THE STORY OF FIRE ISLAND

by

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CHAPTER I

A SAND BAR GREW

A barrier beach came out of the sea and Fire Island was born. The relentless breaking of the ocean waves and the savage winds created a splinter of shifting sands and by the process of slow evolution, a barrier beach was formed. Only a few feet above sea level, 32 miles long and from 500 to 1,500 feet wide, this island, six miles off the south shore of Long Island separated the Great South Bay from the Atlantic Ocean.

The sea itself created this westerly spit of growing sand after the retreat of the last glacier, which had covered the entire width of Long Island with an underlying glacial outwash plain. Above this plan, deposits of sand and gravel of over 100 feet formed a pervious upper stratum. Fire Island is made of this material derived from the erosion of the shore and headlands from the east, and possibly the ocean floor.

Breaking waves deposited piles of sand in ridges parallel to the shore; the ocean floor dropped, and the sand dunes rose above the waterline. Then the winds came to the aid of the sea, and raised the irregular sand heaps to crested dunes over 60 feet. The same process was repeated over and over again. Another sand

bar began at the breakline of the waves. This bar then became a dune, connected to the preceding dunes by a deep interval valley.

The most recent and highest dune is called the "backbeach dune" with steep slopes like lines of cresting waves carved by the wind, which before the hurricane of 1938 rose to heights of 60 feet or more. As the tides rose and fell, the winds howled and whirled into the deep hollows between these giant sand hills. The dunes were like drifting snowbanks, and like snow drifts frequently changed their position and size. The highest dunes were found in the area from Sunken Forest east to Smith County Point, and they are still the highest point today.

Sea currents flowing from bay to ocean cut channels across the barrier that the Dutch called "gaten" or gate from the outer beaches to the mainland. New inlets to the sea were also formed during severe storms. During the hurricane of 1690, the Fire Island Inlet broke through the barrier beach, and it was known as Nine Mile Gut of the Great Gut, as it was nine miles wide.

Another inlet was formed in 1777 during a severe

gale opposite Mastic on the mainland and near the British-held Fort St. George. The inlet was used to transport goods and supplies to the fort, and as a passage for privateers during the Revolution. The Fire Island community of Old Inlet derived its name from this new channel; a town that does not exist today.

In the early days a mainlander said that standing on the shore three miles away he could see the surf breaking over the beach dunes. "It was a wild, desolate, solitary spot; wind-searched and surf pounded." Another mainlander said that "it was a sand spit with coarse grass."

J. T. Headley writes in his letters that "there is a large population living on and about the barren Fire Island whose only means of livelihood is the game and wild fowl they kill. These men do not hunt for sport, but as a business--60 miles from New York City exist this race of people who never see the city, and only know of what is going on in this great Babel from those who visit them or those who take the game to the market."

Sporting Scenes and Sundry Sketches mentions that"the principal inhabitants of Fire Island are gulls and meadow hens. The climate is saline and salubrious. The chief products of the soil are sedge grass, bird's eggs and clams. Wild fowl can be shot."

The island was such a desolate place that it became a refuge and escape for savage characters. Professional ship wreckers, pirates and later slave runners, made Fire Island their hideaway. The Indians and mainlanders would come to the island during the day, but always return home at sundown. It was not safe to spend the night on the beach, as the sleeper could be either robbed or murdered. More than one man had gone to the island during the day, and never returned. And beside human dangers, the mainlanders believed the island was haunted, because whenever boats passed Fire Island at night, the crews would hear strange wails. The howl of the winds became poor souls trying to excape their prisoners!

The land on Fire Island was originally owned by the Shinnecock Indians who were mostly whalers, hunters and fishermen. Each tribe had its own "sachem" or leader who presided at the Fire Island tribal meetings. They also grew hemp from which twine, fishnets and cloth were made, and fashioned baskets from wampum. Wampum (made of clam and periwinkle shells) was their means of exchange. In 1831 bushels and bushels of wampum were brought to Babylon for trading with the local Indians. and so much was put into circulation that

inflation resulted, and wampum was discarded as currency.

Tracts of land could be purchased from Indian owners at amazingly low prices. The largest piece of land was bought by Brookhaven Township, a tract of land extending from Long Island Sound on the north to the Atlantic Ocean on the south and including a large part of Fire Island. At that time the island extended only as far as Point O'Woods.

The first land purchase was made in 1683 by William Nicol from the Indians and was confirmed by Governor Thomas Donegan of the British Crown. The land grant was called the Nicol Patent.

Ten years later Governor Benjamin Fletcher signed a Royal Patent granting to Colonel William Tangier Smith the Manor of St. George, plus thousands of acres in Brookhaven Township, and Fire Island. As the 2,000-word patent, dated October 9, 1693, read: "and whereas our Surveyor General for Sayd Province of New York, hath pursuant to his warrent aforesaid surveyed and layd out the several necks, and tracts of land and meadow, aforesaid with all the islands in the Sayd bay, and the beach, being from east to west bounds twenty four miles and Seaven chains".

The land was granted to "Colonel Smith, his heirs and assignes forever" but today the descendents of Colonel Smith have no claim to this land.

The reason that Colonel Smith was given this vast amount of land direct from King William and Queen Mary was compensation for financial loss. The Colonel had helped King Charles II in the early development of Tangiers for the British Crown, then the capital city of Morocco, and he had lost large sums of money in this venture. On December 17, 1683, he wrote a two-page petition to Charles II describing his financial difficulties in settling on Long Island, and requested that His Majesty grant him "a gracious favor so that he would not suffer want." An official investigation was made of Colonel Smith's holdings and the Royal Patent was then issued.

In the early days the only mainlanders who came to the island were the "Bay Men", men who derived their living from the bay waters. They would sail over to Fire Island early in the morning and spend the day fishing, oystering and gunning for birds. Then at night they would sail back to their homes on the mainland.

The mainlanders had no name for the island in the early 1700's. It was just called the "sand bar" or

Seal Island by the Indians, after a large colony of seals living on the island.

There have been numerous theories as to where the name "Fire Island" originated. One source accepted by most historians is that Fire Island originally consisted of five islands, and the Fire Island Inlet was then called Five Islands Inlet. The script writing on the old charts made the "five" appear as "fire", and thus the name "Fire Island" evolved.

The Shinnecock Indian tribe have their own legend which explains the derivation. There was a beautiful Indian maid called Wa-ha-ha, daughter of Big Frog. She spurned the attentions of the Indian braves, and instead married a prosperous and fat Dutchman, who owned a truck farm on 14th Street in New York City. The Shinnecock braves felt that she had disgraced herself by marrying outside of her tribe, and decided to punish her. The braves surrounded the Dutchman's farm and kidnapped Wa-ha-ha and sailed with her "over the waters of Great South Bay to the narrow strip of land at the edge of Great Ocean." The braves built a funeral pyre for her, and Wa-ha-ha was burned at the stake. Her tears of grief poured into the ground, and spread the

fire into many rivulets of flame. From that day on red roses have grown on the exact spot where the tears of Wa-ha-ha dropped, and the land was named "Fire Island" from this Indian tale.

Some historians believe that the island was named by the local mainlanders during the Colonial days. At that time Isaac Stratford had a whaling station on F.I. for reducing whale blubber to oil, and huge fires would burn beneath iron cauldrons day and night, and the mainlanders would see the "fire on the island".

Fires also burned on the island at night on the beaches. Professional shipwreckers would light them to mislead unfortunate ship captains into believing that the fires were lights from the mainland. The captains would head for what they thought was the lea of the shore, but suddenly their ships were around on the beach. Ruthless pirates would be waiting to plunder the ships. The captains would say in warning: "Beware of the fires on the island!"

During the early whaling days the crews lived on the beach and built fires as signals for the boat crews to come from the mainland, and pick up the whale oil, which had been boiled down from blubber. The mainlanders would see these signal fires on the island, and

call it "Fire Island."

The name is also attributed to "friendly" fires built on the beach to guide ships safely to port. The Governor of New York, alarmed at the large number of shipwrecks and the danger of pirates on Fire Island, made a contract in 1770 with the Indian tribes to light fires every night on the island to guide ships safely into Great South Bay. The fires on the island gave way to the name "Fire Island".

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The first group of settlers on the island were Scandinavians from Sweden, who arrived on at this remote sand bar in the early 1800's, the Andersons, the Petersons, the Hagans, etc. They were mostly carpenters, seamen, and laborers by trade who built their own homes,and spent their days fishing and gunning, an outdoor life similar to the one they had left behind in Scandinavia. They were called the "codfish aristocracy" of Fire Island. During the long winter months they would amuse themselves by inviting large numbers of their mainland firends to drinking parties which lasted several days. They served homemade brandy and beach plum wine, and often drank them together. When the guests finally decided to return to their homes, they had to use the

only means of transportation during the cold winter months, pulling themselves from Smith Point across the frozen bay to the mainland on the Coast Guard breeches buoy!

The Oakleys and Hortons were another group or rugged settlers who came from the mainland and founded Oakleyville, east of Point O'Woods. They inter-married among the two families, and lived together as squatters in a small community of houses made of driftwood and tar paper. Most of the property on the island was part of the original Smith and Nicol Royal Grants of the pre-Revolutionary days, so no proof of ownership or title was needed for living on the land.

The sand bar which grew out of the sea was now being discovered by pioneer settlers...rugged, outdoor people who knew how to cope with the isolation and hardships involved in living on a remote barrier reef.

CHAPTER II

THE WHALE THAT GOT AWAY

If a whale was pursued, but not caught, the whaler would receive $1.00; but if the whale was sighted and captured, the whaler would receive $5.00! These were the 1861 Regulations of Whaling Station No. 9 at Smith's Point on Fire Island. and many a whale did get away! It was a dangerous game and the whales were ferocious mammals with huge jaws who often overturned the whaleboats, and every year over a thousand men lost their lives in the North Atlantic.

The early settlers learned shore whaling from the local Indians, who made canoes by hollowing out a tree trunk of light cedar, using the slow process of alternately charring and scraping the wood. The dugout canoe usually carried five to six whalers, and was launched into the surf from the beach. The whales came close to the beach, and the Indians took turns whale-watching. When they caught a whale, they would harpoon it with wooden spears tipped with stone, but after 1643 they discarded the wooden harpoons and used iron ones. After the whale was harpooned, they drove it into the shallow water. Then the squaws, youths and old men butchered the whale with knives and hatchets while standing in the shallow water.

The whalers on Fire Island were for the most part English with only a few Dutch boats, the reason being that the Dutch could not hire any Indians for their whaling crews, and every

boat needed at least one Indian harpooner, as the Indians were more skilled and experienced in catching whales. But they hated the Dutch and would not work on their boats. The early settlers, also, were not as strong swimmers as the Indians who could easily upright an overturned canoe and swim to the shore. And since the settlers were not such good swimmers, they built boats that were more seaworthy; instead of canoes broader and heavier boats made of more durable wood. But the best swimmer of all was the whale; he swam with his mouth open, and took in from 50 to 75 barrels of water at every mouthful!

A good-size whale yielded approximately 20 barrels of oil and 300 pounds of whalebone, and was worth about $4,000. The season was on from early Fall to late March, and the average yearly catch was about twenty whales for each whaling station. Whale oil was a popular commodity, replacing wampum as a medium of exchange, and was used for articles to be purchased on the mainland. Even the minister's salary was paid in whale oil !

Two Englishmen started their own whaling stations, Isaac Stratford and Colonel William Smigh. Both stations had tryworks for reducing the whale blubber to oil, and night and day huge fires burned under iron cauldrons. In 1690 a law was passed forbidding the boiling of blubber in private homes

because of its "offensiveness" of odor. The whalers had been in the habit of taking pieces of blubber home boiling them on the stove, and then hanging the pieces from the ceiling. Then "the fat wax was mised with corn or peas."

Many stories of whaling lore were found in the records of the whaling stations. One of these was the Ghost of the Fire Island Beach, who according to legend, lived on the beach. During a wintery night in the 1700's Jonas, a whaler keeping watch on the beach heard the Ghost or Bogy of the Beach. He said that "it was something else beside the surf, the wind or the shifting sand.. something moving..something moaning in the wind...and then rapidly it was gone". Several whalers heard the moans again that winter, and one saw a shadowy grey form passing over the sand dunes. The Bogy appeared again near a whaleboat which had been capzied by a whale. Quebox, the harpooner, had just made a 15-foot throw from the bow of the boat, when the whale struck the boat breaking it in half. The crew all jumped and swam to the beach, all except Quebox whose body was never found. However, the crew heard the same noise.."a clapping in the wind" and they believed the Bogy carried Quebox away with home. Not until after the War of 1812 was the Bogy of the Beach seen again. An old bayman, called Uncle Paye, claimed that one night in November he heard a moaning

in the hills around midnight. He said "it was a clapping or beating sound like two flat sticks being struck together." Again the clapping sound occurred two weeks later at the same spot, but then it disappeared, and never returned.

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The most festive and joyous occasions during the whaling days were when the whaleboats returned from a trip. Everyone rushed to the waterfront; the lighthouse keeper flew the American flag; the boat owners dressed up in long-tailed coats and shiny top hats; the local musicians organized a town band, and the wives and children paraded down the streets. The boat owners sailed to the lighthouse, so they could be the first to welcome the whaling heros home again! Some of the unmarried local girls formed a group similar to one on the whaling island of Nantucket. "They pledged themselves never to marry a man until he had proved his worth by standing erect on the leaping bow of a whaleboat and driving his harpoon to "the hitches" into the whale."

A description of a successful whaling day follows:

Usually a fleet of whaling boats sailed together, and the man at the masthead of each boat kept "whalewatch" all day. If he sighted a whale he first cried "Yonder she spouts!"

And by the spout he recognized the type of whale, sperm, right, etc. After the whale was sighted, the captain climbed up the mast to verify the sighting of the whale. Then the whaler threw the first harpoon into the whale. The captain came forward and threw another harpoon. The lines from all the other boats were put together to tire the whale, and capture him. When the whale returned to the surface for his last few breaths, the crew cried, "We have him. Fin out!" The dead whale was then towed alongside the boat and made fast with fore and aft cables. A platform of brick was built on the deck and a fire was made amidships with wooden planks. The cutting stage then began. The blubber was boiled in great iron pots and the oil extracted from it. The fire was kept going by using pieces of blubber for fuel, from which the oil had been already extracted.

But there was the a rare occasion when a whale became stranded and washed ashore. An article in the Babylon Signal of December 29, 1881 read: " Opposite Smith's Point on Fire Island a whale came ashore on Wednesday night and was found by one of the patrolmen. It is 60 feet long, 35 feet in circumference and belongs to the genus "Sulphur Bottom", from living most of its life in the sulphur beds of the West Indies and Africa. It is long and slim compared to the right and sperm

whales. The beach began to look like a whale ship's deck; some men were cutting the blubber with a spade; others were filling barrels with oil; some were carrying it to the try-tanks."

Ahtough the whaling industry grossed almost a million dollars in 1810, it began to fall off rapidly. Whales were harder to catch and no longer came close to shore. They became shy and wary and the demand for both whalebone for women's corsets, and whale oil for lamp fuel was greater than the limited supply, and so substitutes were introduced. Many of the whale ships were turned into coal barges or local freighters, and some sailed to the California goldrush. The whaling days of Fire Island were coming to a close.

But on rare occasions whales came close to shore. On February 23, 1907, a group of fishermen brought a whale ashore off Water Island after a long battle in the ocean surf. In the winter of 1961 a whale was lassoed in the surf off Saltaire, and again in 1965 a whale washed up on the beach.

But the majority of whales were now far, far out to sea, and belong to the early history of whaling off Fire Island.

The oystering business on Great South Bay began later than whaling, and the industries were completely opposite in nature. The "whales could get away," but the oysters lay flat in their beds ready to be dug up without too much effort! It was a very

inexpensive occupation. All you needed was an open rowboat, a pair of "tongs" and two iron toothed rakes with long handles. The first big finds in bay oystering were in the early 1800's off Blue Point in Great South Bay; hence the name Blue Point Oyster. They were sold from 50 to 75¢ a bushel.

The Newtown Register of January 27, 1781 read: "Oyster business on the south side of Long Island never was better than the present season. Oysters being very fat; they have taken the lead in the New York market. Last week two men on natural growth took in three days; $225 worth or 300 bushels"

A group of 50 South Shore and Fire Island men formed the Oyster Planters and Businessmen's Association, "for the purpose of planting of oysters and clams for their protection and providing its members with a suitable place of resort." The initiation fee was $10.00, and the old life saving station on Fire Island was moved over to Oak Island and served as a clubhouse. But the Association was unable to prevent exploitation of the Great South Bay's oyster beds. Men continued taking unlimited amounts of oysters without replanting for the future, and gradually the oysters became scarcer and scarcer and prices higher.

In 1815, the Legislature in New York enacted a statute setting a closed season on oysters, but oyster stocks still continued to decrease.

The Babylon Signal of May 1879 read," 100 bushels of

oysters can be sold where but one can be obtained. 132 men were taking oysters in Great South Bay through holes in the ice. Ice has injured the business terribly. Prices are high. Blue Points impossible to get. It is proposed to sink brush in the bay to catch the spawn, and it is thought this will keep a natural growth on hand."

The oyster business contined to decline, and two years later, the Newtown Register of 1881 read: "The high price of oysters in the past three years, has caused oystermen to clean the bottom of Great South Bay pretty thoroughly. They have failed to seed the ground, because they had no lease. Spoilation of oyster beds for market purposes has ruined it for the people who used oysters for private uses. Natural oysters are so scarce now that a bushel a day is the average catch. Bushels average $1. to $1.40."

