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HISTORIC AND NATURAL DISTRICTS  
INVENTORY FORM  
Planning Dept.

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

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| QUAD. _____   |
| SERIES _____  |
| NEG. NO. _____  |

YOUR NAME: TOWN OF ISLIP DATE: October 1975

YOUR ADDRESS: Town Hall, 655 Main St. TELEPHONE: (516) 581-2000  
Islip, L.I., N.Y. 11751

ORGANIZATION (if any): Department of Planning, Housing & Development

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1. NAME OF DISTRICT: ~~Bay Shore East H.D.~~  
(Baymen's Cottages District)

2. COUNTY: Suffolk TOWN/CITY: Islip VILLAGE: Bay Shore

3. DESCRIPTION:

This small district consists of seven small houses located in a row on the east side of Ocean Avenue near its southern extremity. Watchogue Creek lies back of the houses. See blue form (Quad III ext.-7).

4. SIGNIFICANCE:

A representative group of houses which were once homes of baymen. Baymen were those who made their livelihood working in Great South Bay.

5. MAP:

New York State D. O. T. attached

E. Belcher Hyde Atlas, 1915, attached

Baymen's Cottage District

6. SOURCES:

E. Belcher Hyde, Atlas of the Ocean Shore ..., 1915, Plate 21

7. THREATS TO AREA:

BY ZONING  BY ROADS  BY DEVELOPERS

BY DETERIORATION  OTHER \_\_\_\_\_

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS:

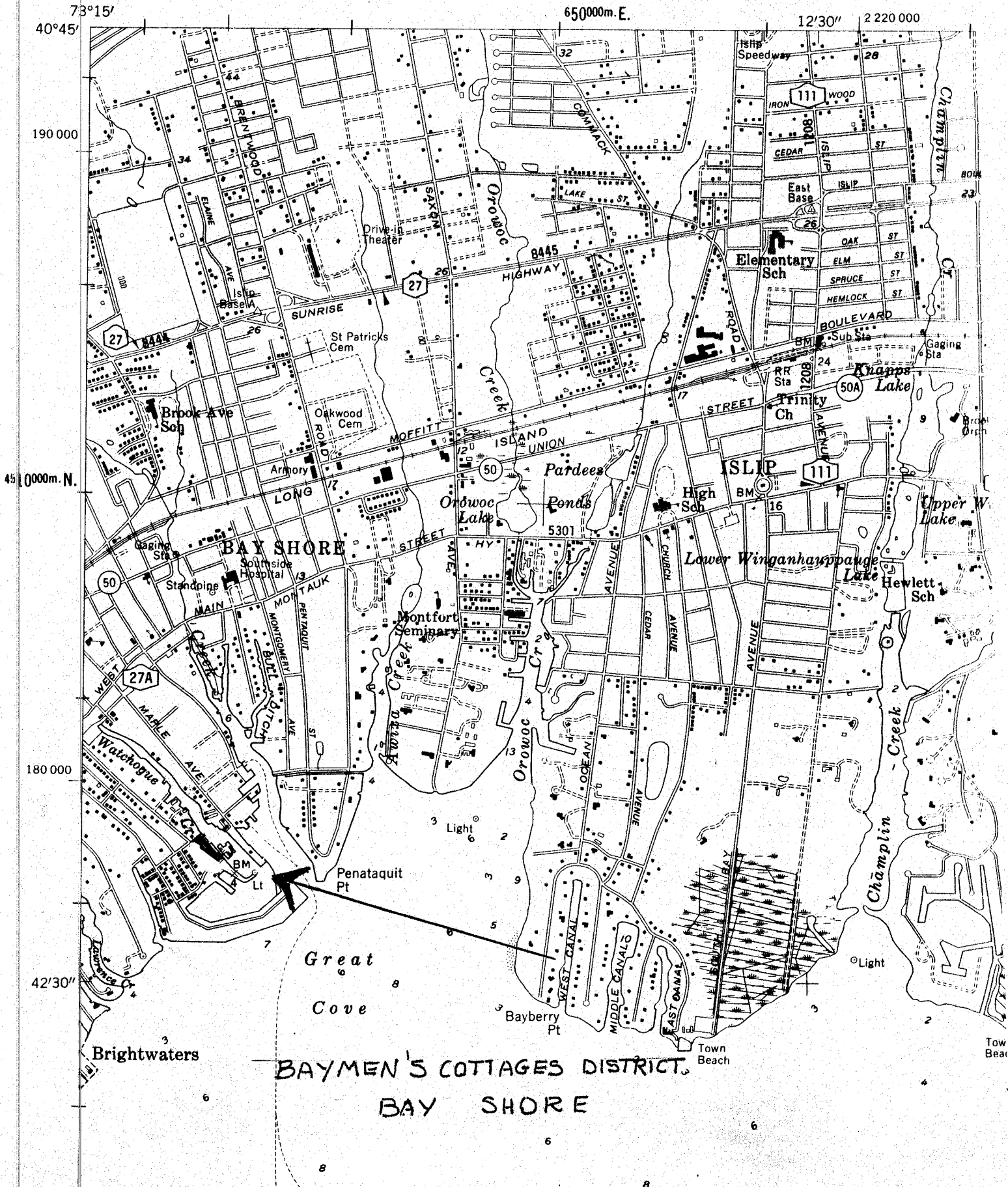
8. LOCAL ATTITUDES TOWARD THE AREA:

