The Village of Freeport, New York
The Municipal Government In Its Formative Years,
1892-1897

By

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A thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty of Arts and Sciences of New York University, in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in history,

August, 1964
Thesis directed by Bayd Still, Ph.D.
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Chapter I
The Background of Incorporation

The village of Freeport, Long Island, New York is part of the suburban complex surrounding metropolitan New York. To the casual observer it appears to be just another commuters' town bisected by the Long Island Railroad. But Freeport’s history is not that simple. The pattern of its development falls more accurately into the classic Indian-frontier, settled-farming-area, land development mold, and then into the modern pattern of suburban-urban development.

Freeport lies on a neck of land on the South Shore of Long Island about twenty-five miles from New York City. This neck of land stretches out into Great South Bay toward the inlet separating Jones Island and Long Beach. On the east lie the Freeport and Merrick rivers flowing into the bay. Natural channels and, today, man-made canals give Freeport one of the longest waterfronts in the United States. To the north lies Roosevelt and beyond that, Hempstead, the original location of European settlement in this part of Long Island. The points of land nearest the water and islands around them are marshlands. In colonial times the Great South Woods stretches north or what is now the Long Island Railroad up to the Hempstead Plain.\(^1\) The whole area was a Meroke Indian Site.\(^2\)

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\(^1\) Hilbert Johnson, Freeport – It’s sic History and Progress (Freeport: Press of Nassau, Inc., 1934), P. 11
\(^2\) Idem.
The settlement of the Freeport area by Europeans dates from shortly after 1643, when the Hempstead area was settled by some thirty or forty families from Connecticut led by Reverend Richard Denton.\(^3\) The flatlands were good for farming, the marsh lands and meadows provided salt hay for animal fodder, the shallow inlets yielded shellfish and other fish in abundance, and the Freeport River was a natural inlet for the ships of commerce or fishing. A few families settled on this southern neck. There were Raynors, Smiths, Carmans, and Pearsalls, so many Raynors that the area was known as Raynortown until 1853, when it was renamed after a vote. Tradition says that the entrance through Jones Inlet was used for years as a landing place where duty would not be collected; the name Freeport.\(^4\)

The character of the area did not change greatly until the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Farming, fishing, clamming, oyster planting; operation of a saw mill and a grist mill, a hotel and a few stores; these activities kept the descendants of the settlers prosperous. They were true to the mold from which they came: New England, protestant, conservative, and rural.

By 1897, however, Freeport was greatly changed. Baymen still hauled in oysters and clams, and fishing boats still sailed for bluefish, but their catch was smaller and their importance to the community was diminished. The railroad brought the commuter to Freeport and Village affairs began to serve the needs and demands of the prosperous businessman from the city who found this countrified town an attractive place to live and raise a family. Meanwhile, governmental institutions had been expanded and developed to meet the changed character of the community.


\(^4\) Ibid, I, 854.
The South Side Railroad (now the Long Island) was completed to Babylon in 1868. Freeport then became within commuting distance of New York. Population growth followed, as demonstrated by the opening of the first Freeport Post Office in 1873 (previously Merrick handled Freeport’s mail), and by the organization of the first fire company, the Excelsior Hook and Ladder Company, in 1874. Little is known of the developments in Freeport until 1892 when incorporation put Freeport on the map. Incorporation had been discussed some years before, and a survey map had been made, but evidently there was not enough sentiment in favor of it.

Improved transportation was not the only reason for growth in Freeport. The change from remote rural village to sophisticated commuter community was aided by and even to a great degree caused by the real estate and financial transactions of a remarkable individual who came to Freeport in 1995, John J. Randall. He purchased a home there and then bought up about 100 acres of farm land, which he cut up into building lots. He then had streets laid out; trees planted, and advertised the area. This was only the beginning of his promotional activities. He purchased more farms, out of these created East Randall’s Park, and made this area a showplace of summer and year-round homes for well-to-do Brooklynites and New Yorkers. In 1890 he opened the Woodcleft area (a waterfront area on a large channel) to building. Randall & Miller, construction company, also advertised the sale of timber and cord wood.

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7. Johnson, (p.33)
8. Minutes of the Board of Trustees, I (June 18, 1892-March 18, 1904), P.1.
11. South Side Observer, January 1, 1892.
On January 1, 1892 the Freeport Bank (the first) was organized. Capital $30,000, President and director, John J. Randall. On August 19, 1892, a dissident group which had withdrawn from the Queens County Electric Light and Power Company formed the South Side Electric Company. Heading the list of its directors was John J. Randall. On March 3, 1893 (after incorporation) Randall and Miller purchased a large plot in southeast Freeport for $91,000. On March 28, 1893 the Freeport Land Company was organized offering 1,000 shares at $100 each. At the organizational meeting 475 shares were immediately taken. The President of the Freeport Land Company was John J. Randall. On May 12, 1893, Randall bought 31 more acres.

Although Randall was not a member of the committee to incorporate the village, he continued to play a key role in the community’s development after incorporation. He was one of the twenty-three men who agreed to be held liable for the expenditures of the village the first year of incorporation. He was appointed the first road commissioner of Freeport. Randall and Miller (construction company) were low bidders for the new schoolhouse in May of 1893. And for the new bridge over Milburn Creek in April of 1893. Both contracts were awarded to Randall and Miller. In later years, Randall dredged Woodcleft Canal and Randall Bay (300 feet wide and 10 feet deep at low tide), thus opening them to marine and residential development. John J. Randall never served on the village board or as a village officer, although his business

13. Observer, August 19, 1892.
15. Observer, March 31, 1893
16. Ibid., May 12, 1893
17. Minutes, P.5.
18. Ibid., P.11.
19. Ibid., P.26
20. Observer, April 28, 1893
partners and relatives regularly did. Today, in Freeport, Randall Avenue and Randall Park preserve the name of this fast moving businessman. The spurt of development after 1885 can be traced to several sources, but one of the most vital influences was John J. Randall and his real estate and financial operations.

By 1892 Freeport was a bustling and rapidly growing town. In January of that year, the South Shore Railroad stationed a flagman at the Main Street crossing and traffic was so heavy that he narrowly escaped being run over. 22 The directors of the village’s first bank, the Freeport Bank, erected the first brick building in Freeport of 1892, a Victorian beauty complete with “brownstone front with rock faced trimmings, brick and terra cotta cornice, arches over windows and doors in cut stone with the name of the bank engraved thereon.” 23 Long distance telephoning came to Freeport in August, when H.P. Libby (Insurance, Auctions, Loans) installed a telephone in his offices. 24 Real Estate was moving briskly. 25 The population of the area was over 1,800. 26

22. Observer, January 15, 1892.
23. Ibid., January 15, 1892
24. Ibid., August 5, 1892
25. Ibid., March 11, 1892; March 18, 1892; April 29, 1892 and others.
26. Minutes, p.3.
Chapter II

The Achievement of Incorporation

The first public reference to the movement for incorporation is found in Freeport column of the South Side Observer for June 3, 1892, a few lines tucked in among notices of church socials and lodge activities. It was headed “To think of,” and argued that Freeport paid about $1,200 yearly into the road fund of the Town of Hempstead which seem, if retained in Freeport as an incorporated village, would not only pay for improving streets but also for lighting them.¹ On June 18 there was a meeting in Van Riper’s Hall, chaired by William Foreman, to discuss incorporation. About twenty people attended. Charles K. Wallace acted as secretary. When William G. Miller moved that steps be taken to incorporate, speeches were made in favor of the motion and it was carried. A committee was then appointed to investigate the procedure.

The committee, in addition to William Foreman and Charles Wallace, consisted of William G. Miller, Samuel R. Smith, and Platt Conklin, Carman Cornelius, George Wallace, H.P. Libby and Hiram R. Smith.² These men represented most of the business and financial interest in the village. Five were directors of the bank (Miller, Cornelius, Foreman, George Wallace, Charles Wallace).³ Three were to be directors of the South Side Electric Company (Charles Wallace, Foreman, Libby).⁴ Libby was an auctioneer who dealt in insurance and loans as well.⁵ Samuel R. Smith dealt in mortgages.⁶

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¹ Observer, June 3, 1892. The publisher of the Observer was Charles L. Wallace, who was the real estate agent for Randall Park and other areas of Freeport, and was also a director of the Freeport Bank and of the South Side Electric Company.
² Minutes, P.1. Contains entire account
³ Observer, January 1, 1892
⁴ Ibid., August 19, 1892
⁵ Ibid., June 15, 1892, and others advertisement regularly approved.
⁶ Ibid., January 8, 1892. Advertisement
George Wallace was an attorney. Carman Cornelius, a democrat, had been in politics since running for town supervisor in 1867. Elected in 1868, he served four terms and later served as deputy treasurer of Queens County. He was to be the first president of the village. This was a small group to represent the wishes of 1,821 people, but the group fully represented the influence and money in the village.

