

BUILDING-STRUCTURE INVENTORY FORM

NYS OFFICE OF PARKS, RECREATION & HISTORIC PRESERVATION
DIVISION FOR HISTORIC PRESERVATION
(518) 474-0479

For Office Use Only
Unique Site No. 10305.000619
Quad _____
Series _____
Neg. No. _____

YOUR NAME: Town of Islip
YOUR ADDRESS:

Date: October 29, 1991

Phone:

ORGANIZATION:

* * * * *

IDENTIFICATION

- 1. BUILDING NAME: Ockers, Jacob, House
- 2. COUNTY: Suffolk TOWN: Islip VILLAGE: Oakdale
- 3. STREET LOCATION: 965 Montauk Highway
- 4. OWNERSHIP: public
- 5. PRESENT OWNER: Town of Islip
AND ADDRESS: 655 Main Street
Islip, New York
- 6. USE: Original: residence Present: historical museum
- 7. ACCESSIBILITY TO PUBLIC:
Exterior visible from public road: yes
Interior accessible: the building is presently closed
due to fire damage

DESCRIPTION

- 8. BUILDING MATERIAL: clapboard
- 9. STRUCTURAL SYSTEM: wood frame with interlocking joints;
wood frame with light members
- 10. CONDITION: Deteriorated
- 11. INTEGRITY: a. original site: yes b. moved:
c. list major alterations and dates:
East wing, kitchen wing, dormer windows and
interior renovation, 1911
- 12. PHOTO: Neg. No.:
- 13. MAP: See attached.



Ockers House, prior to fire. (c.1978)



Ockers House, after fire. (1991)

14. THREATS TO BUILDING: A fire in the spring of 1990 destroyed the interior of the 1911 kitchen, pantry, associated stairways, and portions of the rooms above. The structure and wall and roof coverings of the kitchen wing were also damaged by the fire. The entire house suffered from smoke and water damage. The house is presently boarded up and in its present state cannot be used. Unless the house is restored so that its use as a historical museum can continue, there is the threat of continued deterioration.

15. RELATED OUTBUILDINGS AND PROPERTY: none

16. SURROUNDINGS OF THE BUILDING: residential; a senior citizens housing project is immediately to the north

17. INTERRELATIONSHIP OF BUILDING AND SURROUNDINGS:
The Jacob Ockers House is sited approximately 100' north of Montauk Highway. The house sits on the top of a rise and the front facade faces south toward the highway. The broad lawn slopes down gradually from the house to the south, east and west. Remnants of a semi-circular drive extending from Montauk Highway pass in front of the veranda. The setting of the house is enhanced by a large sycamore tree to the east and a number of locust trees.

The Ockers House stands on a .27 acre site. The property at the time of Jacob Ockers residence amounted to approximately 25 acres. In the early 1970s this property was subdivided. An 11 acre parcel, which contained the Ockers House, was developed in 1974-1975 as a senior citizens housing project. The .27 acre parcel was divided from the 11 acre parcel and donated to the Town of Islip.

No other historic resources associated with the eighteenth or nineteenth century maritime economy of Islip remain in the vicinity of the Ockers House. On the south side of Montauk Highway remain two large turn-of-the-century estates: the William K. Vanderbilt estate, now Dowling College; and the Frederick Bourne estate, now LaSalle Military Academy.

18. OTHER NOTABLE FEATURES OF BUILDING AND SITE:
The Jacob Ockers House has a two-and-one-half-story main block with a gable roof and a four-bay front facade. Extending from the east gable end and set back from the front (south) facade is a one-story, gable-roofed addition. Against the rear wall of the addition is a gable-roofed kitchen wing.

The Jacob Ockers House retains excellent architectural integrity despite the fire of 1990. The house retains all important exterior features and all the interior rooms with the exception of the kitchen, pantry and the rooms directly above are intact.

