MILE-A-MINUTE MURPHY

Ardent Spirits and Brick-Making in Southold

PART II
On Our Cover...

Charles M. Murphy
boxing as part of his intensive training for his upcoming race.

(see Gail Horton's story “Mile-A-Minute Murphy” beginning on page 10.)

Along with sparring, training also included calisthenics with dumbbell weights, jumping rope, and light road work. Photo from the Fullerton Collection, Suffolk County Historical Society, Riverhead, NY.

Happy Holidays to all our readers and contributors.

Look for our “new look” in February!

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There is no January PBS...look for us in February 2010

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ARDENT SPIRITS AND BRICK-MAKING IN SOUTHOLD

PART 2

by Southold Town Historian Antonia Booth
and Principal Planner Mark Terry,
Town of Southold

The same inquisitive colleague who questioned the origins of brick making in Southold recently visited Fishers Island on business and during the trip was awarded a brick from the Fishers Island Brick Manufacturing Company by Mr. Kenneth Edwards, a local inhabitant of the island. It is not news that Fishers Island bricks with the signature frog (indent in the brick) showing the letters F.I. are hard to sequester. However, it may be little known that the one of the most significant exports from Fishers Island during the mid to late 1800’s was high quality bricks.

The exact date of discovery of the vast clay deposits on Fishers Island is unknown, however, prior to the 1800’s, the clay deposits possessed many evidences that bricks and other items were made throughout the history of the island. The first identifiable brick on the island, however, was crafted by Eugene Strickland but it was not until the arrival of the prominent Connecticut businessman, DeWitt Clinton Sage, that the clays of Fishers Island were memorialized in New England architecture and municipal projects.

DeWitt Clinton Sage was born in Middletown, Connecticut in 1837 to Barzella and Elizabeth Sage. He learned the brick making business at an early age working as an apprentice to his father. When he was sixteen years old his father died, leaving him to manage the developing brick making business. After successfully conducting the business for six years he sold it and then focused much of his time on making machinery, a trade in which he was quite successful.

While on business overseas, he became interested in machining munitions and upon his return home he succeeded in developing a new cartridge for the war department. While the manufacturing of cartridges was initially profitable, the short supply of materials during war time increased prices to the point where he could not produce the cartridge for the amount he quoted. Forced to use all of his profits to fulfill the contract, Mr. Sage concluded the contract $30,000 in debt.

So how did Dewitt Clinton Sage arrive on Fishers Island? Ironically, following the closure of the munitions factory Mr. Sage was able to secure another contract manufacturing headstones for the national cemeteries. It was near the end of this venture that he fell ill and ventured to the island to convalesce. While on the island he met Eugene Strickland (the local brick maker) and bought the clay deposits between Clay Point and Hawks Nest Point with every intention of starting a brick making yard.

Mr. Sage’s solid experience and business sense rapidly catapulted brick making on the island to a tremendous scale. In 1879 The Mystic Press reported that 2,500,000 bricks were delivered every season. In 1883 The Brooklyn Eagle reported that the yard has gone into a “possession of a stock

Continued on page 6...
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The Sage photo album titled "Breezy Shores" contains this poignant photograph titled "Robert". The grizzled workman, probably a supervisor, stands in the doorway of a building made of Sage bricks on the Peconic Bayside yard. Also made of bricks from Arshamomaque was St. Patrick's second church in Southold. The building that once was Goldsmith & Tuthill and is presently the Capital One Cutchogue branch is made of Robin's Island bricks. That brickyard was owned and operated by Ira B. Tuthill. David Fisher, of Southold and Manhattan, once wrote a charming article on life at Breezy Shores.
In Doctor John Gardiner’s time the preferred beasts of burden was a yoke of oxen. They were boarded out while not employed at the brickyard. Occasionally they were in the care of the eminent Ezra L’Hommedieu of Southold. In the nineteenth century horses replaced oxen for pulling materials to the crusher and dragging pallets of finished brick to the railway siding or to the docks where schooners awaited. Both means of transportation delivered millions of local bricks to New York and New England.
company electing Mr. DeWitt Sage as the president. He continued this venture for 10 years then decided to set his sights on the Southold mainland.

Fishers Island bricks were of superior quality and were sought after to comprise the exterior of many accomplished buildings and projects. The City of New York ordered 25,000,000 bricks for a new aqueduct to supply water to the population. As a testament to the quality of clay on Fishers Island, all of the three Winthrop houses were constructed of Fishers Island brick including the Mansion House and Brick Yard house which is reportedly filled with spirits (not the drinking kind). Interestingly, the clay deposits on Fishers Island were vast and in some areas occurred to a depth of 40 feet. Interestingly, the composition of the clay was found to be almost exactly to that found at Pipe’s Neck in Arshamomaque on the Mainland.