In the Freeport column of the *South Side Observer* of the following week there was an account of the June 18 meeting, together with a summary of arguments favoring the move. The *Observer* argued that the age and size of Freeport made incorporation logical; that real estate values would increase; that any Board of Trustees elected by conservative Freeport could be trusted not to increase taxes; that a water system was needed for fire protection; that the city people seeking country homes wanted the convenience of public services such as a water system, electrical system, and a sewer system.

The town was already offering other sophisticated urban luxuries. Early in June a livery stable had opened near the depot with twenty carriages to rent. And at, the same time, two “ice-cream saloons” had opened on Main Street. Incorporation, the argument ran, would give Freeport control over local conditions which it did not have as a part of the Town of Hempstead, then part of Queens County. The men of the committee were undertaking a venture which was a little out of their usual line of finance, real estate, and business, but they attached the problem systematically and vigorously.

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7. *Idem.*
10. *Ibid.*, June 3, 1892
The committee for the incorporation held six more meetings to prepare the way for a popular vote on incorporation. The meetings were held in Carman Cornelius' home, the Bank, or H.P. Libby's office. Libby regularly acted as a secretary.\footnote{Minutes, pp. 1-5}

At the first meeting Samuel R. Smith was appointed a committee of one to obtain a copy of the state laws concerning incorporation and to find out about procedures in connection with the recent incorporation of Far Rockaway, another village on the South Shore.\footnote{Ibid., p.1.}

Carman Cornelius and Platt Conklin were appointed to try to recover a survey map made “some years ago” when incorporation had been discussed. The southwest part of town, stretching out into the bay, was known as Coe’s Neck. The committee was uncertain as to the sentiments toward incorporation in the area, so Samuel R. Smith and William G. Miller were appointed to investigate whether the people of Coe’s Neck wanted to be included within the proposed incorporated village. They reported at the next meeting that sentiments were favorable and that there were about forty-two voters in that area.\footnote{Ibid., P.1.} The facts concerning incorporation laws were obtained, at least in part, from a book by More, for which the committee authorized a payment of $2.\footnote{Ibid., P.2.} State law concerning incorporation required proof of 300 inhabitants per square mile, and a survey map had to be made and open to the public for five weeks before a vote could be held. The surveyor hired was Alvin G. Smith and his bill was $40.\footnote{Loc. Eit.} John T. Post agreed to take a census of the surveyed area. On the third of September he reported...
that the number of residents was 1,821. On John Post’s bill was $10.\textsuperscript{16} By the sixth committee meeting, held on the sixth of September at the Bank, all the details were completed. The map and survey were ready to be posted in H.P. Libby’s office and the twenty other public places as the law required, and the election was set for October 18, 1892.

Three issues were to be presented to the people. The first was incorporation. The second was the retention of the name Freeport. And the last was the authorization of a tax levy of $500 for the first year. The election was to be held at the Excelsior Hook and Ladder Truck House on Main Street, the only fire house in the village.\textsuperscript{17}

In August of 1892 twenty-three citizens had signed an agreement holding them liable for the assessment for the village expenditures of the first year. In addition to the original committee the list included John J. Randall and other businessmen.\textsuperscript{18} Perhaps they wished to assure the residents that they would not be burdened with an immediate tax assessment. Tradition in Freeport says that the businessmen passed the hat for the first year’s taxes.\textsuperscript{19}

The \textit{South Side Observer} of October 14, 1892 carried a notice of voting on incorporation to be held on October 18. The paper expressed approval of the move and, oddly, noted that the voting hours were inconvenient and that no public meetings had been held discussing the question of incorporation. The paper also printed a letter to the editor signed “a member of the committee.” The letter admitted that the proper public discussion had been neglected, perhaps due to the “press of other things.” It repeated

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., P.3.
\textsuperscript{17} Loc. Cit.
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., p.5.
\textsuperscript{19} Leonard D.B. Smith present treasurer of the village of Freeport, whose father, S. Dimon Smith was active in local affairs in this period, personal interview with the author on January 10, 1962. In Freeport.
the arguments in favor of incorporation. The letter printed out, however, that the “men who pay more than half the taxes in Freeport, … the men who have done the most to develop our town,” would vote for incorporation. He argued that the rest of the village should not vote against these men, and concluded with the reminder that, if voted down, the issue could not come up again for two years.

The election was held on Tuesday, October 18, between the hours of 10 A.M. and 3 P.M. A total of 346 votes were cast, 214 in favor and 132 against. This was a good turnout, since the total number of voters in Freeport was reported to be 667. There was spirited support for both sides of the issue, but the disagreements were friendly and gentlemanly. Clearly, however, the majority backed up the committee and the move for incorporation.

The next issue of the Observer contained another letter from “One of the Committee.” He noted that Freeport was the first village to approve incorporation on the first ballot. The village’s next task, he wrote was to select “discreet and economical men” to serve on the Board of Trustees. The letter cheered the people’s decision: “Hurrah for Freeport.” On the same day, October 21, the certificate of incorporation was filed in Jamaica (Queens County) at the County Clerk’s Office. Freeport was legally launched as an incorporated village of the sovereign state of New York.

The village framework thus established by law still lacked human leadership. On October 28 the Committee met to plan the first elections. The date set was November 29, 1892. On November 5 the Incorporation Committee met to nominate a slate of
officers, with only six men present. The slate nominated was called the Citizen’s Ticket.

It consisted of:

- President - Samuel R. Smith
- Two-year trustee - Carman Cornelius
- One-year trustee - William G. Miller
- One-year trustee - Chauncey T. Sprague
- Treasurer - Hiram Smith
- Collector - John T. Post

Up to this point, the Committee for Incorporation had faced little or no opposition.

So far this small group had engineered a major change in political organization of almost two thousand people, approved by a safe majority in the election vote. At this point, however, the public began to show a greater desire to participate in plans for its own future.

On November 15 a public meeting was held in Van Riper’s Hall to nominate a slate of candidates. At first the name given to this ticket was Second Citizen’s Ticket, but this “me-too” approach was soon discarded, and the name was changed to the People’s Ticket. The slate nominated at this meeting was:

- President - Carman Cornelius
- Two-year Trustee - William G. Miller (replaced on November 17 by Raynor R. Smith, since Miller had already been nominated on the Citizen’s Ticket).
- One-year Trustee – Henry Mead
- One-year Trustee – H. Asa Nichols
- Treasurer - Daniel B. Raynor
- Collector - Mitchell W. Smith

Perhaps this new ticket represented the political ambitions of Carman Cornelius or his supporters. Carman Cornelius had been one of the prime movers for incorporation and he had a background of public office. In a letter to the Observer

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25. Ibid., p.8.
published on November 25, Samuel R. Smith stated that he would not have accepted the earlier nomination by the Incorporation Committee if Carman Cornelius had expressed a desire for the post. The Committee justified its action by claimed that having been entrusted with carrying through incorporation proceedings, it felt a duty to complete its accomplishments with the nomination of capable officials. The Committee said it had only followed the precedent of other villages, and, in addition, the people had not acted. The Observer took no stand. Instead, it endorsed all the candidates as “first-rate men, real-estate owners, and interest.” These qualities were evidently considered necessary for village officials.

The election was held as scheduled on November 29, between the hours of 12 and 4 P.M. The Truck House was used for the election, and the Town of Hempstead sent two election supervisors to validate the election.

26. Observer, November 18, 1892, Letter to the Editor.
27. November 25, 1892.
Three Hundred and eighty-four votes were cast and the first official family of the incorporated village of Freeport was chosen. It was:

- President - Carman Cornelius
- Two-year Trustee – Raynor R. Smith
- One-year Trustee – Henry Mead
- One-year Trustee – H. Asa Nichols
- Treasurer - Daniel B. Raynor
- Collector - Mitchell W. Smith

This was the entire slate of the People's Party.

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28 Minutes, P.9.
Chapter III
Problems of the New Village

Freeport was, by December of 1892, an official village with an official family, but it faced many problems. The Village Board had no place to meet, no furniture to sit on, not even stationery for correspondence. The village fathers had to determine the assessed value of the village in order to set taxes and expenditures. In addition, various appointments had to be made: road commissioner, health officer, police officer, and others. The question of the relationship of village to town or state was not completely spelled out. Furthermore, private corporations were changing the face of Freeport, including the Electric Company and the Long Island Railroad. The city of Brooklyn owned the watershed area in the village, and its fences obstructed main roads through the village; its dam built on Freeport Creek was causing sediments to mount in Freeport Channel.\(^1\) Fire Protection was inadequate. All these problems and more faced the six newly elected officials. With the sober good sense of men used to the vicissitudes of business, the proceeded to set a pattern for the village government, to assert the sovereignty of the village, and to plan for the future.