SIGNIFICANCE

19. DATE OF INITIAL CONSTRUCTION: 1870s (incorporating framing elements from an earlier building)

ARCHITECT:

BUILDER:

20. HISTORICAL AND ARCHITECTURAL IMPORTANCE:

Summary. The Jacob Ockers House is historically significant under National Register Criterion A for recalling Islip's flourishing maritime economy from the middle of the nineteenth century through the early twentieth century and especially for recalling the wealth and prominence of Jacob Ockers, the owner from 1880 to 1918, who was Islip's most successful oysterman. The Ockers House is architecturally significant under Criterion C as a locally rare intact representative of a vernacular dwelling of the third quarter of the nineteenth century which combines elements of the Greek Revival and Italianate styles. The Ockers House is additionally architecturally significant for the 1911 addition and interior remodeling in the Colonial Revival style. Despite a recent fire which destroyed much of the 1911 kitchen wing, all the significant features remain intact. The broad, sloping lawn surrounding the Ockers House gives it good integrity of setting and preserves the visual relationship with Montauk Highway.

History of the community. Islip developed in the nineteenth century from a few large eighteenth-century holdings to a string of small hamlets along the shore of the Great South Bay. The principal occupation of the residents was fishing, clamming and oystering. By the 1880s the hamlet of Oakdale had its own post office for the collection of approximately two dozen dwellings. Beginning in the late-nineteenth century the villages on the Great South Bay became favorite sites of summer homes. In Oakdale the c. 1878 and 1899-1904 William K. Vanderbilt estate and the 1900 Frederick Bourne estate occupied much of the land between Montauk Highway and the water. This period of growth as a summer resort coincided with a dramatic growth of the oyster industry during which the blue point oyster from the Great South Bay became

famous around the world. According to Pelletreau's 1903 A History of Long Island the oyster industry employed "several thousand" Islip residents.

History of the property. The early history of this property is not well documented. The 1834 U.S. Coast Survey shows a house in this approximate location. The 1834 house was, according to local tradition, owned by Moses Benjamin. At some time during the period ca. 1865 to 1880 a new house was built on the site incorporating the roof frame and other framing members of the earlier house. This rebuilding may have been undertaken by William Philip Benjamin who is identified as the owner of the house on the 1858 Chace Map and the 1873 Beers Atlas. A painting of Benjamin reproduced in The Old Oakdale History shows him as a successful sea captain with spyglass in hand and his brigantine in the background.

Charles P. Dickerson in his 1975 History of the Sayville Community writes that Jacob Ockers purchased the house in 1880 at the time of his marriage to Louisa Smith. The 1896 Hyde Map lists the owner of the house as Mrs. J. Ockers. Jacob Ockers lived in the house until his death in 1918. In 1911, at the height of his success, Ockers expanded and remodeled the house, adding elements of the Colonial Revival style.

The biography of Jacob Ockers in the 1896 Portrait and Biographical Record of Suffolk County noted that he owned 300 acres of oyster beds and that his annual oyster sales amounted to \$100,000 annually. In his 1903 biography of Ockers, William S. Pelletreau characterized his oyster business as "the largest of its kind in the United States, amounting to thirty thousand barrels annually. He raises his oyster seed in beds owned by himself in Connecticut, and plants them in his extensive beds at Oakdale, Long island, whence they are shipped to domestic and foreign markets, world famous as the blue point oysters." In 1912 Ockers combined with other oystermen to form the Bluepoint Company capitalized at \$1,500,000. Ockers died in 1918. The decline of the Great South Bay oyster industry began a decade later.

Louise Ockers, Jacob's daughter, continued to reside here until her death in 1970. In 1974-1975 the approximately 25 acre Ockers property was subdivided. An 11 acre parcel containing the house was developed for senior citizens housing. The developer donated the Ockers House on a .27 acre parcel to the Town of Islip. Since 1977 the house has been the Town of Islip Historical Museum operated by the William K. Vanderbilt Society.

