

History Of Shoreham

by

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*Dedicated to my children
Joseph, Catherine and Michael,
who were kind enough to be
quiet while I was working.*

Geographical Description

Shoreham is a residential hamlet within the Town of **Brookhaven** comprised of an incorporated village, **Shoreham Village**, and an unincorporated area surrounding the village.. It is located 65 miles east of New York City on the north shore of Long Island and is bordered by Rocky Point on the west, Long Island Sound on the north, Wading River on the east, and Ridge on the south. (See Fig, 1.)



Fig.1. Map of Long Island, showing Shoreham. From LILCO Final Environmental Statement related to Operation of Shoreham Nuclear Power Station, Docket #50-32, U.S. Atomic Energy Commission Directorate of Licensing.

It is situated on the Harbor Hill moraine formed from glacial till as the last wave of glaciation retreated from Long Island 18,000 years ago, Several depressions within the hills may be small kettle holes. The rolling hills alternate with seven deep, narrow gullies formed as melting water ran off the glacier and seeped northward back and underneath the glacier, The gullies open onto beaches composed of fine pebbles littered with large boulders deposited by the glacier. Wave action on the beach has produced some fine sand mixed with the pebbles. Between the gullies the beaches are rimmed by sandy cliffs 100 to 150 feet high, The cliffs are constantly being eroded at their base by the action of waves and at their top by occasional severe rainstorms. The updrafting of moisture-laden east winds as they meet the bluff often produces heavier rainfall than is encountered a mile or more inland, The soil in the moraine area

is composed of Miami stony loam, a thick soil presenting a rounded, knobby appearance and extending ten to twenty feet deep. The surface of the loam is strewn with large boulders of gneiss, granite, quartzite, shale, and conglomerate. South of the moraine region is a plateau formed by the glacial outwash carrying particulate material as the glacier melted and retreated. The soil is a Sassafras gravelly loam formed by thorough mixing of gravel with fine silt and clay during the late Pleistocene era. It is a soil which provides favorable conditions for the pitch pine (*Pinus rigida*)-scrub oak (*Quercus ilicifolia*) forests which grow there. (Bonsteel, 1903). (See Fig. 2.)



The Outer Lands



Fig. 2. Map of Long Island, showing region of moraine and outwash plains. From Dorothy Sterling, The Outer Lands, a Natural History Guide to Cape Cod, Martha's Vineyard, Nantucket, Block Island, and Long Island, (Garden City, N.Y., 1967).

Settlement: 1671-1800

The settlement of **Shoreham** as a community is closely linked with the establishment of a settlement at Wading River in 1671. At a Brookhaven Town Meeting on Nov. 17, 1671 it was "voted and agreed upon that.

there should be a settlement at the Wading River or thereabouts of **eight** families or eight men, to have accommodations as the place will **afford.**"¹ Included among the eight men is the name of Richard **Woodhull**, a resident **of Setauket**, and one of the signers of the agreement with the **Montauk Indians** for the sale of land to the early English colonists. **Wading River and the** rest of Brookhaven Town was purchased from the Indians in the period from 1657-1675. The earliest purchase, in 1657, was a conveyance of **land** on the south side of Long Island to **Woodhull** from **Wyandanch**, Sachem of the Montauks, the **consideration** for which was "20 coats, 20 hoes, **20** hatchets, 40 **muxes**, 40 needles, **10** pounds of powder, **10** pounds of **lead**, 6 pairs of stockings, 6 shirts, 1 **trooper's** coat, made of good cloth, **20** knives, and 1 **gun.**"² In 1664, **Tobacus**, Sachem of the **Uncachaugs**, sold the land lying on the south side of the island east to **Yaphank** and north to the middle of the island to the **English.**³ In 1675, **Gie**, the Sachem of **Setauket**, confirmed the sale of all the land "from the west line that runs from **Stoney Brook** to the **North Sea** [**Long Island**] and **south** to the middle of the island, and **so to** extend to the **Wading River** or **Red Brook...to** Richard **Woodhull** and his **heirs.**"⁴ As land at that time was community owned, **Woodhull** released the land to the rest of the inhabitants of **Brookhaven Town.**⁵

The land at Wading River extending several miles in either direction from the creek was referred to as Wading River. The land west of the **creek is** now considered to be in **Shoreham**. Several of the original eight settlers appear to have settled on the **west side** of the river. In a patent of Sept. 29, 1677, Governor **Andross** confirmed the title of Richard and Nathaniel **Woodhull** to "**eighty** acres more lying Westward from ye **afor** said fresh Brook [**at Wading River**] near a mile at a Place commonly called ye long **chessnut** trees, lying in length North and South one hundred and sixty pole and in Breadth eighty.."⁶ This land, a mile and more west of the creek, is definitely in Shoreham, A sawmill was

erected on this site and began operating as early as 1710. (See Fig. 3.)



