

COMING OF AGE

Having survived the birthpangs of incorporation and the building of concrete roads, the Village fell victim to

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the severe epidemic of poliomyelitis which struck in the summer of 1916. Activities ground to a halt. Elaborate preventive measures were adopted: children under sixteen years of age were quarantined for twenty-one days after their arrival in the Village, and also were required to have a health clearance certificate from the communities whence they came. Even these measures did not control the problem, and some children contracted the disease - some seriously but none fatally. By mid-August even sterner measures were adopted: children were prohibited from going to the store, attending church or parties, congregating on the beach or leaving the confines of the Village. With the advent of cooler weather the disease subsided and the controls were lifted.

1917 marked the Country's entry into World War 1. That year and the following constituted a period of marking time, although ripples of excitement arose on rumors that German submarines were operating in the Sound. With the signing of the Armistice in November of 1918, the Village resumed its progress and significant steps in its development came thick and fast.

A spectacle long remembered in Shoreham, and perhaps long regretted in Port Jefferson, was the visit of the Atlantic Fleet to Long Island Sound at about the time of the War. Battleships, heavy and light cruisers, torpedo boats, destroyers, submarines, supply ships and colliers (coal was a principal fuel of the times) steamed up the Sound, deployed and anchored, with Port Jefferson as the chief port of entry for the visit. During a few turbulent weeks of that summer, thousands of "bluejackets" shuttled back and forth between their ships and such of the delights ashore as Port Jefferson was able to provide. From Shoreham's bluffs one could look out on an unbroken dim line of great gray ships and the welter of launches and small boats, ferrying

crews and supplies from ship to ship and between the ships and the shore.

Another memorable event in the Village's life occurred early one morning not long after the Fourth of July in 1919, when the British dirigible R-34 passed over Shoreham on the last leg of the first transatlantic passage by a lighter-than-air craft which had originated in Scotland on July 2. Although larger dirigibles would be built in the years to follow, the old R-34 was indeed an impressive sight as it flew noiselessly and majestically over Shoreham on its way to Mineola.

Just about the time the Village was getting organized, a group of public-minded summer residents founded the Shoreham Country Club. The first clubhouse was the old but solid Log Cabin which stood just South Of the present clubhouse; in fact, it would nearly touch the southwest corner of the present building had it not been taken down at a later date. Little thought was given to youth activities at the outset; the Log Cabin was a haven of refuge for the older residents. There was a gully to the east of it through which the north end of Woodville Road ran down to the beach. To its west was a second gully through which rainwater run-off found its way down to the shore; our present storm drain passes down its former course. Both of these gullies were spanned by footbridges. In 1916 the Log Cabin was made available to the Village for use as a hall, to be used jointly with the Club. That arrangement marked the first link of a long chain which would be forged in future years.

In the winter of 1918-1919 there occurred an event which led to the construction of the first portion of the Village Hall. For many years a feature of the old Shoreham Inn (which was at the site of today's basketball court) was

its related "bathing pavilion" which stood under the edge of the bluff at the north end of what is now the Village parking lot. The pavilion was supported on piles. On its lower level there were dressing rooms, lockers and places for the storage of beach gear; the upper deck was roofed over but open to the breezes on all four sides. It was demolished by a severe storm during that winter. The prime 1-actor in its loss was the battering-ram effect of heavy timbers awash in the flood tides and raging seas which scoured the beaches and eroded the bluffs. During this century our bluff line has receded at least twenty five feet.

Digressing briefly from the present theme, the story of Shoreham's shore erosion and efforts to contain it are noteworthy.

On the bluff lot where Tagliabue Road reaches its northern terminus, there was in 1908 a smallish bungalow situated perhaps twenty-five feet back from the crest of the bluff . There was also a small gazebo on the lot to the west, likewise near the crest. Both are recognizable in a picture presented elsewhere in this book. Unfortunately, the bluff at this location was an unstable sandslide where erosion worked faster than the regenerative powers of vegetation. By 1924 the porch of the bungalow, the "Barnes Cottage", was hanging over the edge. To salvage it, it was raised, moved back, turned and enlarged at its present location. Eventually the gazebo was lost when the bluff collapsed.

Many solutions to the erosion problem were proposed and tested. Locust posts were set in the sand at the base of the bluffs and backed up by heavy log cribworks. The winter storms demolished them. Cement "pancakes" were cast and

stacked along the base of the bluff . The seas scattered them. At the Madigan property, shielding was attempted in the form of large blocks of rock brought in by barge and unloaded by crane. The source of this material was New York City where the Eighth Avenue Subway was being blasted through the Manhattan schist. The first blocks sank in the shifting sands. More were added in later years which proved effectual. The present sheet-steel piling west of the Village beach was installed by Claude V. Pallister and his neighbor Channing Pollock in or about 1931. and has proven a maintenance-free and effective means of control. For many years the durability of this sheet-steel piling was periodically tested by the U.S. Corps of Army Engineers, who were very much interested in its effectiveness.

