History

by Jennifer R. Hance

Theirs For The Taking

Before bridges, ferries, electricity, telephones, and political disputes made their mark on Fire Island shores, the natural wonders of the beach lured curious travellers to the ocean. Without the hindrance of modern amenities these visitors traversed the bay for hunting, fishing, and simple relaxation.

The first daytrippers on Fire Island were the American Indians. They were originally drawn to the Island's abundance of seashells, which were used as "wampum", the form of currency. Eventually, these early tourists built simple shacks for return visits. And so the Indians unwittingly laid the foundation for future "squatters" on Fire Island.

After the Indians, came the whale watchers, building oceanfront shacks in order to keep a view on the Atlantic. When whales were spotted in the distance, the men sailed out and captured their prey.

The following Fire Island visitors also had careers keeping an intent watch on the ocean, but their motives differed vastly. These land pirates' livelyhood was luring ships in to shore by lighting large, inviting fires. The unfortunate ships would often wreck on an offshore bar, leaving the pirates free to collect any valuables that washed ashore.

Later, oystermen came. These temporary settlers were not quite as mercenary as the land pirates before them. They earned their salaries constructing oyster beds in shallow offshore water, rather than causing wrecks, and often spent three to five days in their oyster boats.

Then, the recreational squatters settled on Fire Island in 1940's and 50's. Building shacks wherever they chose, mainly near Leja Beach, the squatters were undaunted by the technicalities of property ownership. Skunk Hollow, Long Cove, and Deep Crick abounded with the squatters' makeshift shacks, built of driftwood and salvaged windows and doors. Robert McDowell, a veteran squatter approximated that about 50 - 60 squatter shack were built during the 2 year period. McDowell himself built three separate shelters during his years on the beach. Yet, he added, it was often difficult to know who owned their land and who was a squatter.

The life of a squatter was simple, but not deprived. Most shacks were built by the dunes, facing the ocean. This location was not favored for the view as much as for the surface water 10 feet below. This water, said McDowell, was "cold and good" as opposed to the bayside wells which yielded water that was "yellow, and smelled like eggs".

Sixteen feet by 16 feet was about the largest shack found, according to McDowell. The layout typically consisted of one small bedroom and a larger living room. There were no elaborate bathrooms in those days, but an outhouse usually sufficed. Kerosene and wood stoves kept the shacks warm on chilly summer nights and cold winter days; it was not uncommon for squatters to use

(Continued on page 20)

their Fire Island homes year-round. "I enjoyed the beach more in the winter, when no one was around", said McDowell. Summertime was for the families, he explained, and winter was the season for hunters. Deer were popular prey, although they were illegal to hunt. Rabbits and duck were also sought. McDowell recalled that returning with thirty or more rabbits in one day was the norm. Fishing was another favorite pastime on the beach. Any game obtained during a day of hunting was kept in a Sunwell refrigerator, which ran on bottled gas, and was the same size as most modern refrigerators. Gas was also used for lighting the shacks. "Gas was terrific", said McDowell, "it provided a lot of light".

To collect driftwood for fires, or to reach prime hunting and fishing spots, the squatters traveled

across the sand in these "beach buggies". These cars used oversized tires, and "they could run with their flat tires", according to McDowell. The most reliable of the beach models were the Model A's, McDowell attested. In the days before the Smiths Point Bridge, there was a $15 fee to have the beach buggies barged across the bay.

Beach buggies were also used for excursions to Ocean Beach and Cherry Grove. These more modern communities had electricity, telephones, and other conveniences, yet according to McDowell, many residents of the more up-to-date areas tried to rent squatters shacks. "They wanted the simpler things" said McDowell. But the squatters seldom rented to their Fire Island neighbors.

When the Smiths Point and Robert Moses bridges were erected the squatters' downfall began. Soon the beach became within reach of the general public, instead of being limited to boat owners. As interest in the beach grew, the National Parks Commission set out to reclaim their land from the squatters. At first, the Commission boarded up the shacks. When the squatters promptly removed the offending boards and proceeded to return to their regular beach routine, the Commission became more forceful. "They harrassed us", finally, the Commission used fire to force out the squatters. "They burned us out", McDowell said.

Life on Fire Island has changed drastically, yet evidence of the squatters way of life is not just a memory. An occasional beach reveler can be found under a boardwalk, carrying on the spirit of a squatter, whether the impromptu shelter is due to a love of the surf or a missed ferry back to the mainland. The simple living style of the squatters perseveres in a few homes in Davis Park, where light and heat are still provided by bottled gas favored by the shack owners decades ago. Although the Model A buggies and makeshift shacks are now obsolete, the memories of the squatters have not disappeared.

VF

Fire Island

History

by Carl A. Starace

Those Were the Days

A dispatch to the New York Evening Post, dated Fire Island July 10, 1873 says: Among the many summer resorts within easy reach of New York few can be compared to Fire Island for coolness, healthfulness and quiet enjoyment. One one side of the house is the Atlantic Ocean, rolling its ceaseless surges over the beautiful beach, and on the other is the Great South Bay, a lovely expanse of water, glistening in the summer sun like some quiet lake. In the far distance are the green and fertile shores of Long Island and the white houses and spires of Babylon and Islip.

That surrounded is the Surf House with its broad piazzas, where more than 300 guests are enjoying themselves to their hearts' content. The house this season has been greatly enlarged and improved by the addition of a spacious cool dining room and numerous bedrooms, and that man must be hard to please who can find fault with his host or his fare.

In truth, there are few places of summer resort more truly enjoyable than this. The house itself is very comfortable. The proprietor, David S.S. Samms, who is hale, hearty and full of good cheer, and most sensitive to his guests needs, is constantly to be found ready for all emergencies and though piled with numerous requests, has a happy faculty of satisfying all. The attractions of this place consist in the purest of air, fresh from the ocean which, with the delicious breezes that temper the heat, renders one oblivious to the fact that summer is upon us, and that such a delicious change can exist so contiguous to New York. Fishing, sailing, bathing and a well-spread board, as well as cool nights, are sufficient to compensate one for a visit to this charming locality.

Conspicuous among the advantages of Fire Island, and not the least, is the class of people who annually, and some of them for a dozen years in succession, have been the habitues of this place. These visitors are from the best society of New York and Albany and other cities, quiet and refined in appearance and manner. For the "shoddy" aristocracy, or "nouveaux riches", with their diamonds and gorgeous dresses, Fire Island had not the attractions of some other watering places, and the Surf Hotel does not suffer from their absence.

Bathing can be enjoyed in perfection- on the one side of the house in the surf, as it rolls in from the broad Atlantic, on the other in the placid water of the bay. To those who love yachting and fishing, the island offers advantages which are unequalled elsewhere, and the fleet of boats at Mr. Samms's dock are in constant requisition. The writer went out in one of these to the bar and in the course of an hour eight fine bluefish were pulled in by the trolling lines. In addition to bluefish, mackeral, weakfish, porgies and other finny inhabitants of the ocean and bay, are found in great numbers wild ducks, snipe and quail later in the season, all along the bay.

(Continued on page 22)

Surf Hotel, Fire Island, ca. 1890.

The entire lack of vegetation affords a never-failing place of relief to the numerous sufferers from the annoying complaint most commonly known as hay fever. It is a pleasure to state these facts, for while the house is constantly full, many I doubt not, unaware of these attractions, will gladly avail themselves of such a resort. To form some idea of what a gay sight presents itself on the Fourth, there were one hundred and forty-two sail of various sizes, including the yachts Gracie, Irene and Clio, to be counted off the Surf Hotel dock. the vessels, with their white sails and gay streamers had assembled from the neighboring ports.

The gaiety is not confined to the dockside and water. One reporter writes that Fire Island's principal products are bluefish, clam chowders, oyster pie and gin and tansey. "I ought to say in the way of explanation that the gin, if Mr. Sammis is to be believed, is raised in Holland, but the tansey is to the manor born. Sammis made his reputation in clam chowder years before his hotel was known. The honors were divided between him and Mrs. Dominy who had earned a world-wide reputation as a chowderess. The lady subsequently retired from the beach and continued her success at her hotel at Penataquit, later known as Bay Shore.

The Surf Hotel close by the Lighthouse and the inlet, is a three-story frame building with a frontage of nearly a thousand feet facing Great South Bay, with a spectacular view of the Atlantic from its southerly windows and piazzas. Plank promenades extend form the bay to ocean.

Body Recovered on Grass Island

The body of Peter Ferraro, 19, the man allegedly drowned May 14 by his boss in a confrontation over stolen tools, was finally found, washed ashore on Grass Island near Oak Beach. Using fingerprints, police were able to identify the body that had been missing for nearly 3 weeks.

The death of Peter Ferraro resulted when his boss, Stephen McGlone, suspected him of stealing $1,300 worth of tools from his business. Ferraro had worked as a boat mechanic at McGlone's Viking Marine Service for 2 months before the accident. In an effort to force a confession of theft from Ferraro, McGlone allegedly dumped him overboard in the middle of the Great South Bay and proceeded to circle Ferraro, police said. Ferraro, who was wearing workboots at the time, sank and drowned.

After the incident McGlone returned to shore and went to Ferraro's family to notify them he was missing. Later that day, however, McGlone confessed to authorities. He was arrested and charged with second-degree manslaughter and is free on $100,000 bail.

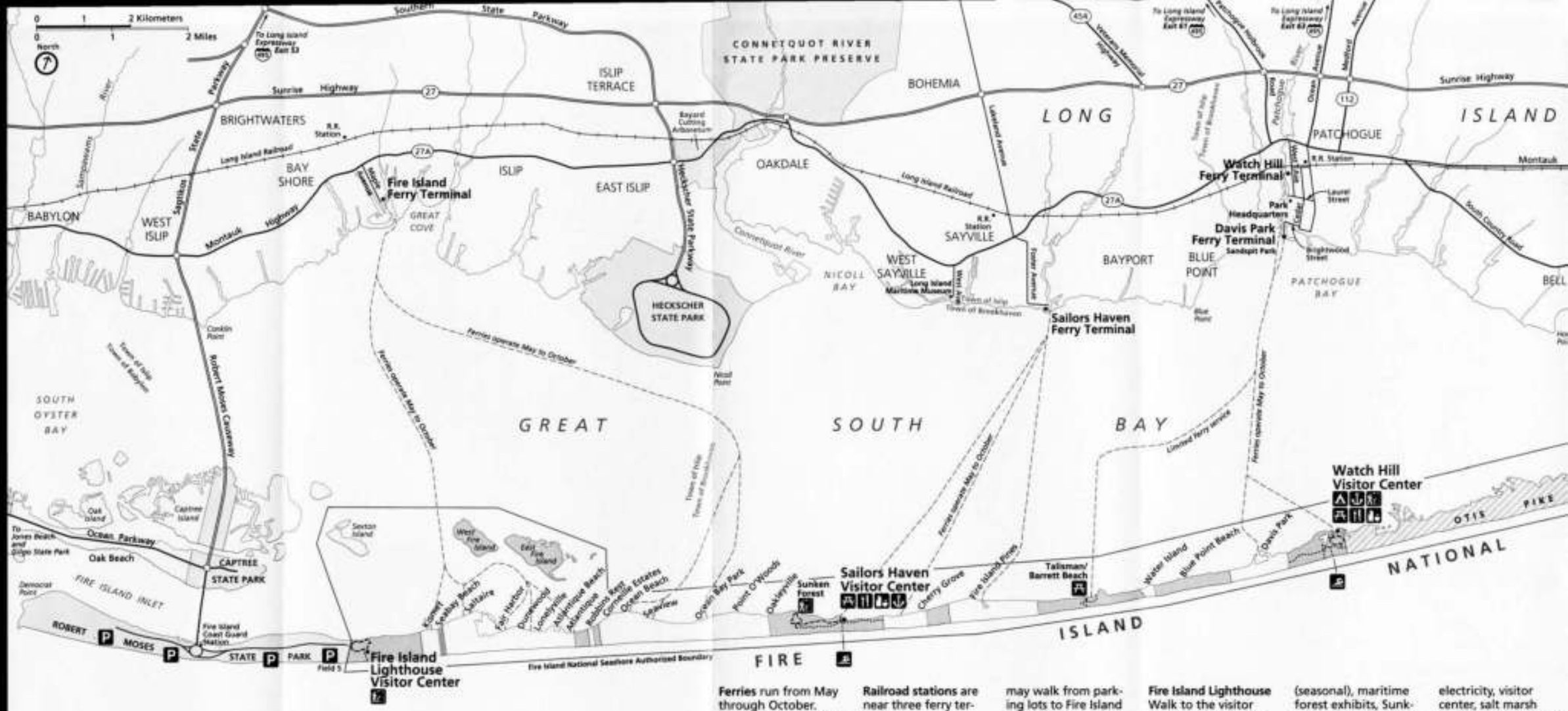
The McGlone and Ferraro families had been friends before the accident. Beverly Ferraro, mother of Peter Ferraro, said "There is no animosity against the McGlone family" and added that she had written to McGlone's mother, whom she often sees at the supermarket, asking that the 2 get together and talk.

Fire Island

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

National Seashore
New York

Exploring Fire Island



Fire Island National Seashore
Wilderness
Self-guiding nature trail
Trail

Lifeguarded swim area
Store
Food service
Marina
Parking
Picnic area
Campground

Boating Safety
DO NOT USE THIS MAP FOR NAVIGATION. Be alert and navigate with caution, especially in marinas and marked channels. Wear Coast Guard-approved life-jackets when boating or on the water.

Swimming Safety
Swim at lifeguarded beaches only. Do not swim in fishing areas, marinas, or near boat traffic.

nps 2011—085-415/80586 Reprint 2008
Printed on recycled paper.

Ferries run from May through October.
• **Bay Shore** to Kismet, Saltaire, Fair Harbor, Dunewood, Atlantique, Ocean Beach, Seaview, and Ocean Bay Park. • **Sayville** to Sailors Haven, Cherry Grove, and Fire Island Pines. • **Patchogue** to Watch Hill, Davis Park, and Barrett Beach.

Railroad stations are near three ferry terminals.

On Fire Island water taxis can shuttle you from point to point. Vehicle access and parking are limited to Smith Point County Park (631-854-4949) and Robert Moses State Park; (fees). You may walk from parking lots to Fire Island Lighthouse and Fire Island Wilderness visitor centers. There are no public roads. Most boardwalk trails, some camping, and parking are wheelchair-accessible. Off-season services are limited.

Fire Island Lighthouse Walk to the visitor center and maritime museum for interpretive programs, tower tours by reservation, exhibits. Call: 631-661-4876.

Sailors Haven Area has a 42-slip marina, electricity, coin pumpout, visitor center (seasonal), maritime forest exhibits, Sunken Forest self-guiding trail, food, pay phone, picnic tables, bathhouse. Call: ferry 631-589-8980; marina 631-597-6171; visitor center 631-597-6183.

Watch Hill Area has 188-slip marina, coin pumpout, 50-amp electricity, visitor center, salt marsh and tidal estuary programs, self-guiding nature walks, limited canoe trips, family and group camping (reservations), pay phone, food, picnic tables, bathhouse. Call: ferry 631-475-1665; marina 631-597-3109; camping,

Where Is Fire Island? This thin New York island stretches 32 miles along Long Island's south shore—from Moriches Inlet on the east to Democrat Point on the west—forming a barrier between Great South Bay and the Atlantic Ocean. It supports a state park, a county park, the national seashore, communities, and the only federal wilderness area in New York.

631-567-6664; visitor center (seasonal), 631-597-6455.

Fire Island Wilderness Area offers visitor center, exhibits on the wilderness and its biodiversity, self-guiding trails, hunting and off-road vehicle permits (seasonal). No parking. Call: 631-281-3010.

William Floyd Estate This Mastic Beach, Long Island, home offers tours, exhibits, and self-guiding tours of 12 outbuildings and the cemetery. Call: 631-399-2030.

Play It Safe Children on docks should wear lifebelts or jackets. Use sunscreen. Poison ivy flourishes here: its three-leaflets, vines, and roots can cause allergic reactions. Mosquitos abound; ticks carrying Lyme disease are common; wear insect repellent and inspect yourself carefully. Stay on boardwalks and protect your feet from splinters. Do not feed wildlife. All plants, animals, and natural features are protected by law. Stay off dunes; their fragile vegetation protects the island.

More Information
Fire Island
National Seashore
120 Laurel Street
Patchogue, NY
11772-3596
631-687-4750
www. nps.gov/fiis

Emergencies: Call 911

Life on a Barrier Island

Seen from the air Fire Island looks fragile and isolated. Atlantic waves beat against its white beach. Gnarled trees embrace its barely visible homes. Then the island passes out of sight, and Great South Bay dominates what you see.

Centuries of devastating storms off the Atlantic Ocean have battered dunes, opened inlets, and threatened to destroy Fire Island. Yet this barrier island is resilient. Beaches eroded by winter storms get replenished by sand returning from off-shore sandbars. Beach grasses stake footholds again on slowly growing primary dunes. Wildlife abounds on the island. Deer roam freely—or take shelter in thickets. Toads, cranberries, and cattails live in freshwater areas between ocean and bay. Migrating ducks and geese seek refuge in marshes.

For visitors and residents of the diverse communities, this island so near urban New York is a place both of excitement and of solitude. Fire Island National Seashore was established in 1964 to preserve the only developed barrier island in the United States that has no roads. In 1980 Congress designated 1,400 acres—a seven-mile stretch of island—as a national wilderness area.

Looking east toward Kismet and Saltaire from the 1858 Fire Island Lighthouse. The Atlantic Ocean and the old Coast Guard Annex building are on the right, and Great South Bay is on the left. The beacon flashes every 7.5 seconds and can be seen 24 miles away.

Sandy soils on the north side of the primary dune cannot hold rain. Only the hardiest of plants, like beach plum and beach grass, can survive here.

Fire Island—the genesis of its name sparks our imagination. It may have been named after Fire Island Inlet, which appeared on a 1789 deed, and the inlet's name may have been a spelling error. The number of inlet islands has varied over time, and it's likely that "five" or the Dutch word for four, *vier,* was misspelled on early maps as *fire.*

Fire Island Beach appeared on charts in the 1850s. Folklore suggests its name arose from land-based pirates, wreckers who built beach fires at night to lure cargo ships onto shore. Some say poison ivy gave the island its name—for its red leaves in autumn or its fiery itch. Its name's origin may be obscure, but Fire Island's role in maritime history is well known. Its wealth of seafood, waterfowl, and plants attracted American Indians and, later, European settlers. The Fire Island Lighthouse guided ships safely past sandbars. Surfmen of the U.S. Lifesaving Service, housed in stations along the beach, rescued shipwreck survivors.

The estate of William Floyd, a signer of the Declaration of Independence, traces the Floyd family from the early 1700s to 1976. The land evolved from wilderness to estate to summer retreat to small game preserve to a national park area. The home contrasts the old with the new and reflects 200 years of change.

Formed long ago by currents carrying eroded glacial debris, Fire Island still changes by the actions of wind and waves. Dramatic hurricanes and nor'easters demolish the dunes and wash away homes. Undaunted by nature's occasional wild spirit, visitors and residents find the island a welcome respite from urban pressures.

Relaxation is paramount here, and the national seashore has much to offer. The seven-mile area west of Smith Point is a designated wilderness that shelters endangered and threatened species. It protects piping plovers that lay eggs on the high beach in hollows lined with small rocks and shells. Hunted until 1918 for their feathers, they are now endangered by seaside development, predators, and recreational activities.

At Watch Hill you can experience the sounds and smells of a salt marsh, where fish, shellfish, insects, and birds flourish among salt-tolerant grasses. You can see herons, egrets, and other wildlife and learn about salt marsh and tidal ecosystems.

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Ocean and Beach

Fire Island is on the move. Every day over 10,000 waves pound its beach, shoveling sand into currents that yearly carry 500,000 cubic yards westward. Most sand moves in winter and in storms, but that daily rate equals 25,000 persons hauling little-red-wagon loads of sand daily to Democrat Point. A witness to this migration is the Fire Island Lighthouse. Built in 1858 at the island's western end, it is now nearly five miles east of Democrat Point. Plants and wildlife move with the island, but humans building homes and summer memories don't find it easy to let nature take its course.

Dunes and Forest

Dunes form when ocean wind carries sand inland until an obstacle like beach grass slows the wind's speed, and the sand is dropped. Grasses respond by spreading their roots and sending up shoots. Birds and other animals attracted by the grasses deposit new seeds, and a variety of vegetation begins. Behind these plant barricades, shrubs take hold and build soil. Thickets and eventually holly and hardwood forests replace them. So the cycle continues. Without the anchoring grass roots there would be no dunes. Without sheltering dunes, no forests. And without this precious balance—no island.

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Relaxation is paramount here, and the national seashore has much to offer. The seven-mile area west of Smith Point is a designated wilderness that shelters endangered and threatened species. It protects piping plovers that lay eggs on the high beach in hollows lined with small rocks and shells. Hunted until 1918 for their feathers, they are now endangered by seaside development, predators, and recreational activities.

At Watch Hill you can experience the sounds and smells of a salt marsh, where fish, shellfish, insects, and birds flourish among salt-tolerant grasses. You can see herons, egrets, and other wildlife and learn about salt marsh and tidal ecosystems.

A special treat is a visit to Sailors Haven and the Sunken Forest, where 200-year-old holly trees, sassafras trees with mitten-shaped leaves, and other hardwoods shade you with their canopy. Salt air and driving winds prune Sunken Forest trees to the primary dune's height.

Also not to be missed are the communities where you can enjoy the lively nightlife and traverse miles of boardwalks past secluded homes. On the national seashore's western end, visit the Fire Island Lighthouse and the museum housed in its keeper's quarters. There you will learn about Fire Island's lifesaving efforts and maritime traditions.

At Watch Hill children learn how different environments create the barrier island ecosystem.

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Marshes and Bay

As well as migrating west—caused by long-shore currents—Fire Island slowly moves north toward Long Island. In a sense the island rolls over on itself as oceanside sand is gathered by wind and waves, blown or washed across the island or moved by currents and tides through inlets, and deposited on the bayside. Marsh grasses colonize these deposits and produce organic debris that mixes with the sand. The resulting marshes and their nutrient-rich muck are among the most productive areas on Earth.

EXPLORING SMITH POINT WEST

FIRE ISLAND National Seashore

1. TRAIL INFORMATION

The trail described in this booklet is approximately 4/5 of a mile long, and you should plan on taking abour 45 minutes to explore it leisurely. In order to have a safe and pleasant time please remember the following points.

- We recommend wearing shoes at all times on the boardwalk. Splinters are our most common first aid problem.

- Portions of the trail are raised. Keep an eye on children to prevent their falling off.

- Be careful not to touch poison ivy with its bright green leaves in clusters of three.

- Berries and edible plants grow along the trail. Please leave them intact for others to enjoy seeing.

-Ticks are present in the grass and thickets and may carry organisms that cause ailments such as Lyme disease. You will not encounter them if you stay on the boardwalk.

Thank you for your cooperation. Now then...have a pleasant time!

Fiddler Crab

2. INTRODUCTION

The barrier island in its natural state is a fascinating mixture of opposites: it is high in some spots and low in others. It may be cool in one place and hot in another. Here it may be sterile, over there fertile. Some locations are windblown, while others are sheltered. Combinations of these and other factors have produced several distinct zones of life within the narrow strip of land known as Fire Island.

The purpose of this trail guide is partly to explain what you will see along the way. More importantly, it is intended to give you an understanding of why things have come to be the way they are.

Be observant as you walk the trail. You may be rewarded by chance encounters: a deer crashing through the thicket, a colorful warbler flitting through the trees, an unusual cloud formation overhead. There is much more to be seen here than can be written down in a book many times the length of this guide.