That it was not easy for a fledgling government to make its will felt may be illustrated by the running battle Freeport fought with, and lost to, the Electric Company. By December of 1892 the Electric Light Company had been working in the village for some five months. In the course of work wooden poles were deposited on various streets and left there, for some unexplained reason. At one of the first meetings of the Board of Trustees, the clerk was ordered to “notify the manijor [sic] of Electric Light

\(^1\) Observer, December 30, 1892.
Company to remove or sett [sic] the poles lying in the Village Streets in twenty days.”

On the twenty-fourth of February, 1893 the clerk once again was instructed to notify the company to remove its poles in fifteen days. On the thirty-first of March, Trustee H.R. Smith was appointed a committee of one to see to the removal. On the seventh of April the Electric Company replied with pleas of the village: they would give the matter their immediate attention. Three times Trustee Smith reported progress concerning the removal of the poles; on the fourteenth of April, the fifth of May and the nineteenth of May. Spring passed, summer came and went. The question of the poles lay dormant, but not resolved. On the eighth of September 1893, a bill for the sum of $19.20 was presented to the village for the removal of 128 light poles, at 15 cents per pole. The village paid the bill without murmur. The individual who had finally solved the dilemma was the man to whom everyone turned for action, John J. Randall.

Not all problems were so frustrating. Many were simply mechanical. The first of these routine questions was that of finding a meeting place. The first meeting was held at Carman Cornelius' home, after which he served a “sumptuous repast.” Further meetings were held in the hall of the Excelsior Hook and Ladder Co. A more permanent home was needed, however, and in February, the trustees rented a room in Van Riper’s Hall for $34 per month. In March the bills for furniture arrived; the totaled $40.70. This office and equipment were necessary since the board met steadily through 1893 with

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2. Minutes, p. 11. The account which follows is taken from this source, pp. 11-32
3. Observer, January 9, 1893.
4. Minutes, P. 20
5. Ibid., p. 25.
the exception of a few weeks in summer. The attendance of the trustees were very consistent.\textsuperscript{6} By May, Village business required the purchase of a safe, at a cost of $50.\textsuperscript{7}

The board adopted a permanent order of business in January 9, 1893.\textsuperscript{8} Evidently meetings were lively and discussions heated. In March a set of rules for the board meetings was adopted. These rules gave the President the power to preserve order and prescribed \textit{Cushing’s Manual} as the Parliamentary guide. Each Speaker was to rise upon recognition, not to be interrupted unless by a call to order. There was to be no talking or walking in front of a speaker when duly recognized. Motions were to be submitted in writing upon request.\textsuperscript{9}

In January the Board adopted \textit{Village Ordinances}.\textsuperscript{10} The regulations adopted show the mixed character of the village. Freeport was still rural but was moving into an urban stage of development. The concern in the ordinances was for a safe, clean, moral community. The job of enforcing these laws was to be done by one village constable. The man appointed constable was John Dunbar, whose salary was to be ten percent of all license fees.\textsuperscript{11}

The Ordinances sought a quiet and clean village. There was an anti-noise law with a penalty of $1 to $10. There was to be no shooting firearms or buildings fires except on July 4 or public holidays. The fine for this was not to exceed $10. A false fire alarm was to receive a penalty of $2 or $5. Garbage and tin cans were not to be deposited in the streets, under penalty up to $5. Earth was not to be deposited in the

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\textsuperscript{6} Ibid., Attendance is recorded for each meeting. \\
\textsuperscript{7} Ibid., P. 27. \\
\textsuperscript{8} Ibid., p. 13. \\
\textsuperscript{9} Ibid., p. 22. \\
\textsuperscript{10} Ibid., pp. 14-17. Contains 18 sections. The following paragraphs are taken from these. \\
\textsuperscript{11} Ibid., p. 26 and p.28.
\end{flushleft}
streets, penalty $5 to $10. Sidewalks were to be shoveled after a snow fall and were to be kept in general repair, “clean of weeds and stumps,” penalty $1.

The morals of the area received the attention in the Village Ordinances. Nude bathing was to be punished by a penalty of $2 to $5. No indecent or obscene publications were to be sold, with a penalty of $10 to $25 for offender. All theatrical shows and circuses were to be licensed, the price of the license ranging from $1 to $50. The penalty for not obtaining a license was $25.

Many of the ordinances concerned the muzzling of dogs, the licensing of peddlers, and other minor local matters. Fines were moderate and went to the Village. It was a quiet town with only brief moments of lawlessness. A jail was not provided until July 1893, when the Electric Light building was rented “for the Purpose of a Lock-up.”

Road and street conditions occupied much time in the Board meetings. The South Side Observer had used the occasion of a carriage accident in Freeport to seek lights for the streets. A few months later the paper called for a sidewalk ordinance. Road conditions as a whole must have been primitive. Two trustees had to be appointed to contact property owners on Seamen Avenue, a main road, to have them remove the stumps from the road. The Observer commented that the street commissioner, John J. Randall, was clearing up previous “execrable conditions.” One difficult problem had been created when the City of Brooklyn, which owned the watershed area in the village, had fenced in this wooded area closing off three main

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12. Ibid., p. 29.
13. December 23, 1892.
14. March 10, 1893.
15. Minutes, p. 29.
north-south streets. The City finally gave an easement to the Village of Freeport to open these streets.¹⁷

Besides correcting existing poor conditions, the Board was planning for the improvement of existing roads and the opening of new ones. In March the Board purchased a road machine for $160 after a thorough study.¹⁸ A road was authorized over the dam at Horsfall’s Pond in the southeast section of the village.¹⁹ This would connect the main part of Freeport with the nearby community of Merrick. Bayview Avenue, a main north-south artery leading to Coe’s neck, was widened and graded. For a price of 70 cents per road low bidder John P. Powell agreed to make Bayview Avenue thirty feet wide, graded, with ten-foot sidewalks on either side, free of stumps. Powell’s payment was to be made in installments of 25% for each one-third of the work, and the last 25% on the satisfaction of the board.²⁰

Bridges were also a concern for the Village Fathers, since the eastern and western boundaries were creeks. The volume of water in these was much greater in 1892 than it is today. Both these creeks were damned for the operation of mills and were also mini arteries for water traffic to and from the bays and ocean. The bridge over Milburn Creek, on the west side of Freeport, was a drawbridge and the village authorized $15 a month as half payment to Charles Smith for tending the bridge during the summer of 1893. The Town of Hempstead paid the other half.²¹ The Freeport Village Board finally decided to turn over to the Town of Hempstead the care and repair

¹⁷ Minutes, p. 19.
¹⁸ Ibid., p. 24.
¹⁹ Ibid., p. 31.
²⁰ Ibid., p. 32. The board bargained hard. On one occasion the official village scavenger, Moses Jarvis, presented a bill for $5 for removing a dead horse, but after three weeks delay the Board authorized a payment of only $3.
²¹ Ibid., p. 29.
of the bridge in the village, instead of accepting Freeport’s share of appropriations for the district.\footnote{Ibid., p. 12}

Fire protection was the next most pressing need of Freeport, and one which arouse considerable discussion among the citizenry. The need for greater fire protection was dramatically driven home on the night of January 9, 1893, when the schoolhouse, located in the center of town, burned down.\footnote{Observer, January 13, 1893. The following account is taken from the newspaper.} The Excelsior Hook and Ladder Company answered the call but the wells in the vicinity could not be used (presumably because they were frozen). A bucket brigade did its best, mainly to prevent the fire from spreading to the house next door. Snow was thrown on the roof of the neighboring house, and spectators pelted the fire itself with snowballs, but to no avail. As hundreds watched, the roof fell in in less than an hour. The loss was estimated at $9,000, but the building was only insured for $5,000.

The Board considered the question of water supply and fire protection before the fire,\footnote{Minutes, p. 12} but after this disaster need was expressed frequently and with vigor. The \textit{Observer} ran an editorial note entitled, “Water Wanted.”\footnote{January 20, 1893.} In February the Board held a special meeting concerning a water supply, and appointed a committee to ascertain the cost of stand-pipe and piping the streets.\footnote{Minutes, p. 18} Progress was not swift enough to suit the citizenry, however. In May, the Excelsior Hook and Ladder Company visited a board meeting in a body to demand better fire protection.\footnote{Ibid., p. 27} In August, citizens visited the
Board again to discuss the issue.\textsuperscript{28} On petition, a new fire company was authorized in September, the Wide Awake Engine Company #1.\textsuperscript{29} Two more fire extinguishers were ordered for Excelsior Company.\textsuperscript{30} In September a Fire Department was authorized.\textsuperscript{31} But the water system was a more complicated question that was not to be solved for some time.

