

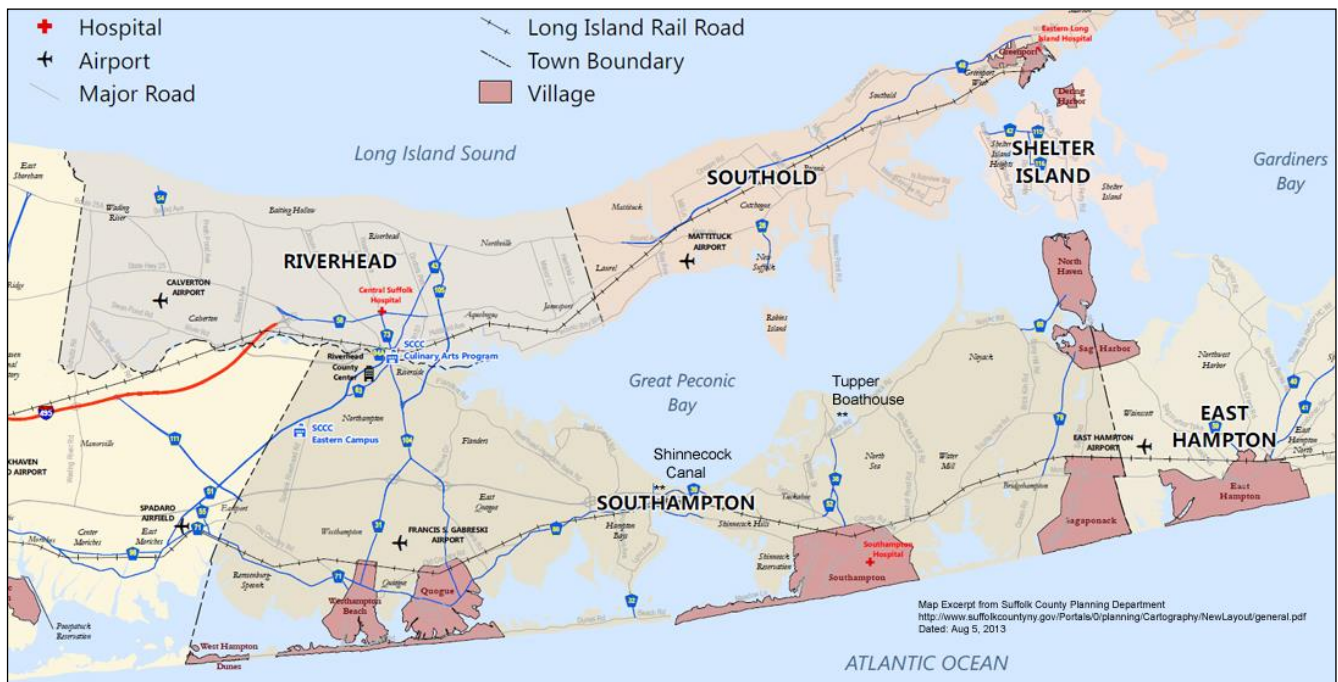
# The Tupper Boathouse In Regional and Southampton Town Marine History Context

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The Town of Southampton, located on the South Fork of Long Island, bordered on the south by coastal bays and the Atlantic Ocean, and on the north by Peconic Bay and its smaller bays, inevitably found its earliest economic and occupational life intimately bound up with the sea, its shores, and its harvestable life.

From its settlement in 1640, residents of Southampton colony and Town needed to navigate the waters by suitable craft, fish for fin and shell fish, carry on whaling for profit, and conduct commerce first with the Connecticut shore communities and subsequently the growing urban population of New York. Along with these maritime interests, ship rescues on its Atlantic shore from the of Life Saving Stations, war time military needs and recreational boating growth also required the service of boats.

Southampton's boat building industry has an early start with the establishment of the port of Sag Harbor which straddles the border of Southampton and East Hampton Towns. It is through this port that early commerce with New England serves the early populations. But it is the growth of the whaling industry that expands demand for boat construction and repair. Early settlers had foraged for beached whales in the manner of the indigenous peoples but soon adapted to the use of whaling ships and boats to met the growing demand for whale oil.