As you follow the trail through each of the barrier island's life zones, remember that importance in nature is not measured by size, and that patience and silence are the virtues of the naturalist. Enjoy your experience.

Salt Spray Rose

3. POISON IVY

Poison ivy seems to grow almost everywhere on Fire Island and does so with great vigor. It may be found in the heat and direct sunlight of the swale, or in the dim recesses of forested areas. It may occur as single small plants, as large bushes, or as vines snaking up tree trunks. It appears attractive, with bright green leaves that turn scarlet in the fall, and with small pretty flowers that eventually become white, waxy berries. BEWARE! Every part of the plant contains an oil that can cause a bad rash on human skin.

Visitors sometimes ask why we don't attempt to destroy this potentially dangerous plant. Simply put, it is because we believe in letting the natural world exist unchanged.

The ivy is a valuable agent in holding the island together by keeping the sand from blowing away. Many birds and animals actually eat parts of the plant, untroubled by any harmful reaction.

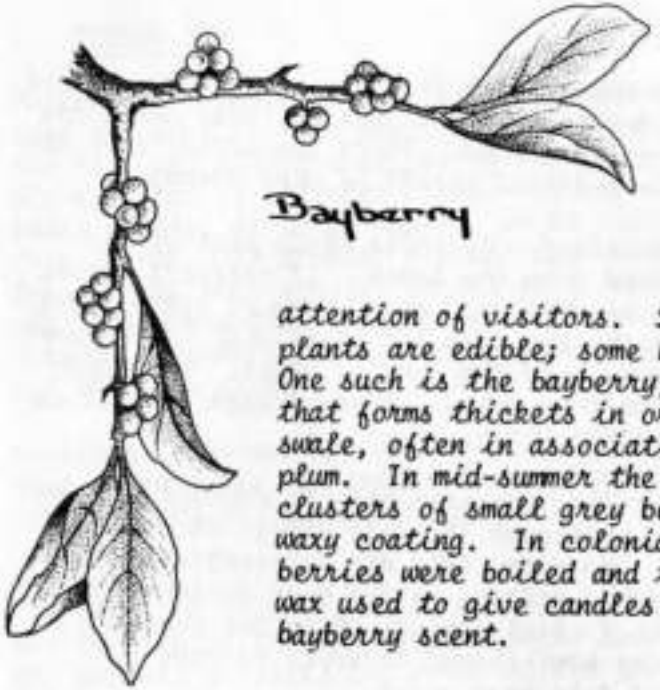
Interestingly, many pet owners have developed the rash inadvertently by touching their dog or cat after it has been roaming through the poison ivy.

4. PRIMARY DUNES

Separating the ocean beach from the rest of the island, a row of tall dunes rises near here. These dunes are the backbone of the island. Their formation, like the ocean waves, is a direct result of wind energy.

Imagine a flat island. Offshore winds pick up and carry sand inland from the beach. It collects around obstacles such as driftwood or a clump of beach grass. Soon a mound forms and then the grass with its network of roots helps to hold the sand in place. Gradually the primary dune line forms. Given enough time it can rise high above the beach.

When left alone the dunes are able to weather the forces of nature. Although they may change shape, they remain intact. However, they are vulnerable to the footsteps of man. Walking on the dune destroys grass roots and opens a chink through which the wind funnels, leaving bowl-shaped blowouts of bare sand. It might take many years for a dune to form; destruction can occur within a season.



5. BAYBERRY

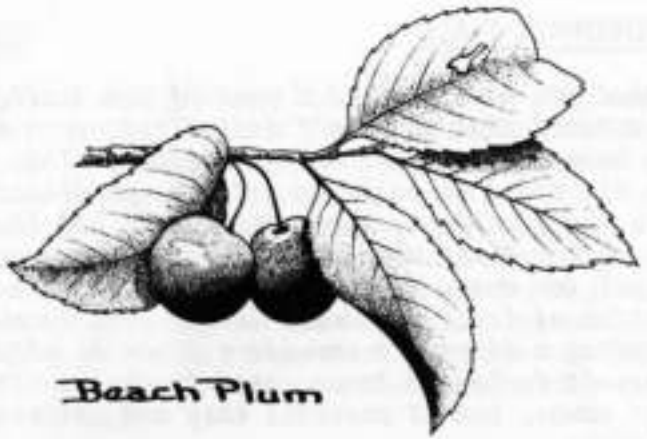
Some of the plants of Fire Island have intriguing properties that have always attracted the attention of visitors. Some of these plants are edible; some have other uses. One such is the bayberry, a low bush that forms thickets in or near the swale, often in association with beach plum. In mid-summer the plants bear clusters of small grey berries with a waxy coating. In colonial times the berries were boiled and the resulting wax used to give candles the pleasant bayberry scent.

6. BARRIER ISLAND MIGRATION

Sea level has been rising in recent geological time, and as it has done so Fire Island has migrated up the continental shelf toward Long Island. Consequently, no part of the present island is more than a couple of thousand years old.

It has been said that the island moves by rolling over itself. That is, erosion occurs along the ocean beach, while the bay side is built up by sand washed across the island or entering the bay through a temporary breach in the island.

This part of the island is relatively low, and bordered by dunes running at right angles to the primary dunes. This, plus the shallowness of the bay here, suggests that inlet formation or washover may have happened here relatively recently.



7. BEACH PLUM

Many of Fire Island's plants produce edible parts: leaves, seeds, berries, or even roots. Probably the best known of these edible plants is the beach plum. In the spring the bushes are covered with such a dense mass of white flowers that from a distance it almost appears that snow has fallen. By late summer large red or purple plums have formed, and are picked to be made into jam. The National Seashore allows these and many other plant products to be harvested for personal use, except along the trail and on the primary dunes.

8. SWALE

The area immediately behind the ocean-facing dunes is known locally as the swale. Because the dunes cut off the cooling sea breeze, the temperature in the swale rises and evaporation increases. There is also a "lens effect" as the dunes reflect the sun's heat back into the swale. Grasses and low scrubby bushes are most common, including American beachgrass, seaside goldenrod, and false beachheather. Here and there an occasional clump of beach plum or bayberry has gained a foothold.

9. BOARDWALK TRAIL

Now that you have travelled part of the trail, you may have noticed that you don't feel tired, even though there have been several hills involved. This is because the trail is built to federal specification for use by the disabled. Where the way is not level, the slope of the trail does not rise or descend more than one foot for every twelve feet of length. In addition, a stretch of level boardwalk is provided every thirty feet along a slope, to provide a place to stop and rest. The result looks odd to us, used to seeing straight, unbroken ramps, but it provides easy and untiring travel conditions.

Other features include a handrail where the slope is more than one foot of rise in twenty, a toe rail along level sections, boards spaced closely to prevent tripping, and benches for resting and contemplation. In these ways we open a section of the National Wilderness for access and enjoyment by all.

10. ARTESIAN WELL

Finding a supply of fresh water can be a problem for the creatures that live on Fire Island, and in many areas they have only a few boggy spots and short-lived rain pools to rely on. Here, however, they benefit from the artesian well drilled in the early 1940's for the U.S. Coast Guard station that stood here.

The water flowing from this well originated as rain or snow on Long Island, then percolated down into beds of sand and gravel. These beds dip steeply as they run southward, and by the time the water enters this well pipe it is more than three hundred feet below the surface and the pressure head forces it up and out.

11. FOREST

In this area a small forest has developed. Pioneer plants that could withstand fairly hostile conditions, slowly built up soil, shade, and other factors more suitable for trees and other large plants. The forest is still in its early stages, composed mainly of wild black cherry trees and a few large bayberry bushes. Given enoudh time, other shade-tolerant trees species such as American holly and sassafras may appear. It is that final advanced stage that has been reached several miles down the island in the wooded area known as the Sunken Forest.

12. LIGHT AND ENERGY

The ultimate source of energy for all life is the sun, and the barrier island plants respond to it, each in its own way. Some, like the pitch pine, keep their foliage all year. Others, like the poison ivy and the beach plum, shed their leaves for the cold winter months and remain dormant during that time.

In this area of the forest, vines of greenbrier, wild grape, and Virginia creeper are vigorously competing with the trees for the available sunlight energy. This energy is converted into leaves, trunks, and roots. When these die, they serve as food for countless other life forms that convert the energy to their own needs. They in turn are eaten by other organisms. The sun's energy is utilized over and over again, converted but not lost.

holly

13. WILDERNESS

With few exceptions, the section of the barrier island stretching before you for the next seven miles is free of structures and appears very much as the entire island must have when the first European settlers saw it in the 1600's. It is this section that was designated by Congress in 1980 as a National Wilderness, the only one in New York State.

If you have the time and inclination to further explore the island, we invite you to experience the rest of the wilderness for yourself. Every dune and blowout, every grove of pitch pine holds surprises and rewards for those who invest the time and energy to seek them out.

14. SHADBLOW

Another forest tree that appears early in plant succession is the shadblow, shadbush, or Juneberry, seen here in competition with the wild black cherry. The shadblow grows in dense clumps with multiple trunks, and the grey and blackstriped bark makes identification easy.

The Juneberries produced by the tree in early summer are one of the first fruits available each season. In colonial times the tree received its name when people noticed that it invariably bloomed along the New England coast at the same time the shad fish were ascending the freshwater streams to spawn.

Shadblow

15. PHRAGMITES

Around you grows a tall, tufted reed called phragmites (fragmite-eeze). It is a colonizer, often an invader of upset plant communities. On Fire Island it is often thickest where man has dumped or pumped dredged material. It has also invaded marshes that were formerly drained by ditches in hopes of controlling mosquitoes.

Although the reed may offer some cover for wildlife, it has little food value for birds or animals and is usually an indicator of a natural system that has been upset.

Phragmites

16. MOSQUITOES

Occasionally you may find mosquitoes along the trail. Or, perhaps we should say that occasionally they'll find you. Many different species live on Fire Island, but the one that attracts the most attention is the one with colorful white-striped legs: the salt marsh mosquito. As the name suggests, it breeds in the marshes along the bay shore.

In the past, insecticides were sprayed on the island in hopes of controlling the insects. However, research has shown that spraying is generally ineffective and can cause great harm to the environment, killing many other forms of life. We now prefer to let the natural system maintain its own balance, relying on such natural controls as the tree swallows that fly above the marsh eating hugh numbers of mosquitoes.

17. SALT MARSH

If the wind is right, you will wrinkle your nose at the disagreeable odor from the dead and rotting plants that lie at the edge of the marsh. To the unaware, a salt marsh is muddy, slimy, and offers no shade. You cannot drink the water. Mosquitoes swarm to harass visitors. The marsh cannot be plowed, though it is fertile. It cannot be easily navigated, though it is wet.

To the aware, the marsh is a marvelous place, a great producer of food and the starting point for many chains of life. Acre for acre, the salt marsh produces forty times the edible plant material of a productive corn field. Many of the ocean fish actually begin their life cycles at the edge of the marsh, feeding on the microscopic life forms that swarm there.

18. GREAT SOUTH BAY

The Great South Bay lies before you. It certainly looks much different than the land over which you have been walking, but it too contains an association of interdependent plants and animals. Naturalist John Aho said:

> From microscopic plants and animals
> to large predaceous fish,
> each is part of a multi-threaded
> web of life
> that must not be broken if the
> species are to survive.

Salt Marsh Cordgrass

> The bay knows the seasons of birth,
> of growth, and death,
> the rhythms of life...
> just as surely as they are known,
> by puppies and paupers,
> by kittens and kings.

19. STORMS

Great Blue Heron

Although the presence of the ocean has a favorable influence in moderating the climate of Fire Island, it can also bring occasional storms. Records collected over a century show that in any given year there is an eleven per cent chance that a significant tropical storm or hurricane may strike. In addition, extratropical storms known as northeasters have caused damage on the average of once every 1.2 years.

Island plants survive these storms in various ways. Some are small and low enough to the ground to escape most of the wind. Others grow only in sheltered pockets of low ground or are protected by the dunes. In forested spots the plants tend to achieve an aerodynamically stable shape as salt spray kills the upper growth, causing them to spread out and fill all available space laterally with leaves and branches. Notice how the cherry trees ahead have been modified in this way.

20. ANIMALS

Although seldom seen, a variety of animal life finds a home on Fire Island, Virginia white-tailed deer are here, their ancestors having crossed the frozen bay in the winter or come across by swimming in the warmer months. Smaller mammals live here too...the red fox, the cottontail rabbit, the long-tailed weasel, and various species of mice.

Birds are numerous and you may encounter a rufous-sided towhee, a catbird, a yellowthroat, eastern wood peewee, or brown thrasher. You might see reptiles or amphibians, including the black racer and the Fowlers toad. Insect life is abundant. All of these and more are linked together in complex food chains and inter-relationships.

21. JUNIPER

Salt spray blowing across the island by the wind can be deadly to the growing tips of plants. It literally burns them up, drawing the moisture from them. For this reason most plants are able only to grow low to the ground, staying below the main zone of wind. The juniper, however, has needles with a dense protective coating that are somewhat more resistant to salt than other foliage. This allows the juniper to grow higher than most of the other vegetation around it, as is the case here.

22. AEROSOLS

Stop for a moment and pick up a handful of sand. It does not look like very promising material in which to grow plants, does it? Some plant nutrients such as carbon, nitrogen, oxygen, and sulfur are provided in air and rain, but others are normally provided by soil weathering. Here there is no soil to weather, only sterile grains of quartz sand. Where do the other necessary nutrients come from?

As winds sweep in from the ocean they pick up seawater in the form of aerosols. The seawater contains calcium, magnesium, potassium, and phosphorous, all necessary for plant growth. The seawater is carried by the wind across the island, lands on the plants or the surface of the ground, and is eventually carried down to the roots by rain. So, the seawater is a danger to the plants, but at the same time is absolutely necessary to them.

23. A FINAL WORD

We hope you have enjoyed your trip along this trail. By now you are familiar with some of the life and processes of the barrier island. While this guide may have answered some of your questions, we hope it has also raised others in your mind. If so, any of the park staff will be happy to discuss them with you. If you would like to learn more about the natural history of a barrier island, there are several excellent books available at the visitor center.

Author - Neal Bullington
Illustrator - Karen Henrickson

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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT
OF THE INTERIOR

NATIONAL PARK
SERVICE

Fire Island

Fire Island

National Seashore
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

FRIENDS
OF THE
WILLIAM FLOYD ESTATE NEWLETTER
SUMMER 1993

ESTATE OPENS FOURTH OF JULY WEEKEND

In conjunction with this year's opening, William Floyd Estate will present *The Finishing Touch*, an exhibit featuring eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth century clothing accessories. Jack Hauptman, superintendent of Fire Island National Seashore, and the Estate staff invite you to view the exhibit before touring the historic house on any weekend during July and August. The Estate will be open weekends and holidays from 10 am to 4 pm, starting July 3rd and ending Labor Day, September 6th. For information on scheduled programs and events, please call the Estate at (516) 399-2030.

The Great Northeaster of 1992

As predicted by the National Weather Service, the eastern seaboard was going to experience a severe storm some time around December 12th, 1992. Moon phases were correct for flooding and winds might reach 80 m.p.h.. Could this be the 100 year storm predicted by so many for so long?

Floyd family accounts and photographs document the 1938 hurricane. When flood tides finally receded on the property, weakfish were picked up by Cornelia F. Nichols south of the front lawn near the Great Boat Lot. Now, that's a storm!

This past December 11th, the predicted northeaster blew, and blew, for almost three days straight. Flood tides cycled through six times! Moored boats were deposited in woodlands along Home Creek on the Estate. The salt marsh was not seen for 2 1/2 days and boundary neighbors were forced to evacuate homes to seek higher ground. Waterfowl never had so much habitat. Finally, by December 14th, the tides receded to a normal level allowing the salt marsh to be inspected. Except for the Home Creek section, a minimum of debris washed up onto the property. In fact, for the most part, the property was purged of accumulated debris.

Upland, trees were lost throughout the property, including one of the largest remaining Norway Spruces in the cemetery.

The 1992 northeaster did qualify as a 100 year storm. Areas on the north and south shores of Long Island were decimated, while Fire Island and other ocean shorelines lost year's worth of accumulated sand. Should all storms that hit Long Island be compared to the 1938 Hurricane? From the photographs documenting the damage to Old Mastic and the years it took to clean up the damage; the 1938 Hurricane should be the measure for 100 year storms.

Participation in Local Government

Volunteer services at the William Floyd Estate were greatly enhanced this past year by a new program required for graduation from the William Floyd High School. Beginning in the 1991-1992 school year, all senior year students are required to perform six hours of community service as part of a new curriculum entitled, "Participation in Local Government".

Once each spring and fall, the Estate schedules one project day to accommodate local students. This new found resource of volunteers allows for labor intensive projects to be completed.

During the fall of 1992, 14 students and two Estate staff members performed a shoreline cleanup along Home Creek and Moriches Bay. Vast amounts of refuse, consisting mostly of plastics, cans, glass and tires were removed. About 3/4 mile of shoreline was cleaned up, resulting in four dumpsters full of bagged trash. Besides the obvious results, the students expressed dismay over the amount of non-biodegradable refuse floating in our oceans and bays.

Other projects completed include the cleanup of cut up trees, damaged from Hurricane Bob in 1991, and general gardens and grounds work in the fall of 1992.

Suffolk County Youth Conservation Corps Returns to the William Floyd Estate

During the summer of 1992, the Estate hosted another YCC program sponsored by the Suffolk County Department of Labor. Up to ten high-school aged youths assisted in the clearing of trails, upkeep of garden beds, and most importantly, the staining of outbuildings and fencing in the historic core. This program especially benefits the program participants by teaching job skills and exposure to natural and local history through programs provided by the Estate staff.

Cultural Resource Management Update

During 1992, Fire Island National Seashore was once again allocated the funds for cataloging historic objects onto the Automated National Catalog System. This project, part of the 1987 Appropriation Act, enabled nearly 6,000 more objects to be accounted for and entered onto the Park's Automated National Catalog System.

A large portion of last year's cataloged objects were items found in closets, sheds and outbuildings at the Estate and included nineteenth and early twentieth century furniture, tools, boating gear and farm equipment.

This four-year project is now completed, with over 16,000 objects identified and accounted for, and with computerization, made more accessible to researchers.

Last fall, two site-specific documents were developed to assist the William Floyd Estate's curatorial staff in managing the site's large and diverse collection. The *Collection Condition Survey*, prepared by the NPS North Atlantic Regional Conservator, will provide staff with a prioritized listing of objects needing conservation treatment and contains technical advice in cleaning, protecting, storing and other forms of object preservation.

The *Collection Management Plan* was prepared by a team of specialists which included the NPS North Atlantic Regional Conservator, Curator, Archivist and Archeologist. The document includes collection needs addressed in the Collection Condition Survey, and provides recommendations for broader issues such as the site's museum record keeping system, environmental needs, security, staffing and programming.

Both of these documents will help guide the Estate curatorial staff in caring for the needs of the collection through the next ten years.

During the winter months, squirrels and racoons find refuge in the warmth of the William Floyd house. Access is gained through the chimney openings, allowing animals to nest within the chimneys and infiltrate the house. In the past, these animals have caused damage to both the structure and its furnishings.

Last January, four chimneys at the William Floyd Estate were re-capped and re-screened. Workmen were able to secure screening to original flagstone caps, but the galvanized cap fitted on top of the main chimney had to be replaced. The main chimney is the oldest and largest, and services the oil fired heating system. A new cap was fabricated for this chimney, using 1/2" stainless steel screening and sheet metal to replace the rusted galvanized screen.

Examples of change and continuity are used during house tours to help guide vsitors through the site's 250 year history. One of the most common questions asked during a tour of the house is, "How is the house heated?" Interpreters explain that in the eighteenth century the house was heated by fireplaces, then in the nineteenth century, central heat was supplied by a coal furnace in the basement. The Floyd family apparently used the coal furnace for heat through the 1960's, but also utilized wood burning stoves throughout the house. In 1974, an oil-fired furnace was installed by the National Park Service to heat the main block of the house. Using the registers installed in 1890's, the ductwork was upgraded to accommodate the new furnace.

With years worth of data supporting the need to improve existing environmental conditions, the National Park Service, Buildings Conservation Branch allocated funds to upgrade and expand the old heating system. A larger, more efficient oil-fired furnace was finally installed this past spring.

With the installation of the new furnace, additional ductwork and registers were added to provide heat to the previously unheated North Wing, Old Dining Room, and Old Pantry, and to corresponding rooms above. The second phase of the project includes the installation of a separate furnace to provide heat to the unheated northeast wing, and a dehumidification unit to reduce humidity levels in the basement. The installation of storm windows and weather stripping, scheduled for next year, will further improve environmental conditions during the heating season.

The Floyd house will finally benefit from lower humidity, enabling the Estate's staff to better preserve the past for the future.

Coming Home

The William Floyd Estate staff carefully studies and reviews the site's interpretive references on a regular basis. Dr. Steven Kesselman's *Room Guide for Interpretation*, as well as many of the Family's manuscripts, such as Cornelia Floyd Nichols's *Letters to My Great, Great Granddaughter*, and Sarah Floyd Turner's *Sunny Memories of Mastic* are constantly referenced. These materials are used as tools to assist staff in conveying not only the site's unique history, but to offer a sense of what it was like to be a member of the Floyd family living in the ancestral home. These references, as accurate and rich in history as they are, could not have prepared the staff for a sample of the real thing.

After the death of John Slocum Nichols last fall, approximately thirty members of the Nichols' family reunited at the Estate for the interment in their ancestral cemetery. After the service, the family gathered in front of the Old House for group photographs. At that point, the Estate staff began to feel a strange sense of deja vue, as nearly each staff member had cataloged, or seen, early black and white snapshots of some of the same faces in the same place. The quiet banter among family while the camera set up, updating each other with family news--one couldn't help imagine that similar conversations must have taken place a generation or two before.

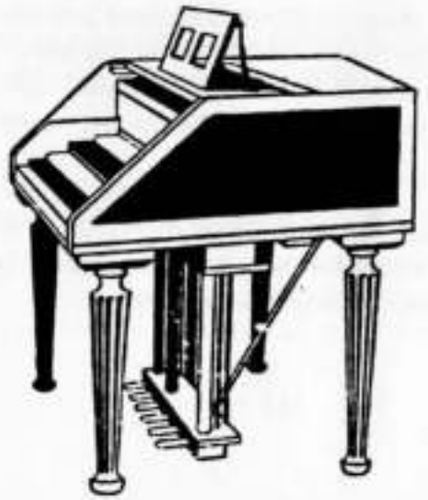
The Family's 1949 Thanksgiving Visit to The Old House

staff had always provided guided tours of the house. While staff offered historical information to the family, they in turn favored staff with stories and anecdotes about everyday life at Old Mastic. These family stories are occasionally used by staff to help bring realism to the house during tours to the general public. On the day of Mr. Nichols' funeral, it was decided to allow the family to tour the house on their own. Staff would simply be discreet and observe.

Old Mastic House seemed to come to life again. It wasn't the sound of voices conducting tours at different parts of the house. It was the sound of family. One generation speaking softly to the next about the..."horned owl captured by my father, your grandfather, almost 100 years ago...", and ..."this is the room I stayed in during the summer, but I liked this one more...", and "remember when Grammy let us dress up in the attic? I wonder if they still have that civil war coat...". The inquisitive eyes of young toddlers absorbed each room, seeing and hearing about their ancestors -- perhaps for the first time. Some family members upstairs, some downstairs, some in the north wing, some in the east. This was not always museum. This was a home.