On September 12, 1893 the second village election brought in a new administration, but the names were familiar.\textsuperscript{32} Elected were:

- President - William G. Miller
- Two-year Trustee - Smith Cox
- Two-year Trustee - Isaac Van Riper
- Treasurer - William E. Golder
- Collector - Mitchell W. Smith

The new administration retained all the appointments made by previous administration,\textsuperscript{33} but John J. Randall accepted the post of Street Commissioner only after filing conditions.\textsuperscript{34}

Despite its problems, the Village government was solvent at the end of the first year’s operations. A special budget meeting was held by the Village Board on August 22, 1893, just before the second election for village officers. The financial report presented was brief and in the back. Village taxes, licenses, and fines had brought in $699.84. Only $476 was paid out. In addition, the real estate tax brought in $1,094.06 (only $15.20 remained uncollected). The budget for the next year was set at $500 for

\textsuperscript{28} Ibid., p.30.
\textsuperscript{29} Ibid., p.31.
\textsuperscript{30} Ibid., p. 38
\textsuperscript{31} Ibid., p.34
\textsuperscript{32} Ibid., p.33
\textsuperscript{33} Ibid., pp. 34.
\textsuperscript{34} Ibid., p. 35
“ordinary [sic] village expenses sic.” In November the Village report to the state showed no indebtedness. 

After one year of incorporation, the residents of Freeport could see many achievements. Local road conditions were improving, local law enforcement meant immediate attention to neighborhood problems, the Fire Department was enlarged and a water supply proposed. But the single greatest improvement was in the value of the land within the village boundaries.

In August of 1893, at a school board meeting, the assessed value of Freeport School district was given at $267,500. In 1893 the total assessed valuation of the village was $423,218. By 1893 the total was $454,174. The Observer praised incorporation for raising real estate value but not taxes. Not all the credit goes to incorporation since land values throughout the South Shore area were rising with the outflow of residents from New York City, but certainly local control enhanced the reputation of Freeport, increased the demand for Freeport real estate, and added to the prosperity of the area.

Incorporation gave the village local control of many affairs, and this gave the Village Fathers the power to direct the growth of the area. Within five years the basic community problem of water, fire protection, road conditions, lighting, and police protection were attacked by the Board with considerable success. The pattern set in the five years following incorporation still shows in today’s village government. The

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36 Ibid., p.38.
37 Observer, August 5, 1892. This is slightly different from the Village boundaries but not substantially.
38 Tax Roll, 1893.
39 March 3, 1893.
development of the village, accelerated in those first five years after incorporation, is part of the story of Freeport today.
Chapter IV

Village concerns: 1893-1897

Commenting upon the annual statement of the Village Trustees in August of 1894, the Observer makes this point: “The most laborious part of the trustees [sic] work has been as Water Commissioners in constructing the Village Water Works.”1 Certainly the residents kept constant pressure on the Board to initiate an adequate water supply, mainly for the purpose of protection from fire. The Observer led the movement. In an editorial on April 21, 1893, it asked, “What about fire protection!” The paper printed letters from citizens demanding fire protection and commented that many people had voted for incorporation solely to achieve safety from fire hazards.2

The Board had always worked closely with the fire fighters. Early Board meetings were held in the hall of Excelsior Hook and Ladder Company and, in 1892, a committee had been formed to determine the best way to provide fire protection. During 1893-1894 almost every meeting of the Trustees dealt with new appointments to the fire companies, their expenses, or their requests for new equipment. Excelsior, the first fire-fighting company, had urged a village-wide fire department in 1892,3 and as already pointed out, in September, 1893, Wide Awake Engine Company #1 was authorized by the Board on petition of the citizens.4 Now that there were two fire-fighting companies, there was a need to coordinate the work of both and provide a framework for additional companies as the need arose. For these reasons, on September 22, 1893, the Board

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1. March 3, 1894.
3. Minutes, p.11.
4. Ibid., p. 31.
created a whole new department, the Fire Department.\textsuperscript{5} Soon the department grew to contain five companies. In December of 1893 a charter was granted for Ever Ready Hose Company #1, made up of residents of the south side of the village.\textsuperscript{6} And in January of 1894, Vigilant Hose Company #2 was formed,\textsuperscript{7} followed a year later by Bayview Avenue Hose Company #3.\textsuperscript{8} When the first fire chief, D.W. Pine, retired at the end of 1895, he recommend, in his final report, the creation of five fire districts with a warning system so that the volunteers would know in what area a fire had broken out.\textsuperscript{9} A warning system using bells was finally put into effect in May of 1895.\textsuperscript{10} The Board was never reluctant to implement the wishes of the eager fire fighters.

The fireman always sought the best in equipment, partially as a point of village pride. “They expect Freeport to have a department that will be second to none on Long Island,” states the Observer.\textsuperscript{11} In addition to minor items, such as fire extinguishers, on April 16, 1894, the Board authorized $4,645 worth of equipment for the firemen. This included hose, the cost of building twelve fire wells, two hose carriages, and (the largest single expenditure) one Silsbey Steam Fire Engine at $2,000, built by the American Fire Engine Company of Seneca Falls.\textsuperscript{12} This engine arrived in May of 1894, was test, and was given to Wide Awaken Engine Company #1.\textsuperscript{13} The people were impressed with the demonstration of the engine. After building up a head of steam in only seven and one-half minutes, the engine spouted water 236 feet through 250 feet of hose. “The engine

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{5} Ibid., p. 34.
\textsuperscript{6} Ibid., p. 51, and Observer, January 5, 1893.
\textsuperscript{7} Minutes, p. 57.
\textsuperscript{8} Ibid., p. 122.
\textsuperscript{9} Ibid., p. 110.
\textsuperscript{10} Observer, May 17, 1895.
\textsuperscript{11} April 20, 1894.
\textsuperscript{12} Minutes, p. 72.
\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., p. 79.
\end{flushleft}
is a beauty and the boys are all proud of it," the Observer exited on May, 1894.\textsuperscript{14} Proud, indeed. Evidently Chief Pine knew that some of the boys were eager to run the engine around town, fire or no, and he kept a close watch on the key to the engine house. But the rest of the firemen pressured the Board, and on the third of July, the Board ordered the chief to turn over an engine house key to all members (in good standing) of Wide Awake Engine Company.\textsuperscript{15} In August the embattled fire chief, D.W. Pine, complained to the Board, "I charge Wide Awake Engine Company, with willful [sic] disobedience of Orders – in taking the Engine out and using [sic] the same without my authority and in defiance of my orders."\textsuperscript{16} The board could not seem to find the culprit but it did act to adopt amendments to the rules of the Fire Department.\textsuperscript{17}

The new equipment obviously delighted and intrigued the firemen and the populace, but its efficient use depended upon a reliable supply of water. This was a more technical problem, and required investigation. The Board had appointed a committee to ascertain the cost of a stand pipe, and to have maps prepared of the proposed water pipes as early as February of 1893.\textsuperscript{18} As earlier pointed out, the Excelsior Hook and Ladder Company had visited the Board Meeting in a body in May of 1893,\textsuperscript{19} and prominent citizens had done the same in August of the same year —\textsuperscript{20} all demanding faster action on the water question. The Board was still studying the question, however, and was not ready to present its proposal until January of 1894. The Board president, William G. Miller, wrote a letter to the editor of the Observer, in which

\begin{footnotes}
\item[14] May 18, 1894.
\item[15] Minutes, p.87.
\item[16] Ibid., p. 91.
\item[17] Ibid., p.92.
\item[18] Ibid., p. 18.
\item[19] See Above.
\item[20] See Above.
\end{footnotes}
he commented that the Board had done its duty in readying the plan and that the people now could approve or disapprove in the special election. He added that insurance rates could be expected to drop from $5,400 to $2,000. On the same day that the Observer printed Miller’s letter, it editorialized, “Freeport people, of late years are determined to make Freeport the leading village on the south side. A majority for the water supply Tuesday next will be a long step in that direction.”