The scarcity of oysters resulted in an illegal practice. Some oysterman fattened up the oysters by dumping them in fresh water during one tide. This filled out the oysters and they appeared very fat. But the fresh water was often polluted. A law was passed prohibiting this fattening process. Another illegal practice was that oysters were sold by the number, but frequently the oysters were not counted correctly when put into the basket. To end this practice, Governor Cornell passed a

bill which provided "all oysters in the shell shall not be sold by actual count, but they shall be sold in a stave that measures 16½" across the bottom, 18" across the top and 21" diagonally from the inside chine to the top. $100 fine or imprisonment for the abuse of this law."

Through exploitation of the oyster beds, the once prosperous oyster industry fell off completely. Studies were made to determine why the oyster business had ceased. The Coast and Geodectic Service made a study in 1908 for the New York City Water Supply Board, and found the tidal circulation of the Great South Bay had been greatly reduced. Also the opening of the Moriches Inlet in 1931 caused changes in the tides, which permitted more salt water to flow in from the ocean; thus increasing the salinity of the water. Both were good reasons for the oyster decline. The Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution also conducted a survey of the bay. They discovered that there had been changes in the inlets cutting the beach during the last 50 years, which changed the circulation of the water. It was also found that the duck farms along the tributaries of the Moriches Bays have increased production during the last 20 years, thus resulting in polluted water passing from Morches Bays into Great South Bay. A suggested solution to prevent the exchange of waters between the bays, and perhaps bring the oysters back, was to close up the channel, and build

locks for boats passing through the intercoastal waterways! An expensive solution for an oyster bed!

But oystering improved greatly in the 1960's, and the National Park Service discovered oyster bottoms with great potential for production several miles offshore from Robbins Rest and Ocean Beach. The Blue Point Company has private oyster and clam beds of over 6,000 acres, the boundaries forming a line from west of Ocean Bay Park across to the mainland, and from Water Island to the mainland. Hard clams are found intermittently along Great South Bay from Robbins Rest to Smith Point Park, and scallops are most prevalent near Sunken Forest

Shellfish are gradually returning to Great South Bay and with the studies being made to remedy polluted waters, and to cease the exploitation of the oyster beds, the industry should greatly increase in the future. The "whale did get away" but the shellfish are making a comback to Fire Island.

CHAPTER III

BURY THE TREASURE

Bury the treasure, hide the loot! Dig, deep into the sand and cover your chest of gold. Fire Island, remote and isolated was the perfect hideaway for buried treasure. Its sand dunes afforded a natural repository for valuable stolen cargoes and the surrounding waters made an ideal off-shore anchorage. A pirate landing party from a small boat could bury their plunder, and then return to their ship without being observed. Enough gold and silver coins were found on Fire Island to prove that it must have been the pirates favorite burying ground!

In the early 1800's two boys actually witnessed the burying of a leather trunk by a group of pirates landing on the beach in a small boat. The boys, hiding behind a dune, also saw a large ship lying off-shore with several gunports on her bulwarks and bow.

On a summer afternoon of the same year, a group of men from Babylon intending to "bag" some wild geese heard honking on Fire Island ran into a group of buccaneers. The hunters were walking along the beach in single file as there was a heavy fog and visibility was no more than 30 or 40 feet. L'Hommodeau was the leader as he was the best shot, and James Telfer walked behind him. Suddenly a group of strangers loomed out of the dense fog. They were dark skinned, and wearing sleeveless

jerkins with short coarse trousers and bare feet. Each pirate carried a knife at the side of his belt; one had a boarding axe and the other a pistol. The two groups of men faced each other. L'Hommodeau and his three companions aimed their heavy guns straight at the buccaneers. One by one the pirates stepped back into the fog, until only one remained. The last one raised his hands above his head in a gesture of surrender, and then disappeared. The men from Babylon did no more shooting that day, but ran for their boats and sailed back to the mainland! This pirate story was handed down from generation to generation, and one of the men in the group was James Telfer, and his great grand-daughter in Babylon told the legend to Douglas Toumey, collector of Fire Island folklore.

The recovery of hidden treasure on the island was almost an impossible undertaking. The continuously shifting sands and strong winds changed the shape and position of the dunes. New dunes appeared and markers became obliterated, and trees became buried. After a year or more, a treasure map became just a scrap of useless paper in a pirate's hand. Some pirates, according to legend, resorted to superstition to guard their treasure, and to assure that no one else found it. After burying the ship's plunder, they enchanted the spot by murdering the survivors of the shipwrecks, and then burying each body close to the treasure with an open knife in their hand. The belief

was that dead men were the best guardians of treasure! But even if the pirates, after capture, divulged their hiding places, the treasure was never found.

During the winter of 1786 a schooner arrived from Connecticut in Great South Bay, and proceeded to rob every ship in sight. The pirates captured one day a Spanish brig with a priceless cargo of gold. After scuttling their ship, the 17 pirates laden with gold doubloons (about $16 each) started for the shore in a small boat. A sudden storm came up, and their boat capsized. Only three of the pirates ever reached the Fire Island beach, Tom Knight, Jack Sloan and the pilot of the ship. They hid in the sand dunes and later each buried his treasure in the sand. A few months later the three pirates were captured and one told of the gold's location..."the hill is a ½ mile south of the Old House, and 3 rods westward of the best beach spot about." But the gold was never found.

However, over the years some of the pirates' gold was uncovered by the receding backwash of the tides, and the shifting sands which brought the gold coins to the surface.

In the early 1800's Captain Jack, a retired seaman, was in the habit of sailing his cutter acorss the bay to Fire Island and taking a walk on the beach. One day he began digging where he had heard in the local pub that buried treasure was hidden.

Suddenly, under the first layers of sand, he found a pot of gold coins..."Carolus di-gratia 1774" (Charles III of Spain 1759-1788) on one half of the coin, and on the other side "Rex R.F.M. Hispan". These coins were supposed to have been a part of Captain Kidd's treasure. After his discovery of the gold, Captain Jack kept searching for more gold, but never found any. However, his original discovery was so profitable that he built a large house on the mainland, purchased a good-size sloop and started his own fishing business!

During the War of 1812 a volunteer was patrolling the Fire Island beach to prevent the British troops from attempting a landing, when he found 38 pieces of English gold buried in the sand. A crewman of the Point of Woods Live Saving Service walking a patrol in 1897 found two English coins (dated 1660) on a high dune two miles west of Cherry Grove. Again in 1900 on the exact spot on the same dune, an iron pot of English coins (dated 1724) was found by an old fisherman. He christened the dune where coins had been found twice as "Money Hill". But no discoveries were ever made again.

Rumors of buried treasure continued to circulate and some men like Captain John from Islip believed them and never gave up hope. He made many trips to the beach, but his search was always unsuccessful. All he ever found was a dead tree stump

buried deep in the sands!

The most notorious and celebrated pirate of the times was Jeremiah Smith. He had left Connecticut around 1754 and settled on the southshore of Long Island working as a laborer for a large landowner. But he could not make enough quick money, so he turned to piracy, and set up a one-man operation on Fire Island. He first built a crude hut to store his supplies of pistols, powder and muskets. Two months later he built a large house from the remains of wrecked ships and driftwood. At night two oil lamps beamed from his window to guide any shipwrecked survivors who might be wandering on the beach. Jeremiah greeted any guest with great cordiality and offered him hot rum, and dinner. Then later when the guest had retired for the night, he stabbed him to death and robbed him. If Jeremiah was out-numbered by two or more men he took no risk of them attacking him, but treated his guests with great kindess and the next day ferried them safely across the bay! Many of the mainlanders thought kindly of him, as J. Cypress, Jr. wrote in his Sporting Scenes and Sketches: "Jeremiah Smith, the only householder on the ridge, a lawful voter, and keeper of the lighthouse, adjoining his tenement, licensed vendor of spurrets and things according." Mr. Cypress and two others in his hunting group took lodgings overnight at their friend's, Jerry, but "Jerry was not in a very amiable mood

when we arrived, so we had no desire to tarry, but got away as soon as we could."

Jeremiah's house became filled with crates of gold, gems, liquor and linens, which had been salvaged from numerous shipwrecks. The only man who ever visited Smith's house was the local boatman, Jim Raynor, who sold Jeremiah's varied merchandise in the city. Every Saturday he would load his sloop with the goods and sail from Islip to New York, where he set up a booth in the Catherine's Market.

For eight years Jeremiah Smith lived on Racoon Beach plundering and robbing ships wrecked on the shore. According to historian J. Cypress, "Jerry Smith hoarded flotsam and jetsam acquisitions found on the beach." But Jerry's career came to a sad ending. A trio of pirates arrived on Fire Island and built a house near Jeremiah. As the three pirates became more prosperous and greedier, they resented the competition of Jeremiah's operation, so one wintery night they murdered him, and burned down his house.

Another verson of Jeremiah's pirate career was much more romantic. He married a mermaid. He felt very lonely on the isolated Racoon Beach with only the sea to talk to. One night he heard sounds like wailing on the wind, and during the day he heard singing voices on the ocean. Walking to the beach, he saw

15 to 20 mermaids sporting in the breakers, and leaping through the sea spray. The girls had pink eyes, long green hair; and robes of seaweed thrown over their shoulders and bound at the waist with a brilliant belt of pearls. The mermaids all dashed away except one mermaid who sat on the beach at Jeremiah's feet. She sang in a soft plaintive voice a ballad of her history. Her name was Galatea from Sicily; her father was the King of the Ocean, and she had wandered from the billowly Aegean Sea to the Atlantic. She was very fair and beautiful, and seemed mortal in every way, except for her hand, which when he held it, felt a little cold and slightly webbed between the fingers. Jeremiah asked her to marry him, and they went to Babylon to find the town magistrate to marry them. The mainlanders thought that Galatea was a queen for she was dressed in beautiful silk, velvets, and jewels, with a plumed hat and white gloves; all part of the pirate plunder she had found in Jeremiah's attic. Three years went by, two sons were born, and a happier couple never existed. But rumors started that Jeremiah had married a mermaid. A fisherman heard Galatea singing one night in the sea, and later an unfortunate ship was lured to the shore by her voice and wrecked on the beach. One night Galatea came home, and told Jeremiah that her mermaid sisters had come to take her away

and that she must leave "this inhospitable coast forever." He tried to stop her as she jumped into the ocean and swam away with her sister mermaids. She was the last mermaid ever to be seen on the south shore of Long Island.

Jeremiah left Racoon Beach on Fire Island and built a home in Smithtown. His sons were the greatest sea dogs in the country. They could swim like fishes, clam or draw a net for a bony fish better than anyone on Long Island, and they had inherited the durable name of Smith!

Another buccaneer, who became a notorious figure, was a mysterious scoundrel, nicknamed Handy Jones, who operated along the shore of Great South Bay and Fire Island in the days of the Revolution when British troops occupied some of Long Island. Handy Jones stole boats from fishermen and then resold them in New Jersey or New England. As boats at that time were not required to be licensed, he needed no proof of ownership. This infamous pirate boarded an unoccupied ship when it was at anchorage, and waited in the hold for the owner to return. When he heard the owner on deck he waited until the captain had set sail. Then he suddenly rushed the poor man, and pushed him overboard. When the owner came to the surface, grasping the side of the boat, with one stroke of the axe, Handy would cut off the man's hands. The victim either succumbed to

loss of blood or drown. Handy carried no knife or pistol; just a sharp axe to cut off the hands of his victims. Hence the name, Handy Jones.

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But with the advent of Prohibition on October 1919, rum running replaced piracy. Instead of "Bury that treasure", it was "Hide those cases"! For 14 years Fire Island played an important role as a hiding spot for rum runners to cache their liquor. Just as pirates had buried their chests of gold in the dunes in the early days. so the rum runners hid their cases of liquor when they feared the Coast Guard boats were in the area. Then later at night when the Coast Guard had gone, they came back and picked up their loot. An unidentified carpenter on Fire Island had a plan whereby he picked up cases that were left by a ship at a designated spot on the ocean side. He then pulled the cases across the island at its narrowest point to the bay side, where he would leave the cases to be picked up by a mainland boat. This plan worked for quite a few years, until the carpenter was caught pulling the wagon!

But a greater threat than the Coast Guard to the rum runners were the pirates. They waited patiently until the

rum runners had sold most of their liquor, and had a sizable amount of cash on board. Then the pirates boarded the ship, took the cash and crippled the motors, so the boat could not pursue them.

Around 1921 a two-masted schooner appeared off Fire Island with no running lights. Her sails were set with anchor dragging, but there was no one aboard and no evidence of a bloody struggle. Bullet holes on the side of the ship and numerous empty rifle cartridges on the deck gave evidence of a battle. The cargo was gone, and only empty cases and burlap bags remained. The pirates probably threw the crew overboard and fled with the cargo.

The Murdock brothers of Fire Island were infamous as rum runners. Most of their boats were faster than the Coast Guard cutters, so they could escape easily. And they knew the waters so well that when they found a Coast Guard boat overtaking them on a rare occasion, they lead the boat onto a sand bar or shallow waters, where it would be grounded. If they succeeded, they then hid their liquor cases on the mainland shore, and returned to rescue the grounded Coast Guard boat!

But in most instances the Coast Guard cutters won. Their crews were fighting men who worked night and day against the rum runners. Smuggling became more

and less profitable every year, and by the time the Prohibition Act was repealed in 1933, rum running had practically ceased.

CHAPTER IV

WRECK THAT SHIP

Wreck that ship! It was a dangerous course to sail past Fire Island! All the destructive forces were waiting ready to wreck the unfortunate ship that sailed by! Four major shipwrecks occurred every month off Fire Island in the early 16th century, and over the years there has been a wreck along the beach about every 100 yards.

In the severe winter storms of the 1700's with only primitive navigational aids, inaccurate charts and no lighthouse beacon to guide them, many a ship was tossed on the rocks or stranded on the sand bars. But another danger equal to the weather were the professional pirates of "free lance shipwreckers", as they were called. These men lived in settlements on the beach and often placed long string of lights along the shores to resemble the mainland and deceive the unfortunate ship masters. Captains seeing lights on a stormy night or in dense fog steered northward toward what they thought was the sheltering lea of the mainland, but instead found themselves stranded on Fire Island Beach! Shipwreckers also tied bells around a group of cows' necks, and on stormy nights walked the cows on the beach to confuse the lost ships. The captains, believing the bells to be guiding buoys, steered toward the

bells and landed wrecked on the shore! These shipwreckers operated their own sloops or schooners, and prowled the beach night and day for a possible shipwreck. When a storm arose, and a ship was spotted in distress the pirates rescued the crew and passengers in lifeboats, and brought them to shore. Then when the storm had abated, the wreckers sailed out to the abandoned ship, and stripped her of all the cargo aboard.

A local paper in the early 1700's described these men in most complimentary terms: "These men were old salts who had found life before the mast unendurable in consequence of the discipline. By nature they were brave and daring to an extent bordering on recklessness, careless of the present and indifferent to the future..easy of conscience, yet, not wholly hardened in feeling..they will spring as readily to rescue without reward as to save property for pay."

But some free lance wreckers were not so kind! They first murdered the crew and passengers as soon as they brought them to land, so no witnesses would be around to see the plunder of the ship's cargo!

Not all shipwrecks ended in disaster for the passengers. When the Dutch ship "Prins Mautits" ran aground on Fire Island with 160 soldiers and immigrants aboard the survivors were saved by friendly Shinnecock Indians who guided

them to their destination, the island of New Amsterdam, by leading them in a group of dug-out canoes.

Another shipwreck ended happily for the Fire Island Lighthouse keeper, Felix Doming.. He wrote in a letter of March 30, 1840, "that yesterday a brig went to shore on the bar from Palermo, Italy to New York. Captain Nicolo Haggio and all men saved...only one spoke broken English. Over 300 boxes of oranges, anchovies, oil, pickles, capers and figs were ashore...and we had a fortunate day picking up the delicacies from the beach..The Italians were very liberal about letting us take as much as we wanted. I "brot" home 1 box oranges and 1 of lemons, the crew "brot" on shore figs and nuts and Jerusha is in clover." Jerusha was the lighthouse keeper's daughter.

The mainlanders and the islanders fared well from another shipwreck on June 9, 1901. A Spanish brig, the Antonio Lopez, 5,975 tons, with a crew of 135, was wrecked off Point O'Woods. The pilot miscalculated in the heavy rains and thought that the Fire Island light was the Ambrose light off Sandy Hook. All 661 aboard were saved, but the ship was completely wrecked. However, the Spaniards managed to rescue the cases of Malaga wine, and brought them to the beach. Despite the language barrier, the Spaniards and the Fire

Islanders opened the wine bottles, and had a real Spanish party on the beach.

In the early 1800's volunteer groups organized on the mainland to come to the aid of ships in distress. They operated on a 24-hour call basis, similar to volunteer land firemen. When a ship was wrecked, the volunteers were immediately alerted, gathered together on the mainland, and sailed over to Fire Island. A beach watchman was appointed by the towns people at an annual salary of $200 a year!

