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MAY 2018



The Peck House revisited



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Peconic Bay SHOPPER

...preserving North Fork History

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On the Cover—

From our collection, one of many Charlie Meredith shots that captures the aftermath or results of an unfortunate dynamic. Here, in early April 1952, a slick road might have caused this accident.

Like so many Meredith shots, this photo tells a story by itself, hence “a picture is worth a thousand words”. The scene is looking west just past Peconic Lane and the roof hangs ominously as it’s support pole has been knock over.

*We are always looking for writers and/or photos that can help preserve local history. If you have old photos, please share. Story ideas to share or write? **Contact us!***

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LOOKING FOR INFO...

We had no feedback in our search for photos from local Fire Department carnivals from the 1950's up until they were no longer allowed to have gambling wheels — so we are asking again. Do you remember betting on the numbers on the spinning wheels and winning those prizes of different levels on the shelves, many donated by local businesses? It would be fun to print photos from those fun times. **Anyone have any to share?**

The Old Town Arts and Crafts Guild is celebrating 70 years this year. The Guild was organized in 1948, bringing local artist together. In the spring of 1953 they purchased the Penny-Crawford Homestead, a house built in the 1800s. Members worked together, having art exhibits and sales at the Guild on the Cutchogue Village Green. Seventy years later, the Guild is committed to offering innovative, diversified exhibits and programs that inspire, educate and stimulate creativity. Visit their building, located on the Main Road in Cutchogue. **If any readers have photos from the Guild's first 50 years, we would love to put them in print.**

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An early photo of the Peck House, corner of Route 25 and Wells Avenue, Southold.
Below photo was taken in 1955.



The Peck House revisited...

With renewed interest, due partially to recent pictorial discoveries in our archives, we are proud to reopen the subject of the Israel Peck home. This home, with ornate gingerbread and cupola, stood where the Bank of America is located today, on the Main Road in Southold. On this same road at one time stood many other beautiful Victorian style homes, with their manicured lawns and picket fences and carriage houses in the rear yards.

The Peck estate, with its amenities, brought to mind a view reminiscent of a Currier and Ives portrait, complete with the out buildings and horse barns.

These two subsequent articles were written for the Peconic Bay Shopper nearly forty years ago and are still important to our “preserving local history” for our current readers. Our village is constantly changing and the following of our past is now as essential as it ever was.



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Southold's Kindergarten class picking flowers, 1954, with a view of the The Peck House in the background.

THE WAY IT WAS

Written in 1978 for the Peconic Bay Shopper by Margaret Hagerman

This gracious old house stood for 114 years on the site of what is now the Chemical Bank [now the Bank of America] in Southold. It was built in 1852 for Mr. Israel Peck, nurseryman and farmer. From basement kitchen and family dining room to attic bedrooms, there were twenty rooms in all. Eight beautiful marble fireplaces, one of which was pink, helped keep the high ceiling rooms warm. The first floor walls were brick lined (an early form of insulation). One rather large room on the first floor contained two marble washbasins. This room was probably a dressing or powder room.

On the outside, the symmetry of the windows, the four brick chimneys, the welcoming front porch and the cupola on the roof gave the lovely old home an aesthetic beauty which made it a showplace all the years it stood on Main Street. The profusion of ivy which covered it may have hastened its deterioration but certainly added to its charm.

Behind the main house stood a smaller but no less elegant building. It was adorned with gingerbread, had its own grape arbor and cement walk. It consisted of just two rooms with back and front doors. Passersby would never have known it was an outhouse.

Eighty acres of farm and woodland extended from Main Street to Jockey Creek. Mr. Peck loved horses and at the rear of his property constructed a quarter mile track where he and friends often raced their trotters. Legend has it that this is how Jockey Creek got its name.

Mr. Peck was responsible for beautifying the Main Street of Southold. He planted numerous elm trees which over the years grew into spreading beauties that shaded the village for decades. Unfortunately, the 1938 hurricane uprooted too many of them and others succumbed to Dutch Elm disease.