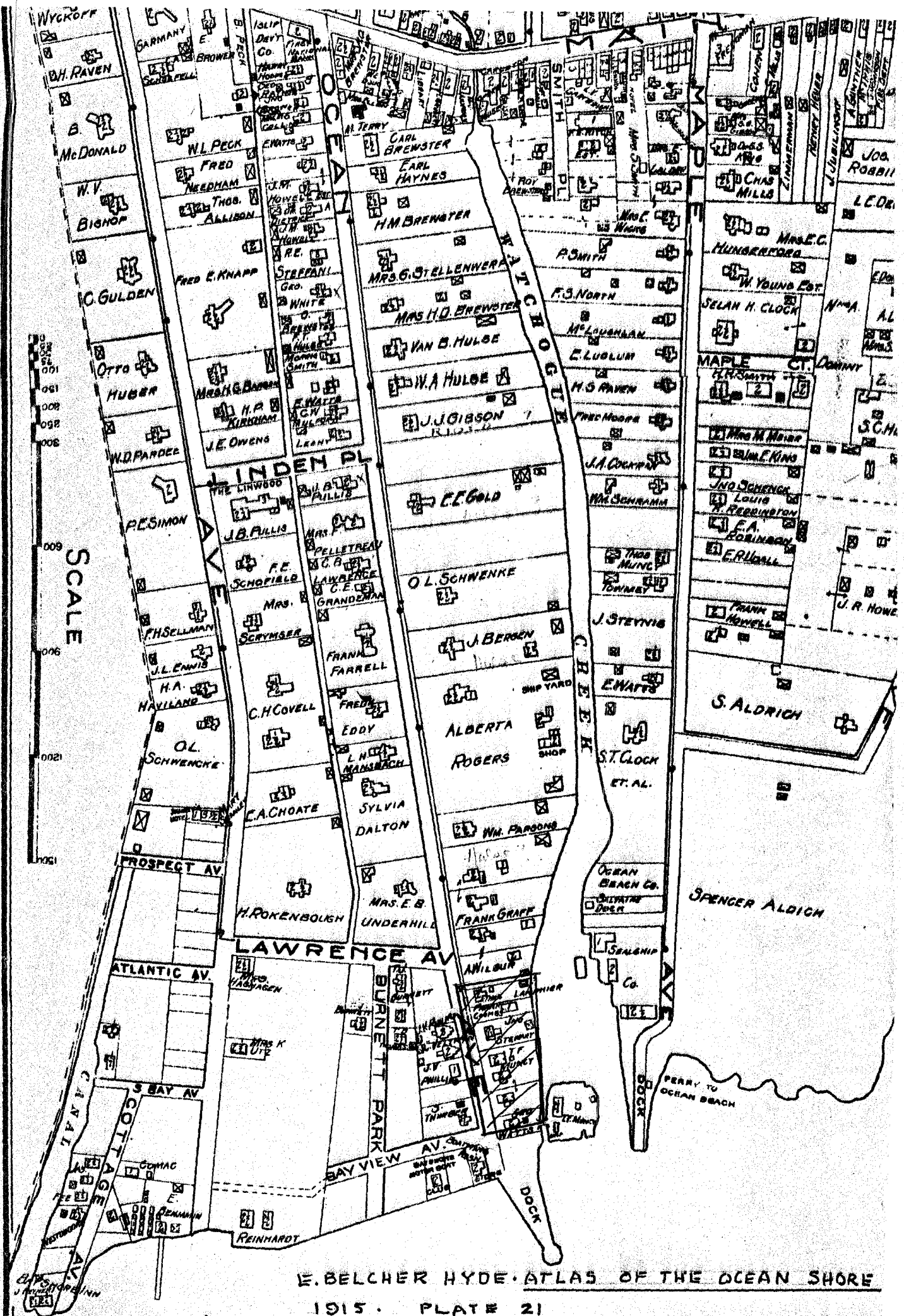
9. PHOTOS:

