



Dr. Solecki leading tour of the site

The History and Discovery of Fort Corchaug was held November 4th, 2006 at the Interpretive Center on Main Rd., Cutchogue, sponsored by the Peconic Land Trust and the Town of Southold. Dr. Ralph Solecki, excavator of the site, told the story of its discovery and excavation, illustrated by slides. His original report from 1950 and a more extensive Epilogue on the site is being published in S.C.A.A.'s Vol. VIII, *Native Forts of the Long Island Sound Area*, due this Spring.

Tim Caufield, Vice President of the Peconic Land Trust and staff organized the event, Jim Grathwohl, who spearheaded the committee which saved Fort Corchaug from development, recounted that history, and Scott Russell, Southold Town Supervisor (and a history buff) spoke about the Town's appreciation of it.

After refreshments, Dr. Solecki led the large, interested audience on a tour of the fort site. In honor of his work, without which the story of the fort would not be known, the Interpretive Center has been named "**The Dr. Ralph Solecki Visitor Center.**"

Dendro vs. Documents: Dating Colonial Eastern Long Island Houses

Dr. Steve Mrozowski of U-Mass-Boston has been excavating 17th century Sylvester Manor on Shelter Island since 1999. Since there is no proof for dating the proposed ca. 1734/5 second house, Abbott Lowell Cummings was asked to examine and 'date' the house. Cummings is the 'father' of Northeastern dendrochronology dating for architectural history; he urged Dr.

Gaynell Stone to get dendro dating done for Sylvester Manor, as he was "tired of doing his best to date a house only to find out he was wrong when it was dendro dated." He connected us with Boston liaison Anne Grady to Dan Miles and Michael Worthington of the Oxford Dendrochronology Lab, Oxfordshire, England, who had done a lot of work in New England, and thus had developed chronologies for Massachusetts, Connecticut, and Rhode Island, which we hoped would connect with Long Island. They kindly extended their stay three years ago to come to eastern Long Island to core 7 of the oldest structures. All but two, the Terry Mulford house in Orient and Sylvester Manor on Shelter Island, are in public ownership – the Halsey house in Southampton, the Old House in Cutchogue, Home Sweet Home, Mulford Farm, and the Gardiner Brown houses in East Hampton. Each of these entities agreed to the coring and to pay for it.

Long Island juts out into the Atlantic between the New England and Mid-Atlantic areas, and has had a maritime orientation and extensive trade networks from prehistoric times. It was heavily forested with white and red oak, which served Native Americans and the early settlers, who harvested it for their houses, ships, and casks for shipping. The east end of Long Island is composed of the North Fork (Southold Town), the South Fork (East Hampton and Southampton Towns), with Shelter Island Town nestled between them. The houses cored are in this area. The Island has 8 eco-zones – the Arctic north side, the Tropical south side bordering the Gulf Stream, and has 4 zones along the length of it; the houses cored are in the eastern-most zone.

A number of early Long Island Towns were organized around a Central Place; the North Fork's earliest Central Place was Southold, founded in 1640, reached by water by Jockey Creek, and which held the Town Meeting House, with jail in its basement, and village green. Now it is the Presbyterian Church and cemetery; the numerous box tombs there indicate the status of the Town leaders.

At the eastern-most tip of Southold Town is the Terry-Mulford House, thought by its owners to have been built early on as a timbering barracks, due to the large stands of white oak to harvest – a strategic resource of the 17th century – as well as a pre-1640 early "industrial" zone of turpentine production and a mill at nearby Hashamomuck. There is circumstantial evidence – 1637 and 1658 documents indicating ownership of the area -- material evidence of rare vertical oak sheathing (also found on later 17th & early 18th century Rhode Island & Massachusetts houses) and subsidence of the rear wing, as well as archaeological finding of lead came of early horizontal leaded glass windows (whose shadows are still in an exterior wall).