When a ragtime tune was heard coming from the keys of the 1860's Steinway played by John Nichols' brother David, and the family sang along, the staff saw how that piano was used and enjoyed. On any other day, a visitor might have been reprimanded and ushered right out the door for touching a key.

During one short hour, the staff of the William Floyd Estate gained insight that went beyond the boundaries of excellent documentation into the house's use as a family vacation home. This reunion allowed the staff to experience a family returning to their roots.



Another Box Turtle Update

Thirteen years of box turtle files produced by Estate staff, has shown some amazing aspects of each individual's survival skills. Some cases files are reviewed below.

A mature male, No. 110, has established his home range in the William Floyd Estate cemetery. Since 1982 he has been recaptured nine times within the cemetery grounds and its immediate borders.

An aggressive male, No. 65, holds the all time record for recaptures. Since first captured in 1981, he has been recaptured 13 times. His established territory, based on the 13 recaptures, is in the immediate area of the historic outbuildings, gardens, mowed lawns and field borders on the east side of Manor House. No. 65 was once found trying to break into a pen holding other turtles waiting to be marked. This pen was located behind the Carriage Barn, the site of seven of the 13 recaptures.

Wildfires generally kill box turtles. Lacking quick mobility, box turtles generally cannot flee an advancing fire. To protect themselves, box turtles will withdraw to the safety of their shells. If the fire is fast in nature, it may just burn the shell and not kill the occupant. Burned shells quickly scar resulting in the loss of uniform coloring patterns.

At some point in his life, No. 176 was extremely burned but somehow survived. He was photodocumented and used for slide presentations and exhibits detailing how tough box turtles can be. Unfortunately, the turtle was found dead from what appeared to be natural causes eight years after his original capture date. Because of the extensive scarring, it was difficult to determine the age, but he was mature and estimated to be 20 years old.

Since originally captured in 1984 in the vicinity of the west gardens, No. 253 has been recaptured seven times. All recapture locations confirm that he has very definite territorial preference for the west garden area and brushy borders surrounding the western edges of the historic zone and outbuildings.

Since his first capture in 1985, No. 286 has since been recaptured seven times. The area immediately behind the flag pole is the extreme headwaters of Home Creek, which offers fresh water seeps for summer retreats in hot weather and heavy brush communities for concealment. No.286 was once found in late 1985 two blocks west of the Estate in a residential community. Presumably, he may have been carried off by some neighborhood children who wanted a pet. When returned to his original capture point, he seemed to stay put as he was recaptured on six more occasions in the immediate vicinity of the flag pole.

First located in 1987 in the field just west of visitor parking lot, No. 346 has been recaptured four times. On May, 18, 1990, she had a close brush with disaster when she was confiscated from a visitor who had found her in the vicinity of the parking lot. The visitor had plans to make her a family pet.

Like many other box turtles on the Estate, No. 346 displays seasonal movement between old fields and surrounding wooded areas, as evident by recapture data.

As with box turtle No. 176 who survived being burned, box turtles display an amazing ability to withstand trauma. Numerous individuals have been captured with just three legs or gnaw marks, suggesting encounters with predators such as foxes and raccoons. Other individuals have been found with damaged shells from encounters with mechanical equipment.

The survival skills of box turtles ensure their ability to withstand the rigors of daily life in undisturbed environments. When confronted by development and habitat fragmentation, box turtles, like so many other wild animals, do not prosper.

The Estate's box turtle colony is landlocked by neighborhoods, preventing influx of new individuals into the population Development and high populations of predators impact nesting activities.

Management of the natural resources at the William Floyd Estate will always be performed in such a manner that the turtles and their habitats will be a primary consideration.

Wooden Memories of the Mastic Shooting Club

The Estate recently accepted a gift of three significant regional waterfowling craft. This donation consisted of two handmade wooden gunning boxes (also known as coffin boxes) and one custom made Barnegett Bay Sneak Box. All three craft date back to when the salt marsh and old pond were leased to the Moriches Bay Gun Club in the 1930's.

The sneak box design is a very effective low profile boat designed only for waterfowling. The traditional olive drab paint allows for easy concealment of the craft among salt marsh plant communities. This specific sneak box was also equipped for sailing to the hunting grounds. Gunning boxes or coffin boxes were designed to transport either behind a tender boat to the hunting grounds or to be towed behind the individual hunter through ponds or over flooded salt marshes.

Basically, gunning boxes accommodated the land based shooter. Gunning boats provided access across bodies of water for shoreline based hunting, or for hunting open water among ice flows and, if the situation dictated, open water shooting. Both the sneak box and the coffin boxes were thoughtfully designed to accommodate the gunner by providing ample storage space for decoys, guns and the endless equipment that duck hunters need to employ their sport.

All three craft will be displayed in the outbuilding area for visitors to enjoy throughout the season.

Sketch from the Family's 1922 Guest Book

Junior Ranger Program

In conjunction with last season's *Mansion of Happiness: Games from the Parlor Closet* exhibit, seasonal Park Rangers Vivian Morgan and Richard Ohlsen developed a Junior Ranger Program designed for the site's young visitors.

The children spent their first day as Junior Rangers studying and learning about the games on display. While studying the exhibit's information pamphlet, they learned the rules of the games, the era of each game's popularity, which generation of the Floyd family played them, and most of all, the children grasped a good understanding of the Estate's use as a summer retreat.

After setting up a weekend schedule, the Estate's Junior Rangers were ready to greet visitors in the reception room of the historic house. Guests of all ages were guided through the exhibit by the Junior Rangers before a staff-guided tour of the house. After a house tour, the Junior Rangers challenged exiting visitors to a game of cards, chess, checkers, Parchesi or any of the other games replicating those on display.

Each Junior Ranger, volunteering 1-2 hours a day on the weekend, had to complete eight hours of service to receive a Junior Ranger patch. By the last week of August, 15 Junior Rangers had earned their patches and, according to the game sign-out list, collectively played over 150 games with visitors!

The William Floyd Estate's Junior Ranger program enabled visitors to experience game play in much the same way as the Floyd family did, while it gave a sense of pride and accomplishment to young members of the Mastic community.

Historic Black Locust Trees Replaced

As a result of hurricane Bob in the summer of 1991, two of the four locust trees in front of the manor house were uprooted. The history of maintaining these plantings dates back to 1863 when Sarah K. Floyd (1837-1923) first planted four locust trees in front of the House and named them after her favorite cousins. The Estate archives confirm that these locust trees have been replaced over history, usually after major storms.

Initially, the Estate staff tried to acquire black locust trees commercially for replanting but attempts were unsuccessful. It was then determined to transplant two trees from the lower acreage with the use of a truck-mounted tree spade.

After an exhaustive search of the property, two specimens, with the desired symmetry, were located growing on field edges.

The project went extremely well and the two new black locust trees are now in place and are expected to thrive in their new location. Both trees are close to 16 feet in height and are 6 inches in diameter.

Wayside Exhibits

A team of specialists from the National Park Service Harpers Ferry Center, Division of Wayside Exhibits, is designing new wayside exhibits for the William Floyd Estate. These informative panels will provide visitors with an orientation to the site, interpretation of the grounds, outbuildings and cemetery and will address some of the most frequently asked questions. The wayside exhibits will be located in the visitor parking area, at the end of the boardwalk leading to the Old House, and at the Cemetery.

Administration

The William Floyd Estate is administered by
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Fire Island National Seashore
120 Laurel Street
Patchogue, New York 11772

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2/16/92
Fire Island

ABOUT LONG ISLAND | Going to School on Fire Island in Dead of Winter

By DIANE KETCHAM

FOOTPRINTS in the sand give way to tire-track winding paths on Fire Island beaches this time of year. When no ferries are running, the only way on and off the island is by authorized four-wheel-drive vehicles.

It's a bumpy trip along the beach. Like snow-skiers, drivers have to decide whether to follow in the tracks of others or break out on their own. The more adventurous head down to the water and race along the hard-packed sand, trying to outrun the incoming waves. At low tide, the beach can resemble a sandy speedway, as station wagons, Broncos and Blazers jockey for position.

When high water reaches the dunes, traveling is by inside passage. The narrow sand and cement walkways through the spine of the island limit vehicles to five miles an hour. The rules of the one-lane path are simple. Eastbound traffic has the right of way; westbound traffic backs up.

Traversing Fire Island off season takes a strong spine and access to one of the 145 residents or 80 contractors' vehicles allowed on the island. Most people choose to wait until summer, when the sun shines and the ferries run.

Wintering in this paradise means isolation. The several hundred adults who live there love it. The school-age children who live there are more ambivalent. After all, there is no cable television to watch. Television consists of only the basic channels. "And we can't even get Channel 4 at our house," said Mark Cherveny, 9 years old, of Atlantique.

There are no pizza parlors or multiplex theaters to run to. The sole retail establishment open is C. J.'s bar in Ocean Beach. It doubles as the general store, selling a carton of milk for $2. Few friends live just down the street. "And there are even fewer girls," said Mark Shockley, 12, who has just discovered them.

Love of School

There is the beach. "But you can't swim in the winter," said Joshua LaViolette, 6, of Ocean Beach. There are the deer. But they are so common that "they follow you around like dogs," one child said. While Fire Island is "pretty" and "quiet" in the winter, those under 13 also say it can be "boring."

That is why on Fire Island children love to go to school. "Children need companionship not just nature," said Louise Gonan, superintendent and principal of the island's only school, Woodhull Elementary School in Ocean Beach. Forty-seven children attend prekindergarten through sixth grade at the school, commonly known as the Fire Island School. Older children are bused to the Bay Shore junior and senior highs.

Besides education, the Fire Island School serves as the social center for the youth of the island. "We offer programs after school like model-building and art clubs," Ms. Gonan said. "This is for socialization more than day care. So they can stay with their friends after school. It's not easy for them to get together. This is a rural school district."

Fire Island is like a farming community in the Midwest, but instead of acres and acres of wheat and corn separating best friends, it is sand dunes and sunken forests. Children are scattered all along the barrier island.

The school's student body includes nine students who live in Coast Guard housing and three who are children of park rangers stationed at Sailor's Haven and the Fire Island Lighthouse. The rest are from various communities. To visit or have visitors is a transportation quandary. "It's a restrictive kind of life," Ms. Gonan said.

But on a recent day the Fire Island School welcomed company. The school sponsored its first Grandparents Day, and grandparents, as well as a few aunts and uncles, were bused to the school from the Captree Boat Basin.

"It's easier to see the grandchildren in California than on Fire Island," said one grandmother, Mary Ellen VanderVeldt of Babylon, who was boarding a bus with her husband, Joe.

Charles and Jane Greaves of Levittown said they were looking forward to seeing their granddaughter Nicky Johnson, of Ocean Beach. "We come over in the summer, when the ferry is running," Mrs. Greaves said. "But this time of year, they usually come to us."

With a cargo of grandparents, the caravan of little yellow school buses passed the Fire Island Lighthouse and turned off onto the sands. The buses all have four-wheel drive and can successfully navigate the shifting sands of the island, most of the time.

A bus carrying Ms. Gonan and several teachers to the mainland was whizzing along the shore when it became stuck in soft sand. "We drifted into the ocean," Ms. Gonan said. "We got out of the bus, and another came and pulled ours out of the surf. We have winches on all the buses just for hazards like that."

"You never know what you're in for," a bus driver, Christine Lindsey, said. "The tide comes in in strange fashions. You can be halfway down the beach, and all of sudden there's the tide coming up underneath your car or bus. Sometimes you have to just go for it."

Photographs by Michael Ibarra for The New York Times

Grandparents traveled by ferry to visit the Woodhull Elementary School in Ocean Beach. From the left were Peg Fraser with her granddaughter, Brittany Metcalf, Ed Helbig with his grandson, Michael Lindsey, and Riva Salzman with her grandson, Matt Danziger.

'Some schools have snow days. We had two flood days.'

As her bus passed the boarded-up oceanfront houses in Saltaire, Ms. Lindsey became a celebrity tour guide. "There's Liz Claiborne's house," she said. "And that's her guest house."

Grandparents pressed their faces to the windows. In Lonelyville, Mel Brooks's house was pointed out. "Is he still with Anne Bancroft?" someone asked.

Close-up views of celebrity homes aren't all the beach offers this time of year, Ms. Gonan said. "We were driving along the other day, and there were deer swimming in the surf. This buck with large antlers strolls out of the water and looks at us like, 'What's the problem? Haven't you ever seen a deer in the ocean before?' "

Most of the eight teachers at the school live "off island," she said, and travel the beach bus every morning. "It's extraordinary to go to work and watch the sunrise by the ocean," Ms. Gonan added. "The beauty out here never ceases to amaze me."

In the gymnasium-auditorium of the school a sign states that no more than 403 people can congregate. In the heart of winter 403 people don't congregate on the entire island. But with the grandparents and a special assembly at the Fire Island lighthouse, a sizable group had gathered. The students sat on the floor. Adults took the chairs.

Becky Silvis, whose husband, Dale, is the district ranger for the western half of Fire Island, was there to see her son Jensen, 6, and to listen to the facts about the lighthouse. She lives next to it now.

Better Than Yosemite

"We came from Yosemite," she said. "Fire Island is much better. Yosemite was a beautiful park, but you had to share your views with 200 or 300 other people. This time of year, we go for a walk on the beach, say hello to the lighthouse, and we're all alone."

Being alone was part of the childhood of Robert Norris, who lived in the lightkeeper's cottage in the 1970's and early 80's, when his father was a park ranger on Fire Island. "Nobody lived around me," he recalled. "So I went to the beach a lot. I found injured birds and helped them. Then there were the deer. I followed them around."

Mr. Norris is 21 now and attending the State University at Potsdam. But he returned to Fire Island and the school he attended from the second to the sixth grade for the lighthouse assembly. The program was given by Vivian Farrell, a storyteller and writer of "Robert's Tall Friend," a book about Mr. Norris and his childhood playmate, the Fire Island Lighthouse.

Few playmates live near any of the children on Fire Island. Toward the eastern end, the children of Dawn Lippert of Sailor's Haven have only nature to entertain them. Mrs. Lippert's husband, Jay, oversees the ranger station at Sailor's Haven. "It's so relaxed and quiet here," Mrs. Lippert said.

Before Fire Island, the Lipperts' home was the Statue of Liberty. "Every hour thousands of people came to visit you," she said. "And you could only get there by boat. You missed the last boat, you didn't get home that night. There's much less stress here on Fire Island."

Except for Grandparents Day. As the school's only teaching assistant, Mrs. Lippert was in charge of organizing the events. She made sure the catered lunch was picked up in Bay Shore. Usually everyone brown bags it at school.

Buses That Can Fit

Each morning Mrs. Lippert rides with her children on the yellow school bus. Some mornings she drives it. "I'm also the substitute bus driver," she said.

The school has 10 buses for its 47 students. "We have so many because we have to use the small ones," Ms. Gonan said. "The others don't fit through the roads."

The school buses are also used for evacuating the island. After the storm on Oct. 31, the school closed for two days. "Some schools have snow days," Ms. Gonan said. "We had two flood days."

When the school day is over, the buses line up to take the children back to their island homes. Joshua LaViolette and other Ocean Beach children walk home, some toward the ocean, some toward the bay. They pass by deer and circling shore birds. A fresh sea breeze pushes them on their way. It is another afternoon in paradise. How will Joshua spend it?

"I'll call up my friends," he said. "They'll come over, and we'll all play Nintendo. ■

Castles in the Sand

By Elizabeth Hawes

Fire Islanders have built their camps on a battleground. And once in a while the sea rises up to remind them where they are.

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FIRE ISLAND IS A long, thin spit of sand that sits off Long Island like a sea wall, closing the southern shore off from the rambunctious Atlantic and creating the still waters of the Great South Bay. From the air, it looks frail and primitive — 32 miles long and only a few thousand feet wide, with bridges at its outer limits but no roads in between. It is an unlikely host for urban pleasure-seekers, yet for a century they have come, the famous actors and writers, advertising executives, drag queens, party animals and old-fashioned families, relishing a place where there are no cars, only boardwalks and bicycles and little pull-wagons to transport groceries or luggage. Children roam as freely as the deer, which are everywhere. It could almost be the 19th century.

Fire Island belongs to the folklore of American summers. Since the 1890's, New Yorkers have established 18 different communities here, each one measuring no more than two or three blocks from the ferry dock on the bay to the wide white beach on the ocean. They coexist like colonies of shore birds — families, groupers, gays. New Yorkers seem to flock naturally to islands, but Block Island, Fishers Is-

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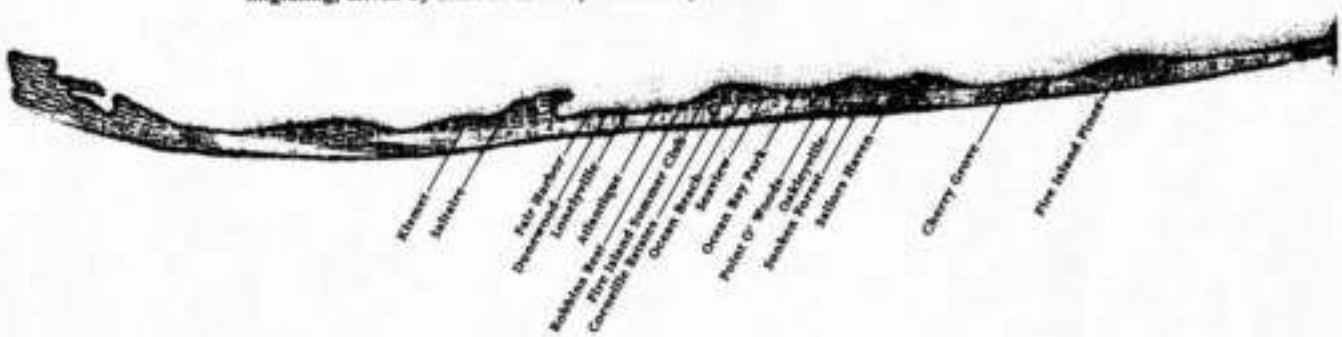
Elizabeth Hawes is the author of "New York, New York: How the Apartment House Transformed the Life of the City."

FAR LEFT: *Lisa Herman and other sunbathers on the beach at Carmelle Estates during the Memorial Day weekend.*

ABOVE: *Precariously perched atop spindly pilings in Fair Harbor, this house was razed in late May.*

Shifting Sand

The western end of Fire Island was hammered by two devastating nor'easters in December and March. Kismet lost 5 homes; Fair Harbor lost 21 homes and 150 feet of beach and dune, and Dunewood lost 3 houses. Atlantique is considered a prime area for the ocean to break through. Water Island lost up to 175 feet of beach in places. Even though the western end was hardest hit, from a geological viewpoint it is the most stable part of the fragile barrier island. "The western end has not migrated in 500 years," says Jay Tanski, a coastal geologist. "The eastern end is migrating, driven by these 50-to-100-year storm cycles."



Allison Clifford was all dressed-up for the Saltaire Fire Department's annual pancake breakfast on Memorial Day weekend.

land, Mt. Desert Island, Martha's Vineyard and Nantucket are very different landmasses than Fire Island, which is a barrier beach, and an atypical one at that. A barrier beach, for all its provision of snugness and safety, is not a stable place. Even if its axis is fixed, its edges are not. Tides change, beaches drift, seasonal storms threaten the dunes and the houses, and when they hit and batter the island, as two nor'easters did with apocalyptic force last December and March, they call into question the whole natural, social and economic life of the place. Suddenly Fire Island seems both mortal and miraculous.

THE HISTORY OF FIRE Island can be recounted in storms. Even before there were 3,800 houses and 30,000 summer people, when there were only whalers who crossed over from Long Island to launch their boats (the Indians taught them how to make harpoons of slate) and wreckers who lighted fires to lure ships off course (the infamous Jeremiah Smith offered the survivors a blanket and a cup of poison tea before he took their worldly goods), or later, when there were duck hunters and oystermen and entrepreneurs who organized chowder parties and shore dinners on the beach, island time was kept by storms: the storm of 1690 that enlarged the Fire Island Inlet at the western end; the storms that wrecked the Savannah, the first steamship to cross the Atlantic, in 1823, and the war transport ship Northern Pacific, in 1919; the storms that reopened the inlet at East Moriches in 1931.

Between 1635 and 1962, there were 231 storms of note, the local chroniclers say. Their collective memories abound, and they tell tall tales that are sadly true about the hurricane of 1938 and the nor'easter of 1962, when more than a hundred houses floated out to sea and 20-foot dunes disappeared; they also recall Robert Moses and how in the wake of these storms he proposed to build a highway and a series of public parks to save the island and how the property owners mobilized a resistance, with political rallies, flotillas of ferries and bus trips to Albany, which resulted in the establishment of the Fire Island National Seashore in 1964, which saved the island from Moses.

Now in the wake of even deadlier storms, the future of Fire Island again looks uncertain. The island is much narrower than it was a year ago. All along its length, its dune system is damaged and its structural integrity nearly breached in at least three places, which renders it vulnerable to overwash in another hurricane season. At the end of May, after months of government inaction, Governor Cuomo pledged to make a detailed study of the barrier and to activate technical assistance. Now there is talk of beach nourishment, artificial reefs and long-range coastal studies.

There is also talk of letting nature take its course. As a national seashore, Fire Island belongs to park rangers and game wardens and geomorphologists as well as property owners and politicians, and it is subject to as many visions as it is jurisdictions. Everyone agrees, however, that a barrier beach is not a tight little island. As a geologist lectured a group of homeowners: "You have chosen to build your house on a battleground, and once in a while the sea rises up to remind you where you are."

IN MIDSPRING, THE light is still thin and the air cool, and there are only clammers out on the Great South Bay, working the bottom. Compared with the ferry, which takes a half-hour, a National Park Service whaler cuts across the water in a fleet 15 minutes, but Fire Island still comes up as a surprise, like a wilderness post. There are no tourists yet, and in the middle of the week, few residents beyond the year-rounders and an assortment of utility men, contractors and real estate people, most of whom are either cleaning up or opening up and all of whom will be encountered sooner or later on the Burma Road, the sandy service strip that runs down the center of the island, or on the beach, the off-season highway, strictly four-wheel drive.

Jay Lippert, a ranger who has been in the Park Service for 17 years and on Fire Island for 5, chooses to travel along the hard sand at ocean side, where he can review some of the devastation of winter, which is still in plain sight. He explains

PHOTOGRAPHS BY JIM ESTRIN/THE NEW YORK TIMES. ILLUSTRATION BY RICHARD DOWNS.

The history of Fire Island can be recounted in storms, 231 of note between 1635 and 1962. The worst ones may be yet to come.

how deadly the storms were, coming as they did from the northeast and wreaking cumulative havoc on beaches that were already seriously weakened by the "no name" storm of Halloween 1991. "A hurricane happens and it's over," he says. "A nor'easter is constant and the sand movement and the sand loss is mind-boggling."

Now, in Water Island, a tiny community on the eastern end, 120 feet of beach have been lost; in Fire Island Pines, dunes and decks are gone, leaving a dozen swimming pools stranded in midair or collapsed in the sand. In Point O'Woods, the sea has come right up to the porch of the private hotel known as the Club; in Ocean Bay Park, Saltaire, Fair Harbor and Kismet, a total of 28 houses are missing, and many more remain in precarious position, excavated or twisted by the ocean or standing like storks on pilings that were once buried in 20 feet of dune. There is a guest house without a main house, a deck around an empty space and, near the water, a fallen chimney. There is a sheared wall of sand where there used to be tall, rounded dunes knit with grasses.