Fig. 3. Wooley's Saw Mill was in operation from 1710 on the original Woodhull patent, along the west branch of The Wading River. Picture taken circa 1900.

From E. Meier, The Wading River: Pauguaconsuk (Riverhead, New York, 1955).

"Long Chestnuts" is also mentioned in the Town Records of 1685 when a sixty acre lot at the long chestnuts was laid out for Richard Woodhull.⁷ Early photographs show the house that his grandson built on the property in the early 1700's. (See Fig. 4.) Another early resident of the area was John Roe who owned fifty acres of land south of Isaac Dayton's lot at the Long Chestnuts, and fifty acres of land east of Isaac Dayton's land "at the Eastward Chestnuts." (Brookhaven Town Records, 1704)⁸ Isaac Dayton owned land to the west of Richard Woodhull's sixty acres and he petitioned the Town Trustees to have a surveyor "lay out and ascertain such passages and wayes to the land and medow of the sd Isaac Dayton ... as may be most convenient."⁹ This right of way requested may have been the origin of the present Woodville Landing Road,¹⁰ On Jan. 19, 1714, Dayton's relatives, Jonathan and Nathaniel Dayton,



Fig.4.

Josiah Woodhull House, circa 1720. The original house was raised to the 2nd story, and the 1st floor was built under it. It is now the property of the Long Island Lighting Company.

From E. Meier, The Wading River: Pauguaconsuk (Riverhead, New York, 1955),

bought from John Roe "lands and dwelling house, orchard and garden at a place commonly called the 'Long Chestnuts west of Joseph Robinson's land, also a ten acre lot on the east of Joseph Robinson's land together with land lying on the west side of Isaac Dayton's meadow and the clift on the north side, with a dwelling house and barn on the land..."¹¹

A year later the Daytons sold this land to James Sell. James Sell continued to buy land in the area and when he died in 1757 his property passed to his sons, James and Wessell. James lived in the old homestead probably located at the southern end of the present Briarcliffe Road, and Wessell built a house farther east on North Country Road.¹² Land in the western part of Shoreham was laid out to Richard Miller, originally of Miller's Place, near the property belonging to Joseph Robinson,¹³

Early Life

Life in the Long Chestnuts section of Wading River was that of the

typical early Long Island settlement , devoted mainly to farming and producing those items necessary for survival. Several of the Long Chestnuts landholdings are described as large farms. In 1757 James Sell's farm consisted of "9⁵⁴ cattle...about 140 sheep, 10 horses, 22 pigs, and eight slaves..." Corn, beans, rye, and buckwheat were the principal farm crops. These were supplemented with fish and shellfish from the Wading River Creek and the Sound. Blackberries, huckleberries, and beach plums were gathered. Vegetables were grown in house gardens, pumpkin being an old standby that was used when other foods were scarce.¹⁵ Bedding and food for livestock were provided by the the Wading River Meadows, which were the common possession of the community members, among them Samuel Dayton and Richard Woodhull (Meier, 1955). Sheep were grown for wool to make clothing. Mills were available for grinding rye and buckwheat. One mill was located on the west branch of the Wading River creek across from Josiah Woodhull's house. (See Fig. 5.)