Miraculously, the house had never been modernized with wiring and plumbing. Many generations of the Terry family



lived there and the 64,000 archaeological artifacts excavated were from their 1700s inhabitation. The State marker in front of the house marks it as “Peaken’s Tavern, 1654,” which is inaccurate, as it never was that, but it does support the idea of early dating of the house, which has had measured drawings, A.L. Cummings as a consultant (who never ‘dated’ the house from the material evidence) .

14 cored samples were taken from 11 timbers; twelve were white oak, two red oak (all of the houses had a combination of the two woods except the Halsey house). The report indicates the felling dates of the house, 1715. The owner feels more research needs to be done.

on the south side of the North Fork, below the Terry Mulford House, there is Budd’s Pond, named after important early settler, John Budd, early involved in timbering and thought to have built the early mill in Water Mill, Southampton, as well as the one at Hashamomuck, and possibly the one at Sylvester Manor. He is thought to have been timbering the area around Budd’s Pond, which is why it is named after him, and producing barrel staves (called “pipes” then), which were then shipped out through the inlet, called Pipes Cove, across from the pond. This spot is on the way west to Cutchogue to the Old House, sited near an inlet on the south shore, thought by local historians to have been Mr. Budd’s house at Budd’s Pond and moved to the site when his daughter married Barnabas Horton in Cutchogue. Or possibly the house was built in the village on Mr. Budd’s homelot in the 1660s (date from the Town Records) and moved here later.

The house was discovered by a Depression-era WPA architect, who spotted the multi-flue Medieval chimney accidentally while driving through the village. After being the home of local families for many generations, it became a barn and farm tenant housing, the last being local Native Americans. It had a large addition on the rear north side (now removed and replaced by a small one) as well as barn doors on the front south side, as seen in historic photographs. The Old House has in the past been restored to its Medieval appearance, which may not be its original look. The interior walls have shadows of horizontal leaded came windows, and an original one was found in the wall, one of a very few in America. No archaeology has been done at the site, but there has been a historical architect review. Thirteen timbers were sampled, of which 4 were red oak. A felling date of 1698/99 and a construction date of 1699/1700 is most likely.

Thus the building is not as old as thought, about 50 years younger. Documentary research using this new date may uncover who built the Old House.

All of Shelter Island was once Sylvester Manor, founded in 1652 by Nathaniel Sylvester and partners as a provisioning plantation for the family’s sugar plantations on Barbados. The original house footprint has not been found despite extensive archaeology, but the second house stands, said to have been built in 1734-35 by family story, “a house” mentioned in land records ca. 1737, and by architectural historian Robert Hefner’s opinion (Georgian style, etc.). It is not exactly symmetrical, one side being 2 ft. wider than the other, very unusual for a Georgian house.

Extensive archaeology by U-Mass-Boston has unearthed the Native American and African presence on a northern slave plantation and 17th - 19th century multi-cultural artifacts, many Dutch from Nathaniel Sylvester’s origins. The house was difficult to core, as exposed attic rafters were fast-grown timbers unsuitable for dendrochronology, and suitable timbers were covered with paneling, plaster, etc. All timbers sampled were white oak except for a red oak front girt. Although one tree was 250 years old, none of the samples matched each other, or any other samples from other sites on L.I., or with the Long Island master or other reference chronologies. The only chance of dating this building is to obtain samples of timbers which are not too stunted or distorted, which means accessing the now-covered timbers. No date has been recovered yet.

Southampton Town was founded in 1640 (and still arguing with Southold which was first), but in 1648 moved from Old Town Pond to Agawam Pond, so there is no remaining Central Place. Thomas Halsey, Sr. was one of the founders of the Town and this house was long thought by local historians to date from the 1640s, but he died in 1677 with no house in his will. His will and Town Records indicate that Thomas Halsey, Jr. had a house. Halsey, Jr. died in 1688, so at least one part of the house was probably built between 1677 and 1688. The house consists of two houses joined, with very different architectural styles; the newer south (left side) part, thought to be ca. 1720, has no front fascia cove as the other side does. The State marker dates the house as 1648, now known not to be accurate.