The United States Life Saving Service, (then part of the U.S. Treasury) had two stations on Fire Island around 1870, the Fire Island Station at the lighthouse, governed by Leander Thurber, and the Point O'Woods Station headed by Captain Edward Baker. The lifesaving station was a red-painted wooden structure with a six-windowed lookout tower, and with space underneath the building for sheltering lifeboats and lifesaving gear. The men of the lifesaving crew did everything by hand. The lifeboats were rolled out of the station and wagons hauled across the sand to the water's edge. The boats were then launched into the water, and the crew rowed through the surf with 14-foot oars. Signal flags in the daytime and lanterns at night were used to communicate

with an off-shore ship in distress. When a shipwreck was too far out to throw a light line, a breeches buoy was used, a ringshaped or belt-like life buoy stretched from ship to shore. It was believed at that time to be the most effective means of saving the passengers and crew of an imperiled vessel. A rocket or gun would fire the messenger line out to the ship.

An exceprt from a letter, written in 1881, describes the life saving drill put on for a U.S. Senator, visiting the Fire Island station: "A signal flag was sighted as the work of a vessel in distress. The lifesaver appled the use... the brass piece did its service admirably. At the explosion, a line shot out which in an instant was fastened to a pole by a man stationed there for that purpose. To the end of the line a board was fastened bearing directions both in and English on how to use the line. By this rope a heavy cable was drawn bearing supplementary instructions, and then the entire breeches buoy was run out, and its use was practically illustrated. Launching of the life boat finished the program."

In the early days of lifesaving a man was paid $40 a month, and half his rations. Since only one person had to stand watch, the other crew members often had time to train

their bird dogs on the beach, shoot wild geese and ducks. Some lifesavers even kept their whaling gear on hand in case they had time for a day's whaling excursion!

Beach patrolling was the most unpopular and rugged job of the Lifesaving Service. At first the lifesavers on duty were allowed to use wagons, bicycles or horses, but they became too lax, and only walking was permitted. On cold and wintery nights the patrollers scanned the pounding surf and cupped their ears listening for the boom of a gun, telling of a ship in destress. They wore canvas or leather masks with slits for the eyes and mouth, as protection against the bitter cold, and the driving winds lifting clouds of blinding sand and jets of sea spray It was a long and lonely walk on the dark beach, and the patroller never knew what bloodthirsty pirate he might meet!

For positive proof that the surfman had made his patrol, a simple procedure was used. The captain of the Point O'Woods station gave a brass tag to the surfman who was walking west. He carried this tag to the station at the end of his patrol, and exchanged it with the surfman who had come east from the Fire Island Station. Then when both surfmen had returned to their respective stations, the tags were delivered to their own captains. And a check of the patrol had been made.

One of the most memorable shipwrecks on Fire Island was that of the Elizabeth, a 530-ton steam packet owned by the City of Philadelphia. It made newspaper headlines because of the drowning of its famous passenger, Margaret Sarah Fuller, the suffragist, and the loss of a priceless cargo of art works. The cargo of the Elizabeth was valued at approximately $150,000, a great deal of money at that time. In addition to liquor, oil, leghorn hats, marble, silks and fruits, there was a priceless art collection of 30 paintings by American artists in Italy and a bust of John C. Calhoun by the famous artist Hiram Powers, and valued at $6,000. The artist, Mr. Powers, thought it safer to transfer this priceless statue on an American ship, since he had already lost so many art pieces on shipwrecked foreign ships. But later, the statue was recovered by salvage crews and found in good condition.

On May 27, 1850, Captain Hastings set sail from Italy to New York with a crew of 14, his wife, and 5 passengers, the Marquis and Marchioness Ossoli, their nine-year old daughter, a young nurse, and Horace Summer, Esq., a prominent Boston businessman. The Marchioness was Margaret Sarah Fuller, suffragist, and literary editor of the New York Tribune. Horace Greeley said of her, "She possessed the most gifted intellect bestowed upon any woman of her day."

At the port of Gibralter on June 4th, Captain Hastings died suddenly (the circumstances of his death were not recorded). Mr. Bangs, first mate, took over command of the ship. Mrs. Hastings, the new widow, stayed aboard the ship and continued her trip. On the morning of June 17th the Elizabeth struck the beach at Fire Island five miles east of the lighthouse. A strong wind was blowing, the breakers were running very high, and sweeping over the decks of the ship. Before the Lifesaving crews could come to the rescue, the ship broke into pieces and all the passengers were drowned. There were conflicting articles on the behavior of the Captain, Mr. Bangs. One report read" the captain used every possible effort to preserve the lives of the passengers, although without success." But another article criticized the captain because while all passengers drowned, seven of the crew managed to swim ashore, and one passenger was rescued, Mrs. Hastings, the former captain's widow. Captain Bangs lashed her to a plank, and gave orders to his first mate, Mr. Davis, to swim ashore with her."

The looting of the Elizabeth's cargo, which had drifted onto the beach was deporable, and a local paper read: "We learn of a species of land piracy has been carried on almost beyond the bound of belief..even the chests of the

poor sailors were rifled of their contents..and their owners had to be supplied with clothes."

But the drowning of the famous Margaret Fuller is what made the Elizabeth shipwreck memorable. The Point O'Woods Society collected funds from all over the world for a Margaret Fuller Memorial on Fire Island. In July of 1901 a colonial-style pavilion was erected on the dunes in Point O'Woods with a bronze tablet inscribed: "Noble in thought and character, eloquent of tongue and pen, she was an inspiration to many of her own time, and her uplifting influence abides with us." Unfortunately both the pavilion and the bronze tablet were swept out to sea in 1913 in a severe hurricane, and nothing remains today.

Another shipwreck on Fire Island occurred during a northeast storm on November 5, 1821, at 3 am. when a three-masted sailing packet, Savannah, came aground on the beach. It was noteworthy on a national basis because the Savannah was the first steam-powered vessel to cross the Atlantic Ocean in 1819. She was built with the engineering genius of Captain Moses Rogers, a friend of Robert Fulton's, and was launched on August 22, 1918. It was a 320-ton ship of oak timbers of an unusual design of a bent smokestack and bulky chain-lined paddle wheels. When the Royal British Navy first saw the Savannah, they thought she was on fire, as smoke was coming

from her funnel. They pursued the Savannah, but she was too fast for them, and they turned back.

When the Savannah was approaching the sandbar, only 100 yards off the shore, Captain Holderidge saw the impending danger, and sounded a cannon from the ship. The lifesaving crews came running and all passengers, and crew were brought ashore through the heavy surf in small boats. The major part of the cargo, 250 bales of cotton, were saved. When all hope of saving the Savannah was abandoned, the local wreckmaster was commission to go to New York for salvage aid. After a week of pounding in the rough seas, the Savannah had worked her way into 9 feet of sand, filling with water at every high tide. The hulk of this elegant steamship finally came to rest on the beach. But not one of the fifteen newspaper accounts of the wreck mentioned her remarkable history. She had been the first to cross the Atlantic under steam, and made many voyages to Stockhom and even to Kronstadt, Russia. Her fame was known all over Europe. But on Fire Island she was just another wreck lying on the sand, and was even confused in the records with another boat, called the Savannah, a small sailing vessel that had also been shipwrecked on Fire Island beach at almost the same time. It was fortunate that her original captain, Moses Rogers, who engineered her construction, and planned her crossing of the Atlantic under steam, did not

live to see her ignominous ending on the Fire Island Beach.

The wreck of the Louis Place on Fire Island deserves mention as it took the LifeSaving Service crews over 40 hours of continuous work to save the crew. The Louis Place was a 3-masted schooner, 735 tons, sailing from Baltimore to New York City, carrying a cargo of coal, and under the command of Captain William Squires with a crew of eight men. From February 7th through the 9th the weather was stormy and extremely cold from Florida to Maine. 29 ships were wrecked along the Atlantic Coast, and the Louis Place and the John Manning were wrecked on Fire Island on the same day. No lives were lost on the John Manning, but the Louis Place only had two survivors of the wreck.

A record describes the Louis Place: "On the morning of February 8th after four days of bitter expousre in the raging sea...the vessel was little better than a drifting iceberg-- almost wholly unmanageable, her running gear frozen in the blocks, her sails as stiff as boards and her deck sheeted with ice. The captain bewildered as to his bearings, but confident that he could not be too far from land, decided, altough his ship was leaking freely to drop his anchors and try to ride out the storm...he gave each member of his crew a ration of liquor and urged them to move about as rapidly as possible."

But the crew's efforts were futile, for as soon as they heard the sound of ominous breakers ahead, and before the anchors could be dropped, the Louis Place went aground on the sand bar. She was discovered five minutes after she hit by crews of the two nearby lifesaving stations, Lone Hill and Blue Point. The crews were already exhausted and some frostbitten because they had just returned from rescuing all abroad the 4-masted schooner, John B. Manning, stranded only a few hours before. The temperature was 3 or 4 above zero, and the winds were 50 miles an hour and it was snowing. A newspaper account read, "The stranded vessel lay three hundred yards from the beach, and one-eighth of a mile west of Lone Hill. The surf was sweeping her from end to end. and her crew were seen in the port mizzen rigging. The surf was very heavy, and filled with a grinding mass of porridge ice two feet in depth...and no boat could be launched from the ship." The only way the crew could be saved was by breeches-buoy. The Lyle gun was put into position for firing the buoy. Suddenly two of the men, the cook and captain, fell from the rigging and disappeared into the sea, a tragic spectacle so early in the rescue. A first shot was fired and a second breeches-buoy was fired. But no attempt was made by the shipwrecked crew in the mizzen rigging to try and reach the breeches line. More shots were fired at intervals until darkness fell. The watchers

kept night vigil on the beach with beacon fires, and the weather was intensely cold. At daylight next day only two out of the original crew of eight remained in the rigging, and they were too frozen to help themselves. Again and again they tried to launch a rescue boat into the ice-laden breakers, but the heavy surf drove them back to the shore. Forty hours had gone by since the ship went aground. Finally at midnight an opportunity came: "At last with one might rush they sent the boat afloat. Keeper Baker of Lone Hill Station, and Keeper Rourke of Blue Point with five other fearless fellows at the oars..Heavy ice pounded and the boat laid alongside.. the two poor fellows slowly descended the shrouds to the rails, and were helped into the surfboat."

The two survivors were brought to the station; William Stevens with badly frozen hands and feet, and Soren Nelson, whose feet were frozen solid in his boots died later of tetanus. The bodies of all were rescued except the Norwegian cook, and they were all buried together in Patchogue. The body of the captain was found in the surf near the Shinnecock Coast Guard Station on the mainland and ironically close to the spot where he had been born. The State Assembly in Albany issued a tribute on February 15th to the Lone Hill and Blue Point Lifesaving Stations: "The stranding of the schooners, John B. Manning and Louis Place...that the rescue of the crew of the former

vessel and of the two survivors of the latter vessel, was effected by the brave men of the above named stations, only through exercise of the highest qualities of human endurance, energy, skill and dauntless devotion to duty."

The Louis Place and the Elizabeth shipwrecks were tragic in their loss of lives, and the Savannah tragic in the loss of prestige of a famous ship.

A reminder of the early shipwreck days occured in January 1961 when the remains of a 19th century sailing vessel was uncovered on the sand dunes at Fire Island Pines after a violent storm. It was believed to be the John B. Manning, which went aground the same day as the Louis Place. There was 75 feet of the ship exposed, a three-foot thick keel, with layers of wood constructed on 12" by 12" ribs. No name was found, but only a bright green strip with a faint outline of letters.

CHAPTER V

A BEACON FLASHING INTO HISTORY

The most historic landmark on Fire Island is the famous lighthouse, built in 1827 and flashing its 18 oil lamps into history every minute and a half! It was 87 feet over the high water mark and situated on the east side of the Fire Island Inlet on Democrat Point. A man standing in the shadow of the lighthouse at that time could knock a fly ball more than 400 feet off the island into the rushing sea! But the winds and constantly shifting sands caused the beach to extend steadily westward until today the beacon is 4.6 miles from the western tip of the island.

The lighthouse cost $10,000 to build and the beacon was the most modern of the day. Later, in 1842 the light had to be refitted, the 15-inch reflectors became 21-inch, and the lamps were reduced from 18 to 14 in number. But still the light was not completely efficient, and the lighthouse itself over the years became unsafe as living quarters for the keeper and his family. The outside brick walls began gradually to disintegrate and were temporarily reinforced with concrete.

In 1858 a new lighthouse was built; 230 feet northeast of the site of the old tower. It was 167 feet, almost twice as high as the old tower, and cost $40,000, more than four times the original light. Every lighthouse in the United States has its own day-mark or individual pattern, and Fire Island

Lighthouse mark was distinguished by 35 feet wide alternating bands of black and white. The lens was a Fresnel, made in France, and used from 1858 to 1932, when it was replaced. This original lens now rests in the Franklin Institute Museum in Philadelphia. A miscalculation was made of the ceiling height of the museum, and the huge lens has only a quarter of an inch clearance from the ceiling!

The first fuel used for the light was whale sperm oil until about 1867 when lard oil was introduced. Then in 1885 lard oil was replaced by kerosene, using the kerosene-wick fixture; and in 1907 the kerosene was replaced by oil, a 55 mm. incandescent oil vapor lamp, which burned 1½ gallons of oil every night.

The early lighhouse keeper and his family led a lonely life, and his only link with civilization was a small boat to the mainland, but there were often sudden storms and squalls in Great South Bay, and small boats often capsized. The Hempstead Inquired of November 18, 1864 reports: "....a boat belonging to the Fire Island Lighthouse was crossing the bay to Pentaquid (now Bayshore) when it capsized in a sudden squall. Richard Eldridge, assistant lighthouse keeper, and hiw wife, held on to the boat until midnight, when a fishing boat discovered them. His wife was frozen to death, and Mr. Eldridge could not speak lounder than a whisper, but

may recover."

The first lighthouse keeper was Felix Doming in 1840. His son, Arthur Doming, was born in the lighthouse, and later took over his father's post. On the average the early keepers stayed only one or two years. The longest term was that of Ezra S. Matt (twenty-one years, 1888 to 1909) and S. K. Hubbard was second with fourteen years, 1874 to 1888. Adrian Boisvert was the keeper between 1934 and 1941. He was a native of Burlington, Vermont, and had been transferred to Fire Island from the Orient Point Lighthouse. He survived the disastrous 1938 hurricane, when the foundation of the lighthouse itself cracked, and the water rose to 3 feet.

In 1819 Congress passed a law stabilizing the salaries of lighthouse keepers from $350 a year to $1,000, depending upon the post. Extra hardship pay was given to isolated lighthouses. For moderate isolation, $60 was added to the base bay; for extreme isolation, $120 was added, and for exceptional isolation," including remoteness and inaccessibility" $180 was added. The lighthouse keeper at remote Minot's Ledge in Massachusetts receivind $1,000 annually. The qualifications needed for a lighthouse keeper were not severe. "The lighthouse keeper must be over 18, and able to read and write, and competent for his duties." A 152-page booklet was

published for instruction to lighthouse keepers. One of the important rules was that the keeper make a daily check to see that the light and lens were upon the exact and proper level. If there was a deviation of only an inch, the beam could be thrown skyward or downward making the light useless to the mariner. An excerpt from a keeper's daily journal read: "punctually at sunset every day, the lighthouse and lamps were lighted...and kept burning brightly to the greatest heights, free of smoke...and shall be extinguished punctually at sunrise and by 10 a.m. everything should be in order for the lighting of the lamp in the evening."

There were two navigational aids that complemented the lighthouse beacon, The Fire Island lightship anchored 15 miles south of Fire Island Inlet, and the Western Union Telegraph Station, a lookout for the arrival of transatlantic ships, and located on the western end of the island.

The Fire Island Lightship was officially anchored in 16 fathoms of water in September 1897. The vessel was 450 tons, steam powered and the name "Fire Island" was painted in red on both sides of the ship. The 15-man crew,including a commander, radio operator, 5 seamen, 3 oilers and 2 cooks served for three weeks and then left for an eight-day leave on the "Liberty Boat" which they called the boat that took them to Bayshore on the mainland.

The first radio fog signals in the United States were

installed in 1920 on the Fire Island Lightship, and also on the Ambrose Channel and Sea Girt Lightships in New Jersey.

During a rough storm at sea the English steamer, Castillion, in March 1924, hit the lightship, and made a great hole in her portquarter from rail to water line. She was towed by the Fire Island Lighthouse tender, Spruce" to the Lighthouse Service Station on Staten Island for repairs. In 1930 she was replaced by a new lightship, 109 feet long, with a 1,000 watt light on her 65 foot mast, and with diaphone fog signals which blasted every 20 seconds and could be heard 15 miles away. During Prohibition the lightship was called "Rum Row Danger Signal", because it was rumored that rum-runners used the lightship to signal other rum runners that the Coast Guard were coming!

But during World War II, the lightship was taken off duty and never put in service again. It was later replaced by a whistling buoy, flashing a light with 1,000 candle power, and riding 30 feet above the water.

The Western Union Telegraph Station, a nine-story watch tower, stood in 1889 on the site of the Robert Moses State Park today. The 75 feet square reservation site was leased by New York State from David S. S. Sammis, builder of the famous Surf Hotel, for $1.00 per year. A watchman was on duty at all times in the tower. When he spotted a transatlantic

ship through the large window, he could tell the name of the boat by the signal flags it was flying, and immediately telegraphed the information to New York City. The news arrived 18 hours ahead of the ship and four hours before notification was received from the Sandy Hook Telegraph Station. The Glen Cove Gazette read: "Mr. Keegan, the watchman who had worked for Western Union Station for 17 years lived in a small house at the bottom of the tower...he knows all ocean steamers and what hour day or night they will pass.. very rarely more than five minutes out of the way in his calculations. All life saving stations are connected to his place by telephone...he is the first to get news"

The telegraph station was abandoned in 1920, and in the hurricane of 1938 it was washed away to sea.

