Raynortown—Freeport

Then and Now

By Daniel M. Tredwell

The curious and interesting phenomenon presented in the colonization and development of Washburn’s Neck (Raynortown), or Freeport, will be found in the text of this brief chapter. This section was one of the earliest places settled in the Town of Hempstead, Long Island, and became at once a thriving colony of its day, and attained to considerable importance. But for some unknown cause a repose settled over the place, development ceased, and for one hundred years or more little advance marked the history of the settlement in either an increase to its population or industries. But in 1868, as if by magic, it burst into new life, manifesting a spirit of enterprise without parallel on Long Island, and arose to the highest rank among suburban villages, and is now the largest and has the best equipped village population in the State.

We had a great affection for old Raynortown regardless of its conservatism, and we look with suspicion upon the man who has no such attachments, no special locality upon which he bestows his affection, or who is at home anywhere, to whom all countries are alike, who loves no one place more than another, as an undutious and unpatriotic mortal, a social ingrate or vagrant having no permanent anchorage for his affections. To be reputed a cosmopolitan, “a citizen of the world,” may be a mark of rank, in theory, or an aptitude to adjust oneself to conditions, with charity flowing out upon everything it meets, a broadcast use of the “ten talents,” but it does not appeal to the cravings of mature years. The time comes when we seek moorings for our affections.

This is the experience of the writer, and his yearnings are toward the subject of the present chapter. This singularly interesting bit of territory (to us) which we have sought to paint in word colors made but little history for itself in early times; we did not admire it, but, somehow or other, the less we admired the more we loved it. It was clothed with childhood’s dearest memories, with schoolboy recollections and the deeper magic of love’s young dream, and we enter upon this little compend with home feelings, to reproduce in ink and type cherished memories of persons, places and scenes that we once knew, ancestral woods and brooks where we dwelt, with a pleasure not attended by promises of profit; and our work shall be performed without the aid of guide books.

The territory of the south side of the Town of Hempstead was peculiarly attractive to the first English emigrant. The forest abounded in all kinds of wild game—bears, wolves, deer, foxes; the creeks and bays were filled with fish—salmon, bass, sturgeon, and every variety of shell fish; seals or sea dogs were not unknown, and their peltries were a source of profit to the captor. No part of America was better adapted
to the frugal English emigrant than the necks and forests of the south side of Long Island.

Soon after the locating of the village of Hempstead, wide-awake prospectors had seized upon the fertile necks of the south side, and for the same or like reasons that they were the favored localities of the aboriginal Indian—the abundance and variety of the products of Nature, and the small amount of labor required to sustain life—were the inducements.

The distinctive characteristics of the first settlers were that they were homeseekers, and here they planted their hearthstones and built for their descendants, and their first act was the elimination and extinguishment of all native rights by obtaining satisfactory deeds of conveyance in fee from the State and the aboriginal owners.

The necks which engage our attention in this sketch were Coe's Neck, Washburn's Neck, and Hay Bridge Neck, known also as the Great South Woods in contradistinction to Middle and North Woods. These necks were taken up respectively by William Washburn and Robert Coe about the time of the first settlement of the Town of Hempstead in 1643. The occupants probably came over from Stamford with the first installment of Hempstead settlers.

The first house erected on territory within the limits of present Freeport appears to have been a log house by Edward Rainer, at the head of Washburn's Neck or Rainer's Neck, and near the mill (afterwards erected) and in front of the inn lately of Daniel Raynor. Washburn's Neck and Coe's Neck were filled up speedily by settlers, who supported life by fishing and hunting.

After the occupation of Edward Rainer, either by emigration or propagation, the population increased very rapidly, and the inhabitants of this section became largely Rainer, or Raynor; three families out of every five were Raynors, and of the remaining two-fifths, one-half were Rock Smiths, and prior to 1680 the name of Washburn's Neck was changed to Raynor's Neck on the record.

The settlement grew northward, following the Indian path which led to Hempstead, the mother colony. The settlers located along the trail for mutual protection against the possible surprise of the Indians and never venturing back in the woods. The population extended northward and was known as Raynortown as far as Rum Point, or Greenwich Point. Raynortown continued to grow, but very slowly; a drowsy conservatism had set in and its progress was only apparent from decade to decade.

