

Transcript of Lecture Delivered by
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March 27, 1998
Pirates, Whales, Wrecks and Salvage

Long Island is a place surrounded by water. This island was shaped by the frozen water from the continental glaciers 20,000 years ago. Since the glaciers retreated the rising tide and the ravages of the wind and rain have molded this small sand encrusted island even more. The island and the water are one.

I have always told young people to think of this island as a fish, newly caught laying on the beach. The head is pressed against the great mainland to the west, its body stretches eastward with two flukes playfully extending into the Atlantic, that this fish calls home. The island fish is huge stretching almost 120 miles, bigger than any stripper that I have caught or even lied about catching. And, it is the water that surrounds and nourishes this place the Natives called Paumanauk. The water comforts us and seems to draw us near. It may be the salt water, the composition of which is so similar to the salinity of the embryonic sac, that makes it all seem so familiar. Maybe, we as people, are drawn somehow unknowingly to the comfort of the womb.

It was the sea that brought life to the Algonquins, who were the first of the island's inhabitants. It was the sea that brought the first Englishmen to the township of what would become East Hampton.. Lion Gardiner came across the Atlantic to work in Connecticut, but it was here on the island that he chose to make his home. East Hampton history begins with the purchase of Gardiner's island in 1639. The first English child born in Suffolk County, even in New York State was Elizabeth. Even though Gardiner's Island was his island, Lion Gardiner is buried in East Hampton. Even today the 16th Lord of the Manor has residence here. The link of the town to Gardiner's island is strong indeed.

The ocean brought life to the island and it was the sea that has been both a blessing and curse to those who live along that boundary between earth and water. The sea moderates the climate, it provided the breezes to turn the early windmills and power the earliest sailing ships. It is that wonderful marine climate that made agriculture possible. It is a climate of long springs, mild summers and cool autumns. One can always depend on an "Indian Summer" in East Hampton. Even after the summer season is over and all of the city people have departed, any islander will tell you that the best weather is at hand. Cool nights, warm days, the harvest of the earth and the sea are still coming. The bounty of Peconic Bay scallops or Stripped Bass rounding Montauk, heading south are part of this magical time called fall. It is the nearness to the water, the ocean, that makes this all possible.

The earliest of settlers to East Hampton numbered a mere nine, nomads from England, from an area around Maidstone, some ten miles up river from the North Sea and the port of Kent. This small English lot first settled in Lynn, Massachusetts, then wised up and continued to the south fork of Long Island. These English farmers who lived near the sea must have found this place quite suitable and probably surprisingly milder than the land they left in either

England or Lynn, Massachusetts.

The first important maritime industry in this town was whaling. Whaling on the eastern shore of Long Island began with the Native Americans. We don't have to go back to the Old Testament and Jonah to find a good whaling story. The tales of whaling always seem to get my heart pumping, and my mind racing. Captain George Waymouth, an English explorer reported that he observed Indians pursuing and killing whales along the coast in 1620. In the work *The History of the American Whaling Fishery*, written by Alexander Starbuck in 1876, the author states "Whales were first taken off Long Island in 1644 by Southampton Indians". The Native Americans probably didn't take them, it was probably easy to say they waited for the whales to come to them. Drift whales were common and coastal storms, disease and simple misdirection would often strand the leviathan along the sand bars.

The native islanders would boil the blubber and mix the oil with their corn and beans, or they would rub the oil into animal hides as a preservative.

If whaling started in Southampton, it wasn't long before it was an active industry in East Hampton. In the original deed of 1648, the native Indians were promised "to have fynes and tayles of all such whales as shall be cast upp, and desire that they may be friendly dealt with in other parts". The deed for Montauk and the point divides all whales with equal shares going between whites and native Americans.

Early East Hamptonites found that whaling was of great concern according to town records, November 6, 1651. "It was ordered that Goodman Mulford shall call out ye town by succession to look out for whale." The whale was a valuable creature, probably more of value than any fur bearing animal. The whale oil was an important source of illumination. The whale oil lamp was more reliable than reed lamps or lard lamps. Whale oil was the fuel of choice. The oil could be a lubricant. Farm tools that were put away for the season could be protected from rust with a rubbing of oil. East Hampton recipes tell of mince pies made with whale meat. If the town was lucky to find a sperm whale, the waxy spermacetti from the cavity of the head made an excellent candle. When mixed with the oil from the bayberry, the candles not only glowed, but filled the home with a perfumed scent. The bone of the whale could be used to make buttons, collar stays, corset stays and handles. The baleen became chair springs, hair brushes and even buggy whips.