The vote on Tuesday, January 9, 1894, brought out 213 people and the measure passed with a substantial margin. It authorized a $40,000 bond issue for five miles of pipe and 75 hydrants, and $5,000 for wells and pumps for outlying areas. The Observer was enthusiastic; Freeport was attracting home seekers (January 19, 1894); Freeport was attracting the attention of other communities and making real estate news (February 2, 1894); Rockville Centre was being “left behind in the march of progress” (January 12, 1894). By May of 1894 chemical tests were being made of water from test wells on Abraham Bedell’s farm, and the results were “perfect”, report the Observer. On January 26, 1894, the Board of Water Commissioners was organized in accordance with the law of 1875, amended in 1894. William G. Miller was president, Smith Cox, secretary, and Raynor R. Smith, Treasurer. In August of 1894, when the water systems had begun to operate, the Board ordered the clerk to write to the Suburban Underwriters association seeking lower insurance rates in Freeport, “which the People

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23. Ibid., May 11, 1894.
24. Ibid., February 2, 1894.
though they were Intitled [sic] to.\textsuperscript{25} The issue of water supply and fire fighting was settled to the satisfaction of the majority of the citizens.

The question of roads took up a great deal of time at the Village Board meetings. The village Fathers were anxious to have road conditions improved and to have the Town of Hempstead assume its share of the tax burden. They also wanted Queens County to care for some main roads in the village to save Freeport tax money.

The entire disposition of matters concerning roads, streets, and bridges fell to the first Road Commissioner of the Village of Freeport, John J. Randall. He served the village energetically and efficiently as Road Commissioner until September 11, 1895.\textsuperscript{26} During his tenure, the main roads of the village were honed and graded and a few, such as Merrick Road, macadamized.\textsuperscript{27} As Street Commissioner, Randall never had a proposal turned down by the Board; most road issues were simply handed over to him and he acted “with full power.”\textsuperscript{28}

In January of 1894, Randall reported to the Board that the low bid for stubbing, plowing, and honing Seamen Avenue was $120. He also recommended wooden sewers for the corner of Bergen and Fulton Streets.\textsuperscript{29} By March of 1894 the Street Commissioner reported that about two-thirds of the streets in the village had been honed and that the rest would be finished in a week.\textsuperscript{30} Continued attention to the roads brought them to such good conditions that by the fall of 1895, Freeport was attracting

\textsuperscript{25} Minutes, p. 93.
\textsuperscript{26} Ibid., p. 136.
\textsuperscript{27} Observer, November 24, 1893.
\textsuperscript{28} Minutes, p. 59.
\textsuperscript{29} Loc. Cit.
\textsuperscript{30} Ibid., p. 67.
close to one thousand bicycling enthusiasts on a Sunday afternoon.\textsuperscript{31} The \textit{New York Tribune} devoted space to the up and coming Village of Freeport, noting its shaded, well-kept streets.\textsuperscript{32} Conditions had certainly improved since July of 1893 when two Village Trustees had been appointed committee to see the property owners on Seaman Avenue about removing the stumps from the road.\textsuperscript{33} The village was still rural, however. The trees were so large and the limbs hung low over the streets that an ordinance was adopted in April of 1894 ordering property owners to trim them.\textsuperscript{34} Rustic beauty had to be sacrificed to progress when a Mr. Ecleston of lower Main Street was directed to remove a large butterball tree in front of his house because it blocked the side-walk.\textsuperscript{35}

The village felt it could save money if Queens County could be persuaded to take over the care and maintenance of main roads. The \textit{Observer} editorialized, "As the taxpayers of these villages pay their full share of the cost of keeping it in order, it would be only fair that the county engineer have charge of the road to its eastern terminus, including those parts within the villages."\textsuperscript{36} Freeport, as well as other villages along the way, was interested in this question. But this was a matter of state law; the county lacked the power to designate and assume control of roads. For the first time since incorporation the Village Fathers were attempting to influence state law directly, for their own benefit. In March of 1895 George Wallace, Council to the Board, went to Albany to attempt to have a road bill enacted, and he recommended that the Board contact their

\textsuperscript{31} \textit{Observer}, October 25, 1964.
\textsuperscript{32} \textit{Ibid.}, May 24, 1894. Reprint of the \textit{Tribune} article.
\textsuperscript{33} See Above.
\textsuperscript{34} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 71.
\textsuperscript{35} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 89.
\textsuperscript{36} March 1, 1895.
state senator, John L. Childs of Floral Park.\textsuperscript{37} Evidently the proper legislation was not before the state legislature, however, because the Board on March 28 hired George Wallace to prepare a bill for submission to the legislature which would empower the County to assume title to main roads and assume their upkeep as well.\textsuperscript{38} Some such legislation was passed, and in June of 1895 the Freeport Board resolved to ask the County to take over Merrick Road.\textsuperscript{39}

The Town of Hempstead was also much involved in the road question, or more particularly, the bridge question, since on both the eastern and western boundaries were bridges connecting to other settled areas. In March of 1895 it was indignantly recorded in the \textit{minutes} that the Town of Hempstead had destroyed a bridge “over the brook crossing the Merrick Road near the house of A.R. Rhodes,” and this after the Board had sent a remonstrance to the Town.\textsuperscript{40} The Board demanded that the Town rebuild the bridge, and after a Freeport committee had met with the Town Road Commissioner, the Town agreed to build a new one in the summer of 1895; it was to be eight feet wide and have stone abutments.\textsuperscript{41}

Not all the road problems involved relations with public authority. Before the village opened road leading east over Horsfall’s Dam, Isaac Horsfall, the owner had fenced in his property, blocking the road. A neighbor, Alexander Losee, searched Town of Hempstead records and proved that this had been a public highway since 1828.\textsuperscript{42} Isaac Horsfall obviously had plenty of good old Yankee independence and

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext[37]{\textit{Minutes}, p. 116.}
\footnotetext[38]{\textit{Ibid.}, p. 117.}
\footnotetext[39]{\textit{Ibid.}, p. 124.}
\footnotetext[40]{\textit{Ibid.}, p. 144.}
\footnotetext[41]{\textit{Ibid.}, p. 116.}
\footnotetext[42]{\textit{Observer}, August 4, 1893.}
\end{footnotes}
cantankerousness. He replied in a letter to the editor of the Observer telling Mr. L…… to mind his own business, that he owned the property he fenced. But the public will would not be thwarted, even by the rugged individualist, Mr. Horsfall; in September of 1893 his road was ordered opened. Thus, the village not only struggled to tend to its own roads, but it also asserted its right to assistance and cooperation from the Town, the County, the State, and even its own recalcitrant citizens. By May of 1894 the attention of the populace was turned from road conditions to road names. The Observer noted that many streets had more than one name, and that this confusion should be cleared up. “The Village Trustees have the power to make the necessary changed and the sooner they do it the better,” the Freeport column advised. Clearly, the Trustees’ power was becoming a matter of common acceptance. As early as December of 1892 the Observer reported a carriage accident in Freeport and commented, “When will the Village Fathers have the streets lights?” It took one year for the Board to get to this question, but by December of 1893 fifty lamps had been authorized and the committee on street lighting reported that the “posts had been satt [sic] and the lamps lighted.” These were kerosene lamps, and a lamp-lighter was employed to light and service them. On one occasion the lamp-lighter’s wagon caught fire, and the wagon was so saturated with kerosene that it burned before the blaze could be extinguished. The fire lamp lighter was Harry Walling, who later headed the electric power plant. As he grew older his son, Clinton Welling, enter the Village electric department and served in it for forty-five years, retiring in 1963 as head

43. Ibid., August 11, 1893.
44. Ibid., May 18, 1894.
45. Ibid., December 23, 1892.
46. Minutes, p. 51., and Observer, December 29, 1893.
The lighting was not adequate nor was it evenly distributed, so in January of 1894 twenty-five more street lamps were authorized. Public demand was evidently high, but the Observer worried as it reported the decision, “We cannot get all the luxuries of city government without paying for them and causing a high tax rate.”

The lamps were a problem in several ways. In the first place, the light was poor. A new paper, the Queens County Review, which began publication late in 1895, claimed that one in five of the lamps smoked up and gave poor light even though cleaned. The lights also were vulnerable to breakage, as boys and teenagers found them the means of a new sport. From April of 1894 through January of 1895 the Board investigated complain of broken streets lights. Finally in a resolution unanimously adopted, the Board authorized a reward for $5 for any person caught “destroying or in any way meddling with street lamps.”

Not only were the lights dim and often out; their upkeep was very expensive. Low bid for lamp-lighting in February of 1894 was 24 cents per lamp. Bills for two weeks regularly ran around $40. The high cost plus the continuing demand for more street lights finally led to consideration of the modern ways to light streets with electricity. The Observer noted that using the power house and waterworks engines, an electric plant could be erected at a cost of about $15,000. Its operating cost would be somewhere around $1,200 or $1,300., which was about the same as the cost of lamp-lighting. However, added the paper, the Trustees hesitated to increase indebtedness, and the

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48 Clinton Welling, speech at a testimonial dinner in his behalf, July 23, 1964, at the Outrigger Restaurant in Freeport.
49 January 12, 1894.
50 December 20, 1895.
51 Minutes, p. 109
52 Ibid., p. 63
53 Ibid., pp. 126-140.
people would probably be given a chance to vote on this matter. On September 10, 1897, a village election was held on the issue of building a municipal electrical system and the proposal was approved, ninety-nine votes in favor and seventy-four against. Thus, at an initial cost not to exceed $20,000, Freeport began to construct a publicly owned electric power system.