The early settlers were all members of the Wading River Congregational Church and as such contributed to the salary of the preacher. Listed among the early contributors were James Sells, John Robinson, and Josiah Woodhull.¹⁶

Swezey's Landing: 1800-1900

The beginning of the development of Shoreham as a separate community occurred in the early 1800's with the advent of the cordwood industry and the development of Swezey's Landing. Swezey's Landing was named after Daniel Swezey, Jr. who established a house and store at the end of Woodville Landing Road near the landing on Long Island Sound. His store was the headquarters for the woodcutters, carters, and boatmen involved in the cordwood industry. Both material goods, news, and mail were exchanged there. The road which led to his store, shown on maps of 1797, was laid out over part of the route of Isaac Dayton's 1704 right of way, principally as a short route for woodcutters to cart cordwood to the landing from the pine barrens in Middle Island. (See Fig. 6.) It is known in Middle Island as Corwin Road from the fact that it began near

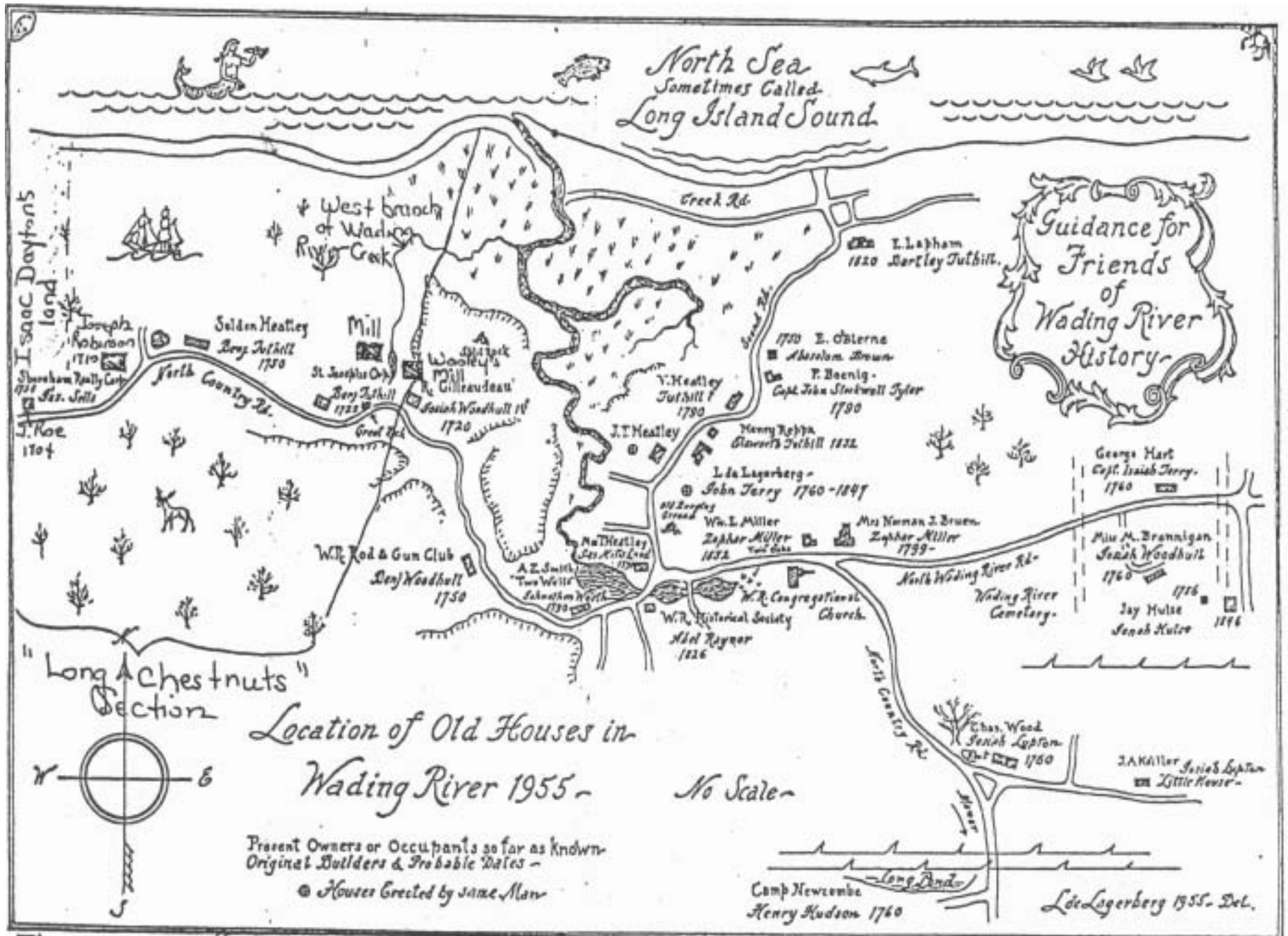


Fig. 5. Map of Wading River From E. Meier *The Wading River: Pausaueconsuk (Riverhead*