Today (1966) the beacon flashes into history every 7 or 8 seconds, instead of every minute in 1825. There are two lamps, one above the other, which rotate on four beacons, with 21-inche reflectors. An electric motor turns the gear box that revolves the 1,000 watt light. The nightime visibility is 19 miles, and some mainlanders claim they have seen the light 57 miles away on a clear night. In the daytime the light is only used if the visibility is under 5 miles.

The duties of the Fire Island lighthouse today are relatively simple, as the beacon is almost completely automatic.

with safety shut-offs and emergency alarms. If the electric motor turning the gear box breaks down in the night, or if the circuit breaks, an alarm sounds immediately. If a bulb fails, an electro-magnet switches the lamp base around, and a new bulb goes into operation. If the second bulb also fails, an alarm rings. There is also an electronic repair shop which services the lighthouse equipment. The only duties left for the keeper are to climb daily the 197 steps to the light, and clean the relectors, wash the windows and oil the gear box that revolves the light. The keeper in 1966 was a U.S. Coast Guard telephone technician, who lived at the lighthouse with his wife and four children, and tended the beacon as an extra duty of his Coast Guard job. The days of the civilian lighthouse keeper have disappeared, and when the few remaining ones retire; the U. S.Coast Guard will take over their jobs.

The Radio Annex of the lighthouse was started in 1947 as a backup radio for the Washington, D.C. Coast Guard. Three men live in the radio annex building and are on duty round the clock. When a call for help is received from a ship in distress the report is transmitted from the Annex to the Moriches radio operators, 35 miles away, and they, in turn, teletype the report to the AMVER Center in Manhattan. AMVER (Automated Merchant Vessel Report System) is an international maritime

assistance program which Fire Island joined in 1958. In a few minutes the information is then punched onto cards and read into an electronic computer system. The computer predicts the location of all the merchant vessels in that area, and punches a card for each ship. Each card is converted to tape and transmitted over the rescue teletype direct to all the ships in the immediate vicinity of the ship calling for assistance. In this way, a man in the Fire Island Radio Annex can resucue a ship miles out to sea without even leaving his chair.

Not only does the lighthouse beacon flash its light into history every few seconds, but the lighthouse also sends out a radio beam a DF (direction finder) with a special Fire Island signal code to all ships at sea, every five minutes, 24 hours a day. This signal is 282 kilocycles with a 100-mile range, and is part of the Atlantic & Gulf Coast Radio Beacon System, serving commercial and pleasure craft.

If a ship is in dense fog or heavy weather, a navigator can take a bearing when he hears the Fire Island signal, and immediately locate his position at sea. He can also triangulate the positons of several other DF signals (Ambrose Light and Montauk Light) with the Fire Island signal, and find an even more accurate position. The beacon system is completely automatic. A clock regulates the timing, and a tripper on the coder transmits the program every five minutes. There are two clock, two coders, two transmitters and two amplifiers, so that in an emergency,

one can automatically switch over to the other. A third clock is used as the lighthouse keeper's checker of local receiver. He can check the Fire Island DF signal every five minutes, just as if he were on a boat at sea; and thereby see if the signal is coming through the receiver properly and accurately.

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The modern U. S. Coast Guard was formed in January of 1915 with the merger of the Revenue Cutter Service and the Lifesaving Service. The Cutter Service, which began after the Revolution charged "to aid persons at sea in distress, and who may be taken aboard, to preserve property found aboard wrecks, secure the cargoes for the owners, and fight the smuggling. The cutter officers also supervised the drilling and inspection of the Lifesaving Station crews.

There were two cutters in the Fire Island area, heavy keeled schooners (35 to 50 ft.) that carried plenty of sail, and completely equipped cost about $1,000. The ships had one master at $30 a month, mates from $14 to $20 a month, seamen at $8.a month, and deck boys at $4. All received rations, which included among other items "half gill of rum, brandy or whiskey, 1 quart salt, 2 quarts vinegar, 2 pounds soap and 1 pound candles" For their good work in curbing smuggling, the crew received increases in pay in 1793 and again in 1796.

But the U. S. Coast Guard today are the watchers of ships in distress. During 1965 the Fire Island Coast Guard Station took care of 576 ship rescues at sea; 1,777 lives were saved, and property valued at $2,386,590 was recovered.

The Fire Island Coast Guard Station was built on the bay side close to the Robert Moses Bridge. 28 men are assigned to the Coast Guard Station, 8 to the Cutter, Point Heron, and one to the lighthouse station. Four small boats are used for patrolling the waters around Fire Island, and a 44-foot motor lifeboat for maintaining navigational aids. There are also a 30 and 40 foot utility boat, and a 7 foot motor launch. The Cutter Point Dome, formerly assigned to Fire Island is now patrolling off Viet Nam a part of the U. S. Coast Guard fleet trying to stop the smuggling of arms and ammunition to the Viet Cong.

The beacon that flashed into history many years ago, and upon which the commerical ships depended on solely to save them from shipwreck, has lost its importance. With the advent of modern radar, directional range finders, and other electronic devices, there have been on shipwrecks on Fire Island, and most of the ship rescues were pleasure boats during the summer season.

The beacon that flashes from the Fire Island Lighthouse is more of a symbol and a landmark than a necessity today.

CHAPTER VI

HOLD THAT FERRY

Hold that Ferry! For that last minute dash to the mainland dock for the "daddy boat" as the Friday night ferry was called when all the fathers rushed from their offices to catch the ferry and join their families for the week-end.

Or sink that Ferry! For the slow drag to the "death boat" as the Monday morning (6:30 AM) ferry was called when the weary passengers after a strenous two days staggered aboard under their load of luggage. But whichever boat they caught, the ferryboat was the only way to reach the Fire Island resort communities.

But as late as 1850 there was no ferryboat service to Fire Island. The only way to reach the still desolated island was by private boat. The commercial fishing boats, sailing between Babylon and New York during the week, became public excursion boats over the week-ends. The fishermen cleaned up the boats, scrubbed the decks and hired a fiddler for dancing. Then on Saturdays and Sundays the holidayers sailed to Fire Island for the day. There were clambakes on the beach, walks on the dunes, and swimming on the bay side. And on the return trip to the mainland, they danced on the decks with a fiddler for music!

The first commercial ferry boat was the Ripple (1858),

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a double-decked side wheeler steamboat designed for shallow waters, and used to carry the guests of the famous Surf Hotel from the Babylon Dock to the hotel. The State of New York purchased the Ripple in 1892 for quarantine service when a cholera detention camp was started on Fire Island. The health officer, who was not nautically minded, built a huge steam-sterlizing chamber amidships, cutting the Ripple in half, and then lengthened her by adding keel and strakes. The result was that the bow and stern ends whipped around amazingly, yet she somehow managed to survive wind and wave. After the Ripple ended her quarantine duty she was renamed the James W. Wadsworth and in 1932 was used by the Sandy Hook Quarantine Station.

The Fire Island Detention Camp was started during the cholera scare of 1892. All ship passengers and immigrants from Ellis Island, who might be possible cholera victims, were brought over by boat to Fire Island. The Board of Health wanted to purchase Surf Hotel, as the quarantine camp was not large enough for all the passengers, and the S.S. Moravia and several other ships were held in the harbor waiting for available space to debark their passengers.

The Legislature was not in session at that time, so there were no funds available for the purchase of the hotel. However, Governor Roswell P. Flower, ordered the

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immediate purchase of the property and gave his personal check of $50,000, as part payment to New York State of the $210,000 for the hotel, including incidental buildings and the dock at Fire Island Avenue in Babylon.

The Babylon residents, when they heard the news of the purchase of the Surf Hotel, and the future cholera detention camp, all rose against the State, and mass meetings were held in Babylon and Islip. A group of fishing sloops set sail for Fire Island with more than 100 indignant citizens armed with guns, and ready to burn down the hotel. But when the men landed on the beach, they found the caretaker and his family living in the hotel, and they refused to leave. So the citizens sailed back to the mainland.

The Bay Shore residents continued the battle against the quarantine station and the next day obtained an injunction from the Supreme Court against the State of New York for using Fire Island for quarantine purposes. Immediately Sheriff Darling and a posse of deputies rushed to Fire Island Inlet with a writ, and tried to prevent another boatload of refugees from landing on the beach. When the S. S. Cephysus came through the inlet and docked at Babylon, an angry mob of citizens cut her lines free from the dock. The captain of the Cephysus used hoses attached to the ship's boiler and

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drove the mob back with torrents of hot water. They finally retreated but the boat, Cephysus, was forced to anchor in the Fire Island Inlet.

The 69th National Guard Regiment and the 13th Regiment were brought to Fire Island for riot duty. Soldiers patrolled the beach night and day, and were ordered to detain anyone found walking within the restricted quarantine area. Two deputy sheriffs were stationed on the Babylon dock to prevent persons from the Fire Island cholera station landing in Babylon.

An oldy bayman recalled an incident between two branches of the Government on the Fire Island beach: "A National Guard soldier on duty saw a lone man walking the beach, and ordered him to halt...the lone man shifted his "quid to port", looked at the soldier and walked on. The soldier showed his bayonet, and said that the man was walking within quarantine limits. The man said that he was a United States Life Saving Service crew member on his five-mile beat of the beach."

The bayman said that "a flask, a siphon and a few things of like nature figured somewhere in the conference, and when the life saving crew member had departed, he was willing to swear that army men were the best ever, and there were no more complications."

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But the cholera camp had another serious problem. There was no telephone to the mainland, and it was desparately needed for communication. The telephone company had no time to wait for a submarine cable, so they made their own cable from strands of telephone wire, wrapped in insulation, and covered with waterproof material. The cable was then wound around a drum and fastened to a scow connected to the towline of a catboat, called the Lido. However, the wind was unfavorable, and instead of proceeding in a straight line, the catboat had to tack back and forth in a crooked line. The telephone man also tried to prevent the cable from paying out too fast, with improvised anchors, which had been made from the iron seats of dismantled street cars!

But almost as soon as the telephone service was installed, the cholera scare subsided, and the camp was abaondoned in 1893. The first telephone to Fire Island cost $1,500, and the only profit for the phone company was a single call to Babylon for 35¢.

The Brooklyn Eagle of 1911 read: "Today fishermen occasionally stumble over the cable!"

Later in 1938 telephone service was installed on Fire Island, but this time the telephone cable was laid more efficiently.

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After the boat, Ripple, the second steam powered side-wheeler, and the first documented boat, was the Atlantique, used as the first public ferry from Fire Island to Babylon, and the fare was only 15¢!

Special train excursions to Fire Island from Brooklyn, Long Island and New York City, were initiated in 1877, and the round trip was $2.50, and this included a ride to the dock in a horse-drawn buggy. To quote an early newspaper:

"It was a ramshackle box on wheels called a horse car, plying between the depot and Fire Island dock in Babylon...it was a piece of construction that nervous people had better keep out of..creaks and groans..the conductor said he could not get one more passenger in, no matter how crowded the car was..it was not safe..."

Ferryboats in the early days were also used for carrying mail, ferrying the school children over to Bayshore High School, and bringing supplies over from the mainland. The only grocery store on the island in 1910 was Nolan's on the bay, and the ferries always left their grocery orders on a platform post in front of the store.

In the severe winters of the 1900's Great South Bay froze over solid from Fire Island Inlet to Moriches Inlet. The winter residents on the island were completely isolated

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from the mainland without ferries or private boats for transportation, and the children attending Bayshore high school had a real holiday. Iceboats and scooters which were usually used for racing or fun, were now pressed into service as the only transportation to the mainland. The iceboats, with a following wind, could reach speeds of 90 miles an hour. Nathan Woodhull, who worked on Gil Smith's fishing fleet on Fire Island, courted his wife on the mainland by iceboating across the frozen bay!

Great South Bay was completely icebound in 1928 from December until late February. In the emergency the Coast Guard purchased an icebreaker for $65,000 to ferry food and supplies to the island, and to take the teen-age children to Bay Shore high school. But in 1935 the ice-breaker crashed into an oil tanker in the ice floes and was completely wrecked. A new 40-foot boat was commissioned to replace her.

John Wilbur, who founded Ocean Beach, ran a ferry service from Bayshore in the early 1900's. One of the boats, the "Evelyn" was a magnificent two-decker steamer, with a large smokestack amidships, and the pride of Ocean Beach. Competing with John Wilbur's ferry line was the Ocean Beach Ferry Corporation, headed by Captain Robinson, who later took over Wilbur's ferry service.

The Saltaire Ferry Service was headed by Captain Patterson and had two boats, the Stranger and the Elado.

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In 1927 when Saltaire became an incorporated village, the name was changed to Saltaire Ferry Company, and the fleet consisted of the Saltaire I, Saltaire II, and a reconverted PT boat, Saltaire III.

After the repeal of Prohibition the rum running boats did not disappear. Many of them became Fire Island ferry boats. With their high speed motors and maneuverability in rough seas, they made excellent ferries, and some are still running today. The first ex-rum runner on Fire Island in 1936 was the Vagabond,a part of the Saltaire Ferry Company, and in 1938 the Artemis, a rebuilt rum runner, was the first boat of the "Z" Line ferry service running from Ocean Bay Park.

The largest ferry line was the Fire Island Ferries, Inc. and in 1946 it had a fleet of five or more large boats, one of which, The Fire Island Maid, was rebuilt from a freighter.

And the largest number of ferryboat passengers at any one time to Fire Island was after the Broadway opening of the Wolcott Gibbs' play on Fire Island,"A Season in the Sun". Captain Patterson said, "We broke all previous attendance records after the play" People were waiting in long lines at the mainland docks to visit this now famous island, and see if the play depicted the true picture.

In 1964 there were 7 ferry lines operating to Fire

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Island and carrying an estimated 1,740,000 visitors.

A new type of ferry service is being initiated by Fire Island Ferries; a lateral ferry schedule, which will take passengers from town to town on Fire Island. The boat schedule will coincide with church services and community meetings, etc. With the possibility of the future banning of all beach buggies by the National Park Service, this new ferry scheduling will serve to replace beach taxis.

Now that Fire Island is becoming a National Seashore the number of summer visitors will more than double and more ferryboats will be needed.

CHAPTER VII

SAVE THAT DUNE

Save that dune...Plant more beach grass...Build more snow fences..Bulldoze a higher sand pile...Any way to fight the endless battle against the eroding dunes. An imaginative engineer even suggested bringing the entire Navy mothball fleet from the Hudson River to Fire Island, and then sinking the ships in front of the beach as protection from the sea!

Like the Dutchman, the Fire Islander wages a constant battle against the invasion of the cruel sea. During the past 55 years, the Fire Island beach has receded 80 feet. Gabriel in The Evolution of Long Island wrote: "These two mighty gamesters (the land and the sea) are still playing as they have played since the time when Long Island was but a bit of sendiment on the ocean. They will continue to play, no man can possibly think how long..the game is yet young..."

Severe storms have been a common occurence on Fire Island. Records show there were 126 storms between 1635 and 1956, nine storms were unusually severe and seventeen caused con. siderable damage. The first great storm ever recorded was August 15, 1635, and it covered all of Long Island..."divers ships were lost and Indians clumb into trees for their safety." All the whale boats on the outer beachs were completely destroyed.

The second great hurricane was in 1690, when the Great Gut, now known as the Fire Island Inlet, broke through the

barrier beach and increased to a width of nine miles.

The Brookhaven Town Historian wrote in 1778 that a terrible storm swept over the barrier beach from 7 to 9 PM and "wrought great changes in the Fire Island shoreline."

The great blizzard of 1811 also struck Fire Island, and the seas were so high that wrecked ships were piled up on the beaches. The deep snow prevented any rescue work.

A hurricane called the September Gale of 1821 caused such high seas that the salt spray carried as far inland as Corman, more than twelve miles north of the ocean.

On October 24, 1879, the waves on the Fire Island beach were over 40 feet high!

The Fire Island Lighthouse went out completely about 2 AM in a hurricane on August 23, 1893. All communication to the mainland was out, 200 small craft were stranded in Great South Bay, and a three-masted schooner lay wrecked on the beach.

But the most famous and disastrous hurricane of the Eastern seaboard was on September 21, 1938. The entire island was evacuated, and 125 cottages were swept away to sea. Three new channels broke through from the ocean to the bay, and one new channel, eight-feet deep, cut right through the village of Saltaire. The very foundation of the lighthouse cracked,

and the water came up to within three feet of the base.

Saltaire bore the brunt of the storm. Only 90 houses remained out of 183 before the hurricane. The Roman Catholic Church was completely destroyed, and all 15 buildings of Camp Cheerful, a home for crippled boys, washed out to sea. Cherry Grove, Fair Harbor, and Point O'Woods also suffered very heavy damages as these communities were not protected by high dunes. Only 25 houses remained in Cherry Grove, where 85 had been before. Measurements made in the bay after the hurricane subsided, showed that the elevation of the flood waters was more than 15 feet above mean sea level in some locations. The damage from Fire Island Inlet to Montauk Point was $6,000,000.

The Federal project, WPA, immediately began restoration work, and 100 men landed on Fire Island and started putting up wire fences and brush jetties along the oceanfront. $150,000 was appropriated to save the dunes. For a 5,000 foot stretch, the beachfront was pumped with hydraulic fill to a height of 10 feet. Under this barrier lay the debris of destroyed houses. Construction began on new cottages, 80% of the boardwalk was replaced, new water plants were built, and electricity restored.