Local Context. The Jacob Ockers House is being evaluated within the local context of Islip's maritime economy from the mid-nineteenth century to the early twentieth century. Few intact properties remain in Islip to recall this important era. The Jacob Ockers House is a rare example of a stylish residence representing the wealth and status of a ship's captain, William Philip Benjamin, and later Islip's most successful oysterman, Jacob Ockers.

Architectural Context. The Jacob Ockers House is architecturally significant as a representative of a vernacular dwelling of the third quarter of the nineteenth century which displays features of the Greek Revival and Italianate styles. The Ockers House is additionally significant for a 1911 renovation which added elements of the Colonial Revival style to the earlier house.

The Ockers House has the two-story, side-gabled form with symmetrical fenestration typical of many eastern Long Island vernacular dwellings of the nineteenth century. Many of these vernacular houses dating from the third quarter of the nineteenth century show the influence of both the Greek Revival style and the Italianate style. The Ockers House is a representative of this group with the following typical characteristics: wide, bracketed eaves; a veranda with a bracketed cornice; a wide architrave door enframingent; windows with six-over-six-light, double-hung sash; round-headed windows in the gables; painted clapboard siding; a narrow, corbeled chimney stack; and interior features such as the double-parlor floor plan, wide baseboards, and the wide, crosseted architrave door and window surrounds.

The setting of the house is also characteristic of the more ambitious vernacular houses of the period. It is set back from the road on a rise and is surrounded by a broad, sloping lawn.

In 1911 the house was enlarged with the addition of the east wing and kitchen and the interior was remodeled. On the exterior the east wing was sympathetic to the main house with its gable-roof form, wide eaves, clapboard siding, and windows with six-over-two-light, double-hung sash. But at the same time, elements of the Colonial Revival style were introduced: the columned entrance portico on the east wall and the pedimented wall dormer on the south wall. The main block of the house was also updated in the Colonial Revival fashion with columns replacing the original veranda posts and two pedimented dormers added to the front roof slope. It is in the interior that the 1911 changes are most pronounced. In the main block of the house, the stair hall was

STRETCHING . . .

entirely remodeled with a parquet floor and a new stairway with Colonial Revival style newel and railing. A new front door and a window with leaded glass to light the stairway landing were also installed. The front room of the east addition became the most formal room of the house with a parquet floor, Colonial Revival mantelpiece, and denticulated cornice. The elements of the Colonial Revival added to the house represent a coherent group of changes which updated the house while leaving much of the earlier house intact.

Historical Context.

From the middle of the nineteenth century to the early twentieth century Islip developed from a few large holdings to a string of small villages along the Great South Bay. The reason for this growth was harvesting the shellfish from the Great South Bay. The oyster industry, in particular, grew dramatically from the 1880s to 1920 and was the basis of the local economy, employing thousands either in harvesting, processing, barrel-making, and shipping the oysters.

The Jacob Ockers House recalls the vitality of this local economy for its associations with men who were at the center of Islip's maritime activity. The c. 1870s house set back from the road on a rise and displaying elements of the Greek Revival and Italianate styles recalls the position and success of a local ship's captain, William Philip Benjamin. The house also recalls the life of Jacob Ockers, who did more than anyone else to promote the blue point oyster in an international market, and became Islip's most successful and wealthiest oysterman. Ockers' 1911 remodeling of the house, introducing many stylish Colonial Revival style elements, recalls his position and the height of the Great South Bay oyster industry in the early twentieth century.

21. SOURCES:

Atlas of Long Island, New York. Surveyed under the superintendence of F.W. Beers. New York: Beers, Comstock and Cline. 1873.

Dickerson, Charles P. A History of the Sayville Community. privately printed. 1975.

Map of Suffolk Co., L.I. Surveyed by J. Chace, Jr. Philadelphia: John Douglass. 1858.

Map of Long Island. Brooklyn: Hyde and Co. 1896.