See form (IIIx-7)

NEW YORK STATE  
DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WORKS  
BUREAU OF PROGRAMMING

Bay Shore East quad  
7.5 min





E. BELCHER HYDE. ATLAS OF THE OCEAN SHORE  
 1915. PLATE 21

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a number of these enterprises. In fact, the name of Conetquot (now Great River) was changed to Youngsport because of its shipyard owned by Erastus Young in the 1840s. In 1876 Smith's yard in Islip built a yacht for which six horses were required to draw its two spars.

When the railroad came in 1844, it went through the heart of the best section of woodland. Quantities of this wood were used in its construction as well as for fuel. The greatest destruction to these forests, however, was caused by the locomotive setting fires from sparks which issued from their smokestacks.

The town population at this time was estimated to be 2602. If we were to list the principal occupations of the people in 1850 and the years that followed we would find but two important ones, "following the bay", and farming. During these years there were approximately 8016 acres of improved land, or about one-ninth of the total acreage of the town. Most of this improved land was tilled. On it were raised hay and grain for the farmers' horses and cattle, and food for themselves. About two-thirds of the male population were fishermen, seamen or skippers. The oyster, then as now the principal product of the bay, and the clam were transported by boat to market. Fin fish were not so readily shipped as "icing" was not practiced at that time.

From 1880 to 1900 the population doubled. In 1900 it was 12,545. This was the period of the Gay Nineties. Wealthy people had found out that the land along the bay was desirable for residences and that the bay was ideal for boating and fishing. Also the fresh-water streams were full of fish and the woods full of game.

Many large estates were established, among the most pretentious being those of the Vanderbilts, Bournes, and Roberts at Oakdale. There was also the Lorillard place, afterwards Cutting's, at Great River; the Taylor and the Hollins homesteads at East Islip, and in West Islip the estates of Wagstaff, Gilmore and Hyde. At Oakdale, "Idle Hour", the Vanderbilt country home, was built in 1900 at a cost of \$1,600,000 on an estate of 862 acres. The grounds were beautifully landscaped with picturesque roads and canals winding through the forests. The mansion still stands, but the property has been sub-divided.

Across the water (Great River) is the Cutting estate of more than a thousand acres. Its arboretum will eventually become state-owned, as arranged by its present owner. The Roberts estate, known as Pepperidge Hall, has gone from the map. The mansion has been torn down and the property sold. To the east of this is the former F. G. Bourne estate, now the home of the LaSalle Military Academy.

Heckscher State Park now occupies the property once owned by the families of Taylor and Plumb. Other places have become developments. Part of the James Hazen Hyde estate at West Islip became the famous Southward Ho Country Club. This and a number of other old places had their own racetracks. Mr. Hyde commuted to New York in his own private railroad car, which was placed on

PAUL BAILEY - LONG ISLAND... - 1949

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across the bay to such oceanside communities as Ocean Beach, Salt-aire and Fair Harbor. There are ferries to and from these beaches. As far back as 1862 there was a steam ferry owned and skippered by John Hicks plying between Bay Shore and Fire Island. At that time B. Doxsee's packet sloop *Eugenia* made regular trips between Bay Shore and New York. Ferries from the beach made connections by stage with passenger trains at Thompson's Station.

Many baymen became yacht skippers for the estate owners. Others used their own boats to sail parties. Boats were built in shipyards at Sayville, Islip and Bay Shore. Racing boats were also designed and built in these same yards. Sailboat racing became a great sport and still is here. Many of our baymen won fame in yacht racing and three of them became sailing masters of America Cup defenders. These were Captain Henry Haff of Islip and Captains Urias Rhodes and Leander Jeffreys of Bay Shore.

Double tracks were installed by the railroad between Babylon and Oakdale in 1905 and by 1913 there were fifteen trains a day. Small industrial plants have been established here from time to time. One of these was that of James Doxsee of Islip who began canning clams. The capacity was four hundred bushels a day. The business was later moved in Ocracoke, N. C., in 1897 and still later it was located in Florida. Two State Hospitals, Central Islip and Pilgrim, located in the northerly part of the town, employ thousands of men and women. In 1945, the town population, exclusive of these hospitals, was in round numbers 33,000.