the house of the Rev, Jacob **Corwin**, and in **Shoreham** as Woodville:Landing Road from the fact that so much **cordwood** was shipped from the landing at its end,¹⁷ Its usage in the transport of **cordwood** developed due to its location in one of the glaciated gullies leading to a flat, level opening onto the beach. **From** the beach, **cordwood** was **loaded** onto a sailing vessel and shipped to New York City, As early as the **1730's** and **1740's** landings like this were being established in the bays and harbors of the North Shore to carry farm produce and wood to New York City and other ports on the Sound, The return boats brought manure, ashes, bricks, or merchandise to these Long Island communities and hamlets.¹⁸ The **cordwood** industry became so important that the whole area surrounding **Swezey's** store became known as **Swezey's** Landing until approximately **1840**, when the name was changed to Woodville Landing. A second, lesser-known landing, called **Tuthill's** Landing was located one mile east of **Swezey's** Landing. (See Fig. 7.)

The **cordwood** industry flourished along the North Shore of Long Island because of the availability of wood from the chestnut, oak, and pine forests of the **Harbor Hills** moraine and areas south of it, and because of the easy transportation to New York City via coastal schooners on Long Island Sound. **Cordwood** was used as fuel for heating homes, to fire brickyard kilns in the Hudson Valley, and later to fuel engines in the steamboats travelling Long Island Sound,¹⁹

The soil of the moraine regions on which chestnut and oak forests grew is composed of Miami stony loam and Alton stony loam, both of which are thick soils ranging from three to forty feet deep. Miami stony loam is a firm, compact, brown loam underlain by silty or fine sand for approximately thirty inches until a yellow sand layer is reached, It holds a good deal of moisture and is thick enough for the development of growing trees and plants. Alton stony loam is much the same but contains somewhat more sand (Bonsteel, 1903.) Minerals are present in

both soils which provide considerable amounts of potassium, lime, iron, and silicon to enrich plants. The early forests found on these soils would be likely to contain chestnut (*Castanea dentata*), red oak (*Quercus rubrum*), scarlet oak (*Q. coccinea*), white oak (*Q. alba*), chestnut oak (*Q. prinus*), hickory (*Carya tomentosa*), sassafras (*Sassafras albida*), black cherry (*Prunus serotina*), locust (*Robinia pseudo-acacia*), and dogwood (*Cornus rugosa*). Locust is not a native tree, having been introduced to this country in 1705 (Conard, 1935). Chestnut trees were, the most common trees in Long Island forests until the chestnut blight destroyed most of them in the early twentieth century.

"The plateau area south of the Harbor Hills moraine were and still are populated by vast acres of pine barrens, containing pitch pine (*Pinus rigida*) and scrub oak (*Quercus ilicifolia*) trees. The soil directly south of Shoreham is a Sassafras gravelly loam. Which consists of a surface soil containing more gravel than loam, underlain by a bed of coarse sand and gravel. It is usually less than two feet deep and thus provides little space for development of extensive plant roots.^{19a} The well drained nature of this soil combined with the humid Long Island climate does provide favorable conditions for the growth of the pines and scrub oaks in the pine barrens. The frequent incidence of forest fire has maintained the pitch pine-scrub oak community in this area.

The oak, pine, and chestnut trees were used for heating fuel and lumber. Svenson (1936) states that white, red, and black oaks provided the largest supply of building timber from the area. Pine provided the second best construction wood and was used also for charcoal, and the turpentine, tar, and rosin extracted from it. Charcoal was produced by enclosing freshly-cut or half-burned pine branches in an enclosure made by stacking large branches closely together. The pine was burned slowly with very little oxygen until charcoal was formed. So A profitable use had been discovered for trees which had been previously burned by forest fire.

Chestnut trees were used as a source of tannin for taming leather, and as wood for poles, fence posts, barrels, casks, pipestaves, and furniture. Hickory and white oak were popular woods used in making horse-drawn carriages and agricultural tools. Locust trees were used extensively in the shipbuilding industry (Conard).

