

Long Island Traditions

NEWSLETTER

www.longislandtraditions.org

Vol. 17 No. 1 Winter 2010

Seafood Screening and Tasting May 2nd

This past fall the Belgium based VRT television visited Long Island to film a program on Frank Sinatra's love of clams. In one of the segments Belgium celebrity chef Jeroen Meus went clamming with bay house owners Eddie Sheehan and Rich Van Wicklen and then prepared a traditional clam stew. The production has aired on Belgium TV. We will be screening the show on Sunday May 2nd at 12:30 pm at the Town of Hempstead's Conservation and Waterways headquarters, and then we'll go to Artie's South Shore Fish Market and Restaurant in Island Park, where we will meet owner and commercial fisherman Artie Hoerning. We will have a sumptuous feast and a chance to learn how fish markets are affected by fishing regulations. In case of rain the lunch will take place on May 16th. The price is \$25 for members and \$35 for non-members. Space is limited so sign up early! ■



The VRT film crew at the Sheehan-Van Wicklen bay house. The film will be screened on May 2nd.

Growing Up In Great River

Al Skinner

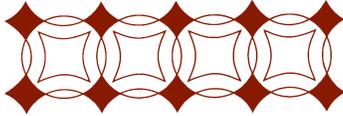
Editors Note: here is another one of our letters from a former Long Islander with some great memories to share. We hope you enjoy it as much as we did. And if you have a good story to tell, please send it to us!

I was born in Great River in 1904. I haven't seen much written about the place so I thought I would tell some happenings during my boyhood there. It was very rural then, lots of woods full of big oak trees, and some pine. There were two main roads: River Road and River Avenue. There were several estates on River Road and I was born on one of them, the Raymond S. White place where my father was superintendent. He had a crew of 13 men to maintain the place.

People were friendly in the little community I remember, and honest. Everyone had a rowboat and they left the oars, oarlocks, crab net, butter tub for what they caught, and a bailing scoop or dish. Houses, boats, bicycles were never locked or chained. If a thunderstorm came along the first one to shore would bail out his own boat and often that of a neighbor as well.

While I was growing up I got no allowance. If I wanted a baseball glove, or anything of that nature, I had to work and earn it. So I would clean leaves out of a hedge, do a little lawn mowing, or clean out a chicken coop. Then I learned the art of catching soft shell crabs. I had use of the rowboat with two butter tubs with water in them. I would stand in the bow and pole along the Connetquot River shore. The shedder crabs would go in one tub and the soft crabs in the other. Usually the best time to go crabbing was early in the morning when the water was calm. It seemed that more crabs shed on a new moon, when the tide was low.

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Long Island Traditions Inc.

Dedicated to the documentation and preservation of Long Island's living cultural heritage.

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Advocacy Center

Once again, the governor has proposed an additional 15% cut to the New York State Council on the Arts, along with cuts to the NYS Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation. Already several arts organizations on Long Island have closed their doors, and here at LI Traditions we have lost a substantial part of our educational network as schools have reduced or eliminated their arts budgets.

We need your help! Please call your State Senator or Assemblyperson and ask them to maintain the current funding levels for the NY State Council on the Arts.

The Brookhaven Town Board is considering limiting clamming licenses at its March 23rd or April 20th board meeting. The proposal will prohibit the issuance of new clamming permits, which may mean that an entire generation of new clambers will vanish. To express your opinion on this issue call the Town at (631) 451-6955 or attend the meeting which begins at 5 pm. ■

Drumming Programs

Continuing the LI Traditions drumming series, on Sunday, February 28th Peruvian composer Theo Torres and two Peruvian percussionists will lead a performance, followed by a workshop at the East Meadow Library. In Peru there are many different kinds of drums including the cajon, bomba, scraper and jaw bones that are used in *huayno*, *cumbia*, *salsa* and the Peruvian *vals*. In this program we will explore the various rhythms of these melodies and the accompanying instruments. Afterwards there will be a hands-on demonstration where you can try your hand, led by a master.

