

GREAT RIVER POST OFFICE OPEN HOUSE

Sunday, August 19, 1984

(An address by Dr. Patrick J. Morrissey, Jr. Woodhollow Road, Great River, N.Y.)

Great River is an old community, probably part of the land grant from the King of England to William Nichols. Once it was called Youngsport. E. Young, according to an 1858 map in the Ocker Museum, had a fishing and boatbuilding business. Great River up to World War II was a little farming, hunting, fishing and trapping hamlet. It evolved into becoming a part of a millionaires' enclave of private estates as those of L. Breeze, Bayard Cutting, J. Ives Plumb, Hollins and others. Mr. Breeze sold a northerly part of his estate to set up the Southside Sportsmen's Club, which was a millionaires' club. George C. Taylor's estate was eventually used by his nephew Percy R. Pine of Pine, Winthrop and Hollister on Wall Street to set up a private game preserve called the Deer Range Corporation for hunting by the millionaires. He usually invited Hollister, stock holders and stock brokers of Wall Street to do some hunting. Most of that estate as well as the Plumb estate make up the Hecksher State Park today. The Timberpoint Golf Club was the L. Breeze estate that passed to Julian T. Davies, a most clever lawyer, who left a will stating that his estate not be broken up but sold as a unit to a club. It was sold to a club, and W. K. Macy was the first President of the Timberpoint Club; later, it became the Republican Party headquarters in Suffolk County with W. K. Macy its able leader. Prominent as its Secretary, actually Manager, for the Republican County Committee was Mrs. Fagerland. Ultimately the club was turned over to Suffolk County to become the Timberpoint Golf Club.

Once there was an elementary school on what was the Mill Road, a road that led to the Southside Sportsmen's Club's grist mill. The Ocker Museum shows in 1883 a Mr. Moore was principal of that school.

Bayard Cutting set up the Westbrook Golf Club, which included in membership some of the millionaires from the Southside Sportsmen's Club and many area residents, a few who were not millionaires. For example, William K. Vanderbilt, who owned the railroad, has his own station at Oakdale. Mrs. Cutting put up the \$10,000 to build the Great River Station to serve the millionaires on this side of the river. A local engineers did the electrical work.

The big white house opposite the delicatessan, owned by George Woulffe, was the J. Ives Plumb gate house and was moved to its side from what we now know as Hecksher State Park. The home of Stellario Morasco on River Road has been maintained as it was outside since it was moved there from Hecksher State Park.

Jeremiah Rollins (Willow) raised horses for steaplechases. John White, a retired New York policeman, rented boats for 25¢ and sailboats for 50¢. R. S. Weiss had a working farm; later the Dempseys lived there.

And there was the Seaside Home, sponsored by Trinity Church for providing two-week summer vacations for poor New York City children. It adjoined the site where Emanuel Church is now. The property was donated by William Nichols.

Jacob Ockus bought up all the clams of Great River Clammers as well as those garnered by West Sayville clammers and shipped them to the Fulton Fish Market. The Dutch knew this business well; many came from Holland to clam here and make a life for themselves.

King Smollen, like the Youngs, was an excellent boat builder. He was the first treasurer of the Great River Fire Department on land loaned by Julian T. Davies. It was the Parish House, used as a starter school, a place where Mr. Davies had a party for the local people. He was a liberal man. While the fire house was closer to the river then, the post office was then opposite where the fire house is now on land later owned by Mrs. West. Today the post office is on land owned by Mrs. Mim Fagerland. There were stores too on River Road like the Montford store. Before the fire department was established, it was a bucket brigade that wet down the roof to help to save the house.

King Smollen was a fisherman on the Lou Dillon, which had a loud whistle hooked up to the exhaust. He could blast it as he came into the mouth of the river, and his wife knew it was time to set the table for dinner. But the famous whistle fell overboard, and years later Frank Massick retrieved it as he looked for the buoy for next year's mooring. He offered it to Dick Conklin, King Smollen's grandson, but he would not take it. Frank will donate it with the story to the museum collection in West Sayville on what was the Heard estate.

Gilly Rhodes (Gee Haw) used to take the waste fish of a catch and plough them under...the odor was deadly...but he had 8 foot tall corn.

King Smollen built the River Queen, but it decayed and rotted at the dock. Many locals used to go on the hull to spear tommy cods as they went up the river to spawn. But, he also built the Clara Cummins, a fast sloop, which Frank Massick served on as a member of the Crew of the Oyster Watch boat. Frank was 40 years the Game Warden for the Southside Sportsmen's Club. The Seal Ship Oyster Company and later the Blue Point Oyster Company paid for the overhaul of the boat and part of the wages paid to the crew. They patrolled from Nichols Point to Cedar Hedge to keep the Oyster pirates at bay.