The Old Oakdale History. Oakdale, N.Y.: The William K. Vanderbilt Historical Society of Dowling College. 1983

Pelletreau, William S. A History of Long Island. New York: The Lewis Publishing Co. 1903.

Portrait and Biographical Record of Suffolk County, Long Island, New York. New York: Chapman Publishing Co. 1896.

22. THEME:

BUILDING-STRUCTURE INVENTORY FORM

DIVISION FOR HISTORIC PRESERVATION
NEW YORK STATE PARKS AND RECREATION
ALBANY, NEW YORK (518) 474-0479

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| FOR OFFICE USE ONLY |
| UNIQUE SITE NO. <u>10305-6344-43</u> |
| QUAD _____ |
| SERIES _____ |
| NEG. NO. _____ |

Oa 40
green

YOUR NAME: Town of Islip Town Hall DATE: 6/11/79

YOUR ADDRESS: 655 Main Street
Islip, N.Y. TELEPHONE: (516)224-5450

ORGANIZATION (if any): Department of Planning and Development

IDENTIFICATION

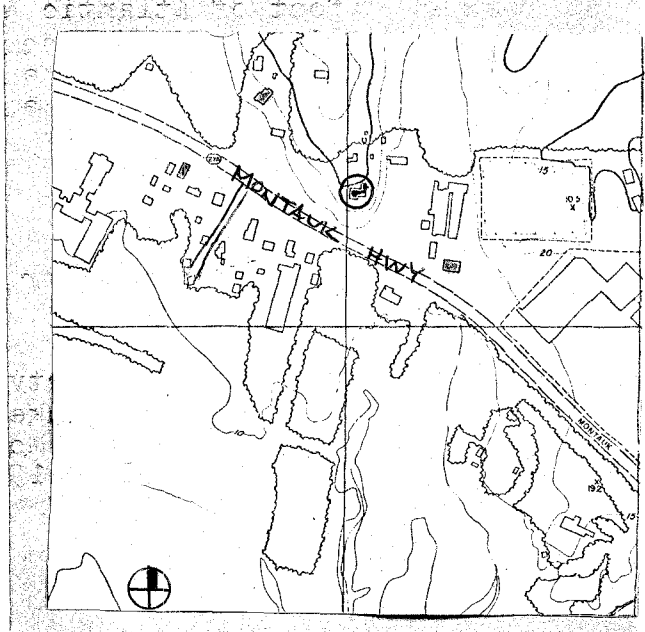
- (Islip Town Museum)
- BUILDING NAME(S): Ockers House / formerly Benjamin House
 - COUNTY: Suffolk TOWN/CITY: Islip VILLAGE: Oakdale
 - STREET LOCATION: 963 Montauk Hwy.
 - OWNERSHIP: a. public b. private
 - PRESENT OWNER: Vanderbilt Hist. Soc. ADDRESS: see #3
 - USE: Original: residence Present: Museum/offices
 - ACCESSIBILITY TO PUBLIC: Exterior visible from public road: Yes No
Interior accessible: Explain open to public

DESCRIPTION

- BUILDING MATERIAL: a. clapboard b. stone c. brick d. board and batten
e. cobblestone f. shingles g. stucco other: _____
- STRUCTURAL SYSTEM: a. wood frame with interlocking joints
b. wood frame with light members
c. masonry load bearing walls
d. metal (explain): _____
e. other: _____
- CONDITION: a. excellent b. good c. fair d. deteriorated
- INTEGRITY: a. original site b. moved if so, when? _____
c. list major alterations and dates (if known):
raised from 1 story to 2 1/2, when bought by Mr. Ockers
sometime befor 1873.