Seventeen samples were taken from 13 timbers, all white oak, from the 3 phases of the house; one had excessive ring counts - 276 - the most found so far on L.I. However, none matched each other conclusively, or any other samples from

other Island sites, or with the Long Island master or other reference chronologies. So far it has not been able to date this house.

East Hampton Town was founded in 1648 as an offshoot of Southampton – both located on south shore Long Island to conduct shore whaling – the fastest way to get rich before the lucrative Caribbean provisioning trade. East Hampton still maintains its Central Place, with its pond for watering man and beast, the village green for mustering, the Town meeting house, and cemetery – again with box and table tombs indicating status individuals. Windmills were important for running-water-deprived East Hampton; the area still has the largest stand of windmills, many Dutch smock mills, in the country. Often an artificial hill was made to catch more wind for the mills in flat East Hampton. The east side of the green still has an enclave of church (a later Presbyterian one), Home Sweet Home (named after John Howard Paine’s song), a windmill, and the Mulford Farm – a rare communal survival.

The southernmost house is Home Sweet Home (lately found not to have been John Howard Paine’s home). Architectural historian Robert Hefner thinks this south-facing (not facing the main street equals solar gain) asymmetrical structure dates from 1720-1740 architecturally. There are no documents indicating who or when it was built, but a 1746 document indicates it exists. Robert Dayton, the owner of the plot, died in 1712; a remodeling in 1750 by Captain E. Jones removed much of the original architecture but installed the rare, for New England, cove cornice, though EH has a half dozen, a notable



occurrence. For dating, most of the timber frame was covered with finishes obscuring it. However, the rear lean-to revealed virtually the whole of the rear wall framing of the upstairs floor level.

Four white oak posts and 3 red oak braces were slow-grown heart-sawn timber. None of the main posts cross-matched; however the 3 braces did, and were combined to form the 70-ring site master HSH, dated as part of the constituent part of the Long Island master, spanning the years 1650-1719. All braces were felled in winter 1719/20, so construction was likely 1720-21 – similar to the postulated building date. Documentary research subsequent to learning the accurate building date has enabled firmer ownership data, now believed to be a Mulford.

Next north and east from Home Sweet Home is the Gardiner mill, restored and operable. Next north of it is the Mulford farm house. It has not always looked as it does today. It has good

documentation that Josiah Hobart of Massachusetts, who became the High Sheriff of Suffolk County, built it ca. 1680. He came to East Hampton in 1676, so the approximate construction date would be 1676-1711. A 1982 architectural study, utilizing earlier HABS drawings, revealed the extensive structural changes the house has undergone – from front steep peaked gables (typical of 17th century English and some Massachusetts homes) to an east side lean-to roof covering storm damage, to the present gable roof. Archaeology was carried out in the front yard to try to determine the original garden layout; bodies were found, so excavation stopped and a raised garden was created. An east side “milk-house” wing (similar to the Terry Mulford one – the families were related) was added after the salt-box lean-to in the rear had been added.

Thirteen samples were taken from 10 timbers in the primary phase of the house, 1 from the phase III extension. All were white oak except 2 red oak; most had over 100 growth rings, one an exceptional 263 rings. Only 3 samples matched together and were combined to form the 180-year mean MUL367. Unfortunately, this sequence did not match conclusively with any other samples within the site, or any other sites on Long Island, or with the L.I. master chronology, or reference chronologies from adjoining regions. How does this appear to jibe with a theory of East Hampton Town Historian Sherry Foster that the frame had been imported from a housewright known to be working in Massachusetts and shipping house frames down the coast?. Only further coring will enable this house to be dated.