The whale's importance seems to have even divided families. In 1653, East Hampton "orders that the share of whale now in controversy between widow Talmadge and Thomas Talmadge shall be divided among them as the lot is". There is no truth to the rumor that this is the legal precedent for community property settlements.

The early prosperity of East Hampton and other villages was largely based on the on-shore whaling industry. This on-shore whaling was not expensive, for no large boats were built and long voyages were not necessary. Tools and implements could be made by local blacksmiths. Small boats might be kept along the shore, always ready for use. The time for shore whaling spanned December through May. This made it a perfect match for agricultural pursuits

which lasted from May through November.

Whaling became an all town task. The area in and around East Hampton was politically divided to insure orderly division of beached whales. There was a finder's fee paid to the person who took note of a beached whale. Native Americans were paid at the rate of five shillings, while an East Hamptonite discovering the whale was given "a piece of the whale three feet broad". Whale watchers were set up to make whale sightings less a form of chance. Small huts, similar to wigwams, were erected as beach shelters. When a whale was sighted, the watcher would scamper up a pole or tree waving his shirt or coat.

"Making a weft", as it was called, set in motion an exciting chain reaction of activity.

Soon horns would be sounded, then the cry "whale off" would be heard as citizens hurried to their appointed tasks.

The small boats were run into the surf. The harpooner, tiller and rowers, all in unison, were set on the same goal. The whale was pursued, chased and struck with a harpoon. The crew held on while the wounded whale took them for what would later be known as a "Nantucket sleigh ride". (I'd like to refer to it as the Hampton Jitney even though it has no basis in history). The chase was not fun or sport, it was exhausting for both the hunter and the hunted. Closer and closer the crew would row toward the whale. Now a lance was driven deep, turned in the wound, hopefully hitting the heart or lung. The ordeal would be over soon if the whale spouted blood. Now with the whale in tow the boat would row back to the shore. Sometimes, the small boats were driven far and the way home was even more difficult and dangerous as winter or spring storms appeared quickly. Small boats would be no match for the dreadful Atlantic .

The whale was returned to the beach where it was met by others ready to cut into the mammal. Huge try pots were now burning on the beach, sometimes lighting the way home for the whalers. The entire male population of East Hampton was divided into two whale-cutting teams. The job was to render the whale blubber into oil, rescue the baleen, bone and all the other parts that were useful. The women arrived on the beach to bring food and warm clothing if the weather warranted it.

By 1680, Amagansett was the most profitable point for whaling on the east coast, not New Bedford, not Nantucket, not Sag Harbor, but Amagansett. In 1687, there were seven companies engaged in whaling on the south fork. So intense was the competition for whales that a boundary had to be set between East Hampton and its neighbor, Southampton. Drift whales and day long whaling expeditions were now big business and the profit from those whales could fuel not only lamps, but fuel the economy of the town.

Jacobus Schellinger owned one of the East Hampton whaling companies. He along with his wife and family had come from Staten Island. Many say he was the first city resident to work his way out to East Hampton, but definitely not the last. So well known and respected was Schellinger for his whaling expertise that the village of Nantucket offered him royalties on every catch a Nantucket

fisherman would make if only he would come and teach them his whaling methods. Jacobus could not be moved by promises of money, he remained in East Hampton content with his life, his work and the people around him. It's hard to imagine that there once was a day when whales were a regular sight on the shores of Long Island. I remember vividly the stranding of a whale in 1980 on the south shore of Long Island at Fire Island. Sick and disoriented, it was helped into the old ferry slip. Fiesty, they called the small sperm whale. Over the next few days before its release, tens of thousands of people came to gaze at the black mass that moved ever so slowly. Smiles greeted each move of the tail, and a wheeze from the blow hole brought almost uncontrolled cheers. There has yet to be another close encounters with the "big kind" since. However, those encounters were once very common. In Frederick P. Schmitt's book Mark Well the Whale he writes "Whales were so numerous offshore in 1700 that a woman walking the dunes for a few miles from East Hampton to Bridgehampton counted 13 stranded animals and saw countless others spouting nearby."

It wasn't long before the government got involved in the all too profitable whaling industry. Robert Hunter, the Royal Governor of New York, passed a tax on half the oil and bone from all drift whales. The King of England called the whale the "Royal fish" and asked officials to license all takers of the "big fish". There were no cries from the citizens of Kingston, Syracuse, Albany or Utica, but the people of Long Island and those of East Hampton became incensed at the tax. To surrender 50% of the catch after all the effort, labor and even the potential loss of life was unthinkable.