But again, storms struck Fire Island; Hurricane Carol on August 3, 1954, Diane in 1955 and Donna in 1960. They became

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more frequent and unusually severe. Wolcott Gibbs, the Fire Island author, gave his impression of the islanders attitude toward the 1938 hurricane: "The inhabitants of Fire Island, who had twice seen the sea smashing over their dunes, had developed an irritable fatalism about the weather, and paid little attention to these alarms that sprang up in September. Some moved back to town; but most of them, confident that the storm would either whirl harmlessly out to sea, or else that the Coast Guard would give them ample warning of its approach, stayed where they were, feeling reasonably safe and agreeably heroic."

But contrary to Gibbs' criticism of the Fire Islanders, with each storm the islanders renewed their efforts to save the dunes. They built snow fences, planted beach grass, used bulldozers to build up the dunes, and everywhere they placed signs, "Keep Off the Dunes". Every idea was tried, even Christmas trees were brought over after the holidays and piled high, as dune protection, but they were later considered a fire hazard.

Point O'Woods hired a bulldozer and operator to build up 2,000 feet of oceanfront dunes, and used it again in 1961. However, the residents of Ocean Bay Park, their neighbors, were incensed at Point O'Woods for their continual use of the

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bulldozer. They felt that they were being robbed of their share of the natural littoral drift, which was east to west at the rate of 150,000 cubic yards a year.

On May 6, 1962, a northeast storm which seemed to come from no where, turned into a severe hurricane and caught the islanders unaware. The dunes were badly eroded for miles, 116 homes were destroyed, and 96 homes were lost completely.

A Pick-Up Pieces Corp. of volunteer clean-up crews was organized to clear up the wreckage. They salvaged what was possible, and then gathered up the debris from houses, board-walks, and fences, and piled them into a huge pyre, a bonfire of wooden timbers. Cherry Grove gathered 250 volunteers who met at 10 AM, and worked until 6 PM planting 30,000 clumps of beach grass, inserted 8 inches deep in two staggered lines the entire length of Cherry Grove beach. A Permanent Dunes Fund was established, and $6,000 was collected from all over the United States. The Cherry Grove Arts Project gave $1,000 to the fund.

But all these efforts were not enough, and a bigger project was started. A temporary State Commission on Protection and Preservation of the Atlantic Shore Front was formed in conjunction with the United States Army Engineers Corps, and one of their proposals was to build an auto road on Fire Island.

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The road was not a new proposal, It had been suggested three times before. In.1927 the Fire Island Beacon (Ocean Beach newspaper) wrote: "A proposed Fire Island Boulevard will be America's most beautiful highway." Mayor Fisher in 1938 vetoed an Ocean Beach proposal to build a road east of Saltaire. In 1961 the Town of Islip suggested a plan for a 25-foot right-of-way road for emergency vehicles on Fire Island, but the residents rejected the proposal.

In the Spring of 1962 the controversy of the road began in earnest, and a public hearing was held at the Jones Beach Park on July 10th. On one side were the U. S. Army Engineers, Suffolk County Planning Commission, U.S. Public Roads, U.S. Erosion Board, and Robert Moses, head of the Long Island Park Commission...all supporting the road. On the other side were 90% of the Fire Island property owners, nature lovers and conservationists, including the National Audobon Society, the American Museum of Natural History, and many other local groups. The actual plan was for the Army Engineering Corps to build a 20-mile road of hydraulic fill along the beachfront at an elevation of 18 feet above the mean high water, with underpasses going beneath the road to the beaches. The cost would be $19 million, which would be provided by both Federal and

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State funds.

The residents looked upon the road with the same horror that the Indians had for the coming of the railroad. They formed an "Emergency Committee to Save Fire Island", headed by Arthur R..Silsdorf, and argued that the road was an infringement upon the quiet sanctuary of a carless island. They visualized hordes of people coming to litter the beaches, and to pollute the air with auto exhaust fumes. The battle of the road continued back and forth. An Army Corps engineer said the road would stabilize the dunes, and act as a protective barrier against severe storms. He pointed out that the Dutch had built hard-surfaced roads on their dikes with great success. The Fire Island homeowners complained bitterly that the road would spoil the majestic beachfront scenery, change the island into a city atmosphere of honking horns, and carbon monoxide clouds, and lower the property values of the houses. Arnold Horwitt, an Ocean Beach musical lyricist, wrote a song for the occasion of the July 10th meeting at the Jones Beach Restaurant. The song was "Everything Comin up Moses". As Robert Moses was the strongest and loudest advocator for the road against most of the Fire Island residents who came to fight the plan, he played a determined and colorful part at the meeting.

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The Fire Islanders finally won the battle of the road, and the proposal died down completely.

But there was still the problem of the narrowing of Fire Island Inlet and the westerly sand migration of Democrat Point. The predominant littoral drift on Fire Island is westerly with the sands eroding from the beaches, east to west, and the winds attacking east to southeast. This causes an average westerly increase of 212 feet a year in the length of Fire Island, and an increase of over 4½ miles since 1825!.

The migration was temporarily arrested in 1940 when a 5,000 foot jetty was built with Federal funds at Democrat Point on the western tip of Fire Island. By 1950, the area east of the jetty was almost filled, and littoral drift was bypassing the structure. It was necessary in 1959 to dredge the inlet to provide for another channel. The constant yearly increase in the overall length of Fire Island can be seen in these quotes:

1950 - Robert Cushman Murphy refers to Fire Island as "a 25-mile strip from Fire Island Inlet to Moriches Inlet."

1954 - Wolcott Gibbs speaks of "the 29-mile splinter of wind-washed sand."

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1960 - Dr. A. Melamid in his speech before American Association for Advancement of Science refers to "the 30-mile strip called Fire Island."

1963 - U. S. Department of the Interior report read: "32-mile long narrow stretch of sand reef."

1966 - Fire Island National Park Service wrote of the "32-mile beach barrier."

This westerly drift not only has extended Democrat Point, but in 1966 the Fire Island Inlet was only 1,200 feet wide. This shoal extension will continue to grow at the rate of 600,00 cubic yards a year, until it will ultimately close the Fire Island Inlet. Both commercial and pleasure boats are completely dependent on the inlet channel. Commercial tankers, carrying petroleum and fish to Patchogue, transported 55,000 tons of cargo in 1952 and 250,000 tons in 1961. Pleasure boats based in Great South Bay numbered 6,770 in 1963, and are estimated to increase to 76,600 in 2015! The inlet waters have become so shallow in recent years that boats have either grounded on the sands or collided with each other, causing great damage; in 1964 $81,500 for recreation boats, and $35,200 for commercial boats.

The District Engineer of the United States Army Engineer Corps made the following recommendations to the Federal Army:

(1) A navigation channel be dredged, 28 feet deep and

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500 feet wide at a cost of $8,500,000. (2) A dike to be constructed at a cost of $5,000,000. (3) 1,200,000 cubic yards of sand to be bypassed to a feeder beach every two years. (4) The existing jetty at Democrat Point to be extended by 1,000 feet at a cost of $16,280,000; and the Fish and Wildlife Service suggested that for the many sport fishermen who used the jetty, the top be hard surfaced with guard rails. In 1966 these proposals were in the model stage awaiting appropriations from Congress.

Today (1971) with Federal and State funds the Army Engineering Corps is digging a littoral trap off shore on the outer end of the Democrat Point jetty. The sands, moving from east to west, fill up this littoral trap; and a hopper then moves the sand to a deposition basin. A pipeline dredge pumps the trapped sand out of the basin to the westward part of the beach where the sand is needed.

Save the inlet is equally as important as "save that dune" because both have the same goals, to halt the east-west littoral drift, and thereby both stabilize and nourish the western barrier beach, and protect it from the erosion of hurricanes. The National Park Service has gone forward by posting large signs, reading "Keep Off the Dunes" and instructing all park men at the information centers. "Save that dune" is the responsibility of every Fire Islander and of every National Park visitor.

CHAPTER VIII

EXPRESS WAGON CULTURE

Pull your wagon to the ferry and meet the weekend guests. Drag your wagon to the grocery for supplies. Pack your wagon with bottles and setups and join the nearest party. The wagon replaces the automobile on this roadless and carless island. It's the badge of the true Fire Islander. It's the Express Wagon Culture...and the wagons vary, some creak with unmatched wheels, some are rusted and need paint, and others are brightly colored with the owner's name or initials emblazoned on the side. And most of the wagons return to their homes at night...to the 18 communities strung along the 15-mile barrier beach. Each town has its own atmosphere and individuality from Seaview, the conservative Newport of Fire Island, to the Fire Island Pines, the Venice with its grand channel lined with smart shops to the informal family atmosphere of Fair Harbor. There are about 2,600 permanent homes, a summer population of 30,000 and about 300 winter residents. According to the 1970 figures taken by the Long Island Lighting Company, there are 110 winter residents in Ocean Beach, 105 in the non-incorporated villages and 73 residents in Saltaire.

The architecture of the houses is wildly diverse, a house of glass that looks like a radar installation; a cottage with a

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dropped handkerchief roof, a wooden structure that resembled a bird in flight and a beach house shaped like a windmill. While some of the homes were wildly imaginative in architecture, most of them were simple wooden cottages with weathered shingles. And the simplest of all were the homes of the few squatters who still lived in the island; a driftwood shack with 4-inch thick tar paper walls has stood east of Ocean Ridge for more than 65 years, and a simple tent is the home of Jimmy Cochina, an Art Students League painter, who does huge outdoor abstractions on the dunes with waterproof colors.

The names of the houses are highly imaginative; Taria Whitmore (tarry a little more), Dunromain (done roaming), EEE (Four Es or For Ease!) and Sandy Beds, In Cherry Grove, a unique resort on Fire Island, there are such names as Dionysian Hermes, Xanadu, Tulle and Belvedere, and even the Male Box. Cherry Grove is a unique community because it has given Fire Island an international reputation as the Capri of the United States. From the beaches of the Riviera to the discotheques of New York to the calypso bars of the Caribbean, Fire Island has often been erroneously tagged as the resort for homosexuals. Before the hurricane of 1938, Cheery Grove was a middle class family vacation spot. But since the end of World War II, the "Gays" have changed the town into a bizarre resort with colorful houses of bright pink, pale blue and purples, striped flower boxes

and vivid umbrellas. On the bayside "Belvedere" the most imposing and largest home on Fire Island, resembles a Venetian palazzio, surrounded by Greek and Roman statues, wrought iron gates and formal gardens.

Wolcott Gibbs described the Cherry Grove residents "as young men, with a common quality, something proud, soft and mysterious. These boys are another thing Fire Island is supposed to be noted for; they came a few years ago, tentative as deer at a brook, and finding no hunters, they stayed and multiplied incredibly."

The Cherry Grove community spirit is the closest and strongest on the island, mainly because they are subject to outside pressures and stand alone. The residents sponsor an Arts Project, put on fashion preview shows, and have two musical revues each season which bring hundreds of curious onlookers. But to make Cherry Grove, one single community out of 18, representative of the entire spirit of Fire Island, is like saying that Greenwich Village is typical of Manhattan. And the Press in the past have over-emphasized the unique community of Cherry Grove. It is certainly not representative.

Ocean Beach, the largest and oldest community on the island is the center of activity. There are from 15,000 to 17,000 weekenders in the summer season, and in ten blocks there

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are over 500 houses! It has the only school, the only jail, only newspaper, two liquor stores and nine bars with a photography studio. Ocean Beach has a complete village common, New England style, with green grass and a white flagpole in the center. It is the most important meeting spot for singles on Fire Island. The girls and boys stroll up and down Bay Walk (the main street), or sit on the cement wall following the walk, and wait for someone to notice them.

Ocean Beach was started in 1906 with a real estate partnership between two first families, the Wilburs and the Corneilles. After many fights between the two partners, they broke up, and Wilbur founded a development of ten houses called Ocean Bay, which later became the town of Ocean Beach. A 1920 brochure published by the Ocean Beach Development Company with John A. Wilbur, President, describes Ocean Beach as "Summer Homes by the Sea where Health and Happiness go Hand in Hand" A four-room furnished cottage from June 1st to October 1st was $250,"including bed linen, silver, washstand bowl, with pitcher and pail, chiffonier and furniture."

In 1923 the first yacht club on Fire Island was built in Ocean Beach and a Regatta Program read, "Fire Island Yacht Club, Albert L. George, Commodore" and listed the main events as "cruiser, runabout and novelty races."

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EXPRESS WAGON CULTURE

But there was also the realistic side of informal island living, and one of the local papers described the Ocean Beach sanitation procedure. "The pail system in outhouses is used, and galvanized pails are emptied, sprinkled with chloride of lime, and the contents taken away before daylight every morning by a scavenger employed by the property owners. He also removes garbage and rubbish. The charge is 75¢ a week per house."

A later folder of 1935 advertises Ocean Beach as the resort: " WHERE there is no hay fever.
WHERE there is no dust.
WHERE there is more sunshine than anywhere on the Atlantic Coast
WHERE you may tread for your own clams for chowder and clam bakes.
WHERE deep breathing is a delight and the atmosphere an ozone tonic!

Point O'Woods has been called everything from the Newport of Fire Island, to a staid New England village, or "Behind the Iron Curtain", the name resulting from a high wire fence which separates it from Ocean Bay Park, with a locked gate the only entranceway. And the residents of Point O'Woods had the key to the gate

An editorial by Wolcott Gibbs in the 1954 Fire Islander on Point O'Woods read:"Nothing ever changes. A lady of 92 lent her house to young relatives with the advice to put the flag up on the Fourth of July. The flag had a blue field and only 38

stars. The really interesting thing about the community is its eerie detachment, both physical and spiritual, from the surrounding landscape."

Point O'Woods is a half-mile, resort community, with over 200 brown shingled houses of uniform style, and each individually owned, but erected under a 99-year ground lease with the Point O'Woods Association. This association owns and maintains all the land and facilities, with the home owners as stockholders, and charging a yearly recreational fee for sailing, swimming, children classes, etc. Any profits left over are used for community improvements. There are volunteer committees for almost every activity, and the Assembly has charge of all the recreational programs. The sale of liquor is banned, but the Club provides setups. To quote an island brochure; Point O'Woods is unique in appearance, unique in organization, and unique in custom and tradition." It has the only railroad on Fire Island, a gasoline engine with three cars which runs a half-mile from ferry dock to Club House. The library has a complete history of Fire Island and also Point O'Woods in a series of pictorial scrapbooks of photographs, news clippings and booklets. The current scrapbook is always taken home every winter, and brought up to date by a volunteer summer librarian.

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Originally Point O'Woods was a chapter of the Long Island Chautauqua, a national organization dedicated to furthering the summer school education of adults with emphasis on religious and classical courses. This educational colony was open from July 4th to September 5th, and included a pastoral seaside retreat, a YMCA encampment, and an auditorium with a seating capacity of 4,000, and room on the stage for a chorus of 500! Admission to Chautauqua was 35¢ and a turnstile ticket house was located at the bayside dock. But later the colony failed financially and 175 acres were purchased in April of 1898 by a group of seven Patchogue businessmen, who with a capital investment of $25,000 incorporated the Point O'Woods Association. The seven owners became the directors and established a 50-year lease on the land, which was later renewed in perpetua.

The purpose of this new colony was "to establish a summer vacation spot for those who like quiet resorts by the sea apart from fashionable resorts"

Saltaire, which has often been called the Bermuda of New York, is a pleasant suburban community. It was incorporated in 1917, and has a Mayor and a board of four trustees, who are elected every two years. There is a community hall where village meetings are held, a yacht club and two churches.

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An interesting notice of a public auction sale in Saltaire

in the summer of 1922 appeared in a library file:

The Supreme Court Order
to liquidate bungalow sites at Saltaire
to be sold, Saturday, August 19, 1922
at a fraction of their value
and regardless of their former selling price
350 choice Saltaire lots
between the Atlantic Ocean and Great South Bay
by order of
Fire Island Beach Development Company

Lonelyville is a small family community of 35 houses east of Dunewood, and with about 500 feet of beachfront. During the late 1800s four sturdy pioneers from Bay Shore established a colony of houses in Lonelyville. Harry Brewster, the founder, worte an article entitled, "The Nature Fakers of Lonelyville" in which he made a set of rules that "dwellings could be only one story high..no gambling..saloons or resorts must be not within a mile of a church or a school...silk socks, a Van Dyke beard, and dressing for dinner will not be tolerated...diamonds, fur coats and little wooly dogs are tabooed in the township".

Daivs Park is a community toward the eastern end of Fire Island with over 230 houses clustered together. It is of particular interest because it is the center of the largest number of groups living together. Groupers, as they are called, are single or married between the ages of 20 and 30 who live together in order to save the expense of the high summer rentals.

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The renters divide food and living expenses, but have little privacy. A quiet summer home becomes a loud and crowded boarding house, and although only two tenants may sign the lease, the rental house will be occupied by 20 tenants, and perhaps 30 additional guests over the weekends. The "Sixish" cocktail hour is an institution started by the Groupers. Around six o'clock boys and girls emerge from their own Group House, drinks in hand, and proceed to whichever house has been designated for this weekend's gathering. The party may end up with 200 people spilling over the porches of the house and onto the walks. One "sixish" party finished with a group falling right through the floor of the front porch, which gave way under the tremendous weight of the guests! Some communities have banned Groupers, but as long as homeowners, greedy for higher rentals, continue to rent to groupers, the problem will not be solved.

