Freeport’s nearly four hundred years of rich, documented past has been preserved through the written legacy of several outstanding recorders of its history through the years. Originally known as Raynortown or Raynor South after Edward Raynor who settled it with John Rock Smith in 1644, according to John F. DeLorme, official Freeport Village Historian and Trustee of some forty-plus years ago, this farming and fishing community with few hardy settlers earned itself the nickname of “Freeport” by the 1800’s because ships with cargo came in through what is now known as Jones Inlet “to avoid paying duties in New York and to get around other regulations.” By mid-century a petition was being supported by villagers to officially adopt FREEPORT as their rural community’s name and, although they did not accept it by a first vote because of equal opposition to the change, Raynortown’s residents did agree in 1853 to call their home a FREEPORT.

William E. Golder, local businessman and an active civic-minded individual whose first-hand account writings were published well over fifty years ago, states that he recalled Freeport as early as 1860 and “observed its’ progress from the Civil War days….”. The village, yet to be incorporated, had only 118 houses and 51 farms, according to Mr. Golder. Fishing and farming still occupied Freeport and the Old Mill Pond (now the site of our Raynor Rock Smith Recreation Center) was Freeport’s beauty spot then. With the arrival of the Southside Railroad (1868) “Freeport soon forged ahead of Hempstead”, and changes in our village into a community closer to what we now know began to occur.

Hilbert R. Johnson, local attorney and Freeport Village judge during the earlier period of this century (and, incidentally, the founder and president of the first Freeport Historical Society in 1941), recounted Freeport’s incorporation in 1892 this way……”at the time the population of Freeport was 1,821….and the bill for surveying the entire village (regarding incorporation) ……was forty dollars. After an October 18, 1892 vote with 214 in favor and 132 against incorporation……a sum of $500. (was allotted) to pay the expenses of running the new Village for the first year, and, on October 22, 1892, a certificate duly signed by the Supervisor and Town Clerk was filed in the Queens County Clerk’s Office” (Nassau County was not yet established), making old Raynortown or Freeport an Incorporated Village within the bounds of New York State.

Revered, and his presence sorely missed here, in Freeport, our MOST prolific writer and Freeport Village Historian, Clinton E. Metz, once stated about our development ….. “popularity of the Village soared in 1909 when an East River Tunnel (of the Long Island Railroad) was
completed. Another plus in the twentieth century’s second decade was an influx of many hundreds of vaudeville actors who flocked to bungalow colonies near the waterfront.” From time to time Mr. Metz elaborated on Freeport’s outstanding progress with a detailed analysis and description of buildings (the Memorial Library, theatres, Stadium, the Village Hall, etc.), businesses (Main Street, Playland, Woodcleft, etc.) topographical development (Sunrise Highway, widening of Fulton Street/Merrick Road, home tract building in the Northwest, Turk Island evolution into the Industrial Park complex, etc.) and the important roles of religious, fraternal and civic groups throughout Freeport history. Ending an article written …… SPECIFICALLY for a Freeport Chamber of Commerce publication, Clinton E. Metz remarked …… “Freeport has consistently faced up to its’ problems (growth and expansion, needs for changes, outdated facilities and so forth), large or small. It is difficult to interpret the meaning of outcome of what happened the past twenty years. Historians need perspective that only time can give. Therefore this brief review ends here.”

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