The National Seashore, together with the state Department of Environmental Conservation and town and county boards, will decide which of these houses will be removed or rebuilt or relocated. A consensus of similar agencies must be reached before any major restoration of the beach will begin. As if to illustrate the gridlock that frustrates recovery efforts, a large orange crane stands at the edge of the dunes. "Tonight, with the full moon, high tide will be up here under the houses," Lippert predicts. "Sea water may rust out that machine yet."

Lippert, like other rangers, describes himself as an optimist about nature in general and about Fire Island in particular. The island has survived as best it could, he states matter-of-factly. Looking out to sea, he explains the action of the ocean like a teacher: how the littoral drift is to the west (the Fire Island Lighthouse, placed at the far western end of the island in 1858, now sits four and a half miles inland); how the beach erodes in winter and accretes in summer; how the offshore sandbar dissipates wave energy and, like a barrier beach in miniature, protects and nourishes the island. "A healthy outer bar makes a healthy beach," he says. "Where it is weak, like in Fair Harbor, a storm blows right through. It repairs itself, too." He gestures toward a waveful of sand to show that the process has already begun.

BY MEMORIAL DAY, CIGARette boats slice across the bay and ferries and whalers fan out from Long Island in a confusion of directions and destinations. As a national park, Fire Island embraces far more than its private summer colonies, which in fact occupy only 20 percent of the barrier beach. Within its 20,000 square acres, there are also seven public Long Island town beaches, four park facilities — the Lighthouse, Sailors Haven, with its an-

ABOVE: *John Eberhardt built the Belvedere in Cherry Grove in the 1950's. Here, he poses in the hotel's Grand Salon with his adopted son and lover, Craig, and his Dalmatian, Baby Doll.*

LEFT: *Fire Islanders put the cart before the car; wagons like these on the dock at Saltaire carry the freight from ferry to front door.*

ABOVE: *Let the good times roll — Ocean Beach in the 1920's.*

LEFT: *This Fire Harbor house was swept into the bay by the devastating hurricane of 1938.*

RIGHT: *Isabelle Beatrice Farrell ready to take the plunge in 1916.*

BELOW LEFT: *Ocean Beachers relaxing on Bungalow Walk, about 1912.*

BELOW RIGHT: *Perambulation at the July 4th Baby Parade in Ocean Beach, circa 1915-1920.*

cient and exotic Sunken Forest, Watch Hill and Smith Point West — and a high dune wilderness area that stretches for six solitary miles. Of the hundreds of thousands of people who visit Fire Island each year, however, most of them are bound for one of the private communities. They comprise a motley throng of homeowners, summer renters, tourists and day-trippers. Crossing the three miles to the beach, they like to say they are leaving America.

On Friday evenings, the ferries are packed like immigrant boats, filled to capacity with people wearing neon and spandex and sandals, eating salad and ice cream and fillet-of-fish sandwiches, carrying dogs, strollers, flowers, duffels, knapsacks, boxes, market baskets, shopping bags from Fairway, Duane Reade, Pier 1, Toys "R" Us, children's games, coffee makers, garden hoses, decorator pillows, coolers and, depending on the destination, many cases of beer. Big white-and-blue double-decker tubs, open on top, the ferries scoot in and out of the docks like buses. The trip across the bay is a release from the strictures of time and place rather than a passage. Everyone is conversational, easy. As the island comes into focus, the towns are low, uniformly weathered-gray and unprepossessing. When it is dark, they look like a series of campfires, strung out as far as the eye can see.

It is difficult for a newcomer to sort out these towns, for their names are interchangeable inventions and their physical arrangements seem almost identical — the beach in front, the bay with its ferry dock and the rack of wagons behind, a wide east-west walk named Midway or Central as a connective boulevard. Yet there are clear and significant differences between the communities, and as residents explain with pride, it is the differences that give them their sense of identity and Fire Island its amazing universality. Although they may reflect the cumulative legacy of architects, entrepreneurs and earlier residents, they are expressed, too, in style, spirit and social ritual, in the tennis whites required in Point O'Woods, in

the sundown drinks called Sixish in Fair Harbor, in the bouncers in the bars in Ocean Beach.

Clarifying these differences is everyone's perpetual preoccupation. "Kismet is tattoos and cigarettes rolled in shirt sleeves; Davis Park is boaters from Long Island," a young woman who has a house in Dunewood offers. "I love Saltaire, but I'd probably detest anywhere else," a lawyer on the dock sums up, mentioning that its tennis sign-ups are Byzantine and that an event at its yacht club is "like wearing a pair of old shoes." "We go to Ocean Bay Park because you can barbecue there," a young man who works in the garment industry explains. Walking along the beach for a mile or two with an eye to houses, beach games, bathing suits, even the recently arrived can sense territorial changes.

EVERYONE ON FIRE Island has an opinion about Ocean Beach, because sooner or later everyone has to go there for one reason or another. Sitting at the center of the hamlets, Ocean Beach is the effective capital, an incorporated village with an elected mayor, a court system, an islandwide elementary school (actually located in the two-block-wide satellite community named Corneille Estates next door), two churches and a public green. In the winter, it houses a sleepy old-fashioned settlement of a hundred people who socialize at the firehouse and on Sunday send a delegate across the bay for bagels and newspapers. (The winter population is about 258.)

In the summer, Ocean Beach accommodates the island's largest population; the summer people arrive by the tens of thousands and pack in bunches into the assortment of small middle-class houses with names like Tax Shelter and Ditty Box. More than half the bars and restaurants on Fire Island are found in Ocean Beach, as well as goods and services — hardware, beachware, lumber, video games, appliance service, bait and tackle, boarding houses, a movie house — which means that the town is a magnet for many people and a nightmare for others, its crush of young groupers and day-trippers threatening to obscure its theatrical beginnings, its family-oriented, democratic nature.

Ocean Beach is the town that was beloved by Fanny Brice, Billy Rose, George Gershwin, John Garfield, I. F. Stone, Carl Reiner and Mel Brooks; where Marilyn Monroe visited Lee Strasberg and said, "What a lovely place this is — it's got water all around it"; where Wolcott Gibbs, The New Yorker's drama critic, edited the newspaper and wrote a collection of short stories, "A Season in the Sun," which later became a Broadway play. "I guess I really like it here better than any place in the world," thinks one of his characters, "and for the moment his delight in Fire Island, in this one place where life could be slowed to the almost forgotten tempo of childhood seemed as much as he could bear."

Gibbs's newspaper, The Fire Islander, has evolved into the weekly Fire Island News now, which is edited by Ildiko Trien, a Hungarian-born poet-actress-talk-show-host who is known locally as the Hungarian Hurricane for her controversial and ubiquitous presence in island affairs. Trien, who is a crusader, worries in print about the future of Fire Island, and she worries about the rowdiness in Ocean Beach. It is a different town by day and night: before 8 or 9 in the evening, it is the friendly old bohemia where young families eat ice cream or Rachel's cookies on storefront steps and older women in exotic hats stroll arm in arm admiring big dogs and sleeping babies; after 11, it is a party town of groupers, aged 22 to 25, who have come for the fun and ease of drinking in a place without cars and with 13 bars within an eighth-of-a-mile walk.

Craig Newmark and Rory Nichols, who went to high school together in Dix Hills, L.I., and now work in Manhattan, share a five-bedroom house with 24 other half-shares, which means 13 people per weekend. They follow a simple routine: drinking at the Albatross, the Island Mermaid, CJ's and the Grill between 11 P.M. and 4 A.M., basketball on Saturday morning, then the beach at Corneille Estates where there are no restrictions on drinking in public. Nichols mentions an Ocean Beach concoction called rocket fuel, which is made with three liquors. "In 11 years as a fireman and 5 as a cop, I have never seen people drink so much," comments Robert Galoppi Jr., one of 17 police officers in the village. "There is no place like this on earth. They call it Fantasy Island." He says that each weekend scores of summonses are issued for noise, disorderly conduct and sexual offenses like indecent exposure.

Ocean Beach has a long tradition of groupers — friends or strangers bundling together, sharing fractions of rooms and floors. It dates back at least to a cavernous cottage called Bolo Rest, which housed numerous Bolsheviks in the 1940's and has been famous for three decades as the "Land of No." Arthur Silsdorf, who was mayor of Ocean Beach from 1956 to 1978, suggests that all the statutes against noise, bike riding, drinking and eating on public walks and beaches have represented attempts to maintain small-town orderliness in a community that holds as many as 30,000 people in its 18 square blocks on the Fourth of July. Silsdorf, who spent his first summer in a rooming house that is known now as Houser's Hotel, led the fight against Robert Moses and his road as the first president of the Fire Island Association. "We all started as groupers," he says.

LAST YEAR, NEWMARK and Nichols rented a house in Ocean Bay Park, a community that they refer to now as the Wild West, both for its frontier-style parties and its raggedy landscape. With the severe damage to the dunes in March, many of its big oceanfront homes sit vacant, still uninhabitable, as ghostly as army tanks abandoned after battle. The rental market has suffered accordingly: with an average half-share going for $1,300 to $1,500, homeowners stand to earn anywhere from $15,000 to $50,000 for a summer lease. Now many of those houses are missing

The drag queen Marlena performing at the Stage Door Canteen in the Pines Community Center, Fire Island Pines. The event raised money for the Gay and Lesbian Community Service Center in New York.

TOP LEFT: FIRE ISLAND TIDE. MIDDLE LEFT: TICE AND KATHLEEN SITZEL COLLECTION. MIDDLE RIGHT: GEORGE FARRELL/OCEAN BEACH HISTORICAL SOCIETY. BOTTOM LEFT: OCEAN BEACH HISTORICAL SOCIETY. BOTTOM RIGHT: WALLY FICKARD/OCEAN BEACH HISTORICAL SOCIETY. ABOVE: JIM KERBIS/THE NEW YORK TIMES.

Judy and Neal Bergman on the beach in Fair Harbor, in front of a dune of debris that used to be a house.

from the listings, and the large grouper constituency has moved on to Ocean Beach or Corneille Estates. In the grocery store near the ferry dock, Allan Whitney, who with his family owns five other stores on the island, voices the frustration of the homeowners who are waiting for permits or sand to build new dunes in which to put their septic systems. "We do feel like outcasts," he says. "And we pay more than our share of taxes."

On the edge of Ocean Bay Park, adjacent to several injured houses, the Fire Island Hotel has new owners and a new look. A former Coast Guard station that was purchased after the 1938 hurricane by Frank Flynn, Ocean Bay Park's most stalwart entrepreneur, it used to be a place where singles could stay cheaply for a night or two while they partied at Flynn's bayfront casino. Now it has a refurbished lodge, a pool and a continental clientele. "We hope it will reflect the changing character of the town," says Gerard Stoddard, the president of the Fire Island Association. "Last weekend, there were French, Germans and Australians here, and a couple who were attending a wedding in Point O'Woods, across the fence."

"THE FENCE" IS the infamous six-foot-tall chain-link fence with barbed wire that was put up in the 1930's to sequester the private community of Point O'Woods from the populist one of Ocean Bay Park. Point O'Woods is to many islanders a genteel version of the Land of No, which has survived in its founding image by force of its rules and restrictions. It is a grand dowager, the oldest community on the island; it was settled in the 1890's as a Chautauqua Assembly, one of the cultural and religious summer camps that flourished in late-Victorian America, and was reorganized in 1898 as the Point O'Woods Association. P.O.W., as residents call it, is less frivolous than the original establishment, which imported trained dogs and monkeys and Japanese jugglers in addition to the celebrated ministers, senators and musicians, and its houses are more permanent than the first Decker Portable Homes, advertised as "easily put up and taken down."

But the imprint is there — cultured, proper and reverent. The original auditorium was broken down long ago for a boardwalk, and an early hotel burned down in 1909. But a 1905 church stands proud, a strong expressive Arcadian cathedral in shingle style, with a new deck to accommodate the spillover from Sunday services, which are always standing room only. Eminent visiting ministers preach each summer, and tennis games on the 11 courts in the community begin only after the recessional.

The church in Point O'Woods is called simply the Church, just as the candy store down the walk, which has a working soda fountain, is called the Candy Store and the stone bench is the Stone Bench, as if they were timeless institutions, which of course they are. The Club, the vast old dinosaur of a hotel that looms up on the ocean like a memory from childhood, is still a relic from the days before airplanes and air conditioners. The houses, weathered, cedar-shingled bungalows with discretely different porches and big Newport-style cottages with cupolas and bays, still number 128. All these structures are monuments to summertime such as upper-class America used to conceive it, and they cannot be altered without approval from the association's board.

Madeleine Johnson, the unofficial custodian of P.O.W.'s past — she founded its historical society and in 1983 published a history of Fire Island — lives in the oldest house on the island, a structure that was carried across the bay by barge in the 1870's to provide a hunting lodge for the Wawayanda Club of Babylon, which sits far back from the shore. "You will notice they weren't fooling around putting houses near the ocean then," she says.

PHOTOGRAPH BY JIM ESTRIN/THE NEW YORK TIMES

In 1912, 'sensible people' could buy a bungalow for $1,800.

eager to share memories, unlike the administrators of P.O.W., who are as wary of outsiders as the old guard in Edith Wharton novels. Johnson arrived soon after the fence went up — "we called crossing that border 'going to Mexico'" — and can delineate families like the Dorrs, the Stearns, the Hanaways, the Dunlops: "They were instrumental in saving the Sunken Forest and perhaps Fire Island, but then everyone thinks he saved Fire Island." Her own grandchildren are fifth generation here.

"Not much has changed here really," Johnson says. The Dorr house was washed away in March, however. It was one of the first four houses built on the ocean-front almost a century ago, and its loss makes a tragic and ironic break in the continuum. Twenty-five years ago, its move back from the beach served as an example of foresight to the community. This year, after having barely weathered the storm in December, the family had filed an application to move it again.

IN SALTAIRE, A HOUSE named Grey Gull went out to sea in March. It, too, was a stalwart old soldier; neighbors say that after the 1938 hurricane it was found floating in the bay. Saltaire has a rich legacy of stories about the storm in which 90 of the town's 150 houses were destroyed and the ocean met the bay.

The early history of Saltaire presents itself as an anatomy of an early New York beach community. The 1912 ad in The New York Times advertised a "children's paradise . . . in a highly restricted colony of outdoor-loving folk. . . . Mr. Family Man, Stop and Think . . . Saltaire Is the Greatest Natural Antiseptic Known," it read. The developers' flyers offered summer homes "for sensible people" — bungalows priced from $1,800 to $3,000 in a boardwalk community that included a casino, private yacht club and general store. By 1917, the 200 new homeowners had incorporated themselves into a village in order to manage their own affairs; they had issued ordinances to ban boarding houses and to request that women wear stockings with bathing suits. It was an era of oil lamps, iceboxes and family bonfires. By 1929, the last of the development lots were sold at auction.

Mike Coffey, the Irish-born carpenter who designed the first development houses, figures in Saltaire history not only as a master builder and a beloved citizen but as an historical marker. A few Coffey houses stand across from the Village Hall complex as showpieces now: the hurricane of 1938 divided town history into a Coffey and a post-Coffey era. It took a decade for Saltaire to rebuild itself after the storm, which reaffirmed its spirit of self-determination. The still tranquil 50's were its golden era; now it is simply "a nice old village," protected from onslaught by outsiders by its lack of restaurants and bars and saved from stuffiness by its renters. Big contemporary beach houses sprawl at the end of private walkways on the bay. Liz Claiborne, David Garth and Geraldine Ferraro are in residence somewhere, but the community still likes to be described by its softball league, a pancake breakfast at the firehouse, the old fisherman on the dock who sings show tunes.

Saltaire is run by consensus, which means that given the number of lawyers, journalists and politicians who have expanded the early ranks of policemen and firemen it is a relentlessly activist town. In response to the recent storms, it has emerged as the island leader; Save Our Seashore, the grass-roots organization founded by residents, is an important instrument of change. The village's mayor, Joel Carr, was a boy in 1938; he remembers what it was like to stand at the ocean and see the bay and how hard the W.P.A. worked to restore the

beach. His theme now is that self-help is the only way to survive the next hurricane. "There are so many layers of bureaucrats that we are lost in a Kafka-like maze of authority," he says. "We have decided we have to go it alone." In May, at a cost of $190,000, the town put more than 10,000 cubic yards of sand back on its beach, a sacrificial berm, and planted 80,000 plugs of beach grass in hopes of conserving the new dunes. The volunteer fire department came to water the seedlings. A week later, the high tide washed out much of the sand.

KEN STEIN AND HIS FOREbears have carried people to Fire Island from Sayville since the 1890's. His great-grandfather, who worked in a boatyard and always welcomed an excuse to get out on the water, took parties over to fish when the big blues were running or hunt when the ducks were migrating or pick holly for Christmas. By the 1920's, his father had initiated a regular service to Water Island, where the White House offered bootleg liquor, and to Cherry Grove, where the hotel that had been fashioned out of the wrecker Jeremiah Smith's old house served shore dinners with fresh vegetables. The family business, which means Ken Jr., his wife, daughter, son and cousins as needed, now own eight boats, a parking lot, repair shipyard, advertising agency, bar and restaurant.

Ferries, of course, are the lifeline to Fire Island. In addition to passengers, food, building materials, medical supplies, newspapers and U.P.S. and Federal Express packages, Stein reports that he has transported Ming vases, with accompanying guards, over to the Pines — "I knew they were real" — and a baby elephant to a Jane and Tarzan party there. From his delivery of housewares alone, he can chart the growth of the island from a simple outpost to a sophisticated retreat: television sets, ice machines, swimming-pool equipment, exotic plants, hot tubs. "In the 50's, the typical island house had a pitcher and a pump, a shower on the deck, tubs heated from tanks on the ceiling," he recalls. "Today, it is a mainland house, with sand instead of grass." From a lifetime observing shipboard behavior, he can philosophize on the fine distinctions between the 17 towns. "I can even tell you where people are going when they walk down the street in Sayville." He has a lingering fondness for Water Island — he sells newspapers directly off the boat there — but his favorite community is Cherry Grove, which he describes as one big stage, filled with friendly, tolerant people.

> Auden called Cherry Grove 'Pleasure Island,' the 'outpost where nothing is wicked/But to be sick or sorry.'

THE FIRST VIEW OF THE white rococo towers of the Belvedere in Cherry Grove, rising above the weathered wood of dockside, makes a lasting impression. Since it was built by John Eberhardt in the 1950's, it has remained, in spirit and lore, the central monument in America's oldest gay settlement, which dates from the 1920's. Eberhardt, who was a scenic designer by trade and has built more than 50 houses in the community, each with at least a touch of the Belvedere's whimsy, is its largest landowner now. He created his masterpiece with architectural bits and pieces he had salvaged from old estates or constructed himself. With the help of his adopted son and lover, Craig, he has been perfecting it ever since, finishing its surfaces with trompe l'oeil marble and fresco, adding gargoyles and finials and elaborate new spaces.

The place, a labyrinth of seductive spaces, is arranged around Eberhardt's own domain, which includes a double-height living room with crystal chandeliers, tiger rugs, grand piano, classical statuary and second-story galleria. In the garden court, a newly acquired 18th-century Italian casting of the "Apollo Belvedere" presides over the live scene of well-muscled young men idling in the hot tub and pool. From a large terrace on the bay, the coast of the mainland is an illusory line in the distance.

The Belvedre is Eberhardt's lifetime achievement, a Venetian fantasy. It is not difficult to conjure up the parties that have transpired here over the years and still do, Dionysian dress-up pageants with casts of thousands. This year, a benefit Toga Tea in August is advertised on lampposts, but in the 1950's, an invitation to the Belvedere was like a key to the city. In those days, the Grove was a primitive place — it had no electricity — but it already had a tradition of hospitality. Oscar Wilde had stayed at the Cherry Grove Hotel; in the late 1930's, Natalie Murray, Janet Flanner and W. H. Auden and his circle frequented the bar and dance hall of Duffy's Hotel; in the 50's, the popular place was the Sea Shack, where the social event known as high tea was first introduced.

In establishments like these, gay life became increasingly public and exotic; the famous patrons defined new eras in Grove history. Now social arenas like the Ice Palace, a large disco-bar known for its drag queens and theme weekends — leather in May, lesbians in September — or Cherry's, a comfortable flag-bedecked dockside shanty where the community celebrates sundown, are their legacy.

Cherry Grove is still at heart a small bohemian town, with some 200 modest wooden houses that have names like the Tulle Shed and Oedipus Wrecks and a core of locals who gather in the evening around the piano at Cherry's. The Grove is proud of its diversity and history and the annual day of volleyball against the Suffolk County Police — the Grovettes versus the Copetties. But in summer, the Grove is a blatantly commercial operation — Auden called it "Pleasure Island," the "outpost where nothing is wicked/But to be sick or sorry." While most local residents avoid the Miss Fire Island contest at the end of summer, some of them like the weekend party scene, however calculated or campy — Cherry's is celebrating a 10th anniversary this year and adding a dog show ("Strut Your Mutt"), fashion show and Bad Hair Day to its many other events.

The center of the Grove, nestled down low just off the harbor, goes all night; it glows like a theme park or an adventure land. The boardwalks are full of pleasure-seeking tourists from all over America and Canada, cross-dressers and beautiful boys and affectionate couples. The new strobes and smoke machine at the Ice Palace create a nether world where glamorous young lesbians act out aggressively and older queens preside at the bar. The Meat Rack, the wooded cruising zone between the Grove and Fire Island Pines, is once again a sexual playground, the place to go for a casual encounter after the beach or late at night.

When Grovers talk about their neighbor the Pines, they usually recite something like "The Pines is pretty but the Grove is fun" or mention "pine clones" or "fur-lined closets." But the spirit of competition is largely playful now. Water taxis travel back and forth between the two predominantly gay communities; on the Fourth of July, ferries full of Grovers in high drag, the Pope, Archbishop and Homecoming Queen and her Prince among them, cross the water for the annual "Invasion of the Pines."

WITH ITS THREE-SIDED dock, its waterfront cafe-bar, and its assembly of big yachts, the harbor at Fire Island Pines looks like a stage set for a European resort. Flats of annuals spill out of the florist shop; two young men with tight neat bodies walk by with their weekend duffels and shirts hung on a pole suspended between their shoulders. The harbor's floral borders are carefully planted and meticulously maintained.

Beyond the harbor, too, the Pines does not look at all like other island settlements. The largest community in all but population, with 600 houses and 200 swimming pools, it runs a full mile from east to west; from north to south, its boardwalk rolls dramatically over the secondary dunes. On the eastern end, there is a complex of 100 cooperative apartments hidden in the pines; along the water, big modern-architect houses are closed behind tall ornamental gates, deer fencing and se-

The island is only a few thousand feet wide, but it is narrower now than a year ago.

MAP BY THE NEW YORK TIMES

curity systems; almost everywhere, shade trees, flowers and bamboo.

Real-estate values in the Pines compare favorably with Beverly Hills; they fell in the 80's with the first wave of AIDS, but they haven't been affected very much by the winter storms. There are only a few examples of the bungalows from the early 50's that replaced the squatters' tents in the area, just as there are only a few direct memories of the original gay community that emerged in the 50's, a "new-class enclave" that was "young, affluent, enlightened and breezy in both attitudes and style," as Midge Decter, a resident then, described it in her famous essay "Boys on the Beach."

John Whyte, who was a successful model when he arrived in the Pines in the late 50's and now owns practically the whole town, can sketch a brief chronology of stars that suggests a social history: Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton; Montgomery Clift, who visited the Pines the summer he died; Tuesday Weld, Andy Warhol and Steve Rubell, Calvin Klein (who left in the mid-80's), Jerry Herman, Tommy Tune, Robin Byrd and Madonna, who visits her brother. Whyte, who has classic blond, square-jawed good looks, serves high tea to capacity crowds on the upper deck of the Pavilion, his bar overlooking the harbor; below, he has added a cavernous disco, decorated with mirrors and crystal chandeliers with blue and purple lights. Looking back on the late 60's, he recalls how there were group dances with women then, because it was illegal for two men to be together. From the 80's, he recounts sadness and memorial services.