Sag Harbor, on the northeast corner of Southampton Town facing the waters of Peconic Bay but with easy access to the Atlantic Ocean, was home to a whaling fleet, the ships of which were built often built in New England. Locally whaleboats for these ships were built and repaired and often provided to ships of other ports. William Cooper was a prominent early builder of Sag Harbor.<sup>1</sup>

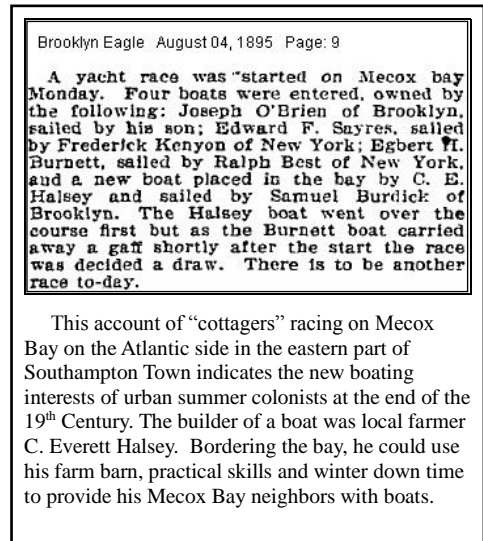
By 1855, the decline of the whaling industry hit Sag Harbor hard and led to the eventual disappearance of an organized boat building industry with skilled and experienced craftsmen and ship carpenters working out of shops. Migration and transplantation of these maritime skills toward western Long Island and the New York port took place.<sup>2</sup>

Growing markets for fin and shell fish from Long Island waters created a boom for boat builders in the last third of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. To the west of Southampton Town, major boatyards under family auspices were established in Patchogue, Sayville and other south shore villages supplying fishing and recreational wooden craft. Among the most famous and durable (65 years building) on Long Island's South Shore was Gil Smith (1846-1940) who moved his shop to Patchogue from Hampton Bays (then called "Good Ground") in 1876.<sup>3</sup>

In a period of decline, much of boat building in Southampton Town was to be left to incidental and auxiliary activity by people following other occupations – sometimes of an amateur sort.

When the Long Island Rail Road arrived in Southampton Town in the 1870's, a new dynamic opened up. The east end of Long Island became accessible to Brooklyn and New York middle and upper classes. Seasonal boarding hotels and houses for the middle classes and the building of elaborate 'cottages' for the wealthy were to be found throughout Southampton's villages and shore lines. Recreational boating and "yachting" in clubs became *de rigueur* as summertime activity. In 1898, the Mecox Bay Yacht Club was organized and accounts of 16 boat entries were reported up from 4 just three years earlier. The Mecox Bay Yacht club was composed of summer "cottagers" and locals with interest in the bays and with boat building and repair skills among the older, often agrarian, settler families of the Town like the Sayres and Halseys. And later other boating and yachting clubs would be formed in the area; often more exclusive like the Devon Yacht Club in East Hampton Town in 1914 under the control of its wealthy patron families and accounts of which were often chronicled in New York society and sporting pages.

To this end, a significant local interest for boats and marine services could be noted by the 1890's. In August 1890, the American Canoe Association, then involving yachts, sailboats and other craft, held a fourteen day encampment attracting hundreds of boaters from around the United States at



1 Sag Harbor Express, April 15, 1897, "Another Forty-niner Gone", obituary of August Jagger; Sag Harbor Corrector, January 18, 1908, "Capt. Lewis Corwin's 90<sup>th</sup> Birthday Celebrated".  
2 Southold Traveler, December 21, 1883, p. 4, an account of Uriah Gordon building boats in Sag Harbor and subsequently in Jersey City and New York City.  
3 Patchogue Advance, November 9, 1928, p. 1, "Family Party for Couple Married Sixty-five Years".