The two most frustrating issues facing the little Village of Freeport involved big money and big power from outside the village. The Long Island Railroad passed through the village and brought the commuter, but the railroad management was little concerned for any inconveniences it caused the community nor did it care to spend money to keep its property attractive. The City of Brooklyn owned the watershed area in village, and utilization of their rights often meant not only inconvenience for the community, but even an economic loss.

The railroad, which was a familiar fixture by the time of Freeport’s incorporation, spent little money on improvements such as stations or depots. According to the Observer, the depot in Freeport was a disgrace. In 1893 the railroad offered to build a new one, if Freeport would donate the land and pay half the cost of the building, some $4,000 or $5,000. Reporting this, the Observer said, “their magnanimity appalled all.” Nothing was done to improve the depot, and people had such a poor opinion of the Long Island Railroad that they openly hoped for other forms of transportation to take business away from the line. A trolley line was begun connecting Jamaica with the south side of the island. More exotic forms of transportation fascinated the age—a

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54. Observer, December 27, 1895.
55. Review, September 10, 1897.
56. March 10, 1893.
57. Observer, April 12, 1895.
bicycle railroad was proposed throughout Long Island, and this spurred the Long Island Railroad to some activity. The Observer sneered, “Meanwhile the Long Island Railroad is trying to warm the cookies of the long-suffering and patient residents of Freeport. They have, with an unselfishness that is astonishing, spent a few dollars in painting the inside of the Long Island Railroad station at this place.” But in the middle of August, 1895, no new depot had yet been built, though there were rumors that one was planned. “Should have had it years ago,” sniffed the Observer.

The Village Fathers were more concerned about safety than beauty, and in the fall of 1893, Smith Cox was appointed a committee of one to see the manager of the railroad to obtain a safety gate for the Main Street crossing. Although Mr. Cox tried, he reported that he did not even see the manager. In May of 1895 the Board passed a resolution requiring gates at all dangerous crossings. In December of the same year the Board went on record demanding, at once, gates at the Main Street crossing. The railroad replied that they had a flagman there and gates were not necessary. At this reply the Board appointed counsel to “proceed to compel the Long Island Railroad to place gates at the Main Street crossing in this village.” This was a losing battle. The case finally had to be brought to court, and, in April of 1896. The Long Island Railroad won its point: Main Street was not considered dangerous enough to necessitate a gate at the crossing.

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58. May 9, 1895.
59. August 16, 1895.
60. Minutes, pp. 34,35.
61. Ibid., p. 121.
62. Ibid., p. 142.
63. Ibid., p. 144.
64. Review, April 17, 1896.
The railroad even interrupted road traffic. Trains were often parked overnight or longer, blocking street crossings. In February of 1894 the Village adopted an ordinance forbidding such parking.\textsuperscript{65} This apparently meant little until the village declared the streets in question to be public highways. Upon petition of a dozen prominent citizens (including John J. Randall) the Board proceeded to do just that.\textsuperscript{66} The railroad attempted to delay this action, but finally allowed the measure to pass without even sending a representative to protest. \textsuperscript{67} And yet, one year later, the railroad was still leaving freight trains blocking the streets at night, and the Board was still protesting this.\textsuperscript{68}

For all the headaches the railroad gave to Freeport, the village needed it badly, even though Long Islanders complained that they paid three cents per mile while passengers on the New York Central paid only two cents a mile. A bill submitted to the State legislature by Congressman Vacheron (of Long Island) to regulate fares on the Long Island Railroad was defeated,\textsuperscript{69} but still the commuter continued to move out to the suburbs. The commuter was so important to the Village of Freeport that the Board of Trustees was ready to speak in his behalf. When a commuter train was dropped from the schedule, the Board ordered the Village Clerk to write to the manager of the railroad asking, “Why the 5:40 P.M. train had been removed as it was a most important train to the commuters and citizens in general.”\textsuperscript{70}

\textsuperscript{65} Minutes, p. 61.
\textsuperscript{66} Ibid., p. 68.
\textsuperscript{67} Ibid., p. 88.
\textsuperscript{68} Ibid., p. 139.
\textsuperscript{69} Observer, April 27, 1894.
\textsuperscript{70} Minutes, p. 88.
Freeport had little better luck in getting concessions from the city of Brooklyn, Brooklyn owned one and three-quarter miles of property around the Freeport Creek, a watershed area used for its water supply. The assessment was $131,999 in 1894, making Brooklyn the largest taxpayer to the village. Brooklyn’s fencing of this property in 1892 had caused the Observer to exclaim, “More Brooklyn outrages,” but, more seriously, in 1894 it sank drain wells on the property to augment the water supply for its growing population. This action stirred Freeporters to protest. The board decided to employ counsel to investigate the law and the rights of the village in this case. The resolution stated, “That the Trustees of the Village of Freeport view with alarm the project of putting in drain wells to drain away water from the Village of Freeport and Vacinity [sic] for the purpose of adding to the water supply of the City of Brooklyn; that such drainage will be of great injury to this village. And that it will be the duty of this board to resort to Every Expedient know to the Law to Prevent the City of Brooklyn from going on with such work of drainage.” Neither protest nor meetings with Brooklyn water officials accomplished anything, however, and a year later Freeport’s new paper, the Review, took up the matter in its fire issue. In an editorial, the Review warned that Brooklyn must begin to look elsewhere for its water, since the drainage of fresh water from the Freeport Creek area was affecting oyster cultivation, one of the important industries in the village. As the fresh water in the Creek had been greatly diminished, oysters in the shallow water where the creek emptied into the bay were exposed to the

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71. Tax Roll, 1893.
72. Tax Roll, 1894.
73. December 2, 1892.
74. Minutes, p. 99.
air at low tide, and this meant that they froze in cold weather. In January of 1896 a citizens committee was formed to fight the mighty city of Brooklyn on this issue, but they were handicapped first, because they were not sure of their legal rights, and second, they lacked funds. Brooklyn was not so easily dislodged from its property rights, and Freeport suffered from the loss of water for many years. Certainly, though, the citizens and administration of the village did not turn their backs on this formidable problem.

Freeport had no real crime problem even without movies, television, automobiles, or radio, the populace seemed to find enough to do to keep most of them out of trouble. There were the culprits who knocked out the kerosene lamps, and there was Daniel Bedell, an old bayman, who was regularly bought into court on charges of poaching on oyster beds that did not belong to him. But according to Justice Wallace, in twenty-three years in Freeport, he had never seen a local boy go to State's prison. The Observer agreed that Freeport very seldom furnished business for the Justice Court. Minor policing was not overlooked in the new Village, however, and the guardian of peace and propriety was its first village office, John Dunbar.

John Dunbar not only served as policeman for the village, he also rounded up stray dogs until the appointment of a regular dog-catcher, and when a compulsory education law was passed by the state, he was also the truant officer. He had the courage to do his job. In June of 1893, as a routine, he stopped a stranger to check up

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75. *November 8, 1895.*
77. *Ibid., January 31, 1896.*
78. *Observer, June 9, 1893, and November 24, 1893.*
79. *Ibid., March 24, 1893. Lecture delivered in Raynor Hall.*
80. *June 9, 1893.*
81. *Ibid., April 21, 1893.*
82. *Ibid., December 21, 1894.*
on him. This stranger was carrying burglar tools and a loaded revolver, but after a chase and a scuffle, Dunbar caught him. The Observer credits this courageous action with searing off other burglars, since this offender received a one-year jail sentence. Dunbar took action against local nuisances, too. He tried to keep stray dogs, cattle, horses and goats off the streets. He arrested two well-known citizens for reckless bicycle riding, which brought an indignant letter to the editor of the Observer from one of the culprits, and a mild reproof, from the paper, “It seems that the officer has not always used discretion.” Maybe not, but he was on the job. In April of 1894 the Board authorized the expenditure of $3.90 for two police badges (for Dunbar and his assistant, Charles Baldwin). Dunbar was reappointed Police Constable in 1894 and he was made the first Captain of the Police Constables a month later. The Observer credited him with keeping the village burglar-free.