Whyte is also president of the Pines Conservation Society, which this year is planning a gala fashion show around his pool to raise money to rebuild the dunes. Summer can be measured out in benefits: the Coming Out Party that opened the season with an auction to raise money for Lyme disease research; the Twice in a Blue Moon party for the Lambda Legal Defense Fund; the Morning Party on the beach in August for the Gay Men's Health Crisis. But the most

Queuing up for the Island Mermaid, a restaurant and nightspot in Ocean Beach.

high-toned parties are private, celebrated in houses staffed by houseboys where dinner begins at 11 and doesn't end until it's time to dance. "I cooked here with David Bouley last night," one resident lets drop, describing a mocha crème brulée.

Alan Brockman, who as head of the Property Owners' Association is the effective mayor of the Pines, lives in a house filled with the art of friends like Lowell Nesbitt and surrounded by a landscape with a waterfall. He shows off the community like a practiced diplomat: the incongruously luxe grocery store, with its lobster tank, crab cakes and vegetarian rolls to go; the seaplane landing; the community center, housed in a comfortably plain old Coast Guard station; the beachfront houses flying flags. He also shows off old friends like Rita and Jack Lichtenstein, who brought up two children here — "We're in all the plays," Jack offers congenially — and recent arrivals like Barbara and Marvin Gilston, who have built an imposing post-post-modern house on the bay. Pines homeowners are almost equally divided between homosexuals and straights now, although about half those houses are rented, mostly to gays.

The Pines is one of the youngest settlements on Fire Island, but it's been there long enough to evolve its own culture. It has its own flag, its social schedule, its aura of active sex and elegant style. It is "strictly *crème de la crème*," as a character describes a similar community in Terrence McNally's "Lips Together, Teeth Apart." It feels like a sheltered place, a strange utopia. The fact that Frank O'Hara was killed by a jeep on the beach in 1966 is still disturbing. "There is no place like this in the world," says Bob Howard, a real-estate broker.

EVERYONE AGREES that the winter of 1992-93 will figure prominently in the annals of Fire Island. Despite the volleyball and long sunsets and kegs of beer, last winter is still felt. "You make do with what you have, I guess," a young woman offers, watching her children scamper around the pilings of houses wrecked by the storms. Homeowners are still reconstructing their landscapes; although most of them had Federal flood insurance and were reimbursed for losses, many are still waiting for permission to rebuild. "What the D.E.C. [Department of Environmental Conservation] spent repeatedly flying over our property trying to catch people doing illegal work is a multiple of what it would have cost to have examined and expedited our permits," Adam Rose, a resident of the Pines, sums up, confronting the skeleton of a swimming pool he wants to repair.

Inevitably, in the aftermath of the storm and with a still-ailing economy, the real-estate market has suffered and the houses have slipped in value, from the $100,000 bungalow in Ocean Bay Park or Kismet to the $800,000 beach house in Saltaire or Seaview and the million-dollar property in the Pines. Beach houses represent larger investments than they did 20 or 30 years ago. "We are suffering, but we're not on the ropes," says Lee Mehlig, a broker in Saltaire. "There is a real tenacity and feeling of legacy on this island."

People like Ken Stein, who have lived through other serious storms here, try to make comparisons and detect natural cycles that would answer the big question, but in the end, they say that Fire Island stands at a new critical point in its history. The Fire Island News reports that the National Hurricane Center has predicted increases in both storm ferocity and frequency for the coming hurricane season. Gerry Stoddard, president of the Fire Island Association, says that Governor Cuomo now seems to understand that Fire Island is not just an expendable rich man's resort and needs to be rescued. He predicts that the state report will declare an emergency situation.

It has taken many months for politicians and the general public to begin to understand the workings of the ecosystem of the Great South Bay and to grasp the important role that Fire Island's barrier beach plays in protecting the South Shore of Long Island, how its dunes buffer waves and dispel storm energy and how without this line of defense, not only the island but also low-lying Long Island, its homes, institutions and billion-dollar tourist industry could be at risk. Major hospitals, apartment buildings and thousands of houses lie in the flood plain and would have to be evacuated with the higher tides and ocean surf that a breach would bring. In the 1960's, the Fire Island Association erected a billboard on the Montauk Highway that read: "If Fire Island goes, you'll be underwater here." Again the association is saying that without its dunes, Fire Island is but a fragile sandbar holding back the Atlantic from Long Island.

In the absence of immediate government assistance, Fire Island has begun to address beach renourishment on its own. Several communities have already hired coastal experts; one is investigating the installation of concrete reefs offshore to conserve sand. The association is trying to establish an erosion control district that will facilitate ocean dredging. Environmental controls often frustrate the efforts of once-ecologically sensitive homeowners as they find that they can't restore beaches where the endangered piping plover nests and they can't dredge sand from just anywhere in the ocean. Everyone agrees, however, that the restoration of Fire Island beaches will require commitment, interagency coordination and an overall plan.

Irving Like, the attorney for the association who was instrumental in drafting the legislation for the Fire Island National Seashore, proposes reactivating a dusty piece of Congressional legislation from 1960 that authorized building a system of 20-foot dunes,

(Continued on page 50)

PHOTOGRAPHY: JIM ESTRIN/THE NEW YORK TIMES

FIRE ISLAND

(Continued from page 34)

broad beaches and groins from Fire Island Inlet to Montauk Point to preserve the Long Island coast. It is the delay in executing this plan and what activists have called the state's "retreat from nature" that are held responsible for the breach of Dune Road at Westhampton Beach last winter, which has now become a half-mile-wide inlet and a multimillion-dollar public problem. "You don't run from nature, you learn from it," says Like, who was instrumental in halting construction of the Shoreham nuclear plant. "Sand is a resource and a mineral in the public trust. If it were gas or oil that we were losing, you can be sure the Federal Government would be out there trying to conserve it. Sand is gold in terms of Fire Island."

With the hurricane season officially only a month away, the Fire Island Association is worried about time. Stoddard hopes that the state's logistical decisions will be made this month and that the Army Corps of Engineers will be working on the beach by September at the very latest, but he says "even that in shooting dice."

Coastal geologists like Jay Tanski, who works with the New York Sea Grant Program, see reason for concern but not for panic. The western end of Fire Island is axially stable, he says; its eastern end is dynamic, which means it is gradually migrating northward. His frame of reference is 50 to 100 years, however. While he warns that a barrier island is subject to natural changes like migrations or the formation of inlets, summer people worry that the island will be underwater in a decade — or less. "The ocean is unforgiving," Tanski concedes, arguing that the only way to minimize storm damage before it occurs is a management policy with both continuity and flexibility: "You can't start something and not finish. But you also can't expect to solve problems with a project that has a distinct beginning and end."

Park rangers are more philosophical about a course of action. David Griese, for example, who began in the Park Service as a dock boy in Watch Hill in 1967 and is the east district ranger now, is sympathetic to homeowners, but he also notes that "the beach comes and goes, especially when you don't have a point of reference like a house." Many people think the rangers would not mind if the whole island reverted to wilderness. Rangers think a lot about endangered species and ecology and the human spirit, these people say, and talk about faith in the future the way Al Gore does.

At the far eastern end of Fire Island, there are only one or two houses left in the wilderness area to attest to the small squatters' colonies that were once there, and they will be gone soon, leaving behind eight miles of uninhabited beach and ancient dunes, some 40 feet tall, the highest on the island, a landscape that must resemble that of the 17th or 18th century. Dick Barnett, who is the mounted ranger for the district, can point out all the old breaks in the barrier and all the imminent ones, too. At the spot known as Old Inlet on the map, he says, "Any betting man would put a buck on the fact that that inlet will be back." At another near-breach, he climbs a foreshortened dune and walks back across the long flat overwash. "I worry about the fall," he admits. "And after that, who knows?" ■

Brown Tide: The Bay Killer

By Patricia McCullough

Fire Island and Long Island are hosts to at least one unwelcome visitor this summer.

It comes and goes as it pleases. It reproduces rapidly, thriving, exploding, killing, then suddenly vanishing. It has scientists and researchers baffled.

It is the Brown Tide, thelocal environment's branch of the Global Red Tide, and despite budget cuts it is open for business. In fact, the Brown Tide business is booming.

Brown Tide is the term given to the huge, troublesme algae masses, made up of one-celled microscopic phyloplankton, Aureococcus anorexefferas. The first outbreak of Brown Tide in the previously pristine waters around Long Island occurred in 1985, and with the exception o a 1987 - 1989 hia tus, these dis tress ing algal bloom have haunted loca waters every suc ceeding summer This Brown Tide is particularly alarming because it devastates the rich marine ecosystem of Long Island and muddies the Bay to a dark coffee brown. With its choking, unattractive "tides," the algae severely threatens Eastern Long Island's tourism and its $2 million a year scallop industry.

Why Brown Tide occurs is still a mystery. Scientists are puzzled at what the Brown Tide eats, what causes it to spread, what role environmental factors,such as weather play, or why no other larger organism has come along to consume it.

Researchers believe the tiny organism endures the winter by sinking to the bottom of the bay. In this dormant state, algae has been measured in concentrations of more than 100,000 cells per milliliter in waters as cold as 32 degrees. The algae feeds on nitrates and phosphates and during the early summer months an exuberant algal growth occurs and appears as slimy brown scum on the water. Current research performed at Stony Brook University and the Suffolk County Environmental Division support the theory that unusually dry conditions during the early spring with a severe drop in rainfall seem to promote the Brown Tides. The algae prefer the high salinity and decreased water circulation resulting from the lack of rain and high inlet ridges. Scientists, like Dr, Nuzzi,are attempting to determine exactly what environmental factors combine to aid an algae "bloom," but they have not pinpointed one cause to the frustrating algae puzzle.

Whatever the origin, this algae bloom causes a variety of extremely detrimental effects upon the marine life of Long Island. Brown Tide blocks the sunlight upon the surface of the water, prohibiting photosynthesis that is essential for the growth of underwater grasses. These grasses are needed for the protection of juvenile shellfish and finfish, such as the Northern puffer, weakfish and bluefish.

The resulting decreases rob predatory animals such as lobsters and crabs of their food. Some lobsters, caught this summer by fishermen were choked and rotted because they had algae in their gills.

Perhaps, the most visibly affected though, are the scallops. Brown Tide interferes with the life cycle of the developing larvae by preventing it from getting the nutrients necessary to support life, and they die of starvation or malnutrition. The undigestable algae have succeeded in pushing out the scallop's normal foods.

Scientists have not yet found the recipe that will enable them to cook up a cure for Brown Tide which, in previous summers, has destroyed 85% of the scallop population. In the meantime, two major scallop trans planting efforts have been undertaken in a desperate attempt to salvage the suffocated scallop beds.

These efforts by the Long Island Green Seal Committee and the New York Sea Grant Extension Office have been successful in rejuvenating the devestated scallop crop, but fishermen are concerned by expectations of an even smaller crop this summer, perhaps wiping out a potential $ 1 billion industry.

This uncontrollably scarce harvest is expected to result in a decrease in full-time fishermen, simply because the profession is no longer profitable enough.

Fortunately, although there were severe algae blooms in 1985-1987 there "has been no evidence of Brown Tide in the Great South Bay this Summer," said Dr. Nuzzi, a scientist at the ecology office of the Suffolk County Health Services Department. Unfortunately, there has been a discoloration in the waters of Eastern Moriches Bay, an inlet proximate to Fire Island. Due to the curious nature of this algae, an absolute reassurance that no Brown Tide will reach Fire Island cannot be given. Water samples taken so far this summer have shown no traces of the Brown Tide Algae.

Dr. Nuzzi explains that Brown Tide, unlike the global Red Tide, is not toxic to humans. Besides being unsightly, Brown Tide can be dangerous to humans because it causes the water to become dense and it becomes very difficult to new bathers.

Before 1985, Brown Tide had never been seen in these waters. Now it affects the appearance and water quality of much of the ecosystems along the south shore . Research by scientists in New York State and Suffolk County, totaling more than $400,000, is continuing. Tests are run on Brown Tide cultures at the Marine Science Research Center of the State University at Stony Brook. Researchers attempt to determine what factors, such as pollution, viruses, or weather combine to cause Brown Tide. Scientists are looking into every aspect of algal blooms, from their nutritional requirements to their growth behavior. So far there is no simple answer, and one can only hope that the murky Brown Tide will realize it is a very unwelcomed visitor, and leave as suddenly and mysteriously as it came.

Fire Island

Proposed Route of the Fire Island Railroad

Bicycle Railroad Car "Rocket" which ran between Bellport and Patchogue.

you, there have been those who did not see that state as either natural or desirable. Most people know that Robert Moses was set on building a four-lane highway down the spine of Fire Island, but Frederick W. Dunton and his grand scheme have been forgotten. And just who was this man?

Frederick Dunton was a nephew of Austin Corbin, a dynamic developer who took over the bankrupt Long Island Railroad on New Year's Day, 1881, and reinvigorated it. He ran the railroad until his death.

ferries. We should, instead, be taking the train to Bellport and thence across the Great South Bay to a terminal where Bellport church is now. Disembarking with our luggage we should take the train west with the porter calling, "All aboard for Watch Hill, Davis Park, Water Island, Barrett Beach, Fire Island Pines, Cherry Grove, Sailors' Haven, Point O' Woods, Ocean Bay Park, Seaview, Ocean Beach, Robbins Rest, Atlantique, Dunewood, Fair Harbor, Saltaire, Kismet and the Fire Island Light. 'Board!" Should the spirit take you, you could also journey eastward through Smith Point until the line looped back across the Bay to rejoin the main line at Westhampton.

Of course in Dunton's day, few of these communities were established, but, in addition to the life saving stations stretched from Smith Point through Lone Hill to the lighthouse, there were hotels in Water Island, Cherry Grove and what is now Kismet as well as the Chautauqua Assembly at Point o' Woods. In the

Dunton took the money and built a two-mile stretch of railroad linking Bellport and Patchogue with a generating station at the end of the line. It consisted of a heavy wooden framework with a single rail on top and another rail running along the ground. The experimental car, named The Rocket, doubtless after Stevenson's famous first steam engine, was built in New York. In one of the best publicity stunts ever, it was delivered to Patchogue perched on a wagon drawn by six yoke of powerful oxen. Many who saw it were so caught by graceful looks of the revolutionary contraption that they bought stock in the company.

A dispatch in the Patchogue Advance in February of 1894 says, "A large number of people came out from New York and Brooklyn last Friday to inspect and take a ride on the bicycle car. Stage load after stage load came down from Patchogue, and about twelve stages rattled up to the Hagerman depot on one day to meet a large company of men who came with

15/ Railroad...

Mr. Dunton to ride on the bicycle road"

All those notables and the curious who had the courage and the where withal to take the two mile ride should have been well pleased. The trip was smooth and quiet and without the smoke and cinders that inevitably accompanied steam transport. More than that, and absolutely remarkable for the time, "The Rocket' lived up to its name. It reached a speed in excess of sixty miles an hour. But if those early riders were impressed, the good folk of Bellport and Patchogue were less prepared to risk their necks at such an ungodly speed.

Frederick Dunton failed to raise the extra money needed to build tracks closer to the city and, by 1902, the Bellport News reported, "The bicycle railroad which held such glittering promises of rapid transit to New York will soon be only a memory. The framework is about to be torn down. Fast time was made in their experimental runs, but the promoters failed to interest sufficient capital. J.W. Overton has bought the timbers and will bring them down to his lumber yard, there to be utilized for various purposes requiring yellow pine lumber".

Thus died Frederick Dunton's extravagant dream to supplant his uncle and bring rapid transit to both Long and Fire Islands. Our communities remain separated and each has been able to develop and maintain its unique characteristics. Had a couple of big investors supported the dream, however, today there might be a Burma Railroad instead of the Burma Road.

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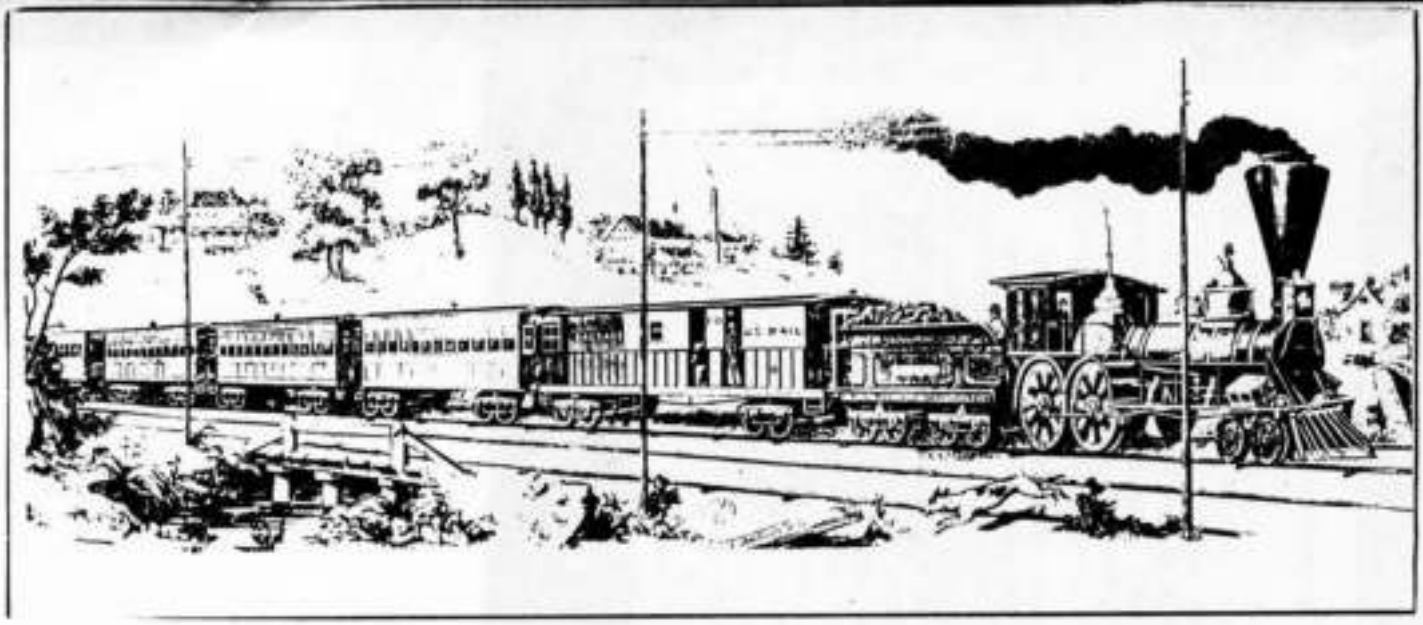

Fire Island

THE STORMY HISTORY OF

FIRE ISLAND STATE PARK

FIRE ISLAND BEACH, FIFTY YEARS AGO

Showing David S. S. Semmis' famous Surf Hotel and one of his Babylon ferries; the lighthouse, the inlet, and, in lower righthand corner, with tower, Commodore Henry Havemeyer's hunting lodge which he called The Armory.

(Courtesy Babylon Leader)

by

CHESTER R. BLAKELOCK

Executive Secretary, Long Island State Park Commission

From the October, 1941

LONG ISLAND FORUM

Reprinted September, 1950

shown most vividly in the accompanying chart:

Date	Total Extension (Ft.)	Average Annual Extension (Ft.)
1825-1834	3660	339
1834-1867	600	18
1867-1873	5025	838
1873-1887	2500	179
1887-1909	2675	121
1909-1911	75	38
1911-1914	1900	638
1914-1924	4800	480
1924-1928	1280	320
1928-1930	850	425
1930-1933	—50	—17
1933-1934	—50	—50
1934-1936	970	485
1936-1937	—600	—600
1937-1938	100	100
1938-1940	1200	600
1825-1940	24,325 (4.6 Miles)	212

The first Fire Island Lighthouse was erected in 1827 on the east side of the Inlet, and remained in that location until 1858 when the existing one replaced it farther west and near the inside shore of the island, possibly because of violent storms clawing at the beach. Accretion was most rapid during the period 1825-1924.

But what about the period prior to 1824?

Capt. Charles Suydam, a former town clerk of Islip, a lifelong bayman, and somewhat of an historian, said that the original William Nicoll patent to a large part of the Town of Islip, confirmed by Governor Dongan in 1683, in the name of the British Crown, extended across Great South Bay making the ocean the southerly boundary. The grant included a number of small islands. In the *Long Island Forum* of April, 1942, Capt. Suydam wrote:

> "We know definitely that much of the Fire Island State Park (now Robert Moses State Park) area existed not at all up to about 1850. As to the Nicoll patent, did it include any part of Fire Island Beach as it exists today? In the light of the following, it is highly doubtful if any part of this area existed at the time the grant was made.
>
> "This may be a bold statement, but consider the physical features of the area in question. Eastward of Point O Woods we find the vegetation to be older, more dense and more varied. As we progress westward we find it to be much younger, less dense and less varied, gradually thinning out to nothing at all as we approach the westerly point of the beach.
>
> "It is extremely doubtful if this particular strip of sand extended in 1683 much farther west than the present site of Point O Woods. Here an inlet known as Huntington East Gut separated it from the beaches to the west and northwest—whose southerly shores were once washed by the Atlantic Ocean."

Capt. Suydam's premise recalls references to the "Seven-Mile Gut" which existed in Colonial times, and that drifting sand linked one island with another until a clearly defined inlet was established. The premise also lends additional credence to the name "Fire Island" deriving from a series of islands — probably four, possibly five—which lay across the then north-south inlet or gut of several miles' width which, through the years, became the almost east-west inlet as we know it today.

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toral reservoir in the mouth of the Inlet to the west of the Jetty, plus a channel connecting the two reservoirs, will be used for the same purpose. When it becomes necessary later, a revetted sand dike will be built northwest of the jetty, and the jetty itself extended 1,000 feet.

The battle to stabilize the Inlet started about 40 years ago with a study submitted to the Federal Board of Engineers for Rivers and Harbors by the Shore Protection Board under the provisions of the Rivers and Harbors Act. Prior to then the Inlet received little attention shoaling, widening, narrowing according to the dictates of tides, currents and wind.

Under the Rivers and Harbors Act of 1905, a study of the Inlet had been authorized with a view to constructing a breakwater. The Engineers reporting to the War Department in 1906 agreed that it was not advisable for the United States to undertake the construction. This was the first study and report on the Inlet by the Federal Government.