12. PHOTO: neg 25a, NJM-2 13. MAP: Bowe-Anderson, Q-14

front (South) facade



14. THREATS TO BUILDING: a. none known b. zoning c. roads
 d. developers e. deterioration
 f. other: _____

15. RELATED OUTBUILDINGS AND PROPERTY: a. barn b. carriage house c. garage
 d. privy e. shed f. greenhouse
 g. shop h. gardens
 i. landscape features: _____
 j. other: _____

16. SURROUNDINGS OF THE BUILDING (check more than one if necessary):
 a. open land b. woodland
 c. scattered buildings
 d. densely built-up e. commercial
 f. industrial g. residential
 h. other: _____

17. INTERRELATIONSHIP OF BUILDING AND SURROUNDINGS:
 (Indicate if building or structure is in an historic district)

The Ockers House, a town landmark, is situated on the north side of Montauk Hwy.,

18. OTHER NOTABLE FEATURES OF BUILDING AND SITE (including interior features if known):

2½ story, 4 bay main section with gable roof, 1½ story wing of 2 bays, also with gable roof. Italianette brackets at cornice and front porch. Interior of first floor is in Queen Anne period. Original stencilling was found on the walls of the front parlor.

SIGNIFICANCE

19. DATE OF INITIAL CONSTRUCTION: prior to 1840

ARCHITECT: _____

BUILDER: _____

20. HISTORICAL AND ARCHITECTURAL IMPORTANCE:
Benjamin Ockers was the owner of the Bluepoint Oyster Company, (foot of Atlantic Ave.) the foremost Oyster company in its day. This house has been designated a Town Landmark. Originally a Seaman House, its second owner was Benjamin, and its third owner was Jacob Ockers.

Charles P. Dickerson, A History of the Sayville Community, Suffolk County News, 1975.

21. SOURCES: **William K. Vanderbilt Historical Society.
 Prepared by: Society for the Preservation of Long Island Antiquities
 Setauket, New York 11733
 Nina Monastero, Research Assistant**
22. THEME: **June, 1979**

Photographs from William K.
Vanderbilt Historical Society



← Looking east



← South facade

OA 40

Rear-
the north
side of
the house



The west
side of
the house



to make certain the harvest of oysters could continue a great quantity was brought and replanted in shallow water of about eight feet. So, when the bay froze over, the men used hand tongs through holes in the ice, then horse-driven sleighs would transport the oysters to the oyster houses. At times the demand would be so great for oysters that dredges were lowered in great holes in the ice, and then horses would pull them along the bed, bringing up immense supplies with astonishing rapidity.

The Oyster King

Capt. Ockers, known as the "Oyster King" had his original plant on land leased from Col. William Ludlow, and later from Commodore F. G. Bourne at Oakdale. The next plant built by Capt. Ockers was a large one on the shore at West Sayville. Capt. Ockers was president and general manager of the Bluepoints Company of Sayville. This company had its own oyster fleet and also owned large acreage at Greenport.

The Sealship Company had a controlling interest in the Bluepoints Company which became a subsidiary of the General Foods Corporation. Much of Capt. Jake's business was done when he drove to Sayville each Saturday night and visited the grocery department of Gerber's store. He paid the baymen in cash for oysters they had delivered. This was an ideal setup for Mr. Gerber since many of the baymen at once spent a large portion of the money for needed supplies such as rope, cordage and hardware.

At this time it would seem proper to mention the Dutch settlement of Tuckertown. In 1842, William Tucker landed in New York and learned of the oyster industry in Great South Bay. Having engaged in oyster catching when in his native Holland, he changed his mind about going west and came to Sayville and settled in what is now West Sayville. Many Holland families followed Tucker to West Sayville and for a long time the community was known as "Tuckertown." Later, the name was changed to Greenville in honor of Samuel Green who owned the land in that section.

In the late nineties it was a common sight to see both young and old walk along the village walks in front of well kept grounds in their wooden shoes. The Hollanders had a certain manner by which they would "float" and "drink" the oysters: They would bring a float of oysters to a point near the creeks where the water was salty but not as salty as out in the beds, and the oysters would be left in the float a day or two. At the west end of Long Island, the oyster growers would place the oysters in long, wooden troughs and let fresh water

run over them so they could drink. This method would cause the oysters to immediately take on a plump condition and to turn white. The Holland method gave the oyster a salt taste and a much finer flavor.