Water Island is mentioned briefly, because it is the last community that has managed to keep its rural atmosphere There is no electricity, no hotel, restaurant, bar or ferry boat service, and only one public telephone for emergencies. The Water Island Home Owners Association had the New York Telephone Company bury its trans-island cables, so that the

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landscape would be be spoiled by telephone wires. Water Island was the farming center of Fire Island during the early 1800s. Many heads of cattle grazed in the fields near the bayside, and sheep were also raised.

The communities on Fire Island are serviced by an elementary school, a local jail and the Suffolk County Police force with a Marine Division.

The first and only school on the island was an elementary one started in Ocean Beach in 1910 with only three students. Mrs. Minna Woodhull was the teacher and principal, and later in 1935, Dick Woodhull, her son, became the principal until his retirement in 1962. In cooperation with the Board of Cooperative Educational Service an additional teacher came over from the mainland one day every week to teach one particular subject, an English teacher on Tuesday, Mathematics teacher on Wednesday, etc. For transportation to the school a four-wheeled bus picked up the students along the boardwalks and beach at scheduled intervals. The teenagers commuted by ferry to the Bay Shore High School, and in the winter when the bay became completely frozen over, the Coast Guard iceboat took the students over the ice of the bay. A new brick elementary school was opened in 1954 in the

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Corneille Estates, and Alexander Vandermark was made the new principal in 1962. Today the school has ___students in attendance.

The Ocean Beach Jail, and the only one on the island, had a colorful beginning, and its opening in 1935 provided the local press with real comedy material. There were three dedications of the jail; the first on July 27th was called off because a laggard plumber was out fishing for blues, and did not finish piecing the pipes together. The second dedication, scheduled for August 4th, was cancelled when the Marshall mislaid the key to the jail. The Mayor paced back and forth, the Honorary Police Commissioner waited, but the key could not be found. The dedication speeches were undelivered and the flowers thrown away! The third dedication on August 11th finally opened the jail, to the strains of Sweet Adelaine. Two local residents asked to be jailed as the first prisoners, but they were told to wait until 2:30 a.m when the bars closed! At that time a crowd of almost 300 people were on hand to see the first prisoners. Billy Rose and his wife, Fanny Brice, also wanted to be locked up overnight and George Gershwin, Jimmy Durant and Ben Hecht all applied for a night in jail. Today the jail is used occasionally for a disorderly drunk or a minor offender, but any serious criminal is transported to the mainland by the Suffolk County Police.

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The Suffolk County Police with central headquarters in Hauppauge had jurisdiction over Fire Island, and divided their areas of duty into three precincts: Town of Babylon (covering Robert Moses State Park), Town of Islip (covering from Kismet east to Seaview); and Town of Brookaven (covering all towns from Seaview east to Davis Park). Power-wagon buggies were used on a 24-hour basis (two men in each car), and to supplement them, eight men patrolled the beach with walkie talkies. In an emergency the communities could telephone the Suffolk Police for aid, with the exception of Saltaire and Ocean Beach, two incorporated villages who each had their own police force, and their own mayor in residence.

The island communities were serviced well by the Suffolk Police and U.S. Coast Guard for protection, by the county school for education, and now by the National Park Service for conservation. But the express wagon gave the communities the hardest day-to-day service. They transported baggage from the ferry dock, carried groceries and supplies from the store, toted weary children and dogs and served as portable cocktail bars. Only children used express wagons on the mainland, but on Fire Island they replaced the automobile. They created an Express Wagon Culture

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FOLLOW THE CELEBRITY CIRCUIT

Escape to a barrier roof! Close to Manhattan is an idyllic island devoid of cars, buses and airports. A quiet place where celebrities can escape their agents, publicity men, and the heavy pressures of the celebrity circuit. And as early as 1800 writers, artists and composers came to Fire Island to find inspiration on this restful strip of barrier seashore. And they continued to come in greater numbers every year. As Wolcott Gibbs wrote: "a pleasant, worldly group, augmented from time to time by urban celebrities, that still understand the value of simple life and adapt themselves to it gracefully without perceptible condescension."

One of the earliest celebrities, Lillie Devereux Blake, President of the New York Women's Suffrage League since its founding in 1886, lived at Point O'Woods for many years. Herman Melville spent two years in Kismet during 1887-89. He came for his wife's hay fever, and thought the Surf Inn was highly priced. "Billy Bud", his classic novel, was written during his stay; it was not well received, and his poems were not published until the 1900's. The score of one of the most popular Broadway musicals, "Porgy and Bess" was written in 1933 by the famous George Gershwin on Fire Island.

Mr. Hewlett R. Bishop, Atlantic Coast Director for

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the Maritime Administration, built a large home in 1912 on Fire Island, and in later years General George M. Marshall settled in Ocean Beach.

The First Lady of Fair Harbor, was the late film star, Thelma Ritter. Peggy Fears, a former Ziegfield Follies girl, was the owner of the Fire Island Pines Hotel, one of the most popular inns on the island.

But the celebrity who really made Fire Island world famous and a center of interest in the metropolitan area was Wolcott Gibbs. In 1950 he wrote the prize-winning Broadway play, "A Season in the Sun", and used many of the local Fire Island residents and vacationing celebrities as characters in his play. After the opening at the Cort Theater on September 28, 1950, crowds of visitors came by ferryboat to see with their own eyes what the plan had described. But many were disappointed because they saw only a quiet island of sand dunes with the usual vacationers. The tourists never saw the Wolcott Gibbs 'round table of friends, nor the mad colorful characters nor the wild life on Fire Island depicted in the Broadway play.

Captain Jerry Pastorfield was a local resident immortalized by Wolcott Gibbs in his play. The name Captain was strictly an accident, as the only sea duty Captain Pastorfield ever did was as cabin boy on the yacht of P. Lorillard.

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His nephew with the same name, Jerry Pastorfield, came to live in Ocean Beach and in order to facilitate the mail delivery, they called the elder Pastorfield, "Captain", and the name stuck. Captain Pastorfield's house, Crest O'Dune, was a large gabled house built in 1919 by Captain Noah Ackerly, one of the island's pioneer builders. Forty-two years of tides and wind had placed the house almost on top of the dunes. The inside resembled a cluttered antique shop or museum, with hundreds of memorabilia; curios from the jaws of a whale to peacock feathers, as Captain Pastorfield was an inveterate beachcomber and his wife, Fifi, an antique collector. Their home was a gathering spot for theatrical people, such as Billy Rose, Fanny Brice, George and Ira Gershwin and Lucille Ball, and later became a boarding house. During the winter months the Pastorfields moved to their restaurant in New York called the "Open Gate". When they closed in the Spring to return to Fire Island, they left a sign: "Don't Eat 'til We Come Back." In 1961 Captain Pastorfield died at the age of 87, and the familiar beachcomber was sadly missed on the island.

Lee and Paul Strasberg, the theatrical family bought a home in Fair Harbor, and made their house a theater-world Salzburg.

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After the Wolcott Gibbs era writers began coming to Fire Island in great numbers. Herman Wouk wrote,"Mutiny on the Bounty", and also founded the only Hebrew synagogue on the island. Theordore White wrote the Pulitzer-prize novel, "The Making of a President"; Robert McLaughlin, "The Walls of Heaven"; Edward Albee completed "Virginia Wolfe" on Water Island; Truman Capote wrote the "Glass Harp" in a beach shack near Fire Island Pines; Jules Pfeiffer wrote "A Notion of Sin" on the dunes, and Reginald Rose, TV producer, used Fire Island as his workshop.

Later Charles Collingwood, CBS news commentator, came and supported the Anti-Road campaign on the island, and Pulitzer Prize winner, Marion Harper, spent a summer writing. She disguised herself as a fisherman in tattered hat and ragged pants, and fished off the ferryboat docks; where she could observe the passengers coming and going, many of which became characters in her book she was working on.

But where there are celebrities, there is Press coverage, and over the years Fire Island had many newspapers, most of which averaged a life span of two or three years. The history of Fire Island newspapers begins in the late 1800's. The first newspaper called "The Point O'Woods Review", a monthly, was published in 1897 in Babylon by the Long Island Chautauqua Assembly Association and cost 50¢ a year. The Reverend

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John D. Long of Babylon and the Reverend A. E. Colton of Patchogue were the editors. The masthead read: "Devoted to Advancement of Religion, Patriotism, Science, Art, Innocent Recreation and Physical Perfection." During the summer months The Review was devoted to the Chautauqua Summer Schools. It listed the courses available in the School of Expression: "Expressional Gymnastics and Vocal Technique"; Pulpit Delivery and Liturgies." In the School of Languages Greek, Latin, Hebrew and Semitic languages were taught, and also a new method of simplifying music courses had been discovered. This new system was "God's way of bringing music within the comprehension of the masses of people. It has transformed the popular music of Great Britain, and it will have the same result in America as fast as it is adopted and applied." But the system never succeeded.

When the Chautauqua Assembly Association failed financially in 1898, the summer schools closed and the newspaper was no longer published.

There was not another paper until the Fire Island Beacon in 1927, a weekly published by real estate developers to attract people to Fire Island, The masthead read: "Where the Sunrise Trail Meets the Atlantic Ocean and the Proposed Fire Island Boulevard will be America's Most Beautiful Highway". The Fire Island Beacon lasted only a short time.

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Another newspaper with a brief history was "The Pepper Pod" published by A. D. Howden Smith of the Point O'Woods Association. It looked more like a magazine with six letter-size pages, issued every other Friday, and costing 25¢.

The Fire Island Reporter was published during 1949 and 1950 by Rayfield Steinberg, who had been with the Tokyo desk of Newsweek Magazine.

During 1954 and 1955 Leo Schull, a theatrical producer, published the Fire Island Press. Wolcott Gibbs, owner of the rival newspaper, commented, "A newspaper like the Fire Island Press is strictly for Broadway consumption." Leo Schull countered, "The Fire Islander was started by a reformed alcholic." Gibbs reply was, "What does he mean, reformed ?"

The Fire Islander was a successful eight-page tabloid, published by Wolcott Gibbs for thirteen weeks of the year. Gibbs' front porch was the newspaper office and his cellar game room was the city desk. The unpaid staff were William Birmingham, a local real estate man, Herman Wechsler, owner of a Manhattan art gallery, Mrs. Wolcott Gibbs and her son, Tony, who was the paper's weekend space salesman.

Gibbs said, "When I can get the paper on a paying

basis, I'd like to buy some fairly good fiction. But his list of unpaid contributors to the Fire Islander was filled with famous names; John O'Hara, John Crosby, Lucius Beebe, James Thurber, Herman Wouk, Nat Benchley and John Lardner, with cartoons by Charles Addams, William Steig and Robert Day.

When the Fire Islander ended in 1956, Jay Garfield Trien, tried to purchase the newspaper, but Gibbs' partner declined, so Jay Trien decided to start his own paper. A 20-year old junior at the University of Pennsylvania, Jay Trien, became the editor, and his co-editors were Paul Garrin, a pre-medical student at Columbia and Stephanie Roth, a junior at Hunter College. The rest of the staff were mostly students. The newspaper was called the Fire Island News, a monthly paper with a circulation of about 3,700 in 1966. Their offices were first located in the Ocean Beach Community House. But in 1960 they were evicted and forced to move to smaller quarters over a main street bar and grill. Village officials claimed they needed the newspaper space for a Police Court, but it was rumored that they objected to the paper's criticism of municipal affairs.

Today the Fire Island News is in larger headquarters and has expanded to a 20-page weekly, published from Memorial Day through Labor Day by the Trigor Publishing Company at 15 cents an issue, and it represents all the communities on the island

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with articles often written by town residents themselves. In addition to news there are feature columns, services guide, and even a corner for marine science. The paper has also published, first in 1960 and then in 1965, the Fire Island Guide, a booklet of about 96 pages, which sells for $1.00 at local newsstands. It tells the history and flavor of each community and offers the visitor a complete guide of lodgings, real estate, restaurants, transportation, etc.

Since 1898 there have been seven local newspapers on Fire Island, and all have terminated except for the Fire Island News which has continued for over 15 years to give complete coverage of the Fire Island scence. Its caption, "if you're not with it, you're without it", gives a true picture of the importance of a local newspaper to the island resident.

The early celebrities and newspapers were the color and life of Fire Island, but the hotels were the centers of resort activity for vacationers and famous visitors and often the source of newspaper stories.

The first hotel on Fire Island was the Surf Hotel, a three-story wooden frame building, 100 feet long with covered walks, porches and guest cottages, built by David S. S. (Sturgis Sprague)

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Sammis of Babylon. For 30 years he was the genial host with a handshake for every guest, and there were many celebrated visitors. The annex or "Albany Cottage" housed these eminent guests; statesmen, senators, governors, and the famous, such as Jay Gould, Diamond Jim Brady, Lillian Russell and many others. The atmosphere of the hotel was formal..."Yachting suits are the order of the day with men and maidens, and a healthy, sunburned set they are. Life here is as unrestrained as on board one's own yacht..a truly happy existence."

The Surf Hotel also published a small paper that gave the guests the daily hotel schedule and other news. It described the Surf as the perfect resort: "The sea has none of your polite little Coney Island waves, but huge ocean surges. The ozonic tonic of the ocean is for those in need of an ocean voyage, but unable to follow the dictates of their physician. It is a place for those suffering from hay fever, or rose cold, and is a place to get rid of malaria fever, catarrh and chills. Therapeutic sand baths were given for the relief of rheumatic conditions. A sand bath consisted of a five-foot hole being dug above the water line, and then burying the patient naked in the sand, except for his head and left or right arm. After fifteen minutes the patient began to feel a pricking sensation

and perspire profusely, and he was immediately removed from the sand. No bath had ever been given without effecting a cure! A man of 60 had rheumatism, but after one sand bath, he continuously wanted to jump and skip like a boy!"

Edward Sammis, the brother of the Surf Hotel owner, was in charge of the bathhouses and bathing area. According to the Glen Cove Gazette of the day: "He knows how to give a tall bather a short outfit, and vice versa!"

But gradually the Surf Hotel began to deteriorate, and f e w repairs were made on the buildings and walks. Later during a summer storm the entire dining hall was swept away from the foundations, and the hotel was totally wrecked. In 1892 it was purchased by the State of New York as a cholera detention camp.

During the early 1900's there was a series of hotel fires on Fire Island which burned seven hotels to the ground. It was understandable because there were no official fire departments in the communities, and no immediate source of water. The fire victims had to depend on a water bucket brigade, while waiting for the fire department to come across the bay from the mainland, and usually the hotel burned to the ground before the fire department arrived.

The Fire Island Hotel, a half-mile from the Surf Hotel and

facing the ocean, was three stories high with 200 elaborately furnished bedrooms. On May 27, 1903, the hotel caught fire, and it was suspected that someone started the fire in the paint shop. The Fire Island Life Saving Station was called, but there was no water! The hotel burned to the ground, and a $2,000 reward was offered by Sire Brothers of Manhattan, for the arrest of the incendiary.

The next fire was the Gerard House, a shingled building constructed in 1895 near the Point O'Woods dock for $2,000, and accomodating 100 guests. On the evening of September 13, 1909, as the cook rang the six o'clock dinner bell, a fire started in the dining area. A bucket brigade was immediately organized, but the hotel could not be saved.

The Ocean Beach Hotel burned down three times! The original hotel (opposite Islip), built in 1908, burned down completely eight years later. The second Ocean Beach Hotel, built on the same site in 1922, caught fire and was completely demolished in 1930. The third was the first hotel on Fire Island to have electricity, but in 1931 this Ocean Beach Hotel was also destroyed by fire.

The largest and most spectacular fire was the Cherry Grove Hotel which lit up the sky at 4:30 a.m. the morning of September 10, 1956. It was a $93,000 hotel with damages listed

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at $140,000! A 30-mile northeast wind kept fanning the flames of the fire, and only two fire hoses and pumps were available. It was the pioneer spirit of ten heroic housewives who left their beds to volunteer as firewomen, that saved the hotel! The Women's Bucket Brigade formed a single line, and passed the water buckets from one to another with great spirit. Later the Sayville Fire Department arrived and finished putting out the fire in time.

Peggy Fears, a former Ziegfield girl, who built the Fire Island Pines Hotel, wanted to make sure that her hotel would not be added to the pyre of the other Fire Island hotels. She commissioned the Reynolds Aluminum Company to construct a completely fireproof two-story hotel and restaurant. It was started on Memorial Day in 1959, and was to be completed by the Fourth of July weekend, the opening of the summer season. But despite all fireproof precations, a year later the new Fire Pines Hotel was completely destroyed by fire. The community, of course, had no Fire Department, and the only help available were the Cherry Grove Volunteers who formed a water bucket brigade. The police launch brought over the firemen from the mainland, but it was too late to save the building.

The Fire Pines Hotel fire of 1959 marked the end of the long history of hotel fires. Fire departments were now organized

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for each community, and immediate water supplies were made available.

Today there are six hotels on the island, but none of them have the formality or the opulent atmosphere of the Surf Hotel, Fire Island's first resort. Instead informality and casual attire is stressed, and the majority of accommodations are room and bath or pullman kitchen apartments. The National Seashore is making plans for 600 campsites for overnight campers to Fire Island.

More celebrities are coming to Fire Island every year, but not to vacation in luxurious hotels, but to buy or rent a hideaway on this barrier beach, free from smog, cars and the noise of city life.