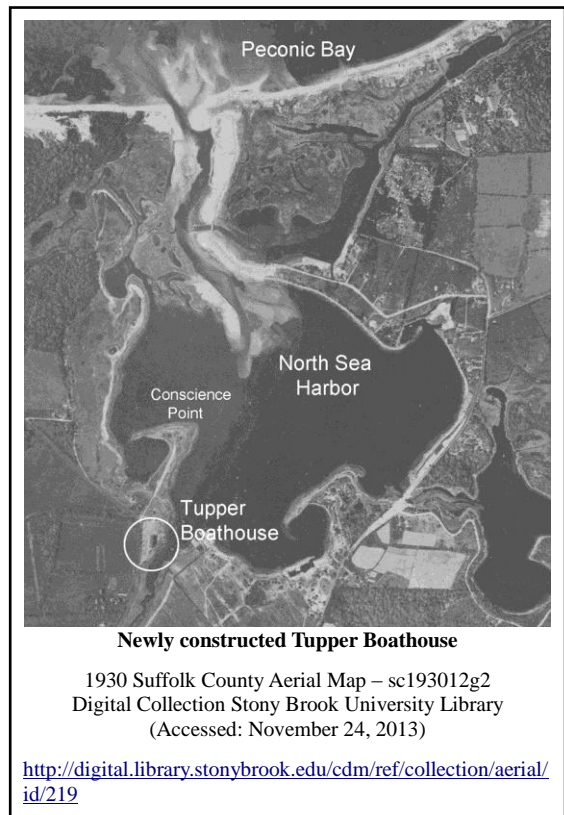
Jessup's Neck at Noyack, on the Peconic Bay shore line of Southampton Town.<sup>4</sup> Later in the decade, sports pages of urban newspapers would regularly feature regatta results among the yachting clubs of Long Island including those of the East End.

Shinnecock Canal, linking Shinnecock Bay and Peconic Bay fishing and recreational activity, was finished in 1892. Despite significant local demand for small boats, boat production in Southampton Town appears at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century as relegated to supplementary activity on the part of local carpenters and others of a practical bent. The only reported established yard was in the East Hampton portion of Sag Harbor under Captain Sandison.

More established boatyards outside of and to the west of Southampton Town appear to be the major suppliers of boats where their construction and maintenance had a sustainable market in the South Shore fisheries of Long Island and where a growing population could afford leisure boating. In effect, there was on the South Shore (Atlantic) a regional market and professional boat builders like Gilbert Smith of Patchogue and others in his area were building for customers from New York to Greenport to Montauk. Other smaller established Town of Brookhaven enterprises were Frank Penny of Center Moriches<sup>5</sup>, Frank Weeks of Patchogue and Otis Palmer of East Moriches<sup>6</sup> in the 1920's. The Weeks family managed boatyard still operates partly in restoration of wood boats.

Yet there was also an amateur fascination with boat building after the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. In 1909 the Brooklyn Eagle featured a story of backyard boat building in Brooklyn and listed a dozen recent how-to books on building a boat.<sup>7</sup> And in 1912, the Sag Harbor Express reports "The library has a goodly collection of books on camping, yachting, boat building and motor boating that will be useful for those spending this summer in the village."<sup>8</sup>

With the arrival of the prosperity of the "Roaring 20's", Southampton Town experienced a real estate boom and growth in summer sea side cottage building often for a population that could afford recreational sailing and motor boating. It is in 1930 that Edwin O. Tupper, with financial backing from his father Frank, builds a boat construction facility as the Tupper Motorcraft Corporation at Con-science Point in North Sea. The Tupper family had already summered in the North Sea area of Southampton since the early 1920's, had acquired property for North Sea Harbor side cottages for themselves and for sale to others. The Tupper cottages were located across a narrow channel from the



4 Brooklyn Daily Eagle, August 15, 1890, p 1, "Scenes at Jessup's Neck".  
5 Patchogue Advance, May 22, 1928, p 5, advertisement.  
6 Patchogue Advance, October 7, 1927, p 6, advertisement.  
7 Brooklyn Daily Eagle, June 7, 1909, p. 2, "Building Motor Boats in Back Yards".  
8 Sag Harbor Express, June 27, 1912, unpaginated.

boathouse itself in North Sea Harbor. The increased general demand for recreational boats led to establishment of the Long Island Boat and Engine Builders Association in 1929, eight months before the stock market crash of October 1929.<sup>9</sup>

The Depression of the 1930's slowed economic activity. With the advent of World War II in 1941, naval defense looked to the maritime resources of New York State and of Long Island to assist in the war effort. Out of Sag Harbor two defense companies worked; the Bliss Torpedo Company built and tested torpedoes and launching mechanisms; and the Grumman Corporation established a research and design facility for whom Edwin Tupper worked. It was in the 1950's post-war prosperity that boat construction for domestic civilian customers was resumed and the time when the Tupper enterprise flourished.