Further north, just below the second expansion of the village at New Town Lane, is the Gardiner “Brown” house – to distinguish it from the Gardiner Greek Revival “White” house down the street. It is stated in local histories to have been built by David Gardiner (1692-1751), fourth proprietor of Gardiner’s Island. The land it stands on was deeded in 1741 to David Gardiner by his wife, Rachel’s, father, Abraham Schellinger (the family was of Dutch origin, early brought in from New Amsterdam to organize the Town’s “Whaling Designe”). Rachel died in 1744 according to her gravestone in the South End burying ground. *East Hampton’s Heritage: An Illustrated Architectural Record*, credits it as the oldest gambrel roof and earliest 2 ½ story center chimney house in the village, which makes it a Dutch/English architectural hybrid). It was moved back from the street in 1924, and subsequent extensive changes and additions, as well as a fire, have left little of the original fabric except the 1740s frame and lower roof timbers. According to architectural historian and Town Historian Sherry Foster, the house is typical of the Connecticut River mansions of the time, the “signature” of the wealthy merchants – the “Kings of the Connecticut River.” The house has been professionally studied and restored by the Ladies Village Improvement Society for use as their headquarters.

Twenty two samples were taken from 16 timbers, all from the attic structure. Most of the studs and braces had been radially driven from larger-sectioned trunks, thus had maximum ring sequences within each timber; nine were white oak and seven red oak. Multiple samples were combined to form same-timber means; subsequent analysis identified timbers from the same tree, so three different same-tree means were constructed. Thus the 16 timbers were reduced to seven individual trees which produced a site master LVI of 140 rings. With 16 samples dated, 16 precise felling dates were produced from spring to winter 1746.



This is the largest assemblage of precise felling dates from a phase of building yet to be encountered for the eastern seaboard. So, an initially unpromising testing situation became the most productive, underpinning the Long Island master chronology.

There is a bar chart visually showing the sequence of the dates of the houses derived from the coring data. It would appear that the earlier the house the more likely it would be all white oak (the Halsey house), and the later it was it had more red oak proportionately (Gardiner Brown house). This apparently reflects the effects of the early extensive timbering of the East End's white oak forests.

Of the 7 houses tested, 4 were dated – Terry Mulford and the Old House, younger than thought, on the North Fork. On the South Fork, Home Sweet Home was dated at 1720, about the postulated date for its construction, and the Gardiner Brown House was dated at 1747, a few years later than thought, but very close. A disparity in postulated date and real date from dendrochronology indicates the opportunity to re-read the records for the currently undiscovered contextual information.

This data supports a floating Long Island chronology of 1505 - 1746, with 242 years of growth, with 4 samples from Terry Mulford (supported by a donor), 5 samples from the Old House (paid by the Old House Committee), 3 from Home Sweet Home (East Hampton Village supported), and 7 from the Gardiner Brown house (Ladies Village Improvement Society). East Hampton Historical Society supported the Mulford Farm dating, Southampton Historical Society the Halsey House, and the Sylvester Manor Project the Sylvester Manor House. The dating was derived by matching the three year analysis of Oxford Lab data 'blind' (without dates) with the matching procedure of the Lamont-Doherty Earth Science Observatory Tree-Ring Laboratory of Columbia University, Dr. Edward Cook, Director.

Dendro dating is based on counting the growth rings a tree puts on each year in response to dry and wet seasons. The Long Island corings were extremely difficult to analyze, taking three years instead of less than a year. This problem is apparently due to the wet Long Island Atlantic-related climate which oak roots do not like and thus create dense, twisted rings, difficult to date; it is believed that their rings may respond more to seasonal temperature changes than precipitation. A further problem is the interior home finishes which obscure the timber frame.

Several houses on Western Long Island have been dated – Conklin house in Huntington, Bowne house and Morris Jumel in

Queens, and several structures in Roslyn. However, all is not lost for the East End houses yet undated. More testing will provide a larger master chronology, enabling their dating, and allow a fuller vision of the now unknown early Long Island climate as well as when the earliest homes were built.

Dendrochronology has become very popular for the owners of old houses, the numbers increasing three fold in the last few years. - Gaynell Stone, Ph.D.

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