CHAPTER X

BAREFOOT IS FUN

"Barefoot is fun" and only 50 miles from Manhattan is a barefoot island where adults and children can throw away their shoes and roam freely on a roadless barrier beach. Artists, writers and city dwellers have all discovered the joy of barefoot living on Fire Island. As Wolcott Gibbs described it, "Fire Island is a state of wonderful irresponsibility at a time which you belong to nobody but yourself." There are parts of the island that are still uninhabited and a visitor looking for complete relaxation and quiet can spend a "Robinson Crusoe" day lying on a deserted beach, climbing over the dunes to see the ocean stretching to the horizon on one side , and the wide, calm Bay on the other side, or walk through the thick woods of the spectacular Sunken Forest. Robert Cushman Murphy, former Natural History Museum ornithologist, said, "Fire Island has infinite solace for body and soul. It affords not only the usual charms of an unspoiled seashore, but also provides features so rare in our northern latitudes that they are in the nature of wonders."

Barefoot is the most fun when fishing or beaching, the two most popular diversions on the island. Sport fishing has always been important, as Fire Island and its surrounding waters is considered one of the greatest fishing areas near

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New York City. During the height of the summer season, the fishing boats in Fire Island Inlet are as close as 25 feet apart, and the fishermen standing on Democrat Point jetty are only a few feet apart.

Fishing for "blues" has been pursued in Great South Bay since the early 1800's. A local paper of 1841 said: "There are so many bluefish that the surplus is left on the lawns of the hotels." There were also great quantitites of bass, flounder, porgy, weakfish, sheepshead and Spanish mackerel. Eels were so plentiful that a Fire Island visitor reported, "In Great South Bay you can wade up to your pantaloon pockets in nothing but solid eels. Whenever we want eels, we take a basket and just scoop up all we want."

In "Babylon Reminiscences, Benjaim Field describes the fishing in 1853:

"There were no fish markets. The baymen put the fish in wheelbarrows and pushed them through the Babylon streets. The best blue fishing was off Conklin's Point where great masses would be caught. I purchased 5 bluefish, weighing 15 pounds, each from a two-horse wagon at 4¢ a pound. Clams were 25¢ per 100, oysters were 50¢ to 75¢ a bushel, and other fish were 3¢ a pound or less."

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Surf casting along the Fire Island beach and the sand bars is the most sporting of all fishing. The number of surf casters doubled between 1961 and 1966 for many reasons: the wide publicity given to surf fishing in the press and magazines, the great increase in the number of Fire Island residents and visitors, the new fiber glass fishing equipment which has made fishing easier, and most important of all the greater numbers of striped bass appearing in Fire Island waters. And striped bass and bluefish are what the anglers are after. Bluefish, the most ferocious fighters, offer the surfcaster a challenge, while the bass, though not so lively, have been known to reach large proportions; a record weight of 72 pounds near Saltaire. The best catching times for bass are Spring and Fall when schools of striped bass swing northward up in the coast in May and then return southward in September.

Surf anglers were interviewed by New York State Conservation Department representatives between April and November of 1961, 1962 and 1963. These men obtained information from the fishermen regarding the number of fish caught per fishing trip, the species of fish, and the anglers' preference for different species. Aerial flights were made over Fire Island in conjunction with these interviews to count the number of anglers fishing in the surf. Fishing trips of less than four hours were not recorded. The estimated number of surf anglers on Fire Island from April to

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November 1961 was 2,779; in 1962 3,248 and in 1963 4,118.

The species of fish per surf catch was:

	1961	1963
Striped bass	21.5	47.5
Bluefish	14.0	9.0
Kingfish	50.0	6.0
Northern Puffer	5.0	26.0

From the above survey it is noted there is a large decrease in the number of kingfish caught from 1961 to 1963. The decline is blamed on the northern puffer, an undesirable fish, which like the kingfish, prefers live bait. Fisherman complain that the puffer steals their bait, so often that they become discouraged and instead use artifical lures which the kingfish will not bite.

The percentage of anglers using bait and those using lures is:

	May	June	July	September
Bait	100 %	36.50 %	22 %	3.8%
Lure	10 %	73.00 %	92.7 %	100 %

It is noted that the combined percentages exceeded 100% but that occurs because anglers often used both lures and bait on the same fishingtrip. The fish in order of surf angler's

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preference were striped bass, bluefish and the northern king-fish. 70% of the surf casters sought striped bass in 1961, and 90% sought bass in 1963. Catch per effort for bass was higher on Fire Island than on the Hamptons' barrier beach to the west. Occasionally surfers were completely surprised with a new and rare species. Two fishermen in the surf near Smith Point Park during the summer of 1963 pulled in fish never seen in the Northeast Atlantic waters; a cownose ray and later an African pompano.

In Great South Bay area there are four types of sport fishing; fishing from the banks and piers, fishing in open boats, in charter boats or in private boats.

Bank and pier fishing has a lower catch per effort than boat fisherman because there is less public waterfront property each year. The bank and pier fishermen usually catch snapper (immature bluefish) in August and September, and blackfish during the Fall.

Commercial open boats and charter boats are usually 35 to 65 feet long with a crew of captain and mate. The open boats are on a "first-come-first-served" basis and the charter boats are reserved for private groups. The fishermen on these boats have a greater catch per effort than those on private boats,

because the commercial boat captain knows from experience where the fish are found. The open and charter boats are almost entirely dependent on fluke and winter flounder for their catch with an occasional weakfish or porgy. Blowfish are frequently caught and they are the most annoying fish of all. It is a nuisance trash fish which can only be thrown back into the water.

Private boat fishing surpasses all other groups, and the number of anglers using private boats is almost twice that of charter boats. They catch the greatest number of bluefish, and also have higher catch per effort of striped bass than the surf anglers. Like the commercial boats, fluke and winter flounder contribute to a large amount of their catch.

John C. Poole,Aquatic Biologist of New York State Conservation Department made a study of fluke in the Great South Bay area to determine whether the major seasonal fluctuations in the catch of fluke could be attributed to changes in feeding activity. The stomachs of 1,210 flukes were collected in 1958 and 1959 and examined for food content, during the early and late summer. 33% of the stomachs were found empty, but the stomachs that were full contained mostly sand shrimp and winter

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flounder. From this survey it was found that there was no relationship between the feeding activity and the catch.

A second study made by John Poole consisted of tagging some 5,845 fluke in the Fire Island Inlet. The recapture of the tagged fluke during subsequent summers showed that there was a strong tendency to return to Great South Bay for two consecutive summers, but the third summer only 3 fluke returned of the 927 fluke tagged.. An amazing incident was that of a fluke, tagged in the ocean off Fire Island in 1957, and the next year recaptured by hand spear near Galveston, Texas! The fluke survey was made to prevent further exploitation of young fluke in the early summer, by both sport and commercial fishermen. The bay serves as a summer nursery ground for the fish, and there was an immediate need for size and catch limitations. The limit is under 14 inches, and in 1965 43% of the summer population of fluke were less than 14 inches.

Catching bonefish off Fire Island sounds impossible to believe, but it did happen in the summer of 1962 when 108 juvenile bonefish were seined in Great South Bay one mile north of Point O'Woods. It was not only incredible to find such a large collection of bonefish so far north, but especially incredible in their juvenile stage of development. The only explanation was that larval drift and inshore migration must have carried

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the young bonefish (only 33 to 81 millimeters in fork length) into Great South Bay. During their ten years of field studies in Long Island waters, the Bureau of Marine Fishermen had never seen or collected a bonefish.

Crustacea provide another source of barefoot fun for the Fire Island, both clamming and crabbing. Clamming for hard shells or Quahaugs on the sand flats at low tide can be done with rakes or shovels, or just plain toes! When a bubble appears on the sand surface, it means there is a clam breathing below. Bare feet are quickly swiveled down into the wet sand until the toes encounter a hard object. Then a shovel digs the clam out But often the fisherman is fooled by the bubbles of the sand worm which appear similar to the those of the clam, but experience in clamming will show him the slight difference in bubbles.

Crabbing is not as popular a sport as clamming. There are not as many crabs in the area, and the tedious chore of picking out the crabmeat, compared to steaming or prying open a clam, makes crabbing even less of a"barefoot fun" activity.

The beach at Fire Island is the center and the nucleus of all activity. It is one of the finest in the world with miles of beaches with broad shelves of white sand within walking distance of every community. The beach is flat at the western end

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near Democrat Point, but becomes higher at the eastern end with dunes of over 30 feet near Davis Park. It is an open sunlit beach facing southward with no snack bars, stores or amusement areas on the oceanside to spoil the magnificent view. From mid-day to dusk the beach is busy with people swimming, eating, drinking and making contacts with other "beachers", vacationers away from their city desk, sun-baked mothers with their children during the week, and their pale husbands on week-ends, various city types from the bikini from Brooklyn looking for a mate, to the guitarist from the Village picking up a gay friend, "groupers" (sharing a rented house) having a song festival, and athletes playing a fast volley ball game. They all meet on the beach.

Many stay to watch the sunset, and remain until after dark. Wolcott Gibbs spoke of dusk at Fire Island "as the hour when lights had begun to come on in some of the houses in the little settlements between the sea and the bay. The tall grass that crowned the dunes stirred with some weightless air, and the swallows dipped furiously in and out of the pools of collecting darkness. It was a moment of curious peace." After dark there are cook-out parties and clambakes with fires glowing in the dark. Occasionally the darkness is pierced by the headlights

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of the beach taxis cutting across the sands, driving party goers from one village to the next.

Since the early days of pirates dueling on the beach, there have been "beach stories" carried from one community to the other and greatly enlarged in the telling.

One story occurred during a World War II blackout. A couple were romancing on the beach when a man suddenly ran into them in the dark. He was so startled that he began jabbering in German. The couple thought he was a Nazi landed from an offshore U-Boat, and sent out an immediate alarm. A search was made, but it was discovered that the man was only a German barber in Ocean Beach who every night took a solitary midnight swim.

Another tale was that a nudist colony existed in 1953 on the beach about 2½ miles east of Cherry Grove. Nudists were seen by campers when they came to the community well for water. On chilly days the nudists wore short sweaters, but nothing else. The Patchogue police kept trying to arrest them, (according to the story), but the nudists were always alerted in advance, ran for their clothes and put them on before the police could arrest them.

A third beach story was that of a fisherman walking along

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the shore. He found a bottle with a note inside reading, "If you mail this coupon to the Lighthouse Restaurant in Manhattan, you will receive $5." The persistent fisherman searched the beach all day, until he found 40 bottles with similar notes inside. He then sent back 40 notes, and received $200. According to the story, this was an advertising scheme by a Manhattan restaurant to attract Fire Islanders to dine at the Lighthouse, but it was the persistent fisherman who got the benefits!

In the early days the beach was used as a campsite by many economical couples. When they left for home, they hid their tents, supplies and even knives, forks and plates in the upper dunes, and when the campers returned to Fire Island for a holiday week-end, they dug at the spot of their marker, uncovered their tent and supplies, washed them off with the community well water, and their camp was ready.

Beachcombers still lived on the uninhabited eastern end of the island in houses of driftwood and tar paper, with no electricity nor running water. Most of them were commercial fishermen or clammers, who made just enough money from fishing and summer jobs to keep them going through the long winter months.

One "broke" but ardent Fire Island beacher could not afford a place to stay. During the entire summer, the itinerant with his beagle dog went visiting from house to house, and at nightful if he didn't find a bed, he and his dog slept behind

CHAPTER X - BAREFOOT IS FUN

a protected dune on the beach.

A famous beach character of one summer was a Scotsman who came to Fire Island with his kilts, sporran and bagpipes. In full regalia, and barefoot, he marched along the edge of the breakers and played his bagpipes to the roar of the ocean. The sound of the high reedy whine of the pipes along the beach brought many an oceanside resident running

Barefoot is fun on Fire Island for all the beachcombers, the sun-worshipers, the fishermen and the campers who spend their days on this barrier beach. By the end of the summer season the "bare feet" have traveled many miles, calloused by the hot, burnished sand, toughened and scraped by the rough cement walks, and occasionally splintered by the wooden board-walks, but they are always unfettered and free!

CHAPTER XI

EXPLORE AN ISLAND

Explore an island..a roadless strip of sand with miles of unspoiled seashore and dunes. Take a walk along the shore and enjoy the graceful beach grass breaking like ocean waves over the dunes and the dense thickets pruned into shape and silvered by the continuous salt spray. Take a woodland walk and explore the thick forest in the middle of the island, quiet and luxuriant as a tropical forest. Take a bayside walk and see the salt marshes along the bay, nursery grounds and habitat for all kinds of marine life, and discover the wheat-like reeds, the bullrushes of the Middle East, described in the Bible.

Going north from the ocean, the newest dune is the backbeach dune. It is covered with coarse grass, poison ivy and sandwort, and both feathery goldenrod and virginia creeper run rampant. On the north side of the dune are solid beds of intertwined bayberry and beach heather.

Inland from the backbeach is the valley or sometimes called inter-dune. Here are found shrub undergrowths of red cedar, beach plum and winged sumac interspersed with reindeer moss, thistles, huckleberry and blackberry.

About a hundred yards from the valley is the middle dune which is older and lower than the backbeach, and well-covered

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with dense vegetation, tall shrubs, pitch pines and gaunt trees covered with catbrier vines or sometimes called bread and butter vines. In October the leaves of the catbrier are vividly splashed and splotched with a myriad of colors.

After the older and eroded dunes come the flatlands or marshes. At the edge of these swamps are many scrub oakwoods, and both eel and widgeon grass grow in a narrow band along the shore. Close to the bay are beds of sea lettuce and brown and red algae. The Rose Mallow, blooming in July, is the most beautiful of the marsh flowers, and grows in groups of pink flowered reeds taller than man.

The most important and world-famous spot on Fire Island is the Sunken Forest, a unique biotic community, and the only forest of its kind along the entire Atlantic seacoast. It is a mecca for botanists and naturalists, and anyone interested in seeing a phenomena of nature. It was used as a setting for a children's book, "The Sunken Forest" by Rene Prud'Hommeau, (1949), a story of spying and counter-spying on Fire Island, with the Sunken Forest as the headquarters for the spy ring.

About 15 years ago the only way to find the Sunken Forest was to march down the inner dune from Point O'Woods, count 18 telegraph poles, and then look for a weathered sign on a post,

reading, "Sunken Forest." Suddenly a 64-acre forest appeared, a tangle of ancient vegetation below sea level, and protected from the salt spray by a 25-foot dune. The tops of the trees are about the same level as the crests of the dunes, so little light filters through the tree tops or ever reaches this dark forest.

Here are the finest examples of aged American Holly trees in the northern seashore. For over 200 years these trees have been growing to heights of from 35 to 200 feet. They are stooped and twisted, huddled together like a group of grotesque gnomes gathered together for a mysterious meeting. The trunks are yellowish-grey in color, knotted and gnarled with cloven branches that form beautiful patterns and designs against the distant sky. There are other more common types of trees in the forest, the tupelo or swamp trees appear like another group of ancient sentinels with trunks that are sinuous and crooked with bark the color of grey mosiac. There are also old pitch pines with 17-inch trunks, and scrub oak, sassafras, rum cherry, red cedar and red maple.

If a visitor is immune to poison ivy, he can walk bare-feet through the Sunken Forest, but his feet will smart with the fallen leaves of the thorny Holly tree and the prickly catbrier

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vines underfoot! But in the middle of the forest the ground is damp, smooth and dark, carpeted with ferns, sarsaparilla, and the inevitable weed, poison ivy. There are six inches of old deposits of black humus on the forest floor before you can see a grain of sand.

The Sunken Forest Preserve, Inc., a non-profit organization, was started in 1952, for the purpose of saving and preserving this 64-acre forest. A three-year funding raising campaign was organized to purchase the Sunken Forest property before it was sold to real estate developers. Nature Conservancy, devoted to preserving native wildlife areas with Richard H. Pough, President, and also Chairman of the Department of Conservation at the Museum of Natural History, bought 1/3 of the property for $25,000. The Dominion Foundation (the Mellon family) donated $15,000, but $26,500 was still needed to meet the January 1963 deadline. The option to buy had already been renewed three times. However, last minute contributions from half the garden clubs in the State of New York managed to raise the funds needed to purchase the land, and Sunken Forest was saved.

It is now under the protection of the Fire Island National Seashore as part of their conservation program. Future plans are

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being made for conducted nature walks, distribution of educational material and slide lectures on this unique forest.

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Take a bird watching walk and count the 66 different species of land and seashore birds on Fire Island. On the ocean-side, the shore birds are petrels, shearwaters, comorants, terns, and three types of gulls; the herring, the black-backed and the ring billed. Even a pelican has been seen near Democrat Point. In the Spring and the Fall a spectacular number of migratory birds in flight and gathering flocks appear around Fire Island Inlet where the currents form shallows and sand bars. Dr. Robert C. Murphy of the Museum of Natural History mentions that "on these sandbars during the migatory period there are about 26 species of birds, curlews, snipes, sandpipers, puffers and other birds. Fire Island is part of the Atlantic Flyway for water fowl and shore birds, and the sand bars are one of their migratory way stations.

From October to March the bay waters are important wintering spots for many of the waterfowl, ducks, geese, and European mute swans. Black skimmers nest on the banks of the bay, and black-crowned night herons nest in the pitch pines. Loons, egrets, oyster birds and grebes are all part of the bay community.

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The inland dunes abound with land birds during the summer months, swallows, marsh and sparrow hawks, red-winged blackbirds, cardinals, brown thrashers and robins. Great colonies of catbirds are found in the wooded beach areas.