On Sunday, April 18 Steel Sensation, a master Trinidadian steelband ensemble led by Ian Japsi will perform and offer a hands on workshop on the popular steel drums. They will perform traditional calypso melodies along with popular and classical arrangements. Then you can join in and learn how to play this traditional instrument.



Theo Torres will be demonstrating the traditional bomba used in Peruvian music.

The programs are free and begin at 2pm. We encourage families and individuals alike to attend. For information call (516) 794-2570. ■

The crabs had to be large to sell and I got sixty cents a dozen for them. I sold most of them to the estate owners in Great River. The price went to a dollar a dozen after a few years. Oh, boy, I made money then! Some days I caught as high as seven dozen. When John Stewart opened a Fish Market in Bay Shore he sent his truck to pick up my crabs. The first year of World War II bought a 5100 Liberty Bond and was real proud of it.

One afternoon I went crabbing up along the Cutting property it seems I caught more there than on the W.K. Vanderbilt side of the river. There was a little brook that came out into the river from three fresh water ponds south of the Cutting place. The crabs liked that brackish water and I always had good luck there.

All at once I heard a woman's voice and when I looked up there was Mrs. Cutting. She called to me, so I poled my boat over to her. She said, "Who are you and where are you from?" I told her and she said, "Yes, I know your mother from the Ladies' Auxiliary of the Emmanuel Church." Then she said, "Well, I will give you permission to catch crabs but be sure and only take the hard shell ones. If you catch any soft shells, put them back." I said, "Yes Ma'am," and I did. Right under the back seat of my rowboat, and covered them with seaweed.

The river was loaded with crabs, eels, white perch, weakfish and blues. In the wintertime first the frost fish would come in, or as some called them, tom cods. Capt. William Smalling used to set fykes for them. They were delicious eating but a stupid fish. I used to place an eel pot close to the staving and fill the trap. After the frost fish, the smelts would come in, and these were caught in gill nets. Capt. Ed Peterson used to fish for them.

In the fall of the year the broadtail ducks would come in the river by the thousands, from about three o'clock on. They would stay overnight and leave next morning at daylight to go out on the bay. At dusk the sky was filled with black ducks coming from the South Side Sportsmen's Club (now Connetquot State Park). Some would go to Timber Point, others to the Taylor estate (Heckscher State Park), and some across the Great South Bay to Hollins Island.

One Saturday morning Mr. Davies drew a good blind at the South Side Sportsmen's Club and shot his limit of 50 black ducks. He then came home and rigged out in the river and shot his limit of broadbill. He didn't know that Harry Haff, the game warden, had checked on him that morning and there he sat waiting for Mr. Davies come in. When he did, he was arrested and fined. He didn't mind the fine but he hated the disgrace of being caught.

I used to go with Harvey Conkling when he rigged out and after a few years I forged my age two years and got a license for a dollar. I was thrilled to go duck shooting, and then I got a bright idea. I got on my bike one evening and rode down to the Davies house. The butler met me at the door and knew me very well. He asked me what I wanted and I said, "I would like to speak to Mr. Davies."

When the butler came back he said, "Mr. Davies wants to

know what you want?" I said, "I would like to shoot up the river where he didn't, one day a week out of sight from him, and I'm asking permission." He came back to say, "Tell him I would have nothing to do with him." I said, "Tell Mr. Davies 'thank you'," and I left.

We had a path to ride our bikes though the woods to school. Mr. Davies didn't know that Harvey had a catboat and I knew how to sail it. So three o'clock the next afternoon when school got out I headed for the river. It didn't take long to get there and I got the catboat underway. First I looked up the river and then I sailed down toward the hay. The ducks were beginning to come in so I sailed past Mr. Davies who was rigged out off of Pepperidge Hall.

I sailed by him a couple of gunshots off in the bay, turned about and sailed by him again. Then I let the sail luff and the boat flounder around. After a half-hour of this, with the birds flaring away, Ole Davies got out his white flag and waved it to the men tending him. They came to him and I heard him yell, "Who's in that sailboat?" I heard Capt. Rhodes say, "That's Skinner's kid." Davies said "Tell him to sail somewhere else. He's ruining my duck shooting."

