

THE ANTECEDENTS : PRE-COLONIAL

In 986 A.D., Bjarni Herjolfsson and his crew of Norsemen, having lost their way on a voyage to Greenland, sailed on westward and were probably the first Europeans to see North America. Although they are reputed to have sailed along the northern coasts for a number of days, there is no report that they ever actually came ashore in the New World. The honor of being the first European to set foot in America fell to Leif Ericson in 1000 A.D. While the Norsemen settled for a time no further away than Martha's Vineyard, there is no evidence that they explored to the west of that point. They probably were not aware of the existence of Long Island or Long Island Sound.

The first serious exploration of the Middle Atlantic coast was undertaken in 1524 by Giovanni da Verrazano, who sailed up the coast from the Carolinas, discovered New York Harbor and then sailed along the south shore of Long Island, reputedly putting in at Narragansett Bay before returning to

Europe. It is of interest to note the parallel between Columbus and Verrazano: the former a Genoan, sailing in the service of Queen Isabella of Spain; the latter a Florentine, sailing for King Francis I of France.

In 1610 Hendrik Hudson explored the river which bears his name, and he, as Verrazano before him, observed the City end of our Island. The honor, however, of being the first to explore Long Island Sound and of being the first European to see Shoreham, fell to a Dutchman, Adrien Block. Having lost his ship, Block built a new one in New York in 1614, the "Onrust", and sailed the East River and the Sound. He reputedly discovered Block Island.

Had Block chosen to make a landing at Shoreham, he would have found a land supporting a forest of mixed hardwoods, pines, brush and scrub. Game was available, but not necessarily abundant. Deer, foxes, rabbits, woodchucks, squirrels and chipmunks were here. There may have been a sprinkling of raccoons and opossums. There were skunks also, but they cannot properly be classified as game. Birds were plentiful: quail, pheasant, partridge, woodcock and snipe. The migratory waterfowl and the usual panoply of shorebirds appeared in their seasons. Among the snakes, he would have found blacksnakes, garter snakes, hog-nosed snakes, milk snakes and racers. Nuts, fruits and berries were abundant.

There is little or no evidence that the Indians ever set up villages or camps in Shoreham, although their artifacts have been found on the LILCO property in Wading River. There have been reported findings of arrowhead-like objects here, but if they are in fact arrowheads, the chances are that they are the relics of arrows lost by Indian hunters. Since Shoreham did not have springs or streams convenient for Indians, there would have been little incentive for them to set up camps or villages here. Such of

the Indians as did roam our woods and beaches in search of fish and game were most probably members of the Seatalcoot (today we spell it "Setauket") tribe.

It has been said that the tetanus bacillus present in some of Shoreham's soil is attributable to horses pastured here by the Indians. It seems more likely, however, that those horses belonged to the wood-Choppers who came at a later date.

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