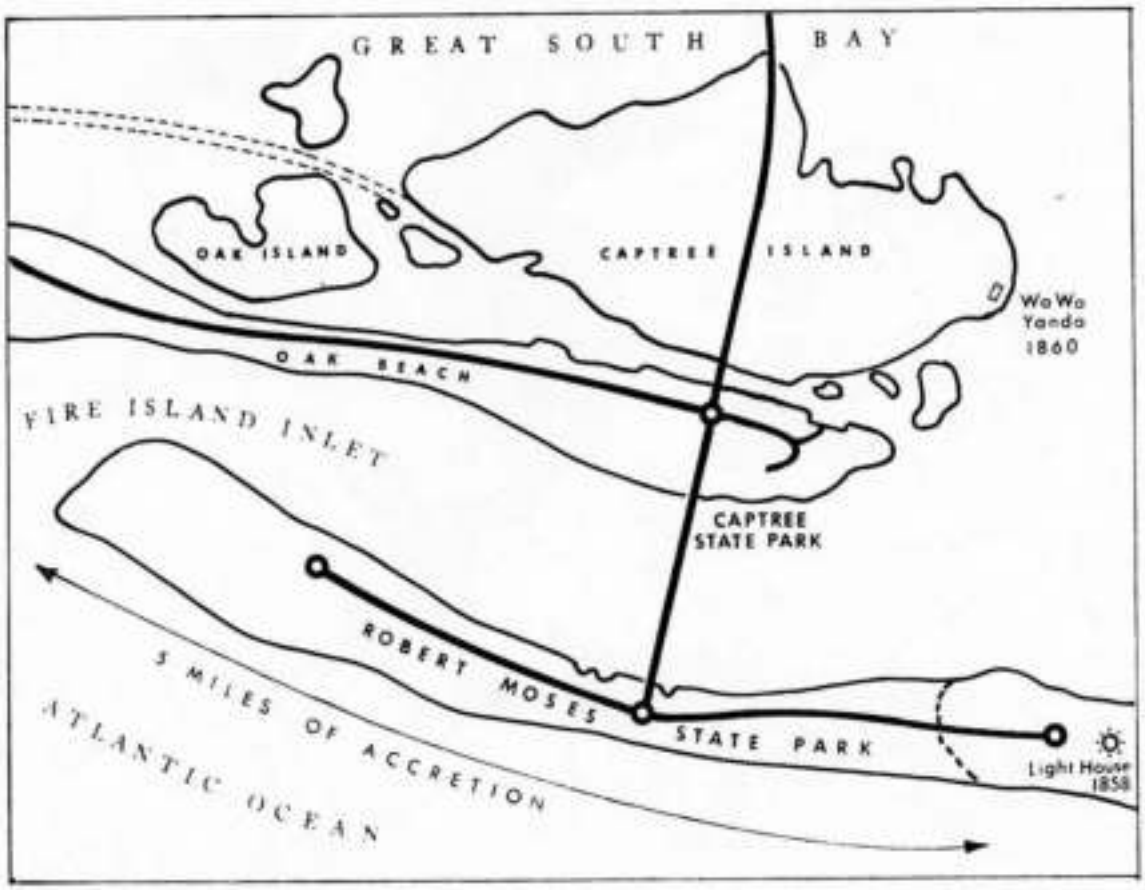
Under natural conditions, the navigation channel across the mouth of the Inlet was about 8 feet deep. Wave action at times reduced the actual available depth by two or three feet. From this it may be seen that crossing the shoal, or bar, was frequently a perilous undertaking considering also that in foul weather the channel could shift overnight.

The U.S. District Engineers, among other things, in 1948 studied the possibility of constructing a new inlet to the east and rejected it. A new inlet, the report stated, "would not be economically justified," adding that "immense changes to nature would occur affecting salinity, tidal regimen, real estate and riparian problems."

The study, completed the same year, is interesting at this time because some discussion of a new inlet has again arisen, in the thought that it might increase the flow of tidal waters into the Great South Bay, provide safer access to the ocean for pleasure boats, improve fishing, swimming, sailing and other water sports, and help reduce pollution.

There is opposition to the new inlet plan by experts who believe the added tidal flow will increase the salinity of the bay waters, and lower the water temperature thereby upsetting the natural balance which may be detrimental to sports and commercial fisheries, to say nothing about the harm it might do the shellfish.

Fire Island history is so closely interwoven with that of the Great South Bay that it would be practically impossible to deal with one alone as an entity. And this is true simply because part of the island in the dim past was part of the inlet. For instance: there is no question about the migration of Fire Island westward a distance of 4.6 miles between 1825 and 1940 when the movement was finally halted with the construction of the Federal jetty at Point Democrat. The migration is



This airview shows how the sand thumb appears today having been moved by Army dredges from the Fire Island shore to the Oak Beach side, creating a protective barrier for the security of the houses in the community of Oak Beach.

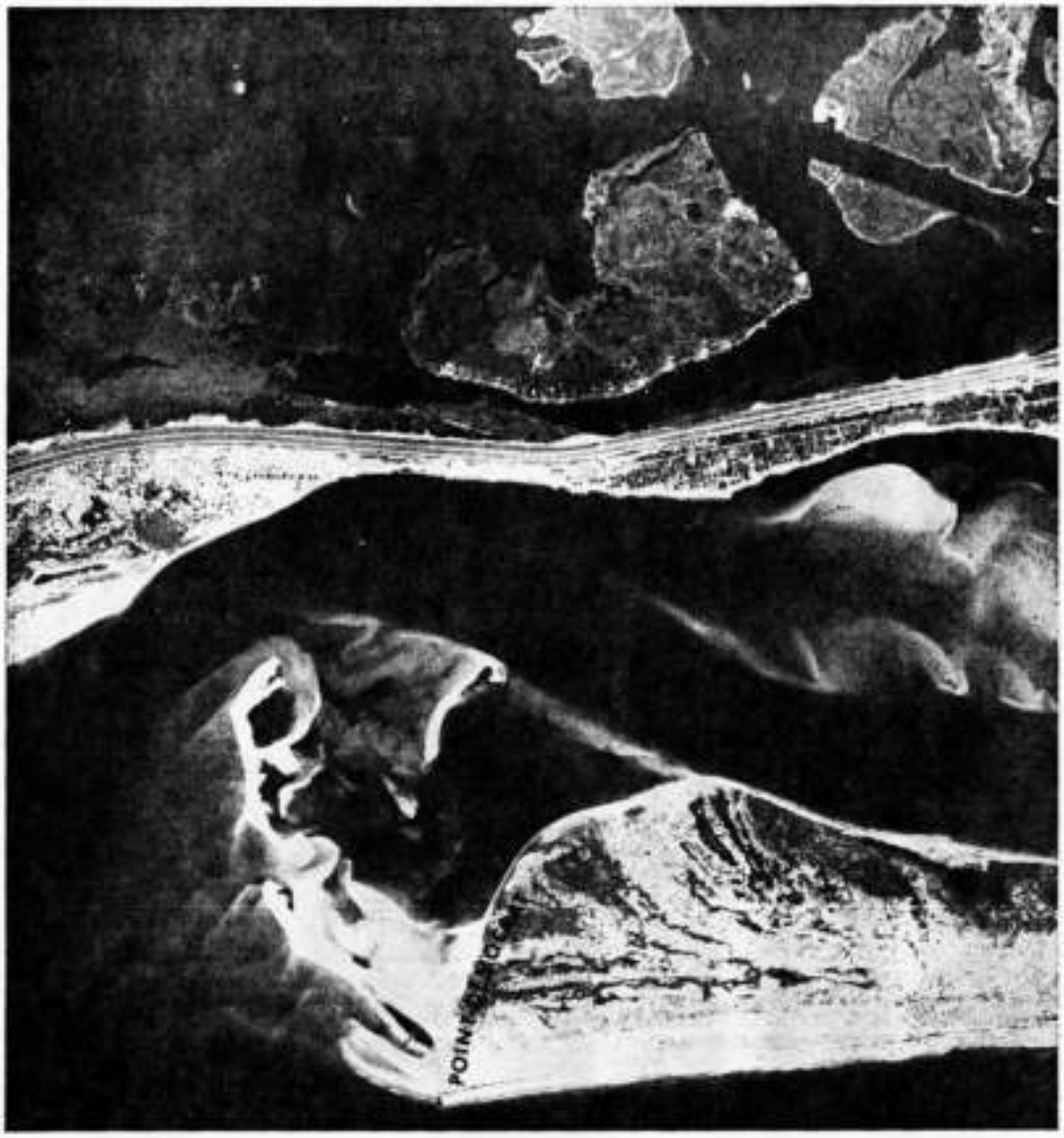
protect the shore from Fire Island Inlet to Jones Inlet under a plan which provides for dredging the Fire Island Inlet shoals opposite the western part of Oak Beach to relieve the pressure of the tidal current against Oak Beach, to provide a deposition area for littoral drift and to obtain fill material for the feeder beach and for Oak Beach. The plan anticipates three dredging operations over a project life of 15 years involving a total quantity of about 6 million cubic yards of material."

Of the three phases of work planned by the Federal Government, two have been carried out. In 1959 a new channel was dug through the mouth of the Inlet where accretion was at its heaviest. The cut was in a northeasterly-southwesterly direction. A dike was built outward at Oak Beach, and finally the old channel close to the beach was sealed. The purpose was to divert the disastrous scouring action on Oak Beach. The entire dredging operation entailed removal of 4 million cubic yards of material most of which provided fill for Oak Beach and Cedar Beach. It effectively relieved tidal pressure against the Oak Beach community, which had already suffered the loss of a number of homes, and which was threatened with wholesale destruction.

The second phase of work in 1964 included dredging a cut closer to the jetty and placing the fill farther west at Gilgo Beach to widen the beach. As in the first phase, this program was in keeping with the original authorization.

Meantime, at regular annual intervals the task of Inlet maintenance was performed by the U.S. Corps of Engineers, thereby assuring a navigable channel.

Phase 3 of the authorized 15-year program is still to be accomplished. It deals largely with the establishment of a deposition reservoir in the Inlet to the north of Point Democrat. The material from this deeply dug area will be used to nourish the area from Oak Beach to Gilgo Beach. In another of its facets, material dredged from a proposed lit-



Fire Island Inlet . . . Airview taken in 1959 shows the long sand thumb on the Fire Island side at Point Democrat as it appeared 11 years ago. The Oak Beach shoreline was being rapidly eroded at that time with the danger of a new inlet breaking across the Ocean Parkway to the inside bay.

"The question of permanent stabilization and maintenance of a navigation channel through Fire Island Inlet is still to be solved. The State dredging is to serve only as a stopgap. There is only one logical way to cope with this problem and that is under the orderly process of Federal procedure through the Corps of Engineers and the Rivers and Harbors Act of Congress."

Reason for the request was given as follows: After noting that the jetty began its work of stabilizing the inlet channel and making it safe for navigation, the report stated:

"The elements, however, took a hand. To begin with, at the time the huge structure was completed, the effects of the 1938 hurricane had not yet been erased from the channels and beaches in the vicinity of the Inlet. On top of this came the hurricane of 1944. This was followed by a succession of severe storms in the Winter of 1944-45 culminating in November and December of 1945 with a series of erosive seas which created new shoals and turns in the tortuous channel."

The recommendation, findings and explanation were included in a letter dated January 3, 1946, and addressed to Col. Clarence Renshaw, then the United States District Engineer with offices on Wall Street, New York City.

In 1956, in a report to Congress, the Army Engineers recommended that:

"A project be adopted by the United States to restore and

Fire Island Inlet

Albert Ruhfel

OVER THE years many theories have been advanced regarding the formation of the barrier protecting much of the south shore of Long Island, possibly the country's finest white sand beach, beyond which lies the continental shelf and the tremendous expanse of the Atlantic Ocean. Nature's factory continuously mills rock into sand which is carried in suspension to near and remote shores providing pleasure, recreation, and relaxation, in one way or another, to the multitudes within easy reaching distance, and beyond.

A natural perpetual motion "machine" fueled by tidal action, ocean current and winds from the four corners of the earth, grinding slow but sure is also responsible for changes in the contour of the shoreline as the unending milling process continues in fair weather, or foul; in tempest, or calm.

Perhaps no better visual evidence and demonstration can be had than at our doorstep—Fire Island, the inlet by the same name, and Jones Beach, together forming so large a sector of the littoral washed, scrubbed, and scoured by the ocean whose fury at times knows no bounds. It seems bent on utter destruction of its handiwork which, not infrequently, in this game of "put and take"—accretion and erosion—it threatens under the name of beach migration, a word prominent in the engineering vocabulary.

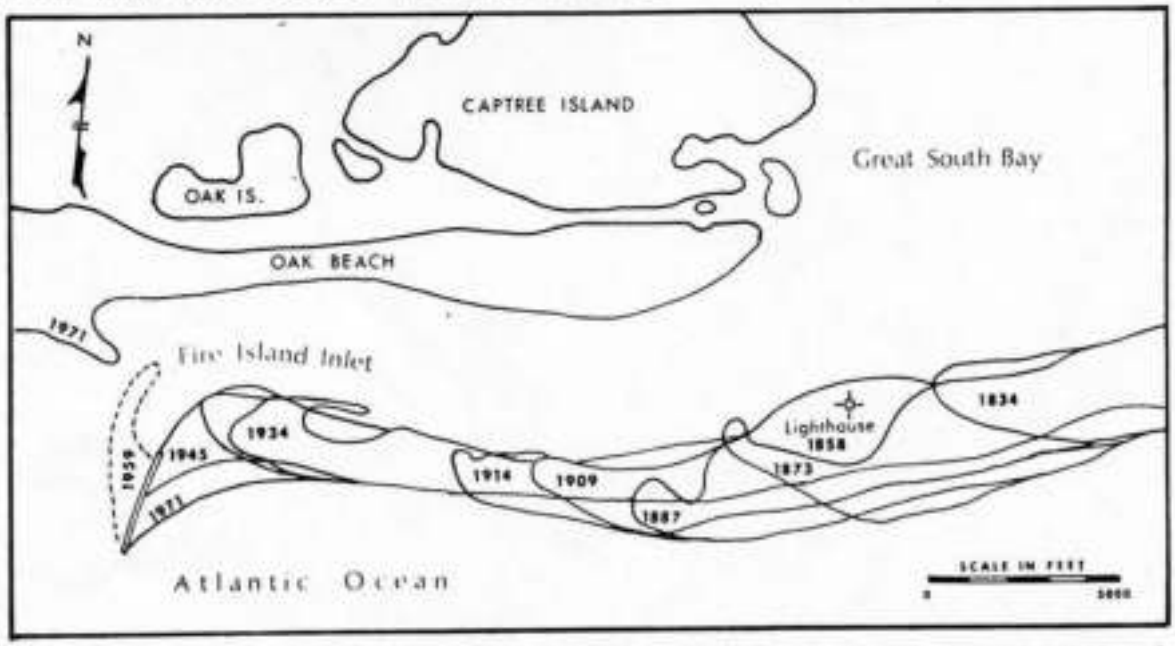
Any account dealing with Long Island south shore must deal with the inlets, or gaps in the outer beach. Fire Island Inlet has come under most intensive study by the U.S. Corps of Army Engineers, and the Long Island State Park Commission which assured itself of the practicability and feasibility of building a park and parkway complex on hydraulic fill 18 feet above high water, before committing itself and the State of New York to such tremendous expenditures in carrying out the plan envisioned by Robert Moses when he was appointed by Governor Alfred E. Smith in the 1920's to head the revitalized Long Island State Park Commission, and the newly organized State Council of Parks.

After the hurricane of 1938, when the ocean practically obliterated the original small beach park on Fire Island, it was decided to rebuild it and its approach road on higher ground, and to halt the westward migration of Point Democrat.

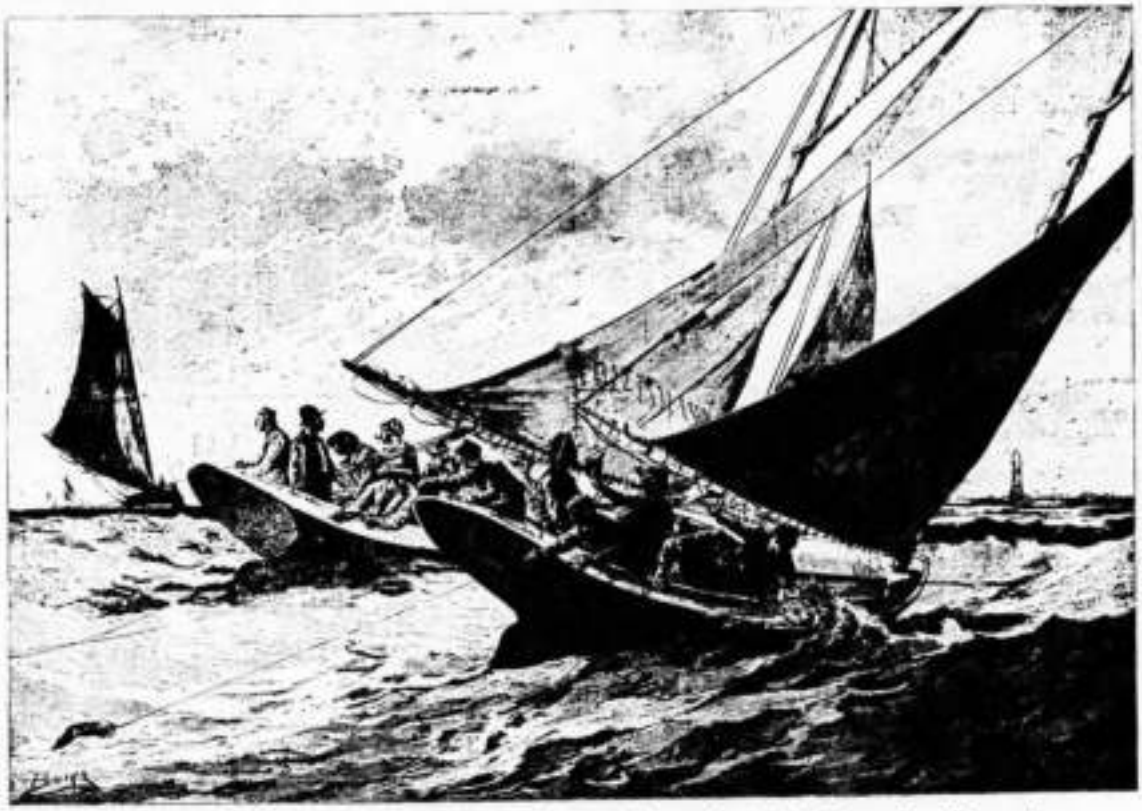
It was realized that this would not be a temporary bout with Nature's powerhouse.

Work aimed at stabilizing the Inlet was actually started in 1939 with the construction by the Army Engineers of a 5,000-foot jetty at Point Democrat. It was believed that the long finger extending seaward would divert sand, in its westward migration, from the constantly shoaling mouth and deposit it on shore between Cedar Beach and Gilgo Beach.

In a 1946 report to the United States District Engineer, the Long Island State Park Commission, the New York State Department of Public Works, and the Suffolk County Board of Supervisors endorsed the findings of its joint engineering committee: Sidney M. Shapiro for the Commission, Joseph J. Darcy for the State Department of Public Works, and Harry T. Tuthill for the County, which follows in part:



The south thumb of sand (shown in dotted line) was removed by Federal dredging in 1959 and deposited on the Oak Beach shore to form the present thumb (marked 1971).



Trolling for Blue Fish in Fire Island Inlet, as drawn by M. J. Burns for Harper's Weekly, issue of July 13, 1889. As this would indicate, Fire Island Inlet has been a favorite fishing locale for a very long period. In pre-Colonial days it was the scene of shore whaling by the local Indians. In recent times it has been especially noted for the spunky bluefish.

About The Author

Albert Ruhfel is a veteran Long Island newspaperman who has reported the developments at Fire Island Inlet for nearly half a century. The publisher and longtime editor of the Babylon Eagle, which served the community directly across Great South Bay from the inlet, Mr. Ruhfel subsequently and for many years was president and editorial director of the Suffolk Consolidated Press, which published eight Suffolk County newspapers, among them the Eagle which it had acquired along with the talents of its owner.

LONG ISLAND FORUM

Robert Moses State Park Water Tower, Fire Island

MAY 1971

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Fire Island State Park was again prominent in the news because of a shipwreck on its shores on the night of March 8, 1941 when the steamship Student Prince II bound for Nova Scotia was driven onto a bar almost directly in front of the new bathhouse. The captain and crew of eight were all rescued by men from the nearby Coast Guard Station but the ship rapidly broke up and was a total loss.

In the early summer of 1941 a stone jetty 4,800 feet long was completed at Point Democrat at the extreme westerly end of the park. This jetty was constructed by the federal government in cooperation with the Long Island State Park Commission and the County of Suffolk in order to arrest the westward accretion of Fire Island and to stabilize Fire Island Inlet. It will also serve as protection to the new park improvements located to the east. Another improvement inaugurated in 1941 was the connection of Fire Island State Park with the mainland by telephone. A public telephone in the bathhouse lobby is now available for the first time in the park's long history for the use of park visitors and boat owners who are out for a cruise or fishing trip of a day or more and wish to get in touch with their homes or offices.

Although Fire Island State Park is still accessible only by water, plans have been made to supplement the present Babylon ferry service with a short boat trip from the easterly terminus of the Jones Beach Ocean Parkway and Captree causeway. The boat basin has already been dredged at this location. It is planned to have the dock, access road and parking field completed in connection with the construction of the Captree Bridge across the Great South Bay from east of Babylon.

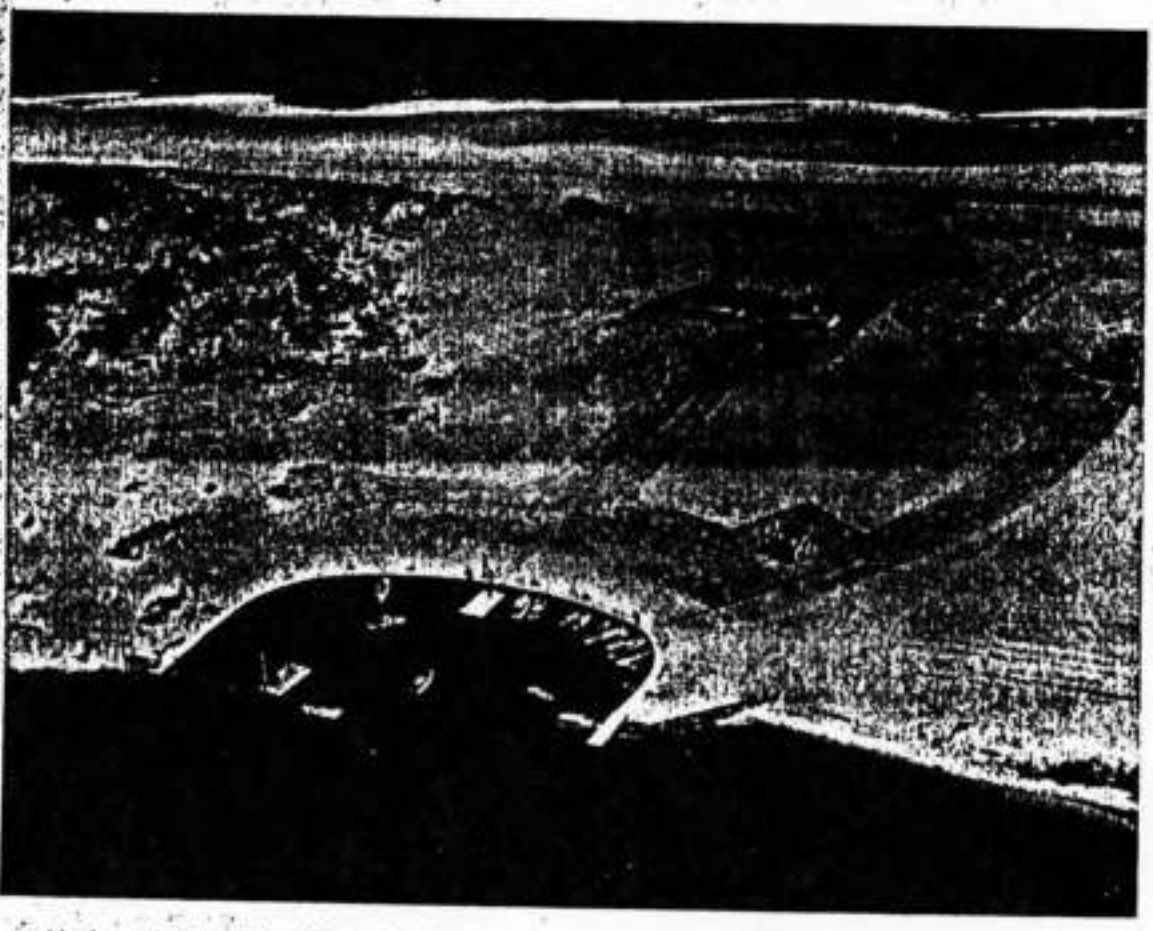
saw nothing but wreckage. Camp Cheerful, which had been closed for the season, had completely disappeared. The sturdy Western Union building which had stood for over fifty years was also gone but several hundred feet away from the building's foundation could be seen pieces of two stories of the old watch tower.