Samuel Mulford was a 70 year old member of the General Assembly of New York and an East Hamptonite who was not going to take this government abuse. He first took action against the governor, but when authorities led him through a legal maze of English law, the homespun whaler went over the governor's head, way over his head. Samuel Mulford boarded a ship for London to take his case right to the top - King George I. In England, this country whaler was truly a fish out of water. His informal dress, new world language, and unsophisticated air gave him little chance with the aristocrats in London.

Day after day Mulford worked his way through the crowded London streets, across the common to petition the government just to hear him. Each time he failed and each time his pockets were picked. No matter how careful he was the precious little money he had was quickly draining away. Mulford could not afford the losses any longer. He went back to his rented flat and sewed fishhooks into the lining of his pockets. The next day as he began his pilgrimage once more through London an unsuspecting "Oliver" attempted to separate Samuel from his money. But to the thief's dismay he became firmly and painfully attached to the old man's trousers. The authorities had their pickpocket and a rather amusing story. Word spread quickly among the London thieves about an old man with a gimpy walk whose pockets had nothing but fishhooks. Soon almost everyone in London seemed to resemble Samuel Mulford. Pickpockets took a holiday rather than mess with the man from the

colonies. Mulford became an instant celebrity, the man who had single-handedly fooled the London thieves. So quickly did his notoriety spread that he not only got to address the members of the House of Common, but he met with King George, himself.

Within a year the whale tax was revoked. Governor Hunter was furious at Mulford for his impetuous behavior. The governor had him expelled from the New York Assembly, whereupon, East Hampton reelected him again the following year.

Samuel Mulford died at the age of 80 in 1725. His tombstone reads "Honest Sam Mulford" but his legend reads Fishhooks Mulford. The East Hampton whaler had defended the principle of "No taxation without representation" almost 50 years before the revolution.

It wasn't long before the whaling industry moved from on-shore whaling to off-shore whaling expeditions. Voyages became longer and longer, the whaling ships bigger and bigger. There were no ports on the south shore, so Sag Harbor became the home port for many an East Hampton whaler. The whaling voyages brought personal wealth back to the East Hampton town. There were men from town who sailed with Captain Mercator Cooper in 1845 when his ship, the Manhattan, first sailed into Tokyo Bay almost eight years before Commodore Matthew Perry in 1853. Although Long Islanders were first to Japan, we are not first in the history books. Men like Jeremiah Mulford sailed out of Cold Spring Harbor. He was captain of the "Nathaniel P. Talmadge" during several cruises "around the Horn" and into Alaskan waters. His final cruise in 1848 was difficult. He had to survive a mutiny before returning to East Hampton four years later.

The off shore whaling trips were difficult at best. Conditions were grim, filled with long periods of boredom separated by short periods of incredible excitement and danger. Families were apart for long periods and sometimes forever. Rennselear Conkling of Amagansett departed this world similar to Gregory Peck in the film Moby Dick. Conkling was last seen heading straight out to sea lashed to the back of a wounded whale. Herman Melville's classic had nothing on the stories from East Hampton.

There are still traces of those off shore whaling days hiding in East Hampton trunks and attics. Log books and diaries tell stories, but so does the art of the whaler, scrimshaw. The teeth of the sperm whale, pieces of baleen and bone were shaped and etched with stories and memories. Pie crimpers, ditty boxes, sewing implements and swifts were accomplished during the long periods at sea when they were just looking for whales. This Yankee folk art once considered to be disposable junk is now highly prized by those who understand the brief era of Yankee whaling. So search out those old trunks of Auntie Tuthill, Stanley Miller and Cheryl Foster, for there are gems yet to be found.

One of my favorite trips as a small boy growing up in Hicksville was a journey to the Museum of Natural History in New York City. There amid the towering frozen skeletons of the dinosaurs I played out my own "Jurassic Park". I remember how the museum smelled to me, old, stale; it seemed huge and disjointed. I remember the fish house and the massive whale that hung

overhead. Little did I know that the Museum of Natural History and East Hampton's whaling past were so firmly linked.

It was February, 1907, and Roy Chapman Andrews, a naturalist and explorer was journeying out to Amagansett on his very first assignment for the American Museum of Natural History. Dr. H.C. Bumpers, director of the Museum, had read about a whale that had been killed on the east end by Captain Joshua B. Edwards. The 78 year old whaler was at the end of his whaling career, but not at the end of his fame. He had sailed around the world numerous times, but nearing eighty he chose to spend these days in and around East Hampton.