Taking in now the collective settlement at our period and as we remember it from Rum Point to the bay, or Walter Whaley's Inn, a distance of about three miles along a single sandy road with a population of about 600 and about two hundred dwellings, half of which had then been standing over one hundred years, and many are still standing, every one of which had its legend, or ghost story, or some ruthless account of pirates, or gorgon tale of sea horrors.

This stretch of settlements possessed characteristics permitting it to be conveniently divided into sections, and this we have done, and shall give our details accordingly, distinguishing them in the order of northern, middle and southern section; this is not the order of settlement but is the order of approach and being more favorable to our method of illustration.

Northern, First Section.—The northern section, that portion beginning at or near Greenwich Point, extends southerly to the present South Side Railroad, a little over one mile from north to south along the road, or Indian trail (evidences of which still exist), every house being located along the road, and at the period of which we write it had become pretty thickly settled.

The residents were generally small farmers, most of the products of which were for home consumption; another class were boatmen, or sailors, men who followed the sea generally in coasters and were an intel-
ligent and independent class; every male inhabitant over twenty years of age was a captain.

Scattered among the small dwellings was now and then the home stead of a well-to-do farmer or planter. There were few old landmarks in this section of sufficient note to engage our special attention. The residence of Sylvanus Bedell, a farmer, was regarded a model of English colonial homestead; it was a picturesque and well-preserved residence of the old order. There was another old structure of more than a hundred years' standing in 1840, when it was occupied by Selah Lane, a prophet, a healer "by the laying on of hands," a Mormon preacher; this structure was called the "Temple." It is said that the first conception of the great Mormon temple at Nauvoo was by Lane, and of which great architectural monstrosity he made the plans. Lane was a man of more than ordinary ability, of good address, and entertained audiences at the "Temple," and had made many proselytes there. Francis K. Benedict, Daddy Bostwick, and many other Mormon settlers at Rum Point. Brigham Young was frequently the guest of Selah Lane. The converts made here were baptized in Raynortown.

The old temple, since its use by Lane, has been successively occupied as a dwelling by Henry Rhodes, Alfred Searing, Oliver Smith. A Methodist congregation held services in it. Miles Southard purchased it some years ago and sealed its fate.

I think it was in 1837, during protracted times, an enterprising real estate operator, imbued with metropolitan ideals, opened up a small tract of land on the west side of the old road, at or near Rum Point, into streets and building lots and advertised great bargains. In 1868 these lots were still there covered with a dense growth of underbrush and a more enduring undergrowth of unpaid taxes.

Another old house of historic importance in this section was the tavern of Benjamin Smith (of Katy). It was on the east side of the old road, or main street, at the junction of what is now Broadway. This was probably the oldest house in this section of Freeport, since owned and occupied by John Mead and now included within the territory of East Randall Park.

Middle, Second Section.—The next, or what we have pleased to designate the middle section, extends southerly along the old road, or present Main Street, from the Long Island Railroad to Daniel Raynor's Inn, or Mill, at the head of the Neck, being about one mile in extent. This was distinctly the business section of Raynortown, ironically called the center of civilization. The first historic building of note, still standing, was the old district schoolhouse, the first schoolhouse built within the present bounds of Freeport, located at the junction of Church Avenue and Main Street, and was probably one hundred and fifty years old. Within this section were located the stores and business places of old Raynortown. Willett Smith kept a country store at the head of Church Avenue, near the present railroad. Willett Chadick kept a large country store corner of Pine and Main Streets, afterwards moved to the corner of Fulton Avenue and Main Street. Mead & Raynor kept another general grocery store corner Merrick Road and Main Street. The hotel on Pine Street and junction of Church Avenue and Main Street was kept by Bedell Edwards, which had burned and was rebuilt. Andrew Rhodes kept a wheelwright shop on the Main Street, opposite Pine Street. William H. Cornwall had a blacksmith shop on Main Street. Elbert Cox, a shoe dealer and manufacturer, was on the main street.

A Presbyterian Church had just been erected, 1840, on the east side of Main Street. Sylvester Woodbridge was the first pastor; prior to this Raynortown had been a place of religious destitution. Horse racing on Sunday was a favorite recreation of the people; they had been familiar with it from infancy and saw no harm in it, but when they began to observe the good, orderly conduct of the church-going people, and when their children brought home moral
lessons learned at Sunday School, their reason became active and the horse racing was discontinued without any law being enacted for its suppression.