In 1887, The Long Island Traveler reported that the Fishers Island Brick Yard was one of the largest in the United States. Advertisements for the enterprise boasted the capacity of 18,000,000 bricks per annum and shipping to “Any port on the coast”. The works could produce more than 400,000 bricks per month with each Scove kiln requiring 50 cords of wood and six days burning. It was this same year that Mr. Sage purchased 180 acres of land near Greenport where Brick Cove Marina is located to-day to begin the Long Island Brick Co. Mr. Sage brought in large cranes and an army of men to mine the clay deposits, notably a boost to the local economy. The clay was mined over the years, separated from the Peconic Bay by a earthen dike. Success followed Mr. Sage; in 1899 a staggering 30,000,000 bricks were ordered for the construction of the State Hospital at Central Islip. A nervous task even for a yard employing 100 men and running three schooners: The Mary Buckley, The Williams Everetts and The Warren Gales.

Another familiar and prominent brick maker in Southold was C. L. Sanford, formerly a sea captain who retired from the sea in 1884. He founded the Arshamomaque Brick Yard which was located where the Goldsmith Boatyard is now. Mr. Sanfords brick was also of superior quality and the demand was high. His works were capable of making 40,000 bricks a day and 7,000,000 in one season. Continued from page 3...
By the time Sage and Sanford brickyards were established, rum and other ardent spirits were no longer legal tender. Suffolk County, and especially Southold Town, were hot-beds of anti-drinking fervor. In the 1840s a working-class teetotal group, the Washingtonian Total Abstinence Society, was organized. Twenty years later, an organization led by Protestant clergymen met monthly—often in Southold’s hamlets. Known as the Suffolk County Temperance Society it flourished about the same time as the Women’s Christian Temperance Union. The legal suppression of the sale of liquor and beer known as Prohibition from 1920 to repeal in 1933 brought an era of rampant crime and rum-running to eastern Long Island.

Continued on page 9...

At first local brickyards imported workers from Connecticut, later they employed many Irish and some Scottish workers. As time went on the workers became mostly Italian and Polish (Charlotte Sage Jorgensen’s photo album shows that Italian and Polish workers had separate housing. This couple, Pietro Caiffarelli and his wife, the former Lucia Bucci, were married in Papoli, Italy, in 1871 and emigrated to the United States in 1890. The prospect of work at Sage’s Brickyard drew them to this area.

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De Witt Clinton Sage came from making a fortune through many business ventures and operating a brickyard on Fishers Island to establishing Sage Brickworks in greater Greenport in 1887. The business soon employed over 200 men whose wives and children also labored at the works. A combination of forces, including an economic downturn and salt water intrusion from the Hurricane of 1938, helped to end brick-making on eastern Long Island.
The brick yards of Southold used Scove kilns to burn or dry bricks heated with oak wood as fuel. The precise arrangement of the bricks formed the kiln. The Scove kiln requires that the bricks be burnt in arches of 35,000 to 40,000 bricks with each arch about 40 courses high. About 15 arches or about 400,000 brick comprise each kiln. It took two setters and four wheelers one day to set an arch of 35,000 bricks. Once set, one more day was dedicated to daub the brick with mud to prevent air escape. In these types of kilns insufficiently burnt bricks were called “pale” and the number of pale bricks lost could be as much as 50,000 to 75,000 bricks per 500,000.
The kilns take several days to cool and, when cool, the bricks are loaded in wheelbarrows and taken to carts for transport to railcars and schooners.

Many advances in transportation (european brick) and construction (poured concrete, concrete blocks and reinforced concrete products) led to the decline of the brick making ventures in Southold. However, it was the northeasters and hurricanes that delivered the final blow (no pun intended) to seal the fate of the companies. In the 1920’s the bay broke through the dike at the Sage clay mine and the mine filled with seawater creating a basin. The Great Depression soon followed and Southolder Fred Young purchased the land from Mr. Sage including the newly created boat basin. The basin which exists today marks the tremendous scale of the mining operation. Reportedly, the hurricane of 1938 filled the notorious Sanford clay mine also with seawater ending that enterprise.

Ideally, we would like to end with a roll of honor of the names of all the brick-workers who labored at the arduous and, dangerous, work at Pipe’s Cove. Many were injured, some died. The Brooklyn Daily Eagle headlined a story at the turn of the nineteenth century: “Kiln Builder Killed In Fall; Aged Southold Brick-worker’s Misstep Cost Him His Life”. The story goes on to tell how 70-year-old Peter Sears, Southold resident for twenty years and an experienced kiln builder previously employed for many years in the brickyards of Havrestraw, New York, was injured when he fell from a kiln in the yard of the Long Island Brick Company in Arshamomake. Sears, who spent most of his life working at kiln building, was taken to his home in Southold where he soon died, leaving behind his wife and two sons.

Legal records exist of the settlement of a suit by the widow, Maria Iorio, of the Kingdom of Italy, and her minor children, upon the death of husband and father, Pietroangelo Iorio, on June 6, 1900 while “in the employ of the Long Island Brick Company at a place known as Greenport, Long Island”. The brick company denied that negligence on their part was the reason for Iorio’s death and settled with the widow for the meager sum of one hundred dollars ($100.) and nineteen dollars and sixty cents ($19.60) in back wages.