Mr. Bumpers wanted to acquire from Edwards the whale skeleton for study and exhibition at the Museum. By the time Mr. Andrews arrived the crew at Amagansett had removed the blubber from the whale. The carcass, all 54 feet of it, sat slowly sinking into the sand. The whale was the largest right whale ever recorded at that time. The skeleton would be of great importance, but how could they get it back to

New York with the temperature at 20 degrees and a tough wind tearing across the beach? The carcass, even with the blubber removed, still weighed almost 50 tons. The museum hired 6 local men to hack carefully at the remaining carcass, removing the bones, as Mr. Andrews checked each piece against a huge blueprint of a whale's skeleton. The incoming tide meant the men worked waist deep in water. Then, without warning, a storm came out of the west. The waves crashed into the carcass. The workmen furiously anchored the beast to the beach, hoping it would not be washed away. The storm lasted three long days, and when it was over the whale was gone. The anchoring ropes were there, but no whale. The ropes were still taught; the whale was now buried beneath the sand. The temperature that day was only 12 degrees as the work crew labored to remove the remaining bones out of the freezing water.

Missing from the survey of the whale skeleton were two pelvic bones, essential to a total restoration. The bones were only a mere twelve inches long and a further search of the remaining sand and carcass did not reveal them. Mr. Andrews had an idea. Racing down to the try works where Captain Josh had sent the blubber, Andrews fished a long handled wire net into the 250 gallon cast iron cauldron. Triumphant, two pelvic bones emerged from the oily soup. For many years the skeleton of Captain Edwards' whale was exhibited at the museum to educate and enthrall visitors. It was the American Museum's exhibit, but it was an East Hampton whale.

It was not only whalers that traveled our shores in search of profit, but other men who sought profit by questionable means. As early as 1689, French pirates had raided Block Island, off Montauk Point, and attempted to hit New London. People along the beach not only watched for whales, but sails. There were those familiar ships and some not so. And, there were those ships that flew no colors at all.

Captain William Kidd was a man who was a legend in his own time. In June of 1697, the sloop Antonio anchored off Gardiner's Island. The lord of the manor was then John Gardiner, who came out to meet the famous adventurer. Kidd proceeded to bury twenty four chests of gold, silver, silk and precious gems in a

hollow on the island.

Gardiner was informed that should Kidd return and not find the treasure "he (Kidd) would have his head or that of his sons". Captain Kidd had started out as a privateer, which was perfectly legal in those days. As a privateer he worked for England with permission to seize the bounty of other nations specifically the French and Spanish.

But Kidd had run into trouble with the English who thought him more pirate than privateer. The treasure was buried as a bargaining chip in negotiations with Governor Bellomont who ruled New York and Massachusetts. But the negotiations soured and Kidd was sent back to England in chains.

Kidd was tried not for piracy but murder. It seems that in a slight altercation he hit one of his crew members over the head with a bucket and killed him. Kidd was hung in 1701, his treasure was removed by Gardiner and sent along to Governor Bellomont who returned it to London. But somewhere along the way, between Gardiner's Island and London, some of the treasure was misplaced.

Rumors have persisted for centuries that Kidd's ship buried more treasure, from Plum Island to Oyster Bay and from East Hampton to Coney Island. I can tell you that no one since John Gardiner has ever admitted to finding any treasure in the sand dunes of East Hampton town. I can also tell you that William Kidd's name did appear in documents during my research in Smithtown. Captain Kidd was hired in 1697 to act as an "agent of protection" for ships sailing out of the Long Island Sound. It seems that Smithtown found it easier to pay Kidd a protection fee than to lose all their cargo and ships to "them pirates".

Other pirate tales tell of Joseph Bradish who sailed the Adventure Galley out of London in 1698. He was spotted off Sagaponack by Henry Pierson who sailed out when he saw the strange ship off shore. Reverend Ebenezer White, Pierson's neighbor, joined the pirate and Henry on a ride to East Hampton where they met with John Mulford and Nathaniel Huntting, a young East Hampton minister. We now have two government officials, two ministers and a pirate engaged in a series of discussions. What a wonderful combination of characters.

Later Bradish returned to this ship bringing ashore 4 sealed bags containing 2,805 pieces of eight and a bag of jewels. He asked Colonel Pierson to take care of them. The Adventure Galley lay off Sagaponack for a few more days before ships were hired to unload the Galley's cargo. One ship was from Southampton and two from Southold. No ships were from East Hampton so obviously suspicions grew.

The Adventure Galley weighed anchor and sailed to Block Island where the unloading continued. After which the the pirates fired guns into the bottom of the ship causing it to sink. The crew and cargo ships scattered. On April 27, 1699, one of Colonel Pierson's neighbors told the authorities of the treasure left him by Bradish. Lord Bellomont ordered the holdings turned over to him. The rest of the treasure was never found. I suggest we start with the Sagaponack minister, because the East Hampton minister, Reverend Nathaniel Huntting, gave a sermon about the evils of piracy a week later!