About this time, in the early 40's, the subject of temperance was being agitated in Raynortown and vicinity, meetings were being held in private houses, and pledges to abstain from intoxicating drinks were being circulated among the people for signatures. Two of the best-known representative and popular citizens of Raynortown, Joseph Smart and Riley Raynor, espoused total abstinence and became active workers in the cause; public meetings were held with marked success. One Sandy Welsh, a reformed rum-seller of New York, was announced to speak in the church at Raynortown on his experience; everybody came to hear what Sandy had to say. The church did not accommodate one-half of the audience and they listened to him through the open doors and windows. When the lecture was over the pledge was circulated for signatures and two-thirds of the audience attached their names.

These acts bore fruit. Joseph Smith discontinued the sale of liquor at his store and his example was followed by others, and the morals and manners of the people were greatly improved. The street at the time of our visit was strewn with waifs, "flotsam and jetsam" of the sea, remnants of many a noble ship, as a figurehead, transom or a spar set up as a memorial of some historic shipwreck, remnants of rigging, pulley blocks, cables, anchors, relics of stranded ships were scattered about everywhere, as memorials of disaster, now subjects of decay; life boats, whale boats out of commission, were hauled up, turned over and left to rot from exposure to alternate storm and sunshine, wherever room could be found for them, sometimes in the very front yards of residences and devoted to the ignoble purpose of coops. All along the road and sometimes in the road was continued this exhibition or museum of deodands, peace offerings to Neptune.

"The Neck" was originally settled, not for its fertility or value of the soil but for its availability, for its convenience to the sea, and never-failing food commissariat.

There was an observed careless thrift about the houses of these people which was indicative of innate native uniformity, or in other words, a unique and interesting pose of individuality. But among the inhabitants themselves there was no variety of type; habits in life in an atmosphere of brine and interbreeding for generations had unified all race and family characteristics to a tarpaulin group. They stand alone with but little commanding grace in their features. The structure of their habitations was without uniformity; they were constructed for shelter, not ornament or conformity, and were of indescribable shapelessness, sometimes a gable, at others a stack of chimneys faced the road. There was, however, among the females some evidence of taste for decoration, the festooned curtains in-
side the little windows, little green patches of dooryards, and some successful efforts at floral culture. But the place was vocal with dogs. Every house had a weather vane on its summit, of which we counted sixteen effigies of fish, two of whales, one of elaborate structure—a ship under full sail, one of Talmudic legend, a female head with body and tail of a dragon.

Of this plain and artless people, however, we may say with the greatest assurance that the author of "Hypocrisy in Real Life" did not get his ideals from Raynor South; there were no "Pecksniffs" cultivated among them. The men most venerated among them were those who were most daring and valiant in the cause of humanity, who jeopardized themselves in saving life or giving succor to the distressed.

Such is the picture of Raynor's Neck as we knew it and long prior and which had undergone but little change down to 1868-70, before referred to. The population of these three sections ranked pretty nearly equal and aggregated about six hundred souls.

Raynortown slumbered in a state of coma for nearly one hundred years and forty years after the awakening (namely, in 1913), we draw another sketch, now of the new Freeport, the dawn of which was inspired by the opening of the Long Island Railroad and the increasing demand for homes in Freeport. This aroused the spirit of speculation and a portion of the estate of Daniel Raynor was laid out in streets and building lots; this proved a limited success. But in 1885, on the appearance of John J. Randall, who purchased the farm of Sylvanus Bedell on the main road, mapped it out in streets and lots and called it Randall Park, marked the true regeneration of Raynortown. The spell had been broken and the spirit of speculation ran wild. The opening of Randall Park was the first; many succeeding enterprises created the new Freeport, and the village went ablaze in the new order thus introduced. Populations flowed in more rapidly than provisions could be made for them, and from a population not exceeding one thousand in 1870 it has now, 1913, reached the unprecedented advance of nearly eight thousand; no parallel can be cited on Long Island apart from the cities, an increase of over 200 per cent, for each of the four first decades.