Capt. Will came out and told me "Mr. Davies wanted me to sail somewhere else as I was scaring the ducks away." I said, "Good, you tell him that he can stop me from anchoring but he can't stop me from sailing on the waters." There was nothing else for him to do but pick up and go home. When they did I put the sailboat away, but I returned the next afternoon and the same thing happened.

The third day was a miserable rainy day and that is the best weather for duck shooting. When I got out of school I rushed to the river and Mr. Davies was rigged out. That old sail was heavy to hoist but I did it. When I got underway Mr. Davies was having a ball but it stopped as I sailed out. The birds flared everywhere and he went to cussing. He didn't want to sit there in the rain and watch me sail around so his men picked up the decoys and they left. So did I as it was very uncomfortable out there.

That evening Mr. Davies' chauffeur came to our house. He said Mr. Davies had sent it as he wanted to talk to me. I said, "No thank you. I prefer to ride my bike." The chauffeur asked why and I told him. "I know his blood pressure went to 412 this afternoon. He may cuss me out and make me walk home." So I rode my bike down River road to Timber Point.

I went in looking like a drowned muskrat and shaking like a leaf. The butler knew I was expected

Growing Up In Great River

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and escorted me right in. Mr. Davie's sat here and I said, "Hello" He said, "Skinner, sit down." And I did. "Now, he said. I have known you for many years and I have watched you grow up. Four nights ago you came here and asked if you could gun ducks up the river out of sight from me." He paused and I said "That's right."

"Well, he said, you asked for one day a week and this is what I am going to do. I am going to let you shoot up river two days a week out of sight from me. Preferably Tuesdays and Thursdays. And from now on keep that goddamned sailboat out of my sight." I thanked him and from then on we got along like peaches and cream. ■

Boating with the Baymen June 13th

On Sunday, June 13th join LI Traditions and the Bellport Brookhaven Historical Society for an afternoon of exploration with Brookhaven bayman and decoy carver George Rigby and bayman Ken Budny. We will be boarding the Lauren Kristy in West Sayville and cruising around Bellport Bay. There will be a hands-on carving workshop with George Rigby, and a family friendly discussion on life on the bay. Register for this popular trip through the Bellport Brookhaven Historical Society by calling (631) 286-0888. ■

EVENTS OF INTEREST

PLEASE NOTE: If you have a Long Island concert or program that focuses on some aspect of traditional culture, drop us a line and we'll put it in our "Events of Interest" column. The deadline is the 1st of June, September, December and March.

- February 20:** Hall of Fame Ceili. 7:00 pm to midnight. Irish American Society, 297 Willis Avenue, Mineola. \$20, tickets available at the door. For information call (516) 746-9392 or visit <http://www.irishamericansoc.com/>.
- February 27:** "Harbor Seal Poetry Writing Workshop" with Max Wheat. Theodore Roosevelt Nature Center, Jones Beach State Park. 9:30am – 2pm. Limit 20, \$4 donation. For reservations and more info call (516) 679-7254.
- February 27:** Lunar New Year Celebration at the Herricks High School, 100 Shelter Rock Road, New Hyde Park. Sponsored by the Chinese American Association of North Hempstead. 7 pm. For more information call (516) 641-9340.
- February 28:** Peruvian Drumming Program, sponsored by LI Traditions. See accompanying article.
- March 20:** 4th Annual Asian American Cultural Festival of Long Island. Farmingdale State College, Roosevelt Hall, 12:30 to 5:30 pm, 2350 Broadhollow Rd, Farmingdale. Free Admission. For more info call (631) 543-5768.
- April 11:** Dave Sear's "An Afternoon of Folk Music", Port Washington Library, Main Street, Port Washington. 3pm. Free Admission. For more info call (516) 883-4400.
- May 2 (raindate May 16):** Seafood film and lunch program (see accompanying article). \$25/members and \$35/non-members. Call LI Traditions for reservations at (516) 767-8803.

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