THE YEARS OF AWAKENING

At times we malign the Long Island Railroad, but it is most unlikely that Shoreham, as we know it today, could have come into being had it not been for that railroad. Its main line to Greenport, although a disappointment to its builders for having failed to live up to its potential as a link in the New York to Boston run, was a profitable carrier of agricultural produce and cordwood to the city and of the necessities of life to the Islanders. Here was a bulk carrier no longer subject to the uncertainties of water transport or the perils of fogs and storms on the Sound and in the Atlantic. It is not surprising that its sponsors saw the virtue of additional lines to service the ports and bays along the North Shore more adequately. In response to those visions, plans were devised for a line to run from head-of-harbor to head-of-harbor along the Sound.

A branch line was taken off the main line at Hicksville; in 1854 it had been completed to Huntington. By 1873 it had been opened as far as Port Jefferson. In 1895 it was extended to its last station in Wading River, with intermediate stations at Miller Place, Rocky Point and Shoreham. The route of the road from Port Jefferson to Wading River is now marked by the line of LILCO's high tension wires. The only visible features which have endured here are the old brownstone bridge spanning Woodville Road, and one of the old trackside mileposts. Shoreham is indeed

fortunate to retain these links with its historic past. The railroad originally had several counterparts of the Shoreham bridge; most of the others, if not all of them, have long since disappeared.

To fully appreciate the importance of the railroad in Shoreham's history, we must consider a subtle magnetism which perhaps makes Shoreham unique in the Electronic Age, namely the coming of Nicola Tesla. Throughout the twentieth century, some elusive factor has, like the Sirens of old, drawn to its environs no less than five generations of electronics.

Tesla was the first of our electronic giants. Not only did he crack the secret of generating high-frequency electric currents and the rotating magnetic field on which all alternating current motors of today are based, but he was a pioneer in the field of radio-controlled torpedoes and, at the turn of the century, described a device which, in the context of today's technology, was plainly the precursor of the electron microscope.

The second generation in electronics is represented by Lee DeForest, who brought the old "Fleming Valve" type of vacuum tube to the degree of perfection needed to open the art of radio telephony. The third generation was the Rocky Point long-wave transmitting station of R.C.A. [1] with its spectacular line of 415 foot steel transmitting towers visible from most parts of the Sound. The fourth generation is the Brookhaven National Laboratory. The fifth, still aborning, is the LILCO nuclear energy plant on the Shoreham Wading River line.

Of these five, Tesla played the most significant role in getting Shoreham off the ground. lie was a flamboyant and ofttimes controversial figure. Tesla was born in 1856 in the part of Yugoslavia then known as Serbia. His father was a pastor; his mother, although illiterate, was reputed to have

been an intellectual genius. Following his education at the Polytechnic Institute in Gratz, Austria, and at the University of Prague, he came to this country in 1884. He was armed with a letter of introduction addressed to no less a personage than Thomas Edison. With uncanny insight into the subtleties of mechanics and physics, and with an enormous sense of showmanship, he rapidly progressed to a point where his imagination and skills drew him worldwide acclaim. By the mid-90's his talents had snowballed to such a degree that he could propound with conviction the principle of transmitting electric power over radio waves. Coincidentally, this was about the same time the railroad came to Shoreham, and these two events fortuitously combined to set the stage for the Shoreham of today.

Through his connection with Edison, and despite the fact that Edison believed in the future of direct current vis-a-vis Tesla's overwhelming affection for alternating current, Tesla succeeded in interesting a group of financiers in New York City in backing an experimental laboratory where he could test his theory of transmitting electric power through the air waves. The Shoreham locale seemed ideal for his venture: land was cheap, the railroad was in a position to bring in the needed materials, supplies and equipment, the plant would be reasonably accessible from New York, and he would be close enough to his backers to maintain a constant liaison with them as his work progressed. With a pledge of $150,000 cash support from J.P. Morgan himself, the stage was set, although he probably realized that the money would not take him all the way to his goal.

To place matters in proper perspective for the entry of Tesla upon the Shoreham scene, a brief Journey back in time is necessary. Somewhere around 1870, the residents of Shoreham Village included at least four families of

Woodhulls, and the names Dickerson, Bush, Reeves, Edwards, White and Skidmore are listed on contemporary maps as homeowners. Most of the old Swezey family holdings had passed to a William B. Dickerson, and upon the death of the latter, they descended to his son, John R. Dickerson, who reportedly died in 1893.