Plans were immediately made for the reconstruction of park facilities but it was found that the old location just east of the lighthouse had been stripped of all its protective sand dunes and would require a huge amount of fill to bring it up to a proper elevation. A new and much more desirable site for these facilities was selected on a high stretch of beach about two and a half miles west of the lighthouse and within the area ceded by the federal government in 1924.

Here was constructed during the following year a modern bathhouse with refreshment and food bar, shelters, play apparatus, superintendent's and State Police headquarters, equipment shop, concrete walks, water supply and sanitary facilities. On the inlet side of the park a large semicircular boat basin was dredged and bulkheaded with steel sheet piling making a sheltered harbor for boats and ferries. These facilities were opened to the public on June 29, 1940.

While the construction of these new facilities progressed a plan was presented by Commissioner Moses to Suffolk County for the rehabilitation and restoration of the entire length of Fire Island beach which had been devastated by the hurricane. The plan provided for the pumping in of a protective hydraulic fill and the construction thereon of a concrete roadway. Part of this proposed plan also included the construction of a bridge across Fire Island Inlet connecting Fire Island with the Jones Beach Ocean Parkway. The inlet bridge was later dropped from the plans because of the extra cost and finally the entire plan of beach restoration as advocated by Commissioner Moses was abandoned by the County Board of Supervisors.

Regular passenger ferry service is maintained from Babylon to Fire Island State Park although the dock which was acquired by the State in 1892 and from which the ferry leaves Babylon was given to the Village of Babylon in 1940 and has been reconstructed.



Airview of Fire Island State Park showing new boat basin and bathhouse which replaced facilities destroyed in the 1938 hurricane. The dark areas adjacent to the walks show the extent of beach grass planting at the time the area was opened to the public in the summer of 1940. Since that time a picnic shelter has been constructed east of the bathhouse.

In 1918 a disastrous fire swept through the park destroying large sections of the boardwalks, the comfort station and shelters. Because of lack of funds only temporary repairs were made. In its 1923 annual report the Fire Island State Park Commission reported that "during the past summer, owing to inadequate appropriations, the boardwalks became dangerous" and that "owing to deterioration, through lack of sufficient and timely repairs, it is not possible to properly conduct this park". The Commission further reported that only because of a transfer to it of $2,000 by the Conservation Commission had it been possible to keep the park open during the season of 1923. The task of keeping the park open to the public was considered a small accomplishment in view of plans advocated by the Commission which included the construction of a large restaurant and two bathhouses and involved the further development of the area at a cost estimated at that time to be over $348,000.

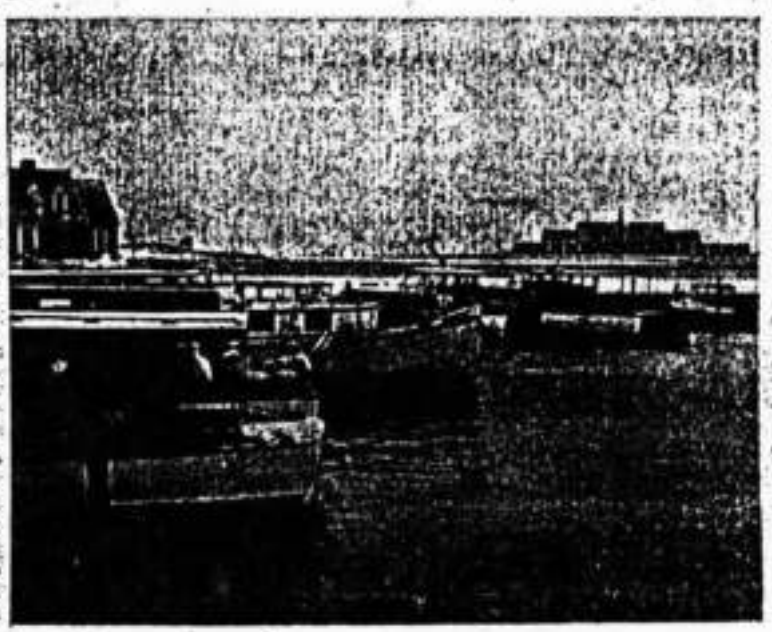
Acting upon the recommendations of Governor Alfred E. Smith, the state legislature created the Long Island State Park Commission in the spring of 1924 as part of a comprehensive state-wide park and parkway program. This Commission, consisting of Robert Moses, Townsend Scudder and Clifford L. Jackson, succeeded the Fire Island State Park Commission as to jurisdiction over Fire Island State Park and was authorized and directed to acquire, improve and operate additional state parks and parkways on Long Island.

One of the first official acts of Commissioner Moses, as President of the newly formed Commission, was to seek a grant from the federal government of some 600 acres of land that had formed by accretion to the west of the federal lighthouse reservation. In 1825 the lighthouse site had been acquired on the westerly tip of Fire Island and the original lighthouse structure constructed only a short distance east of the point, but during the succeeding hundred years over four miles of new beachlands were built up to what is now known as Point Democrat. Lighthouse service officials agreed with Commissioner Moses that these extra 600 acres of accreted lands were not needed for lighthouse purposes and necessary legislation was introduced in Congress to authorize the granting of the land to the state for park purposes. The bill was supported by Congressman Robert L. Bacon, endorsed by President Herbert Hoover, then Secretary of Commerce, passed by Congress and signed on June 7, 1924.

Work was immediately started on park improvements. In 1926 a new bathhouse was erected with a capacity of three hundred and fifty, additional shelters were built and many improvements in sanitation and water supply were developed.

In cooperation with Commissioner Moses, the New York City Rotary Club in 1926 erected a crippled boys' camp. The camp, known as Camp Cheerful, consisted of nine cabins, an administration building, storehouse, infirmary, mess hall, helpers quarters, water supply and sanitary facilities and equipment.

Fire Island State Park continued to be visited by an average of 20,000 persons each year until September 21,



View of Fire Island State Park from the new boat basin showing bathhouse and other park facilities which replace those destroyed in the 1938 hurricane.

1938. On that date the now famous 1938 hurricane hit Fire Island with particular force and fury at the developed section of the park just east of the lighthouse. The accompanying wall of water and high gales completely destroyed all park buildings, boardwalks, docks and water supply. Fortunately, because of several days of rain the park was deserted except for the park superintendent, Mr. Henry Herrnkind and his wife. Mr. and Mrs. Herrnkind survived the storm by cutting a hole through the roof of their battered and half submerged cottage. Escaping to the roof they endured the storm hanging on the best they could. When the storm subsided they

the dock. The captain of the *Cephyus* resorted to a steam hose from the ship's boiler. The mob retreated but the *Cephyus* did not dock.

News of these activities was flashed to New York by the telegraph station and there soon arrived in Babylon several companies of the 69th Regiment, New York National Guard, and one company from the 13th Regiment, together with a unit of field artillery. At Fire Island a boat with a battalion of Naval Reservists ready for riot duty took possession of the property. The troops left Fire Island on October 5th but for the duration of the quarantine two deputy sheriffs were stationed at the Babylon dock to prevent the landing of anyone from the station.

The official purchase of the hotel properties was made by the State of New York on March 9, 1893 after the enacting of Chapter 3 of the Laws of 1893 which provided for the reimbursement of $50,000 to Governor Flower and the payment of the balance of $160,000 to Mr. Sammis.

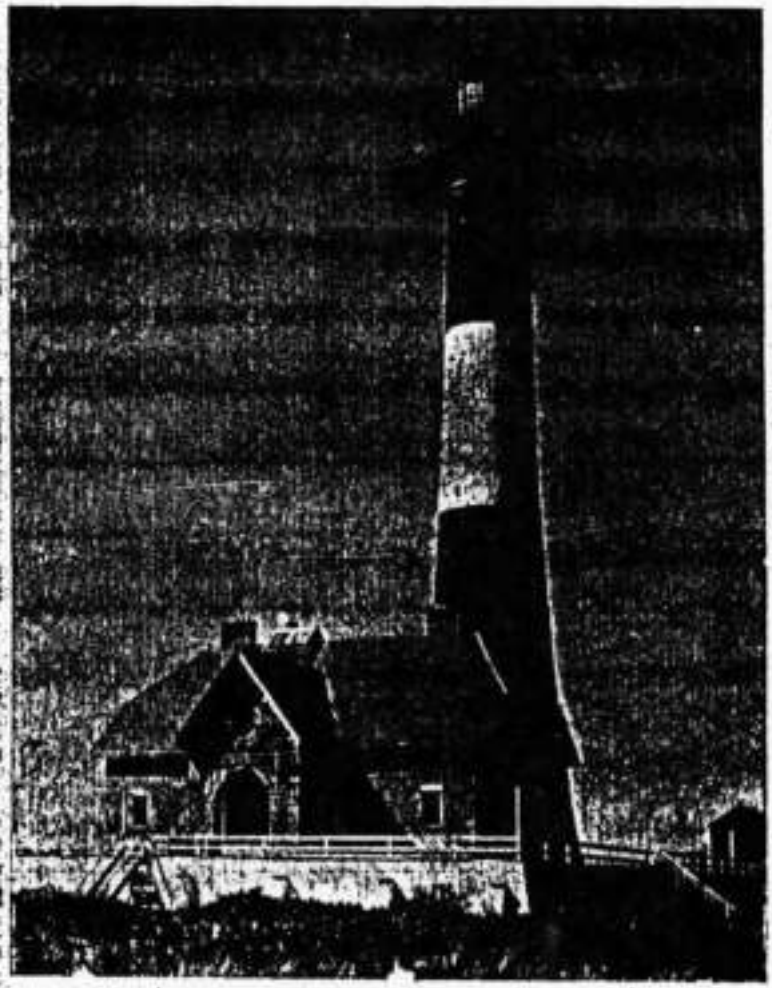
By the summer of 1893 the cholera scare had completely subsided and the following spring the state legislature by Chapter 357 of the Laws of 1894 authorized the Department of Health to lease the Fire Island holdings for hotel purposes. The old Surf Hotel was thereafter operated under lease from the state for several years until major repairs and the falling off of business made it unprofitable.

On May 22, 1908 Governor Charles Evans Hughes signed a bill which had passed the state legislature authorizing the use of the Fire Island reservation as a state park and pursuant to this act he appointed Edward C. Blum, Samuel L. Parrish, Henry W. Sackett, John C. Robbins and John H. Vail as Commissioners of the Fire Island State Park Commission.

Thus it was that the ill wind of a plague-threatened city brought about the establishment of the first state park on Long Island and the only ocean front park in the entire state until the opening of Jones Beach State Park about twenty years later.

The first action taken by the Fire Island State Park Commission was to conduct an auction sale of miscellaneous buildings on the property, most of which were in a dilapidated condition. During severe storms of 1907 the hotel dining hall had been swept off its foundation and other buildings damaged. From the sale of these unsafe buildings the sum of $2,304.66 was realized which together with an appropriation of $5,000 comprised the total funds available for park improvements and operation. With these funds the Commission provided temporary boardwalks and three shelters but were unable to provide any facilities for bathing during the year 1908.

The Commission was untiring in its efforts to obtain adequate appropriations to develop and operate the park. The late Edward C. Blum, former President of the City Art Commission, was particularly enthusiastic and active in behalf of the park. By the time this country entered the World War a small bathhouse on the bay side had been constructed and a comfort station, boardwalks, shelters, dock, water supply system and a few other incidental improvements provided.



The famous Fire Island lighthouse 170 feet high can be seen from twenty miles at sea. This structure, fully completed in 1858 replaced a somewhat smaller light constructed in 1825.

due to the emphasis placed on its fine surf bathing and "the ozonic tonic of the ocean" for those "in need of an ocean voyage but unable to follow the dictates of their physician."

The Surf Hotel withstood the storms and gales of Fire Island for more than three decades when in 1892 the Port of New York became jittery over a cholera scare. Strict watch was kept on all incoming immigrants and passengers from foreign countries. On August 30, 1892 the S. S. *Moravia* from Hamburg arrived in New York Harbor ladened with passengers and because of the scare was forced to remain in quarantine. Several other ships were likewise held up and due to congestion in the harbor the health authorities sought to obtain an isolated spot to hold passengers of these boats who, although not infected with cholera, might have been exposed to it.

In order to meet this need the Boards of Health of both the city and state demanded the immediate purchase of the Surf Hotel on Fire Island as the most logical location for a quarantine station. The state legislature was not in session and there was no money available. James P. Wendell, who was Deputy Comptroller of the State at that time, suggested that if some philanthropic person advanced the purchase price the next legislature might reimburse him. No such person was found so Governor Roswell P. Flower ordered the purchase of the property and gave his personal check in the sum of $50,000 as a part payment on the purchase price of $210,000 for the hotel including about 120 acres of land, dock and incidental buildings at Fire Island and the dock at the foot of Fire Island Avenue at the terminus of the Babylon trolley line.

When the people of the Towns of Babylon and Islip heard of the purchase they became alarmed. Mass meetings were held and a few days later three fishing sloops were manned by more than a hundred indignant citizens armed with shotguns. They set sail for Fire Island bent on burning down the hotel. Arriving at the beach, cooler heads suggested that they first make sure that the big frame building was not occupied. Unfortunately for the would-be fire fiends, it was. A caretaker and his family were living there and refused to be roused.

The following day the still irate citizens obtained an injunction from Supreme Court Justice Barnard against the use of the beach for cholera quarantine purposes and armed with the writ they took possession of the hotel dock to prevent any landings. The *S. S. Cephyus* came through the inlet and attempted to dock. Hawsers were continually cast off and whenever a line was made fast, they proceeded to chop it free from

View of the Surf Hotel and nearby guest cottages as seen from the lighthouse tower about 1880.

The Stormy History of Fire Island State Park

Chester R. Blakelock
Executive Secretary
Long Island State Park Commission

DESPITE the fact that Fire Island State Park is older by nearly twenty years than any other state park on Long Island, its historical background is probably the least known. The lack of general knowledge about Fire Island State Park is due to its comparative inaccessibility and not because its history has been quiet or uneventful.

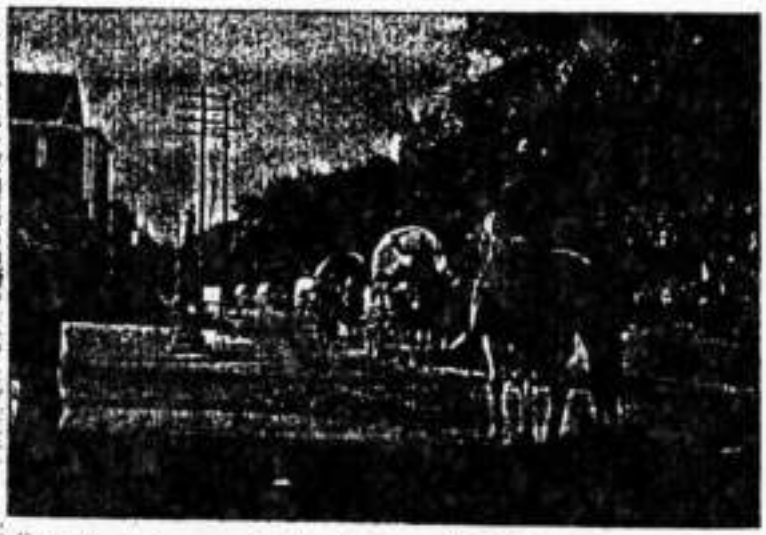
Many times since October 9, 1693, when this area was granted to William Smith by Governor Fletcher as representative of the English Crown, it has prominently figured in the news. The numerous shipwrecks on its shores during these early days kept it almost constantly before the public. It was the frequency of these wrecks that led to the acquisition of the westerly tip of Fire Island as a lighthouse site by the United States Government in 1825 and the construction thereon of a lighthouse which was rebuilt shortly thereafter into the present familiar landmark which has withstood all storms and is still in operation.

The lighthouse apparently cut down the number of serious wrecks at this location until the summer of 1850 when the tragic wreck of the bark "Elizabeth" occurred during a severe storm. This shipwreck has been extensively publicized because among its victims was Margaret Fuller, famous literary editor of the New York Tribune and first advocate of women's rights.

Another landmark in the park until recent years was the Western Union telegraph station with a nine-story high watchtower from which incoming ships were sighted and the news telegraphed into New York City. In this way New York would know some eighteen hours before the arrival of a vessel, what ship was due and when. This service was abandoned around December, 1920.

There are two theories on how Fire Island got its name. One of them, which is accepted by most historians, is that it originally consisted of five islands and the present inlet was called "Five Islands Inlet". Because of the writing of "Five" to look like "Fire" on old maps it became known as "Fire Island". The other theory is that the Indians and early settlers did offshore whaling from Fire Island and during the night kept large bonfires along the beach which could be seen from the mainland and in this way the island became known as Fire Island.

In 1855 David S. S. Sammis obtained title to about 120 acres immediately east of the lighthouse property. Here he constructed the famous Surf Hotel, a large three-story frame building with covered walks connecting nearby guest cottages. A few years later Sammis constructed a dock at the foot of Fire Island Avenue in Babylon from which he operated the side-wheeler steamship "Ripple" in regular ferry service to his hotel. Later the dock was served by horse-drawn street cars from the Babylon railroad station. The hotel prospered even through the Civil War years and was visited by many prominent persons during the 60's, 70's and most of the 80's. One large annex adjacent to the main hotel was called "Albany Cottage" and became famous because of its patronage by noted political leaders and legislators. Early accounts show that surf bathing and ocean air were considered important benefits to health and although the hotel was not strictly a health resort the financial success of the enterprise was apparently



Southwest corner of Main Street and Fire Island Avenue in 1892 showing the arrival of National Guard and Federal troops in Babylon to quell the uprising against the Fire Island quarantine station. Trolley tracks can be seen in the unpaved street in the foreground.

National Park Service

Local Hist Col.

A History

National parks have been called "the best idea America ever had." The idea of preserving special natural and cultural places in public ownership ran contrary to the prevailing national mood during the 19th century, when most Americans saw nature as something to be subdued and history as what had happened in the Old World. But as the wilderness receded and remnants of prehistoric civilization and revolutionary landmarks were lost, some saw the need to protect outstanding examples of the nation's heritage.

George Catlin, noted painter of the American Indian, first expressed the national park idea. On a trip to the Dakotas in 1832, Catlin became concerned about the westward movement's effects on Indian civilization, wildlife, and wilderness. He wrote of this dream that they might be "by some great protecting policy of the government preserved ... in a magnificent park .... A nation's park, containing man and beast, in all wildness and freshness of their nature's beauty!"

In 1864 the Federal Government first moved to protect a grand natural landscape when it granted Yosemite Valley and the Mariposa Big Tree Grove to the State of California to be "held for public use, resort, and recreation ... inalienable for all time." Eight years later in 1872, following exploration of the Yellowstone region in the Montana and Wyoming territories, Congress reserved that spectacular area as "a public park or pleasuring-ground for the benefit and enjoyment of the people." Had those territories then been states, the park might have been turned over to them for administration, like Yosemite. Instead, it remained under the Department of the Interior as Yellowstone National Park --the world's first area so titled.

Four more national parks were created in the 1890s: Sequoia, General Grant (forerunner of Kings Canyon), Yosemite (to which California later returned Yosemite Valley and the Mariposa Grove), and Mount Rainier. Without funds or staff to manage the parks, the Secretary of the Interior arranged with the Secretary of War to have Army engineers and cavalry units develop and protect most of them.

Concern about looting and destruction of Indian ruins and artifacts in the Southwest inspired a new category of protected areas after the turn of the century. In the Antiquities Act of 1906, Congress authorized the President to proclaim features of historic and scientific interest on the public lands as national monuments. President Theodore Roosevelt proclaimed the first--Devils Tower National Monument, a massive stone formation in Wyoming. Later national monuments ranged from cliff dwellings like Montezuma Castle, Arizona, and historic features like the Statue of Liberty, to large natural areas like Death Valley. Some areas initially protected as national monuments, like Petrified Forest and the Grand Canyon, were later made national parks by Congress.

By 1916, the Interior Department oversaw 14 national parks and 21 national monuments--but without effective, coordinated administration. In that year, Congress created a new bureau within Interior to manage these areas with a twofold purpose: "to conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wild life therein and to provide for the enjoyment of the same in such manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations." Thus was born the National Park Service. Stephen T. Mather, its first director, and Horace M. Albright, his assistant and successor, inaugurated the uniformed ranger force, interpretive programs, and a range of policies and practices aimed at protecting the parks while promoting public use and enjoyment.

The young National Park Service dealt mostly with natural areas west of the Mississippi. Beginning in the 1890s, a number of historic battlefields and forts in the East had become national military parks and monuments, but under War Department supervision. Other national monuments proclaimed in national forests fell under the Department of Agriculture, while the memorials and park lands of the nation's capital came under a separate office there. In a 1933 government reorganization, all of these areas were united under Park Service administration, forming a single national park system truly national in scope. Fort McHenry National Monument, Gettysburg National Military Park, the Washington Monument, and other such inheritances paved the way for later cultural acquisitions as far-flung as Independence National Historical Park in Philadelphia and War in the Pacific National Historical Park on Guam.

A third variety of national park lands further enlarged the system in the 1930s--areas intended to serve mass recreation at least as much as to preserve natural or cultural features. The Blue Ridge Parkway and Natchez Trace Parkway, begun as Depression-era public works projects, were carefully landscaped for "recreational motoring" over scenic and historic terrain. The Park Service began to build and administer recreational facilities on several major water impoundments, as at Lake Mead National Recreation Area behind Hoover Dam. Cape Hatteras National Seashore, authorized by Congress in 1937, was the first of several national seashores and lakeshores. More recently, beginning in 1972 with Gateway National Recreation area in and around New York City and Golden Gate National Recreation Area in the San Francisco vicinity, a number of parks, intended for large urban populations, joined the system.

Although new parks still arrive from time to time, the last major expansion of the system came in 1980 when Congress directed additions in Alaska totaling some 47 million acres. These spectacular national park lands more than doubled the extent of the system. Still largely remote and unspoiled, with a vast array of mountains, glaciers, wildlife, archeological sites, and other features, the Alaska parks constitute America's greatest promise of a wilderness legacy "unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations."

By 1988, the National Park System had grown to 343 areas. But these are not the only manifestations of the national park idea. In a movement promoted by Stephen Mather during the early years of the National Park Service and aided materially by the Service during the 1930s, the states developed their own park systems. Internationally, Yellowstone served as a precedent for some 1,200 national parks and comparable preserves now maintained by more than 100 nations around the world.

Concern for natural and cultural resources has also found expression in Park Service programs directed beyond parks. The Service's National Register of Historic Places is America's official list of cultural properties worthy of preservation, and its programs for designating and aiding national natural landmarks and national historic landmarks encourage the preservation of nationally significant lands and features in both private and public ownership.

In preserving America's special places for public enjoyment, national parks help maintain America's special identity for her citizens and for visitors from around the world. "The best idea America ever had" may not be too far from the mark.