Subsequent owners of the peck House were Samuel Dickerson, George H. Wells and Charles Grigonis. It was torn down in April of 1966. Another landmark has disappeared.

OAKLAWN NOSTALGIA

Written in 1980 for the Peconic Bay Shopper by Becky Terry

Oaklawn Avenue – the name did indeed once fit this busy highway leading to Pine Neck and Bay View. Picture a picnic grove with a view of Peconic Bay, spirited race horses being trained on a trotting track and a canopy of oak trees gracing a wide lawn gently sloping to the creek. The story begins over a hundred years ago and evolves around the ingenuity of Israel Peck. Before the Civil War, Mr. Peck, his wife and six daughters had come to Southold from Greenwich, Conn. Their imposing house stood near the site of the present Chemical Bank [now the Bank of America] on Main Road with property extending south to Jockey Creek. Though he was a carpenter and builder by trade, Israel Peck was a man of many interests and was one of the first trustees of Southold Savings Bank. It was his idea to beautify the village streets and from his Spruce Park Nursery he donated elm trees which were planted throughout the area, especially along Main Street. Always an admirer of a finely formed horse, Peck's project in 1872 was the construction of a race course, a one-half mile trotting track named the Spruce Park Trotting Course. It was at this time that Oaklawn Avenue was built, being extended in 1902 to Pine Neck. Before that Benjamin's Lane built in 1859 led from Main Road to the creek.

From the Hunting scrapbook we read, "At the Oak Lawn races a large assemblage of ladies is also present (they being admitted free). The course is beautifully laid out, being surrounded by a grove of trees. At the south end is a picnic ground with the Oak Lawn Club House where ice cream and refreshments are sold. No liquor is allowed on the premises."

The Peck home became social headquarters for Southold's young people. The dance parties were especially elegant, one 1862 all described in the local paper – "A night in mask – the most brilliant affair of the season, attracting fifty or more to the mansion of our worthy friend and neighbor, Israel Peck."

In 1877 Peck founded the Southold Town Agricultural Society which held a fair each year on the Oak Lawn grounds. Perhaps the most joyous event held at Oak Lawn was Harvest Home, the first held Aug. 1, 1881. This

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Israel Peck

was a summer-tide Thanksgiving for a bountiful harvest. One thousand people gathered to hear old time anthems, patriotic addresses and harvest songs directed by D. P. Horton. This first Harvest Home was to be Israel Peck's last, for on Oct. 30, 1881 he was laid to rest in Willow Hill Cemetery. However, beautiful Oak Lawn continued to be the setting for yearly festivals. By 1888 the celebration of Harvest Home included all the North Fork, beginning with a parade of bands and floats at 10 A.M. and ending in late afternoon with ice cream, clam chowder, soda water and the promise that all speeches would be brief. The 250th Anniversary of the Founding of Southold was held in 1890. Following a morning worship service at First Church, the procession to Oak Lawn Grove made a stunning parade, directed by Alva M. Salmon. Every carriage, cart and wagon in town was on show that day as patriotic citizens did honor to their beloved Southold. The affair was held in the heat of August and so an additional well had been driven at the grove to facilitate the water supply for the many visitors and their horses. A writer describes the scene that day "Circling about the platform, ten thousand people formed a compact mass of varying color on every side, while beyond this amphitheater was an outer circle of rows of equipages."

The last Harvest Home described by Huntting took place in 1896. It featured a grand bicycle parade of 100 gaily decorated wheels ridden by the Southold Town Cyclist's Ass'n. At the literary exercises several speakers alluded to hard times for the farmer that year. The audience was exhorted to "Plow on in Hope". Another orator likened our nation to a harvest of other nations. The program ended with all singing the Doxology with a warm feeling of fellowship.

Changes came to Oak Lawn following Israel Peck's lifetime. Property ownership went through several families and the idyllic setting to the grove and racetrack are now nostalgic local history. Even the lovely elms along Main Road fell as time brought disease and storm. Yet it is hoped that the philanthropic spirit and civic pride which motivated this former non-native son to leave his village a better place may continue to keep Southold beautiful.