At this juncture James S. Warden appeared on the scene. He was a lawyer and banker from Ohio who, perhaps envisioning a land boom that could result from a proposed extension of the railroad to Wading River, purchased some two thousand acres of land in the vicinity of Shoreham. Much of this land lay to the east of Woodville Road, but part of it was in Shoreham Village. Warden envisioned a development to be built under the name of "Wardenclyffe". Through his connections in banking and financial circles, Warden learned of the current interest in finding a site for Tesla, and appreciating Tesla's genius, was quick to see that if Tesla's dreams were realized, a whole city might spring up to support the hoped-for power plant. Accordingly, Warden set aside some 200 acres of land for Tesla's use, and undertook the construction of a few houses in the Village which, though not as old as some of the earliest, were built some ten years before the "bungalows".

Returning to Tesla, it is recorded that the services of Stanford White, that architectural giant, were engaged to design the laboratory which still stands and now serves as the plant of Peerless Photo Products on Route 25A. In contrast to the grace and beauty of the laboratory building itself, the most spectacular structure in the complex was the bizarre and unprecedented mushroom-shaped transmission tower which Tesla had envisioned. The tower itself was designed and constructed by White's associate, W.D. Crowe of East Orange, New Jersey. Construction work commenced around the turn of the century. While it was in progress, Tesla

dated 1908, suggests that the name "Wardenclyffe" was shortlived, having been superseded in 1906 by the present name "Shoreham".

The person responsible for adopting the present village name is not identifiable. The name itself was most likely brought over from England, since a town by this name is situated some twenty miles southeast of the heart of London, and a seaside town called "Shoreham by the Sea" is located on the shore of the English Channel a short distance to the west of Brighton. Furthermore, a map of the Long Island Railroad dating back to about 1884 contains a reference to "Woodville Landing at Shoreham Beach".

With these observations the background of the Village has been outlined, and we may proceed to view its growth and development. We can identify the three major components of today's Village as follows:

A) the "Old Village", referring to the original Village on the west side of Woodville Road and north of the Store

B) the "Estates", the lands within the incorporated limits but lying east of Woodville Road

C) the "Slopes", west of Woodville Road and south of the Store

Although the name "Shoreham" is not confined to the Incorporated Village today, we find it necessary to limit the scope of the name to the Village proper, and to mention the environs only to the extent that they moulded and influenced the Village's past.

By 1910 Shoreham had, for the most part, acquired the unique qualities it possesses today. We had a General Store. We had a well-known Inn, accessorized by such features as a tennis court and a bathing pavilion. We had a school house. We had water and ice service supplied by a pumping station and refrigeration plant operated by the

Suffolk Land Company. We had a railroad station with two eastbound and two westbound trains daily. There was a horse-drawn stage line from the station to the Inn. The railroad had two side tracks, a baggage station and a freight station. For the most part, however, the Village was mainly a summer community and vacation resort, inhabited in the wi.nLer primarily by those who supported the needs of the summer folks. Roads were primitive. Electric and telephone services were still a few years away, although in 1909, the Town had granted a franchise to a local electric company to provide servi-ce to the Village. Cooking was done mainly on kerosene stoves and coal ranges; kerosene lanterns and candles were the principal sources of illuminati.on. Heating was mostly by fireplaces in the cooler per-iods of spring and fall. With the departure of the summer folks, the Village settled down for the winter months. Snow removal, except perhaps on Woodville Road, was unheard of.

By this time, the Village was on the threshold of a new era the Age of the Automobile. This revolutionary and flexible means of transportation was to shape and mould the character of Shoreham in ways never dreamed of by its founders. No longer totally dependent on the Woodville Store, villagers shopped as far afield as Port Jefferson and Riverhead. Primitive gasoline stations made their appearance, at first dispensing gasoline from five-gallon cans filled from steel drums. The more sophisticated 11service stations" sold it from hand-cranked pumps which dispensed one gallon at a time. A chamois-lined funnel was invariably inserted into the auto's tank, in order that the water and other contaminants in the crude fuel then available mi-ght be strained out. After having serviced a car, it was not unusual for the station owner to go back to his principal Occupations blacksmithing and horseshoeing. There were plenty of horses around, and many a car came to

grief when its tires were punctured by horseshoe nails, or even calks, lying on the highways. Some of the old-timers will recall the village blacksmith, Jim Robinson, who had his shop on North Country Road (25A) just west of the Firestone plant in Rocky Point. Although Jim's primary training was in blacksmithing, it was not long before he was practically a genius in repairing automobiles, even going so Car as to weld a broken front axle back into perfect condition.

The automobile, however, demanded a road surface which the old dirt roads in the Village could not provide. Even in summer the roads, because of their steep grades, were mercilessly eroded and gullied by every heavy rain, and horse-drawn graders were endlessly at work filling the washouts. With the narrow tires of the times, cars were frequently mired down in mudholes along the low spots in the streets. The solution was not long in appearing: surface the streets; preferably with concrete.