The 1950's expanding demand brought about new marine services to meet the market needs but instead of building boats the marine based business was to provide services. These were small and large boat sales; seasonal boat storage; seasonal or permanent docking; motor engine sales, maintenance and repair; maintenance and small repairs of wooden, metal and new fiberglass craft; and with the later environmental movement, pump outs of on board waste.

Today, as examples, in multiple locations in Southampton Town, Strong Marine Service, established in the 1950's provides such services:

*Stewart Strong started Strong's on Long Island back in 1945 with the Strong & Holland Marina in Lindenhurst. Dave and Dottie established the Mattituck Marina in 1965. Today, Jeff and Re have grown Strong's to include businesses in Mattituck on both the Peconic Bay and Long Island Sound; in Southampton, Port Washington at Brewer Capri Marina West, and in Delray Beach, FL at Marina Delray.<sup>10</sup>*

And in Hampton Bays at the same time was situated Jackson's Marina still operating today:

*It was 1957 when brothers Gordon and Ken Jackson took on the challenge of creating a marina facility dedicated to the boating community of eastern Long Island. Jackson's Marina began on a low lying sandy peninsula with merely one dock and two buildings that over the years has developed into a 7 acre, 200-slip full service marine center on the Southeast corner of Shinnecock Canal.<sup>11</sup>*

Tupper Motorcraft at North Sea represented the first and last full scale boatyard construction of small and mid sized craft, mostly wooden, both sail and motor powered, that were to be built from 1930 through 1960 in Southampton Town. Subsequently, the marine industry there was to focus on aftermarket and utilization services for marine activity whether of a commercial or recreational nature.

Today, what remains of boat construction in Southampton Town is geared to restoration, repair and reconstruction. In any activity that recalls an earlier era, wooden boat construction is conducted in a few venues in Southampton Town. The Scopinich family, while multi-generational boat constructors and marina operators, operate Hampton Shipyards in East Quogue - Hampton Bays and is transplanted, like the Strong Marine, from west Long Island – Freeport to be exact. Howard Pickerell in Water Mill is both a bayman and small boat builder today working with both wood frame construction and fiberglass. He grew up as a bayman in Huntington (western Suffolk) and transplanted eastward to the

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9 Suffolk County News, February 1, 1929, p 6, "Boat Builders Club".

10 <http://www.strongsmarine.com/sitecontent.cfm?contentID=2>

11 <http://www.jacksonsmarina.com/history/>

Hamptons.<sup>12</sup>

*Howard also is renowned among other baymen for the rugged workboats he builds at his home in Water Mill. His stable, open “garveys” feature a blunt bow, progressive vee-bottom, and low freeboard to make it easier to haul aboard shellfish. ... Pickerell has worked Long Island waters for 60 years. While still a youngster, he built his own clam boat, studied diesel engines, and later took a night course in aquaculture, which helps him read bathymetric maps of Long Island waters. Over the years he’s built some 550 boats, more than half of them garveys for clambers in Great South Bay when clams were abundant there.”<sup>13</sup>*

Otherwise, several smaller marinas along Peconic Bay in Southampton Town offer standard marine services like storage and dockage without any boat construction, hull or power repair activity.

In contrast to the Atlantic South Shore regional environment for boat construction, there exists the Peconic Bay regional context connecting to the commercial marine activity of Long Island's North Fork and particularly of the village of Greenport in the Town of Southold (see Map page 1).