If one looks to the Town bounds on the ocean front one finds that Brookhaven Town comes right into our own front dooryard, coming up past Point o' Woods which is due south of Heckseher State Park. This is due to the fact that certain wide awake freemen of Brookhaven Town bought all the right and title to this bay bottom which is therefore in their town and leaves the Town of Islip that much less bay bottom of its own.

Fire Island inlet broke through during a great storm in 1690, seven years after William Nicoll had purchased his land here. The inlet was first called Nine Mile Gut because the original break-through was of that width. Old maps show the name New Gut. It also was called Great Gut or Nicoll's Gut. There were five small islands in one group where the inlet first came through and these islands were known by an Indian name which meant "seal." The name was appropriate because many seals came to rest on these islands in the winter time. Someone who wrote about the five islands got his wires crossed and misinterpreted the word five, making it Fire Island Inlet. The name Fire Island has also been applied to the entire beach lying between the Great South Bay and the Atlantic Ocean. To the native, only that part of the beach from the State Park westward to the inlet is Fire Island. Only that portion from Point o' Woods to the lighthouse is in Islip Town. Within the memory of living man the inlet has moved westward four miles. When the present lighthouse was built in 1856 it was so near the inlet that boatmen could toss newspapers to the lighthouse-keeper as they

snipe such as plover, yellow leg, dorachers, ring neck and surf snipe. In the Fall there was an abundance of black duck, mallard, grey duck, geese, brant, broadbill, old wives, hell-divers, red head and other species of the feathered family. Most of the game was delicious when properly prepared, and a roast wild duck served with beach plum jam was tops on any dinner table.

A bird not mentioned above is the shell-drake. No matter how much it was par-boiled, the flavor was such that one would think of fish instead of fowl. In those days, too, the blowfish was frowned upon, but today we know it as sea chicken.

### Clamming Industry

Our clamming industry originated when the Indians lived on Long Island. Proof of this are the many shell banks found on certain creeks along the south shore of the Island. Some of these banks are many feet deep, attesting to the fact the clam was one of the principal dishes. In addition, the clam shell was the source of the Indian's wampum. There were many varieties of shellfish: hard clam, soft clam, skimmer clam, razor clam, mussel, scallop, oyster, and perri-winkle. The old baymen had methods for preparing these bivalves that made it "fit for a king": baked, stewed or raw clams, fried, steamed or fritters, chowder or soup, and delicious clam pie with home made crust. Pickled mussels always were on a French chef's menu.

The clamming fleet off Bay Shore in the 1850s consisted of 25 to 30 catboats 18 to 25 feet in length. Each boat was manned by two baymen equipped with rakes and three different lengths of handles from 18 to 22 feet along. These were used according to the depth of the water. At the end of the day the catboats would come to the mouth of Penataquit River and unload the day's catch on board three sloops that were at anchor. The men would bring in anywhere from 1,000 to 2,500 clams per man.

Samuel Jayne, who married Adeline Weeks—the sister of my grandfather, was the champion clammer of the fleet. The baymen received money for the clams each day, and the general store keeper was their banker. There were no banks in Mechanicsville (Bay Shore) at that time.

During the Civil War, clams cost as low as \$1.00 per thousand. This brings to mind a story my father told of a Yorker riding through the village and seeing a group of men in front of the general store, remarked that no flags were displayed. The men looked at each other and finally the boldest among them ventured to say:

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SOME OF TOWN OF ISLIP'S  
EARLY HISTORY

BY

GEORGE LEWIS WEEKS, Jr.

ILLUSTRATED BY

THE' AUTHOR

ISLIP TOWN HISTORIAN

CONSOLIDATED PRESS

Bay Shore

1955

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THE EVOLUTION OF  
LONG ISLAND

A STORY OF LAND AND SEA

1921

By

RALPH HENRY GABRIEL



IRA J. FRIEDMAN, INC.

Port Washington, Long Island, N.Y.