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The photo above and on the facing page are Charles Meredith reprints showing the buildings behind the Peck house circa 1920.



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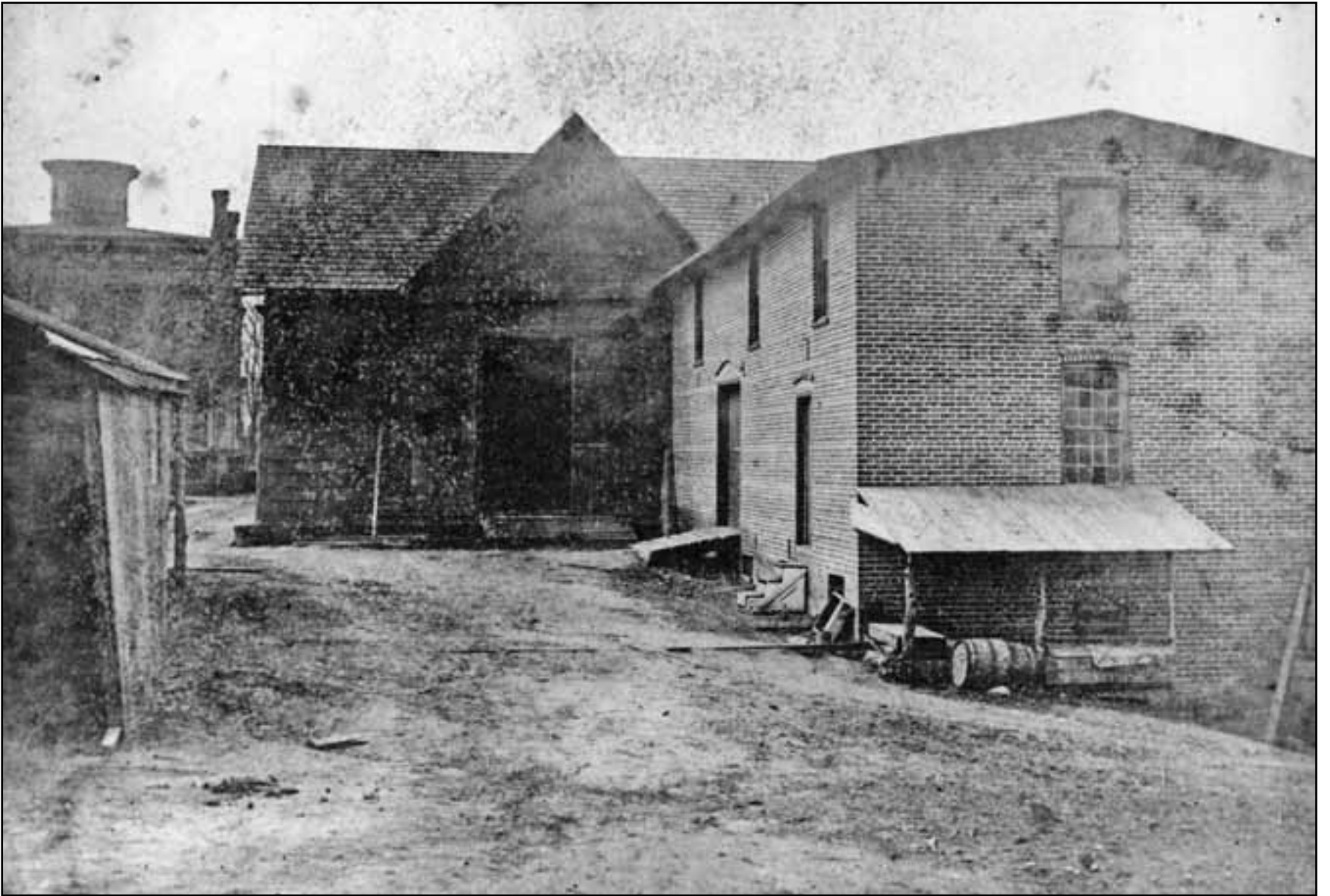
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