The early histories of Fire Island make little mention of its bird population. However, the Linnaen Society of New York (a bird-watching organization) in their records of 1905-1907 list birds of Long Island, including Fire Island. The species recorded sound strange today; the Lincoln Sparrow, the Olive-Sided Flycatcher, the Saw-whet Owl, and a single Leach's Petrel was seen, a rare migrant that is commonly found on the Pacific Coast.

Birds often hit the Fire Island Lighthouse and killed themselves either alone or in group flights. On the night of September 23, 1887, 595 birds accidentally flew into the light-house and were killed instantly. According to E. J. Udall, Assistant Lighthouse Keeper, "there was a great bird wave rolling southward along the Atlantic Coast, and the air was filled with birds". The next morning there were hundreds of dead birds at the foot of the lighthouse tower. 25 species of land birds were found, and 356 of the 595 filled were Black-Poll Warblers. A Palm Warbler

was also found, the first record of this western species ever seen on Long Island.

Near the Fire Island lighthouse, a week earlier in 1887, a European gull, Larus Minutus, was shot. This small-size gull is rarely found in the United States, and is not even listed in North American records by the Audubon Society. It was mounted and presented to the Museum of Natural History for their collection. Robert Powell, who shot the gull, wrote, "I was on the bay for snipe (this is my business), and there came 25 to 30 gulls, 10 or 15 were within shot. This one gull looked so different from the others that I shot him first."

There were many wild animals on Fire Island in the early days. The Indians depended on the animals for both food and livelihood. Wild game consisted of moose, deer, foxes, buffalo and wild boar. Even in the late 1700's buffalo tracks were discovered in the marsh area by a fisherman on a day trip to the island.

Today a few white-tailed deer remain in the wooded area east of Davis Park, and there are colonies of cotton-tail rabbits near Smith Point. During the winter months when the island is deserted, racoons, muskrats, opossums, weasels, foxes,

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and even mink have been seen. Several species of large land turtles make their homes in the fresh water ponds on the bay side at Cherry Grove.

This completes "exploring an island", a tour of the vegetation on the dunes, the marshes of the bay, the woodlands of Sunken Forest, the sweep of long sandy beaches and the birds and remaining wild animals.

Exploring Fire Island can be done many times, and in every season. Each visit uncovers new wonders of this barrier reef.

CHAPTER XII

A NATIONAL SEASHORE IS BORN

How was the Fire Island National Seashore born? The idea started almost nineteen years ago, but the proposal did not really materialize until after the severe storm of March 1962, which did great damage to the Atlantic shoreline. After the storm Governor Richard Hughes of New Jersey called a conference of eastern state governors to discuss how they could protect the beaches from future hurricanes. Secretary of the Interior, Stewart L. Udall, pointed out that the one way to save the beaches was to dedicate certain shorelines areas as national seashore parks.

A Federal task force made an aerial survey of the Atlantic coast from Virginia to eastern Long Island, and one of their recommendations was that portions of the Fire Island beachfront be preserved as a national park area. Fire Island is located only 50 miles from New York City, and nearly 1.3 of the nation's population lives within a 100-mile radius. There is a severe shortage of public beach areas for this over-populated, and constantly growing area. A Fire Island National Seashore will give this growing population an opportunity to use the beaches, both ocean and bayside, utilize the campsite areas, bicycle, hike or fish, and enjoy a public vacation resort.

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From a scientific point of view, oceanographers and marine biologists have a natural laboratory for their studies and experiments. Sunken Forest is to be preserved in its present condition, and botanists will be able to study this unique phenomena at close range. At a hearing before the Senate Subcommittee on National Parks on December 11, 1963, the following groups spoke on behalf of the Fire Island National Seashore:

Bureau of Outdoor Recreation
Citizens Committee for a National Fire Island Seashore
Long Island Beach Buggy Association
National Park Service
National Wildlife Fede ation
Sierra Club
Sport Fishing Institute
Wilderness Society

and many other groups of conservationists who felt that Fire Island should be a national seashore. Charles S. Lowry, President of the Fire Island Association, made a speech at the hearings of the Subcommittee on National Parks, Senate Interior and Insular Affairs Committee, Washington, D.C., December 11, 1963. Excerpts of this speech follow:

"This is probably the first time in your experience that an association of property owners has appeared before you to give enthusiastic and almost unanimous support for a National Park proposal. The Fire Island Association represents all 18

communities on Fire Island, some 3,000 property owners and about 1,500 other people who are regular tenants or who simply love this unusual beach area....most of us came to Fire Island because it offers the only relatively unspoiled natural beach area easily and inexpensively reached from the major communities in the New York Metropolitan area...we feel that the National Seashore is the only practical proposal for keeping the unique and irreplaceable values of Fire Island..the ocean has buffeted us and taken our homes, 41 on the island last year...The commercial developers have bulldozed and torn up acre after acre....six new developments are planned. If this Congress doesn't act, the next Congress may not find enough undeveloped acreage left to bother with"....we will work in close cooperation with the National Park Service to create the kind of National Seashore which will preserve the natural resource of this unspoiled beach, and which will reconcile our private interests with the public interest to the benefit of all."

Congress passed Public Law 88.587 giving the Secretary of the Interior the authority to acquire lands and waters for the purpose of creating a National Seashore; extending 26 miles from the east side of Robert Moses State Park to Moriches Inlet, and including 4,505 acres of land, 14,200 acres of water, and the historical landmark of the Fire Island Lighthouse. The

main offices are located in Patchogue for proximity to Fire Island and to enable direct intercom communication with Fire Island Park stations.

The purpose of the National Seashore in the words of the National Park Service: "For conserving and preserving for the use of future generations certain relatively unspoiled and undeveloped beaches, dunes and other natural features within Suffolk County, New York, which possess high values to the nation as examples of unspoiled areas of great beauty in close proximity to large concentrations of urban population."

The National Park Service initially organized a plan for land acquisition over a period of 5 or 6 years and funds of $16 million had been authorized by the Secretary of the Interior for the purpose of acquiring these lands, waters, and other property and improvements. The condemnation of property was allowed only in an eight-mile area, between the easterly boundary of Brookhaven Township, and the westerly boundary of Smith County Park, and only improved property could be condemned. Improved property, meaning any building constructed before July 1, 1963 and not over two acres for residential or 10 acres for commercial. The landowner had three choices:

1. Sell his property for fair market value to the National Park Service.
2. Retain his property for 25 years.
3. Retain his property as a life estate.

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In both cases of the landowner retaining his property, the price would be diminished over the years by the market value of the estate retained.

The master-plan for the National Seashore was to establish 12 communities and 8 visitor areas, from east to west, West Beach, Sailor's Haven, Talisman, Watch Hill, Long Cove, Whalehouse Point, Pelican Island, Pattersquash, Smith Point West and East, East Lead and Moriches Inlet. Each of these 12 developments would have its own water system, sewage disposal, electricity, ranger patrol, boats with docking facilities, beach cars and communication with the mainland. The National Park Service set a goal of 6 million visitors to be served annually by 1975. Watch Hill was the first community to be established. Ground was broken on May 27, 1966, and the opening ceremonies were attended by Secretary of the Interior, Stewart Udall, Senator Jacob Javits, Congressman Otis Pike and other dignitaries.

However, most of the far range master-plan for the National Seashore had to be abandoned because of lack of Federal funds, and the drastic cutbacks effected the National Park Service Department, and in turn, the Fire Island National Seashore. Instead of the 12 communities planned, only three

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are in operation today, Watch Hill, Sailor's Haven, and also Smith Point with limited services. Of the 760 camp-sites in the master-plan, only 26 sites in Watch Hill community exist today.

Many of the proposed recreational facilities also had to be shelved. The network of bicyling, hiking and horseback trails to be designed by landscape architects and engineers, with rest areas, overlooks and dune crossings were eliminated. The construction of bathhouses for each beach on Fire Island, to be built behind the foredunes, along with a series of pedestrian walks on the dunes, were all cancelled because of lack of funds.

A conservation program of natural resources was also set up in the original master-plan. Projects for Great South Bay included more docking facilities and marinas for the increased number of visitors, with the various communities contributing to the expense. New channels were to be dredged to meet the heavy boating needs, and the dredged material was to be used for soil bank islands for waterfowl rooking sites. Drainage ditches were to be dug for mosquito control, and the sources of the bay pollution to be discovered and remedied. The eel grass problem, an obstacle to navigators, to be solved, but

as the eel grass also serves as a home for the many species of waterfowl, it creates a conflict. Boat tours of Great South Bay were to be organized to study natural history.

Oceanside projects for dune protection were also part of the master-plan. Bare areas of the dunes were to be planted with native plants and shrubs, which were rugged and salt tolerant against the sea spray. A survey of the population control of the wild animal life was to be made as to whether to increase or decrease the number of animals, and a study of the fish population and survey of the sport fisheries undertaken. But all these projects were a part of the master-plan for Fire Island Seashore when hopes were high for allocation of a considerably larger amount of funds than were finally received.

Today there are three active National Seashore communities, Watch Hill, Sailor's Haven, and Smith Point, all open from July 2 to September 6th.

Watch Hill has free primitive camping facilities from May 15th to October 17th, 20 family sites (no reservations) 6 group sites of 45 people (reservation only) Access to the campgrounds is by passenger ferry from Patchogue or by private boat. A concession-operated marina provides 158 slips for

boats to be docked. Watch Hill and Sailor's Haven also have a swimming beach with lifeguards on duty from July 2 to September 6(10a.m. to 5 p.m.). There are concession operated snack shops, grocery stores, boat rentals and fishing and clamming equipment. In addition both communities have information stations with interpretive talks; at Watch Hill, nightly at 8:30 p.m. and at Sailor's Haven, every Friday and Saturday night at 8:30 p.m., July 2 through September 2. Visitors are also provided with picnic tables, showers, and nature trails with exhibits. Both have interpretive walks to be announced on the bulletin boards at the information centers.

Smith Point has limited services, an information station and also interpretive walks. Access is by the Smith Point Bridge (75¢ toll). Adjacent to the national park area is the Smith County Park with swimming beach, refreshments and picnic facilities.

Sunken Forest is to be preserved in its original state, and no changes are planned, except new access signs to help the visitors, and interpretive nature walks to the area.

It is hoped that more Federal funds will be made available in the future, so that more of the original projects

within the master plan may become a reality.

There are two parks on Fire Island that are not part of the National Seashore. One is the Smith Point Park supervised by Suffolk County, and the other is the Robert Moses State Park under the jurisdiction of the Long Island Park Commission.

Smith Point Park, 260 acres at the eastern end of Fire Island was opened in July 1959. It is 8,700 feet wide from bay to ocean, and is connected to the mainland with a bascule type bridge. The park's name is derived from the family of Tangier-Smith, who originally acquired the property by Royal Grant in the 17th century. Recreational facilities include bathhouses, picnic areas, snack bar, restaurant and a parking area. There is also provision for 150 boats and trailer parking.

The second park is the Robert Moses State Park, formerly called the Fire Island State Park, and now supervised by the Long Island Park Commission. This park was also part of the Tangier-Smith Royal Grant. It was the first New York State park on Long Island, and the only ocean-front park in the United States until Jones Beach Park was founded.

The Fire Island Park Commission was founded by Governor

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Charles Evans Highes in May of 1908, headed by John H. Vail, President, Elliott Smith, Secretary-Treasurer with $500 per annum salary, and Charles N. Lowrie, landscape architect. One of the Commissioners was Edward Blum, President of the City Art Commission, who was very active in obtaining appropriations for the new park. According to the March 17, 1910 Brooklyn Eagle: "The Commissioner asked the Legislature to appropriate $300,000. Governor Hughes suggested a small appropriation of $70,000 would be allowed!".

The first action of the Fire Island State Park Commission was to auction off the dilapidated and unsafe buildings which were part of the former Fire Island cholera station. The buildings were sold at public auction for $2,304 and with an initial appropriation from New York State of $5,000, the total funds for future park improvement were $7,304.66. With these funds, the Commission built three bathhouse shelters, temporary boardwalks, and by World War I a small bathhouse was built on the bay side with shelters and a water supply system.

In 1918 a fire swept through the park, destroying all the shelters and boardwalks. Upon recommendation of the New York State legislature in 1919, Governor Alfred E. Smith created

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the Long Island Park Commission to succeed the Fire Island State Park Commission and Robert Moses was made President. However, the Commission's 1923 Annual Report showed that only temporary repairs could be made after the park fire because of lack of funds.

Congress then passed a bill in 1924, proposed by Congressman Robert Bacon, and endorsed by Herbert Hoover, then Secretary of Commerce, authorizing four miles of the western tip of Fire Island from the Lighthouse to Democrat Point (about a 1,000 acre site) to be used as a New York State Park.

In June 1963 construction began on a 4,232 bridge spanning Fire Island Inlet from the Captree State Park to the Fire Island State Park, to be re-named the Robert Moses State Park. The bridge was opened to the public in June 1964 and brought over thousands of people to the park. Attendance increased from 134,000 coming by boat in 1963 to 2,800,000 visitors coming by car during the first eight weeks after the bridge opened. Unfortunately, the bridge is only two lanes wide, and plans are already being made to expand the bridge for the heavy traffic during the summer months.

Smith Point County Park, Robert Moses State Park, and

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the 20 communities on Fire Island have all become a part of the future of the Fire Island National Seashore.

The unique qualities of an unspoiled beachfront and barrier island community has been preserved for future generations. The "sand bar that grew" is now one of our most important national seashore parks.

Local Characters

There were also many early local characters, beside Jerry Pastorfield mentioned in Chapter IX. Bob Arnett was a handyman who took care of the residents outhouses. He traveled in a bright red wagon, with orange stripes and a horse in full livery, and died in 1920.

Axel Hageman, a local carpenter could carry more beer than any man alive. "A bright, clever man when he was sober...and knew his business too, but you could never keep him sober...And polite !! even if he fell down getting up--he'd give a lady his seat."

Walter Briggs, a carpenter and builder from 1905 to 1928, was also a beachcomber, and the official custodian of the Point O'Woods chapel.

Oyster Beds Watchman

When the oyster business started to decline on Fire Island, and they needed to seed new beds to prevent further exploitation, the oystermen hired a year round watchman to guard the seed beds for the lowly salary of $20 a month. He lived a lonesome existence in the winter on the desolate marshes and lined his house with eel grass and newspapers to keep the bitter winds out, and hunted for driftwood on the beach for fuel in the stove.

The Hay Mowers

During the summer months in the early 1900's a group of mainland farmers gathered hay on Fire Island on the meadows of the bay-side. They sailed to the island on special boats built for haying, flat bottomed and square ended. Scythes were used to cut the grass and the mowers counted how many swaths had been cut, a series of swaths called a bout or round. Between bouts the mowers "whet up", which meant there was always a jug nearby to "whet" their thirst. Then with new energy the mowers made the scythes fly, and with each blow the ringing of clear steel notes could be heard. As the mowers worked they chanted, "There's the first bout round, now "whet up" for the next."

Slave Stockade on Fire Island

During the days of slavery, schooners coming from Africa sailed openly through Fire Island Inlet and up Great South Bay to deliver blacks to estates which kept large slave quarters. But after the abolishment of slavery, the estate owners of the south began kidnapping Northern blacks and sailing them to the South. These kidnapped slaves had to be kept in a safe hiding place before debarking, and Fire Island was the perfect hide-away. It was rumored that a large stockade was built on the bayside to keep these prisoners.

Marine Division of Suffolk County Police

The Marine Division of the Suffolk County Police protect the boats in the Great South Bay area in cooperation with the U.S. Coast Guard. They patrol 24 hours a day in a fleet of 30-foot twin screw cruisers with the following code names: H (hotel), I (India), J (Juliet), K (Kilo), L (Lime) and M (Mike).

Commercial Fishing - 1900's

Commercial fishing on Fire Island began in the early 1900's. The Brant brothers, one of the first families of Ocean Beach, started a fish factory in 1905. At the same time Gil Smith organized a fleet of white bunker boats and a fish factory.

Ocean Beach Mayor Arrested

The headlines of the New York Times on August 10, were: "Fire Island Mayor Arrested - Hit a Reporter". The Mayor of Ocean Beach and Manhattan attorney, Arthur Silsdorf was charged with 3rd degree assault of Thomas Frayhe, 24-year old reporter and editor of the Fire Island News. Frayne who filed the complaint said the Mayor hit him in the face, and then shoved him down four steps of the Ocean Beach Community Hall during a hearing of alleged police brutality. The

Ocean Beach Mayor Arrested (continued)

argument started when Frayne questioned the Mayor's right to sit in a closed hearing room, while statements were being taken from witnesses who had seen police brutality. Frayne was barefoot and the Mayor wore sneakers.

The defendent of the police brutality was Patrolmen Eppler (26), a junior at Kansas State University and a member of the college wrestling team, who was working as a policeman during the summer. On Saturday night he tried to arrest a drunken brawler, Edward Beebe (37) of Blue Point, Long Island. When Beebe resisted arrest, the patrolman threw him down on the pavement, and he landed head first! But Patrolman Eppler claimed that when he lifted the man, he was forced to drop him suddenly, because he was jabbed in the ribs by the man's elbow.

Both Patrolman Eppler and the Mayor were placed in the local jail and the Assistant District Attorney of Suffolk Count was sent to investigate. On September 6th the Suffolk County Grand Jury refused to indict the Mayor on an assault charge, and he went on to serve his fourth two-year term as Mayor of Ocean Beach.