Returning to the main stream of the narrative, the other significant event of 1918-1919 was the growing realization that the Log Cabin had outlived its usefulness and had become too small to adequately fill the requirements of either the Village or the Club, both of which were assuming increasingly important roles in the affairs of the residents. In the summer of 1919, preliminary arrangements were worked out for the transfer of the Club property to the Village and the construction of a new "pavilion" to fill the needs of both, with an equitable sharing of costs. Arrangements were finalized in 1920, and the new building went up in 1920-1921. The structure then erected - it will hereafter, for convenience, be designated the "Club" to distinguish it from other Village-owned buildings - was composed of the central portion of the building which stands today. It had screened porches along its west and north sides. The footbridge to Beach Lane was elevated to the level of the present floor, and the old footbridge to the bluff on the east was demolished. The old Log Cabin

had a porch along its north side; a flying bridge was built to connect the west end of that porch with the west porch of the new "pavilion". Over the ensuing years, many changes have been made: the west and north porches have been brought indoors, a new sundeck has been added and the stage area has been created. The old flying bridge and the footbridge have disappeared as has the old Log Cabin. The Club property is noteworthy as the first real estate acquired by the Village. The present dimensions of the Club were achieved in 1934-1935.

The Prohibition Amendment and the Volstead Act had their impact on life in the Village. Taking effect early in 1920, they led to the rumrunners, moonshiners, bootleggers and speakeasies which were a prominent part of the American scene until the Great Drought came to an end with Repeal in December of 1933. Because of our open coast, it was a relatively simple matter for small but swift vessels to venture out in the Atlantic to "Rum Row", just outside the three-mile limit, load up with potables and, under cover of darkness, come up the Sound to unload their illicit but welcome cargoes at many of the old landings along the Sound.

Shoreham did not escape this. Many were the reports of covert night landings at Sills Gully. The old Log Cabin (under the aegis of the "Club") was the spigot at the end of the supply line that catered to thirsty villagers. Its steward and his bird-like assistant produced a broad assortment of potables both imported and domestic. Because of the Village's heritage of orchards and arbors, homemade applejack, brandies and wine were plentiful, as were the only slightly less lethal imports "right off the boat" (some cynics said "scraped off"). To liven things up a bit, the Log Cabin sported a wind-up gramophone and a slot machine or two. The potables and paraphernalia were, however, carefully

stowed away when (under Village auspices) voting took place on election days.

For several summers around the time of World War 1, we were treated to the spectacle of large sailing yachts owned by residents of the Village, their friends and their relatives. These vessels engaged in frequent match races manned by crews recruited from among those of the villagers who had seagoing inclinations and, perhaps, some talents. Herbert Stone, for many years Editor of "Yachting" magazine, was a Village resident in those days, living in the small house on the south side of Overhill Road up behind the store. A keen rivalry sprang up between Stone and his yachting cronies on the one hand, and Richard Upham and his coterie on the other. Among the more notable and spectacular boats participating in those races were Upham's "Sea Fox" and the Stone group's "Santana" and "Bagheera".

For the less affluent., canoes were abundant, rowboats abounded and there was an assortment of dories, catboats and other small craft lying at moorings off the beach. The offshore moorings were precarious at best, and it was a rare vessel - whether raft, dory or catboat - that stayed off the beach in the northeasters which seemed inevitably to follow August's full moon.

Beach life was much different in those days. Bathing costumes were elaborate and cumbersome. Cork "water balls" and wooden pails and shovels, plus toy sailboats, were about the only playthings seen on the beach. Inflatable white canvas "water wings" were the universally accepted life jackets. Beach chairs were homemade affairs constructed of shelving boards. Beach umbrellas have changed little. For a number of years "sun shelters" were popular; they were composed of a framework covered over with a roof of boughs. The dried leaves would last through the summer. The shade afforded by these shelters was of

critical importance in those days when beach apparel was nearly as warm as today's winter garments.

Tennis anyone? Throughout this century Shoreham has had a tradition of being tennis-minded. The first tennis court was just north of the Inn; between it and the Bluff Lot . There have been at least six privately owned tennis courts in the Village: one on the "Gridley" lot at the southwest corner of Gridley and Wardencliff roads; another on the Mazzei lot on Sturgis Road just to the south of the Garvins; a third on the Crane property at Sturgis and Overhill; a fourth on the Stevens property on Briarcliff Road; a fifth on the Reid tract on lower Hill Road, and a sixth on the Pisacano lot on Thompson Street. The Club had one court, and later two, which were located where the Club parking lot is today. When the Clubhouse was enlarged in 1934-35~ those two courts were built at the southeast corner of Briarcliff and Woodville roads on land taken under long-term lease from the Suffolk County Land Company. The two upper-level courts in the same complex are of later vintage.

Squeezed in between the old Log Cabin and its two tennis courts was a house which for many years was occupied by the Jantzer family. When the Club was enlarged and the Log Cabin demolished, that house was jacked up, moved down Woodville Road and planted at the corner of Woodville and Fitzgerald, where it still stands as the residence of the Baisches.