As Freeport became more sophisticated, more rules and regulations for the average citizen became necessary. In April of 1894 a new ordinance on the licensing of dogs was adopted by the Board. New restrictions on the shooting of firearms and firecrackers were adopted soon after. Bicycle riding was the rage, and an ordinance was passed for bidding riding on sidewalks or riding at night without a light. During the summer months bicycles thronged the highways, and Officer Dunbar employed as

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83. Ibid., September 29, 1893. As late as the 1920’s the village officers questioned all strangers, according to William Martin, Long-Time resident.
84. Ibid., July 21, 1893.
85. Ibid., August 18, 1893.
86. Ibid., December 28, 1894.
87. Minutes, pp. 70,71. Baldwin was later dismissed on charges brought by Dunbar. Ibid., p. 101.
88. Ibid., pp. 99, 102.
89. December 27, 1895.
90. Minutes, pp. 74,75.
91. Ibid., p. 86.
many as four assistants to keep order on the weekends. In 1895 the Bayview area asked for its own constables, and one was appointed. Months of negotiation with the Town of Hempstead resulted in the Town’s providing “a cage for the Village for Prisoners [sic].” At first the “cage” was kept in the Trustees’ rooms, but this was objectionable, so they were moved to Corwin’s Livery Stable.

The police question was effectively handled, but in the selection of a Police Justice, the village was not so successful. In August of 1894 the Board created the office of Police Justice and appointed F. Jay Bedell to the post, at a salary of $25 per year. The Board requested frequent accountings from Justice Bedell. Perhaps the Board had reason. Justice Bedell was arrested by Officer Dunbar for being drunk and disorderly on one occasion. Bedell protested in November of 1895 that there was too much talk about his keeping the fines he collected. Finally, in February of 1895, the Union League Club petitioned the Board demanding his resignation, charging that he was incompetent, that he relied on the opinions of attorneys, and that one was “obliged to find him… in a public barroom.” Bedell fought back, demanding investigation. A committee was appointed by the Board to review the case, and in June of 1896, he was forced to resign; Wilber F. Tredwell was appointed in his place.

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93. Ibid., pp.123,124,130,136, among others
94. Ibid., p. 123.
95. Ibid., p. 65.
96. Ibid., p. 84.
97. Ibid., p. 95. In the margin
99. Ibid., November 29, 1895. Included in the Trustees report of their weekly meeting but not included in the official Minutes.
100. Minutes, p. 146, and Observer, February 21, 1896. The paper printed the charges, but they are not included in the Minutes.
102. Ibid., p. 154.
Chapter V

Maturing Freeport

The membership of the Board of Trustees of the Village of Freeport changed with the annual village elections, but not much. A handful of men active in business and government alike continued to dominate the Board, and evidently the citizens were satisfied with their local government, because no major revolt was recorded in the newspapers of the times. Most of the Board members were Republicans, although not all.\(^1\) Local Politics was, and general still is, divorced from national politics in Freeport. The Board members were all in business in or around Freeport. William G. Miller, who served as President up to 1900,\(^2\) was a business partner of John J. Randall, and, moreover, his brother-in-law.\(^3\)

The number of voters who turned out to select the village officers indicated that people generally were content to let this informal clique run the village. The first election brought out 384 voters;\(^4\) the second election only 187.\(^5\)

Many people turned out in January of the following year for the vote on the water issue – 208 voters.\(^6\) In September of 1894, about 130 people attended a meeting to nominate a slate for the village elections, but only 69 votes were cast in the election to elect an unopposed slate.\(^7\) In 1895, again, only one ticket was put up, this time with a party name, the People’s Party, and an emblem, the oyster. The Observer reported that

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1. Observer, March 24, 1893. List the results of elections in local political clubs.
5. Observer, September 15, 1893.
6. Ibid., January 12, 1894.
7. Ibid., September 14, 1894.
Freeport was to be congratulated on her able officers, but little interest was stirred by the election, which brought out only 58 voters. William Miller’s speech at his installation in 1894 might have been repeated every year. He hoped for as much success in the year ahead as the Trustees had had in the year just finished.

The meeting night of the Board was changed from every Friday night to the first and third Fridays of the month. This appeared to provide enough meetings to handle affairs.

As in the first year, the attendance of the Trustees continued to be steady throughout the surrounding years. Regular business included the reports of various committees such as the Drawbridge committee, the Road and Street committee, the “Cage” committee, the Water committee, The Board of Health also reported as did the Police Justice and Officer Dunbar; and the Fire Department continually submitted the names of new members and asked for more equipment. Bills were presented and payments authorized about every two weeks. Regular bills included stipends for the lamp-lighter and the constables, charges for supplies for the Firemen, Village Clerk and tax Collector, payments for legal services, insurance, rent, printing, and coal in the winter. The Board was frugal. When authorizing bells for the Fire Department, they stipulated that their coat was not to exceed two and one-half cents per-pound, and the chief reported that he had found second-hand bells at that price. Occasionally the Trustees refused to pay a bill, and sometimes they cut prices. A Letter to the editor of

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8. September 13, 1895.
9. Minutes, p. 95.
10. Ibid., pp66, 112, or any other meetings. Following paragraph chiefly drawn from these two meetings.
11. Ibid., p. 120
12. September 1, 1893.
the Observer praised the Trustee for being “careful and economical,” and noted without compensation.\textsuperscript{13}

There was one significant change in Board attitude and action within the first five years of incorporation, and this was their willingness to put the village into debt. Increased services due to increased pressure from the residents led to this improvements which, in turn, attracted more residents and again increased the demand for services. Village pride also played a part. The Observer was not just blowing Freeport’s horn when it stated, “Freeport is bound to take the lead among South Side Villages.”\textsuperscript{14}

Although the end of 1893 saw the village with no indebtedness, the road bond, the water bond, and the fire equipment bond were authorized within the next few years. By the end of 1895, the Board had to borrow $2,870 from the Freeport Bank to pay its bills, mostly interest and principle on Village debts.\textsuperscript{15} In addition, village expenses, held to $500 for the years 1893, 1894, 1895, and 1896, leaped to $1,000 in 1897. By 1897, the annual statement printed in the Observer took up almost one full-length column in the paper.\textsuperscript{16} The complexities of the maturing Freeport demand not only money, but newspaper space. The indebtedness was not a real problem to the village, however,

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., p. 88.
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., August 25, 1893.
\textsuperscript{15} Minutes, p. 144.
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., pp. 31, 107, 141, and Observer, September 10, 1997.
since by 1895 the assessed valuation of Freeport was well past half a million dollars and still rising.\textsuperscript{17}

The economic base of old Freeport was mixed farming, fishing, clamming, oyster planting, crabbing, and a certain amount of trading, since the village served as a trading center for the south shore.\textsuperscript{18} Even after incorporation the area was still rural. Opossums raided chicken coops,\textsuperscript{19} and Horsfall’s mill still turned out the “best grade of flour.”\textsuperscript{20} and meadow grass was still auctioned off for the cattle feed.\textsuperscript{21} The new residents in Freeport bought houses, not farms, and were more likely to commute to New York than to dredge oysters from the bay.

Every spring the Hempstead Town Board met in Freeport to grant oysters licenses. The old families—Bedells, Smiths, and Raynors—predominated in this industry,\textsuperscript{22} but in the mid 1890’s, the industry was suffering. Fresh water streams watering the oysters poured forth a diminishing amount of water, especially Freeport Creek.\textsuperscript{23} In addition, the winter of 1893-1894 was a very severe one, and the Observer reported that the oyster trade was very dull in the spring season.\textsuperscript{24} In November of 1895 senator Childs came to Freeport to address the oystermen, a meeting at which William Miller stated that oystering was Freeport’s main industry. Senator Childs gave figures to show how the oyster trade was declining, stating that the Town of Hempstead had received $2,750 in fees for oyster leases in 1884 but only $1,415 in 1895.\textsuperscript{25}

\textsuperscript{17} Review, December 13, 1895.
\textsuperscript{18} Golder, “Reminiscences,” Review-Star, January 29, 1940, February 5, 1940, March 18, 1940.
\textsuperscript{19} Observer, March 10, 1893.
\textsuperscript{20} Ibid., April 23, 1893. Advertisement appeared regularly.
\textsuperscript{21} Ibid., September 1, 1893.
\textsuperscript{22} Ibid., May 19, 1893. Seven Raynors were granted licesnes.
\textsuperscript{23} See Above.
\textsuperscript{24} April 20, 1894.
\textsuperscript{25} Ibid., November 1 1895.
The sea and the bay yielded much to Freeport besides the oyster. The fishing boats sailed out on Monday for a three-day voyage, returning with their holds filled with iced fish for the New York market. A sloop sometimes anchored at Long Creek and placed a clam basket on its mast. This was a signal to the baymen that they were buying clams to haul to New York. And there were two fish oil works in the vicinity of Freeport. The treacherous waters of Jones's inlet often drove boats ashore, and findings from these wrecks also gave Freeports an occasional windfall, such as logwood from the schooner “Glanola,” wrecked in February of 1893.