There are other stories of money ships, slave ships who ran Black Ivory after

the whaling trade had faded. The stories of rum runners and smugglers of the 1920's maybe too fresh for anything other than a discussion of current events in East Hampton.

Nathaniel Prime wrote *The History of Long Island* in 1845 and said "Although the bays on the south side of the island are numerous and large and completely defended from the rage of the ocean by the great barrier of sand, more durable than stone; yet the inlets are so few and difficult of access, even for small craft, that it is impracticable to enter them when the refuge is most desirable. In the whole length of the island, there are but ten openings in the Great Beach, and these are constantly varying by violence of the waves, so that after a single storm, the channel which is never deep may be materially obstructed or changed. This necessarily renders the coasting business on the whole south side exceedingly uncertain and precarious".

What was Nathaniel Prime speaking of, this place of shifting sand and ever changing shoreline? The first coast zone survey of Long Island had been done only ten years before Prime wrote his work. In the one hundred and fifty years since Prime's work, the beaches and outer bars have accounted for precarious coastal

business and awful disasters. The movement of sand along the shore, the treacherous rocks that loom under the waves have terrorized ships since the earliest times.

The first beacon constructed on Long Island was on the eastern tip of the south fork. Montauk light was one of the first federally funded marine projects approved by George Washington in 1796. The original construction was made on Turtle Hill some 300 feet from the raging Atlantic. Now, in less than 200 years, the 300 foot distance has been considerably shortened. Engineers of the time thought the Montauk light would last 200 years; their estimate may not be that far off the mark.

Additional lights were constructed at Fire Island in 1826, Shinnecock or Ponquogue light was established in 1858 and had to alter its signal characteristics to distinguish it from the Montauk light. That initial error probably resulted in some wrecks from unwary mariners. Other lights were constructed on Plum Island in 1857 and Gardiner's Island in 1855. Even though there were more naval aids, the coastal fogs and frequent storms made land marks and lighthouse identification difficult.

Shipwrecks have occurred on Long Island ever since 1656 when the Dutch vessel *Prins Maurits* carrying colonists to the New World went aground on the barrier beach near Saltaire, across from present day West Islip. Then as now, the native population came to the rescue. But in 1656 the rescuers were a band of Algonquins known as the Secatogues. They helped the stranded passengers and even sent runners to New Amsterdam to advise Governor Peter Stuyvesant of the incident. The passengers, crew and treasured old world possessions were brought back to New Amsterdam.

Here on the East end ships stumbled ashore for the next three hundred years, and, sadly, not all the passengers, crew and cargo would return safely. One of the more infamous shipwrecks of the 18th Century was the H.M.S. *Culloden*.

This 74 gun British ship of the line was part of the fleet that patrolled the Long Island Sound from New York City to Newport , Rhode Island during the Revolutionary War. Since the Battle of Long Island, August, 1776, the entire island from Brooklyn to Montauk Point was occupied by British forces. It was on January 23, 1871, that the Culloden, loaded with a contingent of marines and crew numbering 650, went aground on the west side of Lake Montauk. The ship had been trying to make the open water as a heavy winter storm with strong winds and freezing rain struck the Long Island Sound. All efforts to free the ship were fruitless. The guns were turned overboard, the cargo removed and the vessel burned to the water line. However, there was no loss of life. Over the years the name Culloden Point became less an historical landmark and more of a landmark for fishing expeditions. The ship's timbers rose and sank with every "Nor Easter" that blew through, but little was left to really mark the exact location of the wreck. In the 1970's attempts to find the ship's remains were successful and several artifacts including a cannon were recovered from the sight. The H.M.S. Culloden was made one of the first underwater archeological sites designated by New York State.

The number of wrecks and strandings in and around the south fork increased. In 1828, the brig Mars came ashore near Georgica in remarkably fine weather. Some of the load of molasses the ship was carrying was removed. Molasses cookies and cakes became the rage for the next few months in East Hampton and the surrounding

towns. The real sticky subject was the talk that the molasses had been only ballast for a cargo of slaves. The Amistad, off Montauk in 1839, was not the first ship with a cargo of "Black Ivory" to pass the East Hampton shore. In 1836 the wreck of the Bristol and the ship Mexico took the lives of some 206 passengers and crew. Although the wrecks took place to the west, the agonized frozen corpses washed up on the south shore from mid-October until January of 1837. These gruesome scenes along the beaches were burned into many a south shore diary. Walt Whitman in his new work Leaves of Grass immortalized the wreck of the Mexico in his poem "Sleepers", so that even the people of East Hampton could connect with the tragedy.