During the hey day of summer hotels in Sayville, the oyster fleet would be idle in the summer and many of the boats were used to take out parties. Most of the best eating places in the metropolitan area had a sign displayed, "Oysters R in Season." This was from September to April. During the busy season, a couple of thousand men were employed and the average price the shippers received at the market was \$6 a barrel. In 1905 there were 22 oyster shippers located between Oakdale and Patchogue.

Incidentally, Capt. Jake Ockers, the "Oyster King," died on Dec. 4, 1918. He was one of Long Island's most successful and respected businessmen.

ABOUT CURRIER & IVES

Thomas Worth, one of the artists for Currier & Ives, was born on February 12, 1834 in New York. As a young man, he worked for a time in the National Park Bank. When he was about 19, he took his first sketch to N. Currier. It was a comic, the type of which he was unsurpassed in sketching.

Worth titled his sketch: "Get along dere: I'm one of the wood-ruffs, and I'm boss of de road, G long." Mr. Currier was very much impressed with the sketch, and paid Worth \$5.00. This comic sketch was given several titles by Currier & Ives, such as "A Brush on the Road," "Mile Heats," "Best Two in Three," etc. The sketch showed two boys on a four wheeled wagon, driving an old gray horse. The sketch gave Thomas Worth his start. From then on he became one of the noted artists for Currier & Ives. His Darktown Comics as well as his white comics were very popular and Worth was one artist who saw his rediscovered prints take their proper place as valued and sought-after by collectors. Harry T. Peters once said Worth told him Mr. Ives once mentioned to him that the firm sold 70,000 copies of a single one of these side-splitting subjects.

One of the methods for printing these cards, the size of a post card, was to print in sheets of twenty-four and place them in stock, known as stock cards. When a company ordered a quantity, they would be cut and the imprint of the company shown on the card. These cards advertised Clark's Mile-End Spool Cotton and other companies (Mile-End stood for One Mile of Cotton on the spool).

Both the main block and the additions are set on brick foundation walls. The exterior walls are covered with clapboards which are original to each section of the house. All the roofs are clad with wood shingles. The main block has wide, boxed eaves with paired, scroll brackets. The roofs of the additions duplicate the wide eaves and fascia, but have no brackets.

The main block has an interior end chimney to the west with a narrow, corbeled stack. A chimney rises from the rear roof slope of the east addition. The chimney against the north gable end of the kitchen was destroyed by the fire, only the lower 5' remain in place.

A veranda spans the front facade of the main block. The veranda features Doric columns supporting a cornice with paired brackets. The porch roof features exposed, chamfered rafters and purlins. A wide architrave frames the front doorway and transom above. The door has three horizontal panels below a single light.

A second formal entrance is at the east wall of the addition. A portico over a concrete and flagstone stoop features Doric columns supporting a gabled pediment. The doorway within the portico is flanked by sidelights.

The windows of the main block have six-over-six-light, double-hung sash. A round-headed window is in each gable. To the right of the front entrance a small window with leaded glass lights the stairway landing. The windows of the east addition have six-over-two-light, double-hung sash. Two pedimented dormer windows are on the front roof slope of the main block and a pedimented wall dormer is centered on the south wall of the east addition.

The first floor of the main block features a wide stair hall with a parquet floor and a stairway with a Colonial Revival style newel and railing. To the left of the stair hall are two parlors joined by a wide doorway with double pocket doors. Doors and windows have wide, crosseted architrave surrounds.

The east addition features a formal room across the front which is entered through the portico in the east wall. The parquet floor continues into this room which is trimmed with Colonial Revival style features including a mantel with slender colonettes and a denticulated cornice. Behind this formal room is a smaller room with plain trim, a butler's pantry, and the kitchen. The interior of the kitchen and