But men like Randall and Miller foresaw the future importance of Freeport’s waterfront in activities connected with New York’s urban population. They began in 1894, to develop a channel from Woodcleft Canal to Long Creek, with bathing facilities, docking for pleasure craft, and a ferry service to the beaches. The true picture of the economy of the new Freeport could be seen in the multitude of new houses, large, ornate, and modern, being built every season, and the listings of real estate deals carried by the Observer. John J. Randall’s house was being built in the fall of 1895. It was on twenty acres of land, the largest house in town, boasting a tower and a large hall domed with colored glass. And while new homes and stores and offices were being built the Freeport Bank paid a steady dividend of six percent, prospering even though the year 1893 saw a financial panic.

Every innovation of the 1890’s was beginning to reach Freeport. And while the old ways of living and the old forms of entertainment did not disappear, much that novel

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29. Ibid., October 28, 1895.
30. Ibid., January 12, 1894.
was began to be part of the village scene. Social life in Freeport had always been lively, if provincial. The typical social life in old Freeport included parties, sometimes of more than fifty people, "socials" given by various organizations church activities, club meetings, bowling leagues, and visits of friends and relatives.\textsuperscript{31} In the spring, the circus came.\textsuperscript{32} Summer meant beach parties and sailing, especially in the Glorious Fourth. This day was the occasion for picnics in Randall and Miller's grove, athletic contests, perhaps a concert by the Freeport Concert Band, and, of course, shooting off firecrackers and guns, legal on this holiday.\textsuperscript{33} The Methodist Episcopal Church held revival meetings with outside speakers.\textsuperscript{34} For the men, there was still plenty of hunting,\textsuperscript{35} and, for those who could afford it, the excitement of fast horses. Justice Wallace owned $5,000 trotter named "Has-been"\textsuperscript{36} and he had competition from at least a dozen more local horse-fanciers, "all ready for a brush afternoon."\textsuperscript{37}

A new fad was encroaching upon the domain of the house, however, -- bicycle riding and racing. The improved roads in Freeport attracted Sunday riders and E.A. Dorlon, who sold bicycles (at prices of $75 to $100), also set up races, and even published a magazine about the sport, and he must have turned a handsome profit.\textsuperscript{38}

The \textit{Brooklyn Eagle} printed a story about Freeport in 1895, and reported a population of 2,300 and upwards,\textsuperscript{39} But the character of the population was changing,

\textsuperscript{31} Ibid., February, 1893, see all issues or any other.
\textsuperscript{32} Ibid., April 21, 1893.
\textsuperscript{33} Ibid., July 7, 1893. June 29, 1894.
\textsuperscript{34} Ibid., January 27, 1893.
\textsuperscript{35} Ibid., April 14, 1893.
\textsuperscript{36} Ibid., May 19, 1893. Also contains advertisements for horse-clipping.
\textsuperscript{37} Review, November 18, 1895.
\textsuperscript{38} Ibid., March 27, 1896, and Observer, September 7, 1894
\textsuperscript{39} Reprinted in the Observer, November 1, 1895
and there was an increase of summer residents from the city. The list of summer visitors chronicled in the columns of the Observer showed a distinguished and influential group. There was Lt. Peary, the Artic explorer, a congressman from upstate, newspapermen from the Brooklyn Eagle, and the Standard, prominent businessmen, and university students on holiday. The Review urged a midday postal delivery with the argument that “strangers inevitably express surprise that our postal deliveries are on a par with the smallest villages.” At least the Post Office had been moved to Main Street into D.B. Raynor’s new store when it was built in April of 1894.

Business began to cater to the new trade. Verity and Raynor’s new store just north of the tracks featured paint and the latest wallpapers, and would contract the work, too. Near Randall park a dealer in slate and marble mantels also carried ornamental brackets, terra cotta goods, and cabinets. A florist opened opposite Van Riper’s Hall, and a new confectioner appeared, and, on Main Street, a “New York barber.” George B. Smith opened a new hotel next to the post office. Four ice cream “saloons” catered to the village sweet tooth, and in 1895 a bowling alley opened its doors. And in every direction, cement pavements were being installed (at the expense of the property owner).

The village not only enjoyed more entertainment and creature comforts, but it began to enjoy more cultural outlets as well. The Union Free School of Freeport only graduated nine students in June of 1894, but in the fall of that year it began to offer,

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40. Ibid., July 13 1894
41. Ibid., June 21, 1895.
42. December 27, 1895.
43. Ibid., April 6, 1894.
44. Ibid., Advertisements and notices appearing from 1893 to 1895. Following paragraph taken wholly from these.
45. Ibid., July 6, 1894.
for the first time, a full high school course.\textsuperscript{46} This was in keeping with developments throughout the state, since a compulsory education law was adopted by the state in 1895.\textsuperscript{47} The previous year had seen a meeting of these interested in a free library in the village. \textsuperscript{48} Teachers and pupils put on a fair to raise enough money for the initial outlay so that a state charter could be obtained,\textsuperscript{49} and in November of 1895 the Board of Education organized the first Public Library in Freeport.\textsuperscript{50} And if a parent wanted more refinement for his child, private art classes commenced in the spring of 1895.\textsuperscript{51}

The interested citizens of Freeport were still concerned with Village conditions, even if they did not turn out numerous for elections. The first civic association was formed in the spring of 1894, called “The Village Improvement Society.” It drew a large attendance to its first meeting. Its purpose was not to fight the Trustees, but to back up the Village Fathers on issues such as a proposed trolley line or the fight with Brooklyn. The society’s immediate aims were stated to be a new railroad depot, improved sidewalks, and a village club.\textsuperscript{52} Later, plans considered called for a flower bed near the station and a bandstand for Saturday evening concerts.\textsuperscript{53}

The women of Freeport were also beginning to utilize their energies towards goals beyond local church charities and other traditional female activities. In May of 1894 the \textit{Observer} noted that the movement for women’s suffrage was gaining momentum in Queens County. The article listed various local chapters, but none in

\textsuperscript{46} Ibid., September 7, 1894
\textsuperscript{47} Ibid., September 21, 1894.
\textsuperscript{48} Ibid., June 22, 1894.
\textsuperscript{49} Ibid., June 22, 1894.
\textsuperscript{50} Review., November 18, 1895.
\textsuperscript{51} Observer, April 26, 1895. Advertisement.
\textsuperscript{52} Ibid., March 30, 1894.
\textsuperscript{53} Ibid., June 8, 1894.
Freeport, The one closest to Freeport was located in Hempstead.\textsuperscript{54} Two weeks later, however, Mrs. R. H. Mayland held a meeting of the “Political Quality League” in her home to organize a Freeport Chapter.\textsuperscript{55} Future meetings included some gentlemen, but the observer reported that the discussions were rather one-sided since almost all present favored suffrage for women.\textsuperscript{56} Mrs. Mayland, who husband was active in the “Village Improvement Society,” went on to be the treasurer of the Queen County League.\textsuperscript{57}

Religious facilities were expended in Freeport in the years following incorporation, and elements were added to the religious picture. In the fall of 1893, Bishop Littlejohn of the Episcopal Church visited what had previously been called the Freeport mission and designated it a church, the Church of the Transfiguration.\textsuperscript{58} Within a year the members had erected a new chapel.\textsuperscript{59} The Baptist minister had preached in the village for some time without ever being ordained, but was finally ordained in January of 1894.\textsuperscript{60} The village had been overwhelmingly Protestant from its earliest beginnings, but by the period of incorporation a few Catholics had moved into town. On Christmas day, 1895, the first celebration of the Mass was held in Freeport at the home of Mr. Tait.\textsuperscript{61} There were a few Jewish residents, but no mention in the papers of an

\begin{footnotes}
\item[54] May 11, 1894.
\item[55] Ibid., May 25, 1894.
\item[56] Ibid., June 8, 1894.
\item[57] Ibid., June 28, 1895.
\item[58] Ibid., October 6, 1893.
\item[59] Ibid., November 2, 1894.
\item[60] Ibid., January 19, 1894
\item[61] Review, December 27, 1895.
\end{footnotes}
organized Temple. Nevertheless, the population was becoming more and more heterogeneous.

Freeport in the mid 1890’s was entering its suburban phase, and, led by the efforts of a relatively small group of interested people, Freeport had the autonomy to deal with its development. In succeeding years the municipal services begun by the first Village Fathers were expanded in 1969. Freeporters have never seemed to shrink from a problem; there has always been a civic association or other group to voice the will of the residents. Certainly the example of Freeport’s early start as one of Long Island’s first villages has encouraged those who have maintained the tradition of self-government in the Village of Freeport.
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