In May, 1839, the Edward Quesnel came ashore at Napeague. Seven men were drown as the vessel along with its cargo of whale oil was thrown upon the shore. The precious whale oil was quickly recovered, and the lights on the south fork burned a little longer and a little brighter that year. Henry P. Hedges of East Hampton recalls the other details, the bodies drawn up on the beach, pale, motionless and ghastly; it became a haunting memory for many.

In 1851, the St. Catherine out of Ireland went aground at Amagansett. She was carrying 270 immigrants on their way to Castle Garden. All of the passengers were rescued with the help of T. Mulford and Nathaniel Hand.

In 1842 the Louis Philippe came ashore near Mecox. Bound for New York from Bordeaux, France, the cargo of trees, shrubs, European varieties of plants and roses were thrown overboard to lighten the grip on the sand bar. The beach combers had a field day recovering the agricultural specimens all along the beach. It has always been rumored that some of the elm trees along East

Hampton's main street were rescued from the Louis Philippe. Even if it's not true, it makes a great story.

The wreck of the John Milton on February 19, 1857, is one of the most often repeated episodes in East Hampton history. The vessel, weighing some 1445 tons, was heading eastward along the south shore looking for its home port in Massachusetts. The ship seems to have mistaken the Shinnecock light for the Montauk light and made her turn north too soon impaling the vessel on the rocks off the point. The ship broke up and there were no survivors among the thirty three persons on board. The bodies that washed ashore were buried in the burying ground at East Hampton. The Sag Harbor Express in 1890 had the recollections of a Young Dr. A. Huntington "My father was coroner and I recollect how a messenger came on horseback the next morning bringing from Montauk news of the fearful wreck and loss of life; and later, just as the dusk of twilight gathered around, how two farm wagons rolled slowly through the snow up to our home and fourteen frozen corpses were lifted out and laid side by side in the carriage house. I remember also what feelings of awe, I went with my father later in the evening and gazed by the light of a dimly burning lantern on the ghostly spectacle".

Weeks later Mr. Aleck Gould was walking the beach only to find the arm of a sailor's pea coat in the sand. The coat was heavily laden with more than \$400.00 in gold coins. The coat belonged to the Captain of the John Milton, an Ephraim Harding.

The money was turned over to the Captain's widow who sadly lost her twenty year old son in the wreck along with her husband.

There was an increasing incidence of shipwrecks and groundings. The early attempts of aid for the Louis Philippe, and the Edward Quesnel were all voluntary. It was the duty of every south shore family to use the spy glass and frequently scan the sea. If anything looked unusual neighbor would signal neighbor and everyone would make for the beach. It was not only men, but women and children as well.

Housewives built fires, made food and volumes of warm drink. Clothing and blankets were ferried to the beach for both the rescued and the rescuers. The early life saving efforts were made by men and women with simple values, life and property were important. These east enders, the fishermen and whalers, who responded to a marine crisis were true to the principle of "helping thy fellow man".

The first organized efforts to protect the loss of life did not start on Long Island. The Massachusetts Humane Society of 1780, as part of their work, set up unmanned "relief huts" along the vast stretches of their beaches. The huts were stocked with provisions and instructions of how to get help. Those sailors lucky enough to find the beach and find the huts might survive.

The federal government took action in the 1840's at the behest of Dr. William A. Newell, a congressman from New Jersey. The doctor succeeded in passing legislation to help deal with the ever increasing maritime incidents and the loss of life. As the golden door beckoned the old world, millions of Europeans

sought our shore. The commercial status of New York as the economic capital meant that ships from all over the world would be coming in greater and greater numbers. Between 1839 and 1848, Newell estimated 338 ship wrecks in the New York-New Jersey area, 122 of them on Long Island, an average of one major wreck each month for almost ten years.

The first federal appropriation of some \$20,000 in 1849 was made to set up eight unmanned relief stations mainly on Long Island. In the first year of operation over 300 lives were saved. Soon a Life-Saving Benevolent Association was established with better equipment, more stations and a body of paid men organized to patrol the beaches. By 1872 the Treasury Department reorganized the Life Saving Unit again. There was the hiring of qualified surf men and new permanent facilities were created. It had become the United States Life Saving Service.

