no visitors at Sagamore Hill this summer unless an engagement is made in advance, and then only on business of the most pressing importance.

SUMMER CAPITOL AT OYSTER BAY OPENS.

OYSTER BAY, N.Y., June 29.—The new executive offices were opened for business by Secretary Loeb at 8:30 this morning. The Secretary and Assistant Secretary Barnes drove down from their lodgings in the Thompson cottage in the midst of a driving rain storm. Stenographers Latta and Himann and messenger Lightfoot were already on hand and without any formalities the summer capital was opened. Lightfoot had already visited the Postoffice and returned with a big pouch of mail.

Secretary Loeb announces very emphatically that the President will receive no visitors at Sagamore Hill this summer unless appointment is made in advance and then only upon business of the most pressing importance.

TURNING TO OYSTER BAY.

Sympathy With Mr. Roosevelt as to Summer Quarters.

[From the Springfield Republican.] They do say that there's no end of trouble in getting the immense White House clerical force and Secret Service man any place to board and lodge the coming summer is that same neighborhood of Oyster Bay by the Sound. Never before has the problem occurred. Every other President before this extraordinary one has been able to get along without a train of dependents. But Mr. Roosevelt has got to have clerks, stenographers, telegraphers, telephone talkers — why, there is a new and novel, and in fact fairly romantic body of royal trailers to be provided for.

And in the face of this situation, the new hotel of Oyster Bay is not ready; two or three boarding houses have been closed; the Thompson cottage, where all the dependents have been wont to eat, is not to be reopened.

Then it really seems that Mr. Roosevelt has got to keep house for himself and somehow provide for his host of servants. This is too bad.
James Thompson, Jr., became ill and died of cancer in 1908, but his wife Elizabeth was still running the “Thompson cottage” on Anstice Street in the 1910 census. In 1912, it looks as though Elizabeth tried to sell the Anstrice Street house in an auction, but she was listed in the 1915 census and in 1917 she was still living on Anstice. She sold off many household items in 1917 as you can see in the auction notice on next page. Elizabeth was still on Anstice when the 1920 census was taken, although she had two very young temporary wards and a housekeeper. The 1925 census is the last census where I find Elizabeth and it confirms that she had been living at 64 Anstice all these years, the same house that James Thompson purchased in 1891.

1910 Federal Census, Oyster Bay, NY: Elizabeth Thompson boarding house Anstice Street, rows 27-31. There are no street numbers on this census page, only number of family and house visited.

1915 NYS Census, Oyster Bay, Anstice Street, no house number: Elizabeth Thompson, no boarders.
1920 Federal Census, Oyster Bay, NY, Anstice Street, no house number: Elizabeth Thompson, wards and housekeeper.
Finally in the 1925 census, we have a number for the house on Anstice Street, and it is 64; Elizabeth had been living in the same house all those years following James' death. There were six people living at 64 Anstice in 1925 and there seem to be multiple “head” of household. Elizabeth was 67 at this point.

1925 NYS Census, Oyster Bay, 64 Anstice Street: Elizabeth Thompson