To offset the clumsy old daily stage route of Raynortown, Freeport has now a railroad service of sixty-five trains a day, and a trolley route on a twenty minutes headway to Brooklyn.

In 1892, Freeport became an incorporated village, embracing within its limits about five square miles, nearly four thousand acres included between Millburn or Hick's Neck Creek on the west, and nominally Washburn or Mill Creek on the east, and absorbing the farms formerly of Thomas Tredwell, John Tredwell, Daniel Tredwell, Samuel Tredwell, Phebe Tredwell Smith, Benjamin Tredwell, Robert Porterfield, William Bedell, Oliver Smith, Samuel Seaman, Jacob Smith, Thomas Garman, George Smith, John Mead, Sylvanus Bedell, Daniel Raynor, and many other small proprietors. It has gas, electricity and flowing water, a post office and free delivery. The old Raynortown seat of learning, heretofore described, had a capacity of about fifty pupils, while the new Freeport has high and public schools superior in equipment to any on Long Island outside of the City of Brooklyn, with a maximum capacity of thirty-five hundred pupils, with a library of four thousand volumes.

The modest little Presbyterian Church of 1840, of which we have spoken, with less than one hundred and fifty sittings, has been supplemented by five churches of more pretentious structure and accommodations for three thousand worshippers. The means of grace is now dispensed from five pulpits—a Methodist Episcopal Church, Presbyterian Church, Protestant Episcopal Church, Baptist Church, and a Catholic Church. It has two banks, the Freeport Bank and the First National Bank, incorporated, respectively, in 1893 and 1905.
made itself—it was never constructed—and along which was clustered old Raynortown up to 1868, the new Freeport has now, in 1913, forty-five constructed streets, avenues and boulevards, aggregating forty miles of streetway and flagged sidewalks.

It has a fire department, hotels, clubs, charitable organizations, and everything contributing to perfect city life.

The above two pen-and-ink sketches, "Then and Now," separated by an interim of forty years, are introduced as remarkable contrasts in village growth, and in no sense intended as a history of Freeport; that is to come later and is now in preparation. Hoping the two above hastily drawn pictures of stagnation and growth, after awakening, may stimulate an interest in the history of one of the most remarkable villages of the State of New York.

A Long Island Wife and Grandmother of a President

By Charles A. Ditmas

In Anna Symmes Long Island had a distinguished daughter. She was the daughter of a soldier and a jurist; the wife of a soldier, a statesman and a president; the grandmother of a soldier, a statesman and a president; the dame of whom we are all so proud, the dames of domesticity. In this age of clamor for woman's rights, I believe our learned institutions could render no greater service to humanity than to establish a new degree of honor for women of character—D.D.I.—"Doctor of Domestic Intelligence." Anna Symmes could have qualified for it.

Her ancestor, John Tuthill, Jr., was one of the founders of Southold prior to 1654. He was born July 16, 1635, a son of Henry Tuthill, of Thorston, England, and Hingham, Mass. He married Deliverance, daughter of William and Dorothy King.

Their son, Henry Tuthill, was born at Southold May 1, 1665, and married Bethia, daughter of Captain Jonathan Horton. They were the parents of Henry Tuthill, born at Southold in 1690. He is supposed to have married Hannah Bebee, although some say her last name was Crouch.

Their son, Henry Tuthill, of Aquebogue, was born prior to 1715, and married Phebe Horton.

Anna Tuthill, their daughter, was born in 1741. She was the first wife of Judge John Cleves Symmes. The last number of the Bulletin contained an interesting article about Judge Symmes and his nephew, from the pen of Mr. Tredwell, which has led the writer to investigate the Symmes family and their connections.

Anna Symmes, the subject of this sketch, was born at Morristown, N. J., July 25, 1775. Her father, Colonel or Judge, as you prefer, John Cleves Symmes, was a distinguished soldier, justice and statesman of New Jersey, and her mother, Anna Tuthill, his wife, came, as has been shown, from a long line of thrifty Long Island families. She died shortly after Anna's birth, and Anna was brought up by her maternal grandparents at East Hampton, L. I., where she attended school. Her education was completed at the Isabella Graham School in New York City, so far as school work was concerned, but to Anna Symmes the world was a vast schoolroom of experience.

In 1794, she accompanied her father