The Life Saving Service improved methods of sea rescue. When launching rescue boats into the ocean was not possible, a mortar might be used to shoot a life line out to the floundering vessel. A 24 pound ball could be launched almost 400 yards. Various types of mortars were employed, including the "Manby" the "Parrott", until the Lyle Gun was introduced in 1877. The Lyle Gun was much lighter and easier to manage than the old mortars. The bronze construction made it less prone to corrosion from the salt water. It could also throw a projectile with life line over 470 yards. Small amounts of powder on the Lyle Gun were enough to make it work well; too much powder by an inexperienced volunteer and the gun might travel as far back as the projectile went forward. The successful deployment of the life line was only the first part of any rescue.

After a larger, strong line was played out to the ship, a clothes line pulley system was set up from ship to shore. Next passengers and crew would enter life rings with canvas pants attached, called the breeches buoy. One by one the rescue of passengers and crew would continue, as the rescued hung above the crashing surf, swinging precariously from side to side, jerking forward with each and every tug given by the men on the beach.

There was the life car which was a metal lifeboat which unlike the breeches buoy could carry several people. A small metal boat with a metal cover could travel the same harness system used by the breeches buoy. The life car was dark and cramped, coupled with a few panic stricken passengers, it did not always meet with a high degree of confidence. Even though it worked very well, the 225 pound life car fell out of favor and the lighter breeches buoy, although it only moved one individual at a time, was quicker. By the turn of the century the life car was rarely used.

Lifeboats were the mainstay of the rescue effort. At first the boats were made of wood, approximately 27 feet long. They were designed to not only be self righting but self bailing as well. Later, metal boats were experimented with at some stations.

These boats were strong and light, they would dent but not leak. Unlike the wooden boats, they did not require the constant maintenance to prevent them

from drying out and leaking.

The cry of "ship ashore" was like the fire alarm of today. A remarkable group of men that served the U. S. Life Saving Service were stationed all along the beach from Montauk Point station, Ditch plain, Hither plain, Napeague, Amagansett and Georgica. The keepers and the surf men carry names that drive deep into East Hampton's history.

These include Conkling, Dominy, Gould, Edwards, King, Mulford, Parsons, Hedges, Stratton, Miller and Hobart just to name a few.

By the time the George Appold wrecked on January 9, 1889, the U.S. Life Saving Service was in full operation. The wreck occurred a mile and a half west of the point. The weather that day was clear, calm, but cold when the Appold ran some rocks in the minutes just past midnight. The ship seemed fine and one life boat was launched easily making it to the shore. There was plenty of time for preparation which at first seemed unnecessary until a storm erupted badly damaging the ship's wooden hull. As the storm increased in intensity the crew was ferried one by one to shore. The ship broke up on the rocks and its cargo floated ashore over the next few days. Bolts of calico cloth, New England rum, shoes, boots, stockings, hats and underwear were devoured by eager beachcombers. Quilts of similar calico seemed to magically appear on clothes lines throughout town, as if purchased through the Sears Catalog. Sometimes parties were held after a wreck and participants were told to bring all unmated shoes with the hopes of finding their "sole mates". "Wreck shoes" were worn by school children who were most easily identified by the copper toes that seemed to indicate some mysterious fashion trend. Although East Hampton history speaks of the ugly calico, or the wreck shoes, very few negative comments have been found concerning the 100 barrels of rum. Just two months later on March 14, 1889 Charles Raynor Bennet of the Georgica station saw a distress flag on a ship off shore. Then he noticed a life boat had been lowered. The crew of the mystery ship touched the beach and headed single file up the dunes then stopped in their tracks when they saw the Life Saving Station. Mr. Bennet saw a ragged crew of men suffering from scurvy, who had been without food or water for days. Their ship the Wingate, was of British registry, had lost its rudder and had been adrift for almost a week. They had delayed coming ashore because they feared that the island was inhabited by cannibal indians. They became desperate and decided to give one leap for the shore then run. (the crew of the Wingate was saved - they were however later eaten by a sight seeing group from New Jersey) Not all rescues ended in disaster. Like the wreck of the Appold, the wreck of the Elise Fay on February 17, 1893, caused the people of East Hampton to go nuts, literally. The schooner went down off Ditch plain station, but her crew of seven were all rescued. Her entire cargo of coconuts made it to shore. Local residents found every conceivable way to use coconuts over the next year. In 1893, it was expected that one invited for dinner would arrive with a coconut cake.