In winter the ice was cut to slide in and to set smelt nets for salt water smelts. Men speared eels, which were sent to the Fulton Fish Market. They would trap fox, raccoon, mink, and muskrat. In summer, they would fish for clams, oysters, and blue claw crabs. All were plentiful; pollution was unheard of. All this occurred in the past 82 years of Frank Massick's life.

Hollins, stockbroker for William K. Vanderbilt, had his estate bounding on that of George C. Taylor. The Hollins Duck Ponds became the East Islip Marina. Between the marina and the Hecksher Park, houses were constructed by developers on the highland part of the Hollins estate.

Cutting, Davies, Plumb and Taylor sought to preserve something of that millionaire ville by giving for public posterity and tax relief the arboretum, the country club and golf course and the State Park areas. It is fortunate that most homes in Great River have kept the estate effect with most homes on half acre and full acre sites. The Town of Islip has supported this to maintain Great River as a beauty spot.

There are many outstanding people in Great River, each worthy of acclaim in each of their professions or occupations. But, I cite one example as if I had spoken for someone in each of your homes.

It is 1979 and the "Heavenly Trio" charmed Mayor Ed Koch at Gracie Mansion. It was at the Madison Avenue Presbyterian Church and that McDermott Trio, Kerry, Maureen and Anne Marie, played chamber music. T. Patrick has been their official page turner, but he is a budding Violinist in his own right. They are a credit to

their late mother Anne Marie and their father Thomas. These talented Great Riverites won the Artists International Competition, did the debut at Carnegie Hall and did performances in the MGM movie "hot Lunch". Most will recall the successful visit to Moscow for the Tchaikovsky International Music Competition. But, one of their most worthy gigs was to play at the 75th birthday party at the Four Seasons Restaurant for Senator Jacob Javits.

Even the architecture of some of the houses are castle-like with turreted towers. We still have our businesses, and excellent delicatessen, and excellent restaurant, and a good bar in addition to our post office 11739-9998.

We keep our post office because we buy all of our rolls of stamps there. Besides letter writing, we can use our riding stables to use the horse trails at Hecksher. We can golf at Timberpoint. We can picnic by the water near the golf club entrance. We can fish at the dock opposite Church Road. We can launch a boat at River Road, near the Marine Police in the golf club or at the launch area in Hecksher State Park.

Great River has its own Emmanuel Episcopal Church, which for many years had as pastor Reverend Webb and then in later years the Reverend Hindley. The present pastor is Reverend Robert Schwarz. But Great River is made up of many Protestant denominations, Roman Catholics, Jews and other families. It is truly a melting pot today

So, whether it be Woodhollow Road, Church Road, Leaside Drive, Timberpoint Road, River Road, Peters Boulevard, McCarthy Lane, New Street, Provost Street, Wilton Court, Widgeon Court, Teale Court, O'Connell Court, Birchwood Drive, Pinetree Lane, Redwood Drive, Riviera Court, Russet Lane or any other named street, it is still Great River.

In 1941 the names were Frakes, Andorfers, Mullens, H.B. Petersons, M. Cummings, Koncelike, Browns, Mary Burr (our former excellent postmaster) Maguires, Bouviers, Dempseys, Carnavaras, Walkers, Frank Blacks, Massicks, Wests, Wymans, Millers, Woods, Sidlahars, Hubners, Hobbs, Burkes, Papinis, Hawkes, V.C. Pettersons, Reverend Handley; Rhodes, Larsens, Russell Koehlers, Harvey and William Conklin, Wasengs, Richard Conklings, Shepherds, Bashwiners, Horans, the Suffolk County Republican Committee, Days, Campbells, Pansers, Lettenbergers, Skulstads, Paulsens, Sopers, Hansens, Seaside Home, J. Dillons, Wetheringtons, International Tele. and Radio, Gus Brewers, Cattells, Blonklings, Edsalls, Halans, the Meridous, the Dahls, Enrights, Kuhns, Mullers, Rasmussens and many others. Some are yet here and many new families have become Great Riverites, dedicated as those of the past to keep this a beautiful, happy, private place to live. Our legacy is from millionaires. Thank you for being in Great River. Thanks to the millionaires and the local people that made Great River a place of dignity.

The Staff of the Great River Post Office 11739 on Sunday, August 19, 1984 are:

(Mrs.) Patricia J. Markosfeld, Postmaster
(Mrs.) Pauline D. Ammann
(Mrs.) Mildred J. Etzkorn
(Ms.) Cathy M. Southard
Mr. Michael Chicarelli

Special Credits to:

Gertrude Welte, Curator of the Ocker Museum, Oakdale, New York.
Frank Massick, Life resident of Great River, New York and former
Game Warden, Southside Sportsmen's Club
Mr. & Mrs. Stellario Morasca, Long time residents of Great River
Dick Conkling, one of a Family generations resident in Great River.
"Red" Dahl, one of the old Families of, Great River.