Wood was shipped by horse and wagon over Woodville Landing Road where it was **stacked** to await loading aboard ship. In the early days of the eighteenth century wood was cut during the winter months when farming **was** finished for the year. Loading the cordwood on board ship had to be done at low tide whether that occurred **during** day or **night**. Schooners came in as close as possible to shore at high tide and became **"beached"** as the tide went **out**. As the water **level fell**, the water ebbed almost completely away from the side of the vessel **nearest** to the shore. Wagons **were** driven **onto** the beach **alongside** the ship and the wood was **loaded** onto the ship **as** quickly as possible so that the **vessel could** refloat and be ready to sail when the tide **next came** in. (See Fig. 8.)

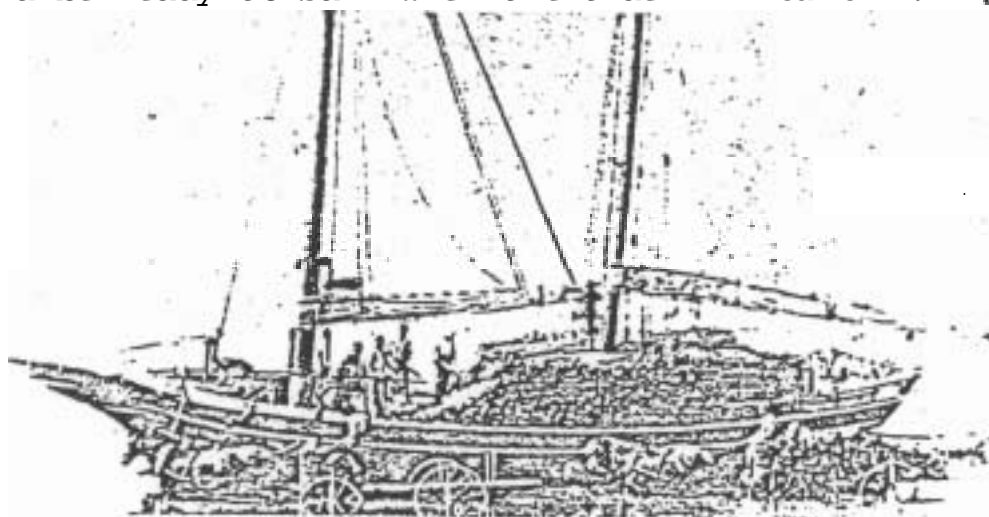


Fig.8.

The Olive Leaf, representative of the shallow sloops used for coast-wise transport, was built, owned and commanded by Captain Vincent Davis. It was used in the cordwood industry for many years. Picture taken in 1898.

From E. Meier, The Wading River: Pauguconsuk (Riverhead, New York, 1955).

There were many sloops carrying **cordwood** and fertilizer between the

landings in Brookhaven Town and New York City. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries Brookhaven Town shipped 100,000 cords of wood per year. In 1824, Brookhaven Town employed 100 vessels in the cordwood trade. Stony Brook alone used "1 brig, 8 schooners, 15 sloops. in the transport of 4,000 cords of wood per year with the return of 20,000 bushels of ashes, 1,000 bushels of bone, and 300 loads other manure."²¹ In fact, so much cordwood was shipped that in the middle of the nineteenth century wood began to be scarce,²²

Near the end of the nineteenth century the cordwood industry from Woodville Landing gradually declined, due primarily to the availability of coal as a source of fuel, and perhaps to the scarcity of wood. Swezey's Landing and the property surrounding it remained in the Swezey family for many years until it was transferred to the Dickerson family sometime after 1850. The Dickerson family planted extensive apple, peach, and pear orchards in the area.²³

Wardenclyffe-on-Sound

In 1895 travel by land on Long Island was difficult at best. The roads were in deplorable condition. North Country had been laid out as a dirt road in 1728 and remained a dirt road into the twentieth century. A picture of Teddy Roosevelt travelling on Route 25A in 1910 suggests that it was little more than a cowpath. (See Fig. 9.) However, this situation changed dramatically with the opening of the Long Island Railroad from New York City to Greenport. The opening of a northern branch of the railroad in 1895 reduced travelling time between Shoreham and New York City from five hours to two hours.²⁴ James S. Warden realized the possibilities offered by speedy travel and in 1895 he bought 1400 acres of land at Woodville Landing.²⁵ A few years later (about 1901) the J. S. Warden Co. published a brochure extolling the charms of "Wardenclyffe-on-Sound, Wardenclyffe, Long Island as an exclusive summer resort community an hour and a half away from the heart of New York City. (See Fig. 10.) Wardenclyffe thus became the fourth name for the area.