Did the elements of these marine mishaps have any effect on the artists of East Hampton? Two prominent artists who journeyed to the south fork were

Winslow Homer and Thomas Moran. Both men painted typical rural scenes. Many involved a beach on a sunny day, the sea and tranquility. The period for both in East Hampton is marked by the arrival of the U.S. Life Saving Service and various important shipwrecks. They both had to be aware of the life saving operations. Homer spent five years on the shore of Long Branch, New Jersey before coming to East Hampton in 1874. His painting entitled "East Hampton" is very refined. Although the beach is crowded, Homer focuses on a few elegantly dressed women relaxing on the beach. The rest of the crowd fades into that typical south shore summer haze.

In Homer's next work "The Tent", again, we see women and children in a relaxed mode, enjoying the fresh sea breeze sheltered from the blazing sun. I wonder how much of his experiences and stories from East Hampton played into his work ten years later. There are still women and the water remains a key ingredient but the mood and tone are much different.

Thomas Moran came to East Hampton on the suggestion of some artist friends in 1878. He returned over several summers until he took up permanent residence in 1884. Moran, like Homer, was aware of the importance of the sea in his work. His was a calm sea, inviting and comforting. Moran had to have been aware of the "Bengal" that ran aground off Amagansett in April of 1878 and Captain Joshua Edwards' efforts to rescue the crew. He must have heard of the ship "Daylight" that ran aground at Georgica in 1882 or the John D. Buckalew in February of the same year that lost all its crew save one off Hither plain. These incidents are summarized in one of Moran's less known engravings done in 1886, "The Much Resounding Sea".

The U.S. Life Saving Service saw gradual improvement over the years. In 1899 all Long Island stations were telephone connected. Now help was only a phone call away. Wrecking tugs and revenue cutters could be summoned if needed. By 1915 the Life Saving Service had proven its worth. The nation needed to develop an even more effective and efficient branch of coastal service. Existing station keepers and hands were offered positions in the newly ordained United States Coast Guard. The birth place of the Coast Guard you might say was in part right here in East Hampton and Long Island. And can you imagine what may have happened had not Coast Guard Seaman 2/c John C. Cullen been on patrol on June 12, 1942 at the Amagansett station the night the German saboteurs came ashore from the U-boat 202?

There is just one more East Hampton marine story that I believe is worth telling. I have not found it listed in any account of the Life Saving Service or exploits of the Coast Guard. It does not involve a great whaling event, or the rescue of hundreds in a stormy sea.

It begins on a summer's day July 7, 1883. A young man was beginning to lower the sail of his cat boat in Gardiner's Bay. It was only three days since the fourth of July and the island was still in a holiday mood. The young man, known only as Irvine, was an inexperienced sailor but wise enough to see an approaching storm. He headed himself and his seven year old passenger Anna Miller back to the shore. The wind was beginning to shift quickly as the front neared and a strong gust of wind caused a jib in the boom. The boom struck young Anna

knocking her overboard, Irvine dove after her and managed to keep her head above the increasingly choppy water. The frightened girl clung tight to her rescuer who himself now needed to be rescued.

He was quickly becoming exhausted by the effort, as the boat drifted further and further away. That innocent summer day of sailing could have ended tragically.

Fortunately for Irvine and Anna, a young East Hampton girl named Maria D. Parsons had witnessed the accident from shore. Quickly she launched a skiff and rowed nearly a quarter of a mile to reach the pair now barely afloat. With the storm still bearing down, Maria managed to lift Anna into the boat and helped Irvine slowly climb aboard. Exhausted, he could barely help Maria row the boat back to shore.

On February 7, 1888, after several witnesses gave accounts of Maria's extraordinary feat of courage and daring, the United States Life Saving Service awarded Maria D. Parsons a silver medal with the accompanying citation "With great presence of mind and bravery she rescued the man and child from drowning. It was fortunate that Maria Parsons was skilled in the use of oars, otherwise her noble efforts would have proved fruitless, the courage and self possession she displayed considering her years deserves the highest commendation".

How could young Maria not have been a good oarswoman? She was a Parsons, a member of one of East Hampton's oldest families. She grew up around the bays and oceans, the land and sea were one to her. Without her effort, two people may have perished. Who knows how those two people changed the world? Maria D. Parsons was the real life George Bailey of East Hampton. By the way, Maria was only 10 years old when she performed her gallant rescue, that's a 5th grade elementary student.

Since 1874 the U.S. Life Saving Service and the U.S. Coast Guard have awarded just 1800 medals. President Ronald Wilson Reagan made over 70 saves as a young life guard and never got a medal, but Maria D. Parsons of East Hampton did!

The marine heritage of this island community is long and rich. The part played by the people of the south fork and the town of East Hampton has been significant. Take pride in the 350th Anniversary of this town. Be proud of the place where you live, take pride in its past and take care of its future.