1934 was. a notable year in Village affairs. In addition to the Club improvement, it marked the first of a number of acquisitions and annexations whereunder the Village expanded to its present limits. In the early 1920's the Daily News had acquired lands which now comprise North Shore Beach, and to improve its circulation, was offering small lots at bargain prices to its subscribers. It was not

long before the woodlands west of the Village, which had reverted to an open forest after the departure of the woodchoppers, were giving way to small cottages and full-scale development. This occurrence was not without its advantages. Shoreham for years had feared forest fires, which broke out from time to time in those woods, threatening homes along the west side of the Village. The opening of North Shore Beach quieted those fears, but gave rise to a new problem: vandalism. Furthermore, concern was expressed that the streets of North Shore Beach might be extended to connect with Shoreham's roads and subject them to a traffic burden they were not designed to accommodate. In 1934, a group of citizens raised a fund with which they acquired a strip of some 11 acres along the entire west side of the Village, and deeded it to the Village for park purposes. This strip served as an effective buffer zone along our western boundary.

Fires? We have had our share of them - some trivial, some serious - but fortunately all without loss of life.

The first major fire totally destroyed the "Millard" house, sometimes referred to as the "Chapman" house, which stood near the bluff line just to the east of the Village's Bluff Lot. Another totally razed the "Burlingame" house, sometimes called the "Murdoch" house, which stood on the site now occupied by the Curtis house. The former "Nye" house on Overhill Road went in the 1930's. A spectacular fire at the height of the summer season in 1928 totally consumed the "Hanan" house which was on the Pisacano lot on Thompson Street. After the fire, the foundation was removed and a tennis court was constructed in its place. The destruction of the old Zenke house in 1967 when it was owned and occupied by G.E. Beatty Jr. and his family, is well remembered. In the days before we had hydrants, about the only tools at hand to combat fires were a hand-drawn hose

cart, some portable extinguishers and a pump. A respectable fire engine operated out of Rocky Point after the North Shore Beach development matured. It was first called in to fight the "Hanan" fire, but because of a breakdown in communications, could not arrive on the scene in time to be effective.

I want to thank Robert R. Oliver for giving me this interesting insert for my father's Shoreham History to augment the information about Shoreham's fire-fighting experiences and capabilities. He and my father were among the original residents of Shoreham's summer community beginning in 1908, and were lifelong friends.

"Our fire losses were indeed substantial and usually total. However, it must have been during those years when Merv was away from Shoreham, when we had our own young volunteer group of fire fighters. A serious attic fire in the old Gilbert Frei house was extinguished while a dinner party was in progress below. A major fire in the Roger Adams house on Overhill Road was successfully contained until the arrival of the Rocky Point company. The Herbert Frei home was saved from probable total loss by our young boys. A number of building and brush fire calls were answered, as well, in the greater Shoreham area. It was during those years that we had our own two antique fire engines which proved themselves on such occasions to be practical as well as ornamental."

The Shoreham Inn (pictured elsewhere herein) deserves mention in this history. It was for many years owned by the Suffolk Land Company, which hoped that patrons of the Inn would become prospective buyers of home sites both in the Village and in the Estates. The first proprietor your historian can recall was a Mr. Chapman. He was followed by the Lynn family, which later ran the store. The Lynns were followed by the Flaveils. Under both the Lynns and the Flavells, the Inn gained Island-wide acclaim and was noted for the excellence of its food. A copy of one of the old proprietor's leases survives, and it is of interest to note

that it obligated the inkeeper to provide "taxi service" in the form of a horse-drawn carriage to meet all trains at the railroad station, and to provide the prospective guests with transportation between the station and the Inn.

The Inn was demolished in the early 1930's. a victim, no doubt, of both the Depression which followed the 1929 market crash and its own age and obsolescence. The story of its passing from the scene is a curious one, involving as it does a perhaps obscure but colorful character - "Crazy Joe". Born in Italy, he appeared here when the concrete roads were being laid, and was one of the crew of laborers performing the work. After the roads were down, he stayed on in the vicinity, living in one of the small houses on North Country Road near the church. He was a likeable chap; swarthy, stocky, round faced and with a ready smile. He supported himself with gardening work for the most part, but had the versatility of a Jack-of-all-trades. Unfortunately he was possessed of "the vapors", violent at times, and his presence in the Village was, from time to time, involuntarily interrupted by excursions to the west where he was a guest at Kings Park. When the time for the demolition of the Inn arrived, he was in one of his better intervals; at least lucid enough to offer his services to demolish the Inn for "salvage" Accordingly he, together with some associates" commenced the work, but before it was completed they hit a snag. A letter from the State Labor Department arrived, touching upon the need for insuring his employees engaged in the project. Joe saw trouble ahead. This touched off another spell of "the vapors", and one morning, after he had been observed in his usual activities for several days, he was found dead in one of the Inn's remaining buildings. He had hanged himself.

Photos and Illustrations for this section

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