Since most of the brick-workers’ names are unknown this story will have to end with the account of those we do know: the father of James Patrick Kelly, known as “Badge One” of the Southold Town Police, was an indentured servant at a local brickyard, a tale he told to Paul Hunter. Other workers at Sage Brickyard were Jeremiah Burns, Thomas Corrazini, John Ciacia, Henry Mazzaferro, Ding Harris, Manuel Corrazini, Steve Buckin, Adam Sawicki, ___ Mullen, James P. Grady, Thomas Rempe, Henry Capon, John and William Troyan and Vincenzo Santacroce. Hugh Rogers of Ireland probably worked at the Robins Island Brickworks, as did Owen, Thomas and Peter McGee, Charles Taylor, Thomas Gallagher, Thomas Carrag, James Armstrong and James Mc Guire, Michael O’Brien, Nicholas Cullen, John Brady, James Conway and William Bracken. The last fourteen were listed on the 1870 and 1880 federal manuscript censuses for Cutchogue and Arshamomake.

FINI

In the May 2000 issue of the Antiques Journal an article Antique Cycles states that “About two million bicycles were built in 1897 by some 400 US manufacturers and there were 100 bicycle racing tracks scattered across the country.” Indeed, the machines had evolved since their first sightings in drawings on Egyptian tombs and the 15th century sketches by Leonardo DaVinci with the greatest improvement taking place in the century leading up to the 19th century date.

Elsie Corwin relates, in her book The Diary of a Country Newspaper that the following appeared in the (Suffolk) Times in 1894 “Greenport is bicycle mad. It is estimated that there are at least one thousand wheels ridden through the streets every day. At night the principal thoroughfares swarm with the many colored bicycle lights. Bells ring continuously as the jolly boys and girls meet. Little tots boldly join on smaller wheels and women as well as the sterner sex are enthusiasts in the sport. Gray-haired men, too, are in the wheeling procession and they seem to enjoy the sport as much as the younger fry. Altogether for the number of inhabitants no other place on the Island, can boast of as many bicycle riders as Greenport.” She also asserted that the bicycle explosion brought about many changes in both Greenport and most parts of the country including: better streets and highways paving the way for the automobile and suburban living; changes in the style of women’s clothing; and that at the time a good suit of clothes cost $10.75 a bicycle cost from $100 to $200.

When, in 1886 after a peddling a mile in 79 seconds on a stationary training bike, the sixteen year old cyclist Charles Murphy bragged to reporters that “If I can be protected from the wind, there’s no limit to how fast I can ride. Why I can keep up with the fastest train! There’s no locomotive built that can get away from me!” he foreshadowed his success thirteen years later when he, near the end of his cycling career, reversed the derision from his boasting in front of the Pennsylvania reporters to praise and set a long enduring cycling record.

When Hal Fullerton and Charles Murphy met and fused their energies they staged an event that was emblematic of the growing Long Island, rocketing along with the Long Island Rail Road – the railroad that was to become the largest commuter system in the United States – leading the...
charge. A feat with a plethora of sites on the internet; noted in many journals from Scientific American to The New Yorker to Sports Illustrated; celebrated many commemorations by local historical societies that include wide-ranging celebrations and postal first day covers; and a favorite topic of local citizenry, train enthusiasts and cyclists alike.

In the preface to The Blessed Isle – the biography of Hal Fullerton - author Charles L. Sachs states: “Anyone who is interested in exploring the visual landscape or iconography of Long Island’s past will find the photographs of Hal B. Fullerton (1857 – 1935) and the Suffolk County Historical Society’s collection of his negatives immensely valuable. Fullerton’s work was so extensive, inclusive, and pervasive that it is difficult to imagine the Island’s appearance at the turn of the twentieth century without subconsciously conjuring up his pictures.” In researching for this article I became fascinated by the man who contracted and staged the Mile-A-Minute race on June 30, 1899 because he not only made a major contribution by observing and recording the topography, culture and change of Long Island; he was also a major participant in the process.

Charles M. Murphy stated in his account of the famous bicycle event: “For ten years I had petitioned almost every railroad in the United States to prove to the world the disadvantage of wind resistance. My endeavors, however, were almost in vain. By chance I met Hal Fullerton, special agent of the Long Island Railroad at Howes Roadhouse. We jested about my ride behind the train. I pointed out that an exhibition of that kind would prove to the world that the Long Island Railroad had just as good rolling stock, roadbeds and employees as any other road in the world. I believe that this talk hurried along the agreement as forty-eight hours after the conversation a contract was signed.”

Fullerton was a tenacious, exuberant, creative man with broad interests who had traveled extensively in his various occupations before he discovered Long Island in his middle age and declared it to be “the most richly and beautifully Nature - endowed region of the whole United States, Canada, Mexico, and the West Indies.” The former merchant seaman, machinery salesman, civil engineer and soldier of fortune was hired in 1897 as a special agent for the Passenger Department of the LIRR and was assigned to do publicity by the president, William H. Baldwin Jr. According to Sachs, “Fullerton seems to have been recruited … specifically to help coordinate and enhance the railroad’s efforts to encourage local roads and highway improvements and to capitalize on the exploding mass market of recreational cycling.”
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