

Westhampton Beach Historical Society

Serving the
Communities of
Westhampton Beach,
Westhampton Dunes,
Westhampton, Quogue,
Remsenburg, Speonk
and Eastport



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Newsletter

Spring 2020

Main Street, Westhampton Beach Marches Through Time!

Significant changes have been made to Westhampton Beach's Main Street over the past year, including reconfiguration of the street's infrastructure and demolition of some historic buildings. We thought it would be interesting to compare "then and now" photos to see how some things have changed while others remain the same.

Right: The circa 1905 postcard at right shows Main Street (unpaved at this time) looking east. The distinctive Grimshaw



and Redfield Building (constructed in 1896) is to the left and the Weixelbaum's Building (103 Main Street, constructed circa 1895) and former Platt Building (constructed in the mid-1800s, most recently Magic's Pub) are at the far right. Main Street did not receive its first pavement until 1925, when concrete was laid.

Below: A similar view from early 2020 shows the Grimshaw and Redfield Building still present at left, with the adjoining property to the west (white building corner at far left) now occupied by the new Burner Law Group building, which replaced the circa 1918 A. E. White building formerly fronting on Main Street. Many of the buildings in the distance



in the distance

and at right, including the Weixelbaum's Building, have remained present since the early 1900s with some modifications, but (alas) the Platt Building (Magic's), one of the oldest buildings in the Village, has been demolished.

Right: The circa 1920 postcard image at right shows the Westhampton Beach Post Office (constructed in 1914, now the Post Stop Café), the original Seaside Bank building (constructed in the early 1900s, partially obscured by trees), and the former Westhampton Free Chapel building (also known as the Union Chapel, constructed in 1874).



Below: In early 2020 this portion of Main Street looks much different! While the former Post Office building remains present (modified by a side addition) as the Post Stop Cafe, the original Seaside Bank and Westhampton Free Chapel buildings are gone. In 1924 the Seaside Bank building was demolished and the Chapel building was moved to Library Avenue to make way for a new larger Seaside Bank building, which is presently the Chase Bank building at the far right. The Chapel building was moved again in 1950 to a site on the beach, where it became a summer home.



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Main Street, Westhampton Beach Marches Through Time!

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Below: A circa 1940 postcard shows two well-known buildings that remain present on Main Street: the former Speeds Drugstore (constructed in 1933 and now SonSet Gifts & Sweet



Shop) and the former Main Street Theater (constructed in 1932 and now the Performing Arts Center). Both of these

buildings, together with the Patio Building, were constructed by the Heelbarp Corporation, a group of local businessmen

who organized in 1926 for the purpose of further developing downtown Westhampton Beach.

Below: The current view shows that although there have been a few changes, these buildings remain very recognizable and contribute significantly to the historic character of Westhampton Beach's Main Street.



Sons of the Beach:

A History of Local Firefighting on the 25th Anniversary of the Sunrise Wildfire

(with supporting information from www.firehouse.com)

At 1:30 PM on August 24, 1995 a column of smoke was noted near Suffolk Community College in Speonk and a fire alarm was raised. Aided by high winds and a 19-day drought, the fire quickly spread, passing over and around fire trucks on Speonk-Riverhead Road an hour later, and eventually crossing Sunrise Highway where a fire command post had been established. The fire's unexpected jump over Sunrise Highway and rapid movement toward homes and businesses produced what is undoubtedly one of the largest mutual aid calls in the history of New York State. One hundred seventy-eight fire departments from Nassau and Suffolk Counties sent apparatus and firefighters, who were joined by New York State forest rangers and firefighters from the National Guard. For the first time in its history, the New York City Fire Department sent fire companies to Suffolk County. By the time the fire was finally extinguished, approximately 7,000 acres had burned, homes and businesses had been damaged, and over 400 people had been forced to evacuate.



Sunrise wildfire in August 1995

On the 25th anniversary of this historic wildfire, the Westhampton Beach Historical Society will present an exhibit of the history of firefighting in the Greater Westhampton area. In addition to a special focus on efforts to combat the 1995 Sunrise Wildfire, the exhibit will cover three major periods of firefighting in our area: formation of the Quogue and Westhampton Beach Fire Department (1904-1918) including creation of the Quogue Fire District, establishment of the independent Westhampton Beach Fire Department (1918-1953), and Westhampton Beach's modern firehouse era (1953-2014).

Each section of the exhibit will present a history of the period in photos, a discussion of the firehouses and equipment used during the period, and mentions of the more significant fires. Artifacts from the earliest days of organized firefighting in the area, including leather fire buckets and examples of original protective gear worn by firefighters, will be on display. We also have examples of early fire extinguishing hand grenades, communications equipment, and personal protective equipment and turnout gear that local firefighters used.

We hope that once we are past the current health crisis, you will be able to join us at the Museum this summer to enjoy this special exhibit. Please watch your email and other information sources for news of when we expect to open!

An Historic Preservation Success Story: The Privy Returns Home!

A little piece of history was saved this year when Larry Jones relocated a privy (outhouse) from Quogue to his property on the corner of Main Street and Griffing Avenue in Westhampton Beach, where it now stands just a few streets away from where it first stood more than a century ago. According to Pat Shuttleworth (as documented by the Southampton Press), the privy was originally located on Beach Lane as part of a boarding house complex that is likely to have been the Howell House. It was reportedly once owned by the estate of Peter Tuthill until 1930, when it was purchased by Frank Driver who moved it to his home on Delafield Street on Quogue in 1969. It was later moved to the grounds of the Quogue Library, where it complimented their presentation of several historic structures, including the Old