Local Hist. Col.
Fire Island

"TOWN OF BABYLON HISTORY"

"CHOLERA SCARE AT FIRE ISLAND"

The Baltimore, Maryland cholera scare of (1887-88) had hardly subsided when, in (1892), the inhabitants of the Atlantic Seaboard, particularly of the Township of Babylon, had to deal with another. Immigration from Europe had reached a new high in the fall of that year and sickness aboard one of the ships halted at the Staten Island Quarantine Station for a routine inspection, was diagnosed as the dread scourge cholera. More ships arrived with cholera sick and death lists, and as the number under quarantine increased, some of the passengers were sent to Swinburn Island and some to Hoffman Island, soon creating a problem of overcrowding. In addition to many ships flying the yellow flag in New York Bay, the following ships were held off quarantine: S. S. Darmstact; S. S. Fulta; S. S. Bourgoyne; S. S. Subbenhur; S.S. Rugie; S.S. Moravia and the S. S. Normannia, the three latter being anchored between Sandy Hook and Coney Island in the Lower Bay.

Kings County Health Officer Jenkins, Charles G. Wilson, President of the Board of Health, and his pathologist, Dr. Frank Ferguson, held a three hour conference, after which Dr. Jenkins announced that Fire Island seemed the logical place in which to quarantine the remaining suspected passengers. The news spread like wildfire!

As quarantining Fire Island would also put Great South Bay under quarantine, depriving many of a livelihood, men from Babylon to Patchogue gathered at Arcanium Hall, Bay Shore, in a

vehement protest meeting at which plans were discussed, committees appointed and a united front established. Feeling ran high! Some of the baymen joined the force already on the first line of defense on the Island, while others obtained an injunction against the landing of cholera suspected immigrants on Fire Island. It was signed by Supreme Court Judge Barnard and handed, for enforcement, to Sheriff Darling of Suffolk County, who, accompanied by about thirty armed deputies, went to Fire Island to do their duty, being quartered at the "Surf Hotel", where they lived like kings.

On the afternoon of (September 11th, 1892) the Hudson River Steamer "Cepheus", with a New York City Police Sergeant and eight patrolmen on board transferred (471) passengers from the S.S. Normannia and headed for Fire Island Inlet, reaching the outer bar after dark. The expected pilot from the mainland having been intimidated by the fishermen, failed to show up and the "Cepheus" returned to New York, reaching Upper Quarantine at 4 A.M., (Sept. 12th), At 7:30 P.M., the first class passengers were transferred to the "Stonington" and the second cabin to the "New Hampshire", while the distraught Captain set out for coal, water and food.

On her second trip to Fire Island, the "Cepheus" was commanded to anchor (500) yards from the dock while the fishermen, sheriff's deputies and the Captain conferred. From one of the small fishing boats surrounding her came the command, "Take your damned cholera-ridden pets back to New York", 'cause they ain't goin' to land here". Neither the pleas of the women, the wails of the children nor all the diplomacy of the Captain and the passengers were of any avail, where upon Dr. Jenkins and other officials aboard angrily drew

up a long telegram, appealing to Governor Flower for tropps. In the meantime scanty rations and lack of sleeping quarters caused great discomfort and sickness, especially among the weak.

Governor Flower and the Health Officers were determined to land cholera victims on Fire Island. On (September 13th) about 1:50 A.M., Adjutant General Porter, by command of the Governor, ordered out the Naval Reserve and the 69th Regiment, under command of Colonel Cavanagh, for duty at Fire Island, with both forces under personal command of General Porter. General McAleer, of the 2nd Brigade, was closeted with the Governor at 2 A.M. and again at 10 A.M. Colonel Williams, the Governor's private Secretary announced that the Governor had requested General McAleer to send the 47th and 14th Regiments, of Brooklyn, N.Y., to Fire Island, but this order was countermanded later.

The Iron Steamboat "Pegasus", commanded by Captain Pearch, with pilots Harvey and Wise and a twenty man crew, took aboard at pier 36, at 12:40 P.M., the following troops: (260) Officers and men of the 69th Regiment and (340) Officers and men of the Naval Reserve. The 69th Regiment was immediately transferred to the Sound Steamer "Narragansett", which was made available for the trip. Two Navy Yard Steam launches, each mounting a Hotchkiss revolving gun of thirty-seven millimeters in the bow, with the gun-carriage in the stern for shore duty (if and when) were made ready but only one was finally taken to Fire Island.

Governor Flower came to New York on (September 12th) with the intention of remaining until his objective was

attained, making his headquarters at the Windsor Hotel., where he conferred with Professor Collins, his legal advisor, Secretary Balch of the State Board of Health and Dr. Briggs of the local Board of Health.

On motion of Judge Wilmot M. Smith and attorney Fischel of Islip, in the General Term of Supreme Court, sitting in Brooklyn, a temporary injunction was granted to Judge Barnard of Westchester County restraining Governor Flower, Health Officer Jenkins, Captains of Steamboats and all others from landing passengers or baggage from cholera-infected ships on Fire Island. The show cause order was made returnable September 15th at 12 noon in the Brooklyn court.

Back on the FIRST LINE OF DEFENSE, fireballs had been ringing since midnight of the 11th, in Babylon, Bayshore, and Islip, summoning all able-bodied citizens to resist what they deemed was a flagrant invasion of their rights. (And when your Suffolk County Yankee feels that his rights are being trampled upon---look out for "storm weather"!) Sheriff Darling had sworn in about (400) deputies who left in boats for Fire Island, every one armed. The Steamboat "Ripple", belonging to the "Surf Hotel", was tied up at her dock at "Islip" and the local authorities would not permit her to re-fuel. The only other Steamboat in the Bay was "Eclipse", the ferry-boat that plied between Bay Shore and Fire Island. The local authorities had chartered her, as she had a capacity of (75) to (100), so that the Quarantine Officials could not obtain transportation to Fire Island,---a nice long swim of five miles.

The situation was fast becoming critical and an armed clash seemed imminent, as boatmen were arriving hourly from all the towns and villages located along the Bay, the resentment being directed equally at the Government Officials and Captain Sammis, the hotel keeper who sold the "Surf Hotel" to the State. (Ed. Note: Deed to this sale was filed on (May 8th, 1893) by the State of New York in Riverhead, Suffolk County, Long Island, N. Y., for the Fire Island strip of beach (125) acres) Sumpawams Creek property, Babylon, and the boat"Ripple", Conveyed from Davis S.S. Sammis and Antoinette, his wife, for $210,000). Captain Sammis was so bitterly denounced by former friends that he left for New York City of the 12th, being escorted to the Railroad Station by a body-guard. Only a spark, now, was needed to touch off the "fireworks" as boatloads of determined Baymen swarmed around the "Cepheus"; deputies and Baymen patrolled the docks and a dangerous impasse existed, the cook of the "Surf Hotel" sent out food to the "Cepheus" but it was cold and insufficient.

As evening drew to a close, the men of the blockade softened a little and allowed blankets, mattresses and food to be put aboard the beleaguered "Cepheus", BUT, NO ONE, must land! A bitter Southeast gale swept the Bay that night and every corner of the "Cepheus" was cold, even in the cabin, where the people huddled together; but the implacable Baymen, used to earning their living braving all kinds of hardships in the Bay, took the weather in stride and were unrelenting in their vigil. They held that, inasmuch as they were not responsible for bringing the unfortunate cholera-suspected passengers here, they were not accountable for their welfare.

The dawn of the 13th brought tidings to the boatmen that the Militia was on its way; but a more ominous situation developed at noon when official word was received that the injunction barring the landing of the passengers had been vacated in the General Term of Supreme Court, with Judge Barnard (who had granted the temporary injunction) dissenting from the decision of Judges Pratt and Dykman. Consternation beset the Baymen as their legal props fell away, for these Long Islanders, staunch advocates of Law and Order, did not wish to defy the authority of the State, so offered no resistance to the Militia. They bowed to the authority of the Court and allowed the "Cepheus" passengers to land. The boats dipped their sails and disappeared while the crowd on Fire Island melted away with the recall of the Sheriff's Deputies. To the suffering passengers, Fire Island seemed like a paradise. But the episode was not yet over.

The troops took up their duties of guarding the shore front and the village streets, making it safe for Officials going to Fire Island, while the remainder of the troops took over Fire Island. The troops were under command of Colonel Austen, who was characterized by one of his officers, Major Finklemeir, as a "hard-boiled egg". Sheriff Darling and Colonel Austen conferred frequently, the former demanding the Militia depart at once, while Colonel Austen insisted on getting definite orders from Governor Flower.

Due to the gale of the night before, wires were down and communication to the outside was slow and intermittent. One of Colonel Austen's messages to the Governor was delayed two hours. When

the Colonel heard of this, he exploded and stormed into the Chief Operator's office and shouted, "I demand that my message be sent at once!" "I will send it the very moment I can", replied the telegrapher. "If you do not send it this instant I shall seize the wires in the name of the State", demanded the enraged Colonel. There was no answer. By this time the small office was choked with newspapermen and soldiers. Excitement flared up as the Colonel yelled", Captain Babcock! Summon a corporal's guard instantly!" Down to the Watson House, Troop Headquarters, rushed several troopers to execute the command.

"Is there anyone here who can use the telegraph key?", inquired the Colonel.

A newspaperman, who could, volunterred, whereupon the Colonel appointed him his operator. But the Western Union operator, impressed by this show of authority, proceeded to send the message

"See that every word is transmitted verbatim", ordered the martinet. The message was sent word for word.

"Now send another message to Governor Flower", was the imperious command. It was to the effect that his message had been deliberately delayed and that he had seized the Telegraph Office and was awaiting orders from the Governor. Just then the Corporal's guard arrived in a wagon and deployed as for battle, but the Colonel had retired from the scene.

At 5 A.M. on the 16th, after an early breakfast, the quarantined passengers were examined and those pronounced qualified for release were returned to New York via the "Cepheus", while about fifty passengers and seven guardsmen were taken by the "Ripple" to Babylon and thence, by train, to Brooklyn, N. Y.

The unhappy "Cepheus", loaded with its human cargo, ran into fresh trouble by not getting away at high tide and got stuck fast on the bar in the Inlet, thus being forced to wait till late afternoon for the incoming tide to be released. The departure of the "Normannia" passengers was not the end of the trouble, for their release was rushed in order to make room for a new batch from the "S.S.Wyoming", which angered the natives anew. But later in the day Colonel Austen got a message from the Governor to remove the Militia and the citizenssoldiers marched to town.

On September 15th a detachment of the 13th Infantry comprising Companies (F), (H), and (I) were ordered to Fire Island under command of Captain Cochran to take command of the quarantine, setting up their tents where is now located the United States Naval Radio Station. Two days later (100) first-class and (200) second-class passengers from the "Wyoming" arrived via the "Cepheus", including twenty-six fist-class passengers from the "S.S.Scandia" and when they landed on Fire Island a new crisis seemed imminent. The residents of Fire Island were desperately afraid of fire and they were alarmed at the prospect of the exasperated Baymen firing the hotel.

As there were about (700) Baymen on Fire Island or in

boats off shore, Colonel Austen received orders at 4 P.M., September 18th, to send reinforcements to Fire Island to augment the troops already there, just in case trouble did start.

On September 22nd a detachment of (45) men from the 13th Regiment under command of Captain C. H. Denike, was relieved by the 14th and 47th Regiments of Brooklyn, N. Y., under command of Lt. Colonel Seldon C. Coldrige of the 14th, and such rotation of troops continued until the last of the quarantined passengers were certified for release on October 10th, when the Island returned to its customary peaceful routine of life. The cholera uprising died down as suddenly as it had arisen.

From the "Soud Side Observer" (Rockville Center, L.I. N.Y.) issue of (March 17th, 1911), we learn "Benjamine P. Field of Babylon took to Miami, Florida, a collection of coins and other mementos collected at the time of Washington's inauguration. These were placed in a sealed continaer by his son Benjamine P. Jr., and were not to be opened until (1989)".

Visitors to Babylon turning south from the Sunrise Highway into Deer Park Avenue will doubtless be attracted to the names of many of the village streets which intersect the Avenue at right angles,--names which, in themselves, are particularly suggestive of the American aborigines.

The names of these streets were selected by James

Fire Island
8/99

Robert Moses State Park

History

Robert Moses State Park on Fire Island is more than 20 years older than any other state park on Long Island. In 1693 the area was part of a grant to William Smith by Governor Fletcher, as a representative of the English Crown. The frequency of shipwrecks off its shores led to United States acquisition of what was then the westerly tip of Fire Island (Point Democrat) for site upon which a lighthouse was erected in 1825. It was rebuilt in 1858 and stands today as a beacon of world renown. Accretion over the years has moved Point Democrat westerly a distance of five miles and changed the course of Fire Island Inlet to practically an east-west direction.

In 1892 the Port of New York was in the grip of a cholera scare when the S.S. Moravia from Hamburg arrived in New York Harbor with a number of cholera suspects. the ship was forced to remain in quarantine as were others arriving later. The health authorities of the State sought establishment of a quarantine station. As a result, the Surf Hotel was brought on order of Governor Roswell P. Flower who gave his personal check in the sum of $50,000 as part payment on the purchase price of $210,000. The property was officially purchased by the State of New York on March 9, 1893.

On May 22, 1908, Governor Charles Evans Hughes signed a bill authorizing the use of the Fire Island reservation as a State Park, thereby establishing the first State Park on Long Island and the only ocean front park in the entire State until the opening of Jones Beach State Park, approximately 20 years later. At this time, the western tip of Fire Island was located appoximately where the Robert Moses water tower stands today.

In 1938 the park was devastated by a hurricane. Plans were immediately made for the reconstruction on a more desirable site. A stretch of beach about two and a half miles west of the Lighthouse and within the area ceded by the federal government in 1924 was chosen. In 1939 a modern bathhouse and complete park layout on a hydraulic fill elevation 18 feet above high water were constructed and opened to the public the following year.

Regular passenger ferry services were maintained from Babylon to the park until the causeway to Captree State Park was from completed in 1954. Then a shuttle service by water from Captree was inaugurated. It was abandoned when the Inlet was bridged.

With the opening of the bridge spanning the Inlet in 1964, and the renaming of the Park to Robert Moses State Park in honor of the Long Island State Parks' first commissioner, attendance became so great that new bathing areas had to be provided. The first few years saw three bathhouses complete with refreshment buildings and parking fields constructed. Field 2 opened in 1964, Field 4, in 1966 and Filed 5 in 1972. A pitch-putt golf course, is another

attraction.

Erection of a 202-foot high water tower with its 1,102-feet-deep well was completed in 1968. The water tower today holds 313,000 gallons of water and annual usage is approximately 50 million gallons per year.

Facilities and Services

- 875 acres - approximately 5 miles of ocean beach
- 4 Ocean front parking fields - total capacity approximately 8,300 cars
- 18 hole Pitch Putt golf course - fee required
- Day use Boat Basin - capable of accommodating 40 boats with free Pump-out station
- Lifeguard protected bathing areas - each field
- Restrooms and shower facilities
- Picnic areas - barbecue grills at each field
- Food concessions and gift shops
- Umbrella rentals
- Locker rentals - available at Field 3 only
- Surf and pier fishing - A variety of special events are available through out the year.

Park Operations

Open year-round seven days a week

Sunrise to Sunset

For group outing (picnic) or youth (example-daycamp) outing applications, please call (516)669-1000 ext. 223 or call the park office at (516)669-0449

Programs and Events

- Summer Run Series
- Golf Tournaments
- Cultual Concerts
- Childrens Theatre
- Environmental Interpretation
- March for Parks Walk-a-Thon

Directions

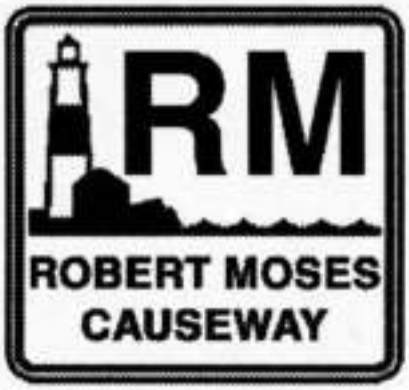
48 miles from Manhattan via Southern State Parkway to Robert Moses Causeway (exit 40) south to park.

Robert Moses State Park
PO Box 247
Babylon, New York 11702
(516)669-0449

More about Robert Moses State Park

Fire Island
8/99

Robert Moses Causeway



LENGTH: 8.1 miles
CONSTRUCTED: 1950-1954 (parkway and single-span bridge over Great South Bay); 1966-1968 (parallel bridge over Great South Bay)

Robert Moses observing construction of the single-span causeway bridge that bears his name over Fire Island Inlet, just before the bridge's completion in 1964. (Photo by New York State Division of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation.)

THE CAPTREE PARKWAY AND CAUSEWAY: The Robert Moses Causeway, which was known as the Captree State Parkway until 1963, forms part of the north-south parkway corridor from Sunken Meadow State Park in Kings Park to Robert Moses State Park at the western tip of Fire Island.

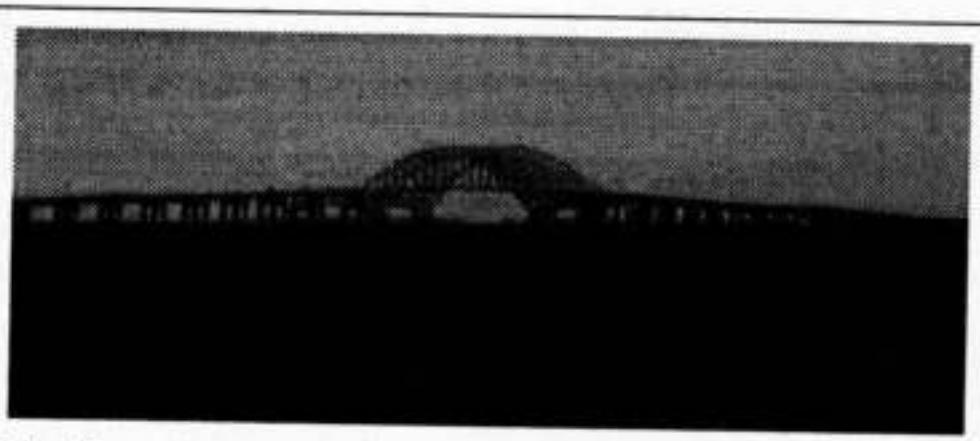
The first section of the Robert Moses Causeway, between the Southern State Parkway and EXIT RM2 (NY 27A-Montauk Highway) in West Islip, was completed in 1953. The original construction of the parkway comprised of two 22-foot-wide roadways, each carrying two lanes of traffic, with the opposing roadways separated by a nine-foot-wide grass median.

Construction of the original Captree Causeway south of NY 27A began in 1950. The first causeway bridge, which had one northbound and one southbound lane, was opened to traffic in April 1954. The two-mile long span across Great South Bay to Captree Island features a 600-foot-long main span, with a 60-foot clearance for boats. On either side of the main steel-arch span, a series of piles support the roadway 25 feet above Great South Bay. The piles are arranged not only vertically, but also diagonally. The diagonal piles, which are called "batter piles," resist the forces along the roadway such as those caused by vehicles stopping or starting, as well as those caused by the expansion and contraction of the bridge

deck due to temperature changes.

At the southern terminus of the Great South Bay span, the Robert Moses Causeway continues south through Captree Island, where an interchange is provided for local traffic. After crossing the State Boat Channel over a 665-foot-long bascule bridge, the causeway meets the Ocean Parkway at a cloverleaf interchange. This interchange, which offers motorists access to Gilgo and Captree State Parks, served as the southern terminus of the Robert Moses Causeway until 1964.

The Fire Island Bridge continues the two-lane road, one lane in each direction, across Fire Island Inlet to its terminus at Robert Moses State Park. This span, which employs the same design as the Great South Bay span - a 600-foot steel-arch span with a 60-foot clearance, flanked to the north and south by low-level causeway approaches - opened in 1964.



The Robert Moses Causeway over Great South Bay consists of two steel arch spans, each carrying the northbound and southbound roadways. (Photo by Steve Anderson.)

ADDING CAPACITY ACROSS GREAT SOUTH BAY: The popularity of Robert Moses, Captree and Gilgo state parks seriously tested the traffic capacity of the original two-lane bridge and roadway. Southbound traffic to the beaches was backed up for miles in the morning, while northbound traffic to Long Island was heaviest in the late afternoon hours. To meet this demand, a parallel causeway was constructed over Great South Bay just east of the existing two-lane causeway.

To accommodate the peak travel hours of the beach-going public who tend to arrive over several hours of the morning, but depart in a noticeably shorter period in the late afternoon, the new bridges and roadway for northbound traffic were constructed three lanes wide. Along Captree Island, the opposing roadways were separated by a wide, variable median. The original two-lane roadway became the southbound lanes of the causeway. The three-lane parallel Great South Bay span, which was to carry the northbound lanes, was constructed between 1966 and 1968.

Not long after the second Great South Bay span was finished, plans were announced for a parallel span to the Fire Island Inlet bridge between Ocean Parkway and Robert Moses State Park. Although such a span would provide relief for traffic leaving Robert Moses State Park, this proposal remains inactive.

DESIGN CHANGES: In 1977, maintenance of the Robert Moses Causeway was transferred from the Long Island State Park Commission (LISPC) to the New York State Department of Transportation (NYSDOT), although ownership remained under the jurisdiction of the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation (NYSOPRHP). To accommodate the increase in traffic volume and speed, and to address the accident history,

the NYSDOT began to modify the parkway in accordance with federal and state traffic safety guidelines.

In July 1978, one year after maintenance of the parkway was transferred from the LISPC to the NYSDOT, the southbound tollbooths prior to the Great South Bay bridges were removed. For about a quarter-century, a 25-cent toll was collected at that location.

During the late 1980's and early 1990's, new MUTCD-compliant signs and high-intensity lighting were installed on the Robert Moses Causeway. Additional safety measures included the construction of a new concrete ("Jersey") barrier and the implementation of sand-filled crash attenuators.

In September 1997, long-term reconstruction began on the original Robert Moses Causeway span, which carries the two southbound lanes over Great South Bay. This project consists of the replacement of the bridge deck and roadway, renovation of the steel arch span, and the installation of fiberglass jackets over the causeway. During reconstruction of the southbound causeway, the three-lane northbound span is carrying both northbound and southbound traffic. A moveable concrete barrier allows for two lanes of traffic in one direction, one lane in the opposing direction, and for easy changeover when appropriate.

The southbound Robert Moses Causeway over Great South Bay, taken in August 1997. The two-lane southbound span is currently undergoing reconstruction. (Photo by Steve Anderson.)

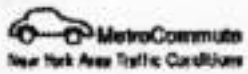
SOURCES: Arterial Progress 1959-1962, Triborough Bridge and Tunnel Authority (October 1962); The Power Broker by Robert A. Caro, Vintage Books-Random House (1974); History of the Long Island State Parkway System, New York State Department of Transportation (1985); Robert Moses: Single-Minded Genius by Joann P. Krieg, Heart of the Lakes Publishing (1989); "Beach Causeway Closure Delayed" by Sylvia Adcock, Newsday (5/29/1997); "Life in the Slow Lane" by Kim Nava, Newsday (4/05/1998); "Life in the Slow Lane" by Kim Fiorio, Newsday (3/14/1999); Ralph Herman; Larry Lucchetti.

- Robert Moses Causeway shield by Ralph Herman.
- Lightpost by Jeff Saltzman.

ROBERT MOSES CAUSEWAY LINKS:

- The Long Island Parkway System
- Captree State Park

- Robert Moses State Park
- Fire Island National Seashore



CURRENT METRO COMMUTE ROAD CONDITIONS:

- Construction and Accident Delays

THE EXITS OF METRO NEW YORK:

- Robert Moses Causeway, Sagtikos State Parkway and Sunken Meadow State Parkway exit list by Steve Anderson.

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