Greenport, like Sag Harbor, fielded a substantial whaling fleet in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century until the decline in the market for whale oil. But its marine construction business fared better in tapping and maintaining its reservoir of boat construction skills in the aftermath of the decline. Fred Beebe's boatyard served both local and national marine interests. It is noted that their surfboats on the Atlantic shores were used by the United States Life-Saving Service, a precursor to the U.S. Coast Guard formation in 1915, for the legendary exploits of the Life-Saving Station crews dealing with shipwrecks.<sup>14</sup> The Greenport Basin and Construction Company served not only local building interests at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century but also built naval patrol boats in the 1915-1920 period and many Navy tugs and mine sweepers in the 1940's for the effort in World War II.

The menhaden fishing industry became important in the last decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century on eastern Long Island allowing for tens of thousands of tons of these fish to be hauled. For many decades, the menhaden could be processed as fertilizer at a time when the importation of bat guano as fertilizer and its transport by rail to farmers on Long Island was particularly expensive. One of the means for capturing menhaden was by the deployment of fishing nets by a type of craft called seine boats. In Greenport, the boatyard of Captain Jackson provided a substantial number of those craft.<sup>15</sup> Today, replaced by synthetic fertilizers, menhaden are an important as dietary supplements of fish oil but without the large fish harvests of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries.

Today, North Fork boat construction activity is found in the Hanff boatyard (now owned by John Costello since 1999) in Greenport. Within it, a sublessor and an allied owner of Wooden Boat Works, Donn Constanzo, a transplant from Sayville, refurbishes and reconstructs a now aging fleet of wood constructed craft from an earlier period that are now at a stage of need.<sup>16</sup> The demand for wood boat reconstruction and refurbishment increased in the 1990's as noted by Weeks Boatyard<sup>17</sup> and Anders Langendal (and sons) of Greenport, a restorer of wood boats and a transplant from Sweden in the 1950's.<sup>18</sup> In addition, a Clarke family boatyard operates in Greenport.

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12 <http://www.longislandtraditions.org/artistprofiles/maritime/pickerell.html>

13 Sag Harbor Express, August 5, 2011, “Patron Saint of Oysters”.

14 Long Island Traveler, March 12, 1886, p 8 “Deferred Correspondence”.

15 Sag Harbor Corrector, April 23, 1898, pages unmarked.

16 Newsday, June 23, 2013, “Staying Afloat: Boatyards Hark to a Vanishing Era”.

17 <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gAvd1kD4WxU> ; Long Island Traditions profile of Weeks Boatyard.

18 <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WrzykpJUSmA> ; Long Island Traditions profile of Anders Langendal.

Also part of the Peconic Bay region of boat construction is the activity on Shelter Island. Isolated and reached only by its North (Greenport) and South (North Haven) Ferries, the Island features Coecles Harbor Marina, operated by Peter and John Needham, Glen Cove natives, and 1973 transplants.<sup>19</sup> Island ferry boats for both locally owned services are not produced locally but generally bought new or second hand from other coastal production offerings. The yard has a specialization for producing and refurbishing wooden craft.

The Tupper Boatyard, which the Town of Southampton purchased for \$3.15 million in 2003, is a free standing icon of marine history on Eastern Long Island. As an entrepreneur, Edwin Tupper was a transplant of boat building activity to Southampton Town just as earlier generations from Southampton transplanted themselves elsewhere in the wake of the declining whaling industry. As a boat construction facility, it has experienced the same turbulence and movement of skills in maritime boat construction that is found everywhere among the yards along the coasts of Long Island. While a few boatyards have wooden buildings dating to one hundred years or so, most have been redeveloped with modern additions and metal industrial buildings.

Given a growing discussion of and the felt need for preservation of the New York marine history in the Lower Hudson Valley, New York Harbor and Long Island coastal communities, the Tupper Boathouse should be included. Freed of any current operational activity, holding much of its original form, situated in the Town owned marina at Conscience Point, an effort at preservation, restoration and connection to its marine environment holds promise for the Town of Southampton and the State of New York to raise the level of public understanding of the State's important marine history.

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<sup>19</sup> Shelter Island Reporter, March 4, 2013, "Island Profile: John Needham".