AND

THE COST OF PROGRESS

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controlled by local capital, came into existence, but these were neither large nor numerous. If the decade from 1850 to 1860 had been marked by the almost exclusive control of the oyster business by the bayman, that from 1880 to 1890 was characterized by the predominance of the individual planter. By 1890, twenty-five packing houses were to be found scattered along the south shore. The principal shipping points on the bay were Babylon, Bay Shore, Oakdale, Sayville, and Patchogue. Out of these villages between sixty and seventy thousand barrels of oysters were shipped every year, forty thousand to the New York market and the rest to supply the new and growing trade with Europe. Nothing in the old days of exploitation could surpass such an output. Oyster planting had come to stay.<sup>1</sup>

Such success attracted attention. The growth of the new business was watched. By the beginning of the nineties, interested parties were convinced that large corporations could be made profitable in Great South Bay. The economy which large-scale organizations would effect was important. The producing branch of the business could be united with the packing and distributing branch. Formerly the bayman and, later, the oyster farmer had sold to the packing company. If the packing company and the planter should become one, the middleman's profit would be saved. The scheme had already been successful on the Connecticut shore, where corporations had erected large "shucking houses" and had established regular markets for their products. In 1891, three large companies, supposed to be backed by New York capital, made their appearance in Great South Bay. Two thousand acres were at once leased outright. Oystering in southern Long

<sup>1</sup> *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, LI (1891), no. 261; LIII (1893), nos. 11, 321; New York State Commissioner of Fisheries, *Report* (1885), pp. 49-57.

885), pp. 49-57.

Island waters entered upon the last phase of its development.<sup>1</sup>

The new companies promptly introduced the most important improvement in the oyster business subsequent to the dredge. The rowboat of the early tongers had developed into the small sloop with a single drag attached. This sailing craft had grown in size until two dredges were dropped over the sides and a considerable crew was required for the handling. The sailboat, however, was at the mercy of calm and storm and, moreover, wasted much time in coming about, a manœuvre frequently necessary in dredging fields with fixed boundaries. In 1894, the first oyster steamer made its appearance on Great South Bay. *The Curiosity* was its name but the hostile baymen dubbed it *Hell's Wagon*. *The Curiosity* was a vessel sixty feet long, eighteen feet wide, and four feet deep and was built at a cost of five thousand dollars. It used six dredges and was manned by a crew consisting of a captain and four men. Its owners estimated that the new boat would do in a day six times the work of an ordinary sailing boat. Significantly enough the first large corporation and the first oyster steamer appeared on Great South Bay at almost the same time. It is also significant that the baymen named the new boat *Hell's Wagon*. This name measured the competition they were compelled to face.<sup>2</sup>

With the appearance of the large corporation in Great South Bay, the troubles which had long beset the path of the bayman reached their climax. Between the competition of the planter, on the one hand, and the growing exhaustion of his beds, on the other, he fought a losing fight. In 1883, when a crisis seemed imminent, he appealed to the ballot and won. A board of "free bay" trustees was

<sup>1</sup> *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, LI (1891), no. 261.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, LIV (1894), no. 329.

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<sup>1</sup> New Yor

<sup>2</sup> *Brooklyn*  
LIII (1893),

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, LV

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, LV

porations employing ten or a dozen large steamers and controlling thousands of acres. Gradually, these large concerns, imitated to a less extent by their smaller competitors, pushed their way into other waters. Narragansett Bay was invaded. The north shore of Long Island, Oyster Bay, Hempstead Bay, Northport harbor, and the rest began also to feel the Connecticut influence. Plants subsidiary to those across the Sound appeared upon Long Island shores, and shipping stations for the Connecticut products were established in Long Island villages.<sup>1</sup>

Great South Bay was far enough away to be at first comparatively free from this influence. In fact, companies of that region after they had settled the competition of the baymen, began a campaign of expansion and conquest into other waters. When, in 1899, it became known that Peconic Bay, with its large unoccupied area, could be turned into successful oyster land, a sharp competition arose between Connecticut interests and those of Great South Bay for the purpose of acquiring the best bottom in that region.<sup>2</sup> But the struggle could not be long, for the Connecticut corporations were larger and more powerful. Their expansion continued until, in 1910, one of the largest among them made its appearance in Great South Bay itself.

Although the bayman and the small oyster farmer still exist both in Connecticut and Long Island, consolidation and expansion have put the controlling influence into the hands of the great companies. These, with few exceptions, have their headquarters on the southern New England shore. Important as it is, the Long Island industry has, to a large extent, become an adjunct to that of Connecticut.

<sup>1</sup> *The Oysterman*, III (1905), nos. 3, 4.

<sup>2</sup> *Long Island Traveler*, XXVIII (1899), no. 38; *The Oysterman*, III (1905), nos. 4, 17, 18, 21.