

An Introduction to the History of Lloyd Harbor  
(Written at the request of George Hunt, Editor of  
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By Reese F. Alsop, M.D.

Dear George:

"History," you say, "the history of Lloyd Harbor and Lloyd Neck." I don't know. Is this kind of history interesting? The appropriation of farmland by the opulent has been anatomized before.

When I arrived twenty years ago to take up housing on the fringes of a big place, the establishment was already solid. Nobody was interested in agriculture. The Jones' were in residence, but not Farmer Brown.

We were welcomed warmly, very warmly. I still feel indebted for almost unbelievable kindness. At that time, there were relatively few large establishments, encircled by loyal Republicans, living in various elaborately remodeled barns and outbuildings. It was a generous community, mostly, as Lillian Hellman would have said, 'not little foxes, but big foxes.'

There was money for all good causes, and for the local church, though I doubt if a bowery bum had presented himself falteringly at the threshold, he would have been made welcome; comfortable, and warm with an extra cloak. I'm afraid we were Pharisees in those days, perhaps we still are.

Almost everybody in Lloyd Harbor had made it, or was about to, or was single-mindedly interested in the process. The American dream, so simple-minded, yet so extraordinarily productive over the last century was still serving Mammon.

As Eugene O'Neil once said when asked to explain the deep vein of tragedy running through all his plays, "We've sold our souls to the devil here in America. The only difference is we've received an unusually high price." And then he quoted from a well-known best seller, "What profiteth it a man if he gain a whole world and lose his own soul?"

Yes, on Lloyd Neck, the very rich man's jokes were funnier, his diner parties seldom declined, his artistic and political judgments given respectful attention, his friendship esteemed. But the deceitfulness of riches was never really able to hide the cracks in the foundation.

There were other redeeming features; many of us out on the Neck were relative newcomers who had done most, if not all, of it ourselves, who remembered what it was like to be down-and-out, to be savaged by the system. This permitted us to properly interpret the phony Edwardianism which otherwise might have reigned supreme. The riding to hounds, the shoots, the English houseguest with the tweed suit and hungry eyes could all be put in their proper transplanted, hybrid perspective.

But what am I saying? The people in Lloyd Harbor are like everyone else...courage, endurance, and love still abide, as do betrayal and self-betrayal. The sudden unexpected crushing pain in the chest, the secret hemorrhage, or the explosive astonished anguish of emotional ills hit just as hard and are withstood with the same varying degree of fortitude as elsewhere.

After all, clannishness is a universal attribute. The long hairs and the short hairs are always excluding each other, possibly as an exercise in self-identify or even protection. Only the periphery of the herd is exposed to the predators, though there may be some danger of smothering at the center. If the social structure here is a little more wooden, a little more afraid of change, a little more anxious to conserve, the temptations are greater.

But where is the adventure? This is the essence of history and we have not enough of it here. Our children have been telling us; they go away; there is nothing here for them. It has been said, "If you work in the vineyard, sleep under the vine." But we in Lloyd Neck have not been able to do this. We scatter with the dawn. History and growth are indigenous. How to describe progression when the elements are either afield or asleep? In the last ten years, the 'little foxes' have been pushing out some of the 'big foxes,' but we are still properly described as a cul de sac.

You asked me about Nan Wood's election parties at Fort Hill. They were like any other gathering of Nawabs. No burning issues were discussed, no passionate convictions displayed. All was loud and merry, but to be honest, I seldom lingered, paying my respects and then surreptitiously departing via a circuitous secret pathway. Which brings me to Nan herself, a woman warm as sunshine, indefatigable, loving-hearted, possessed of an emotional certitude which would light up a room where she was. Everybody always has loved Nan, I suppose because Nan loves everybody. Her enthusiasm, affection, and good spirits transcend, and at the same time, infuse whatever she does. Lloyd Neck, it's wonderful side-seagirt water emblem, really is Nan, whether she is walking, sailing, or riding or simply saying "Hello." She has reigned, not through any special intellectuality, but through the much more powerful implementation of the heart.

Framed in my living room is the original deed for the purchase of Lloyd Neck in 1718, and beside it is a family map depicting the four farms which belonged to the Lloyd brothers. What do you suppose it was like then, when the smell of new mown hay mingled with that of the salt marshes, when the blues swarmed and the Sound was clear and cold? There wasn't any causeway then, only a boat from Oyster Bay. It took old Mr. Matheson, Nan's father, to protect our shores with the bedrock from Manhattan's subway excavations. Certainly, he was one of the great conservationists. Those of us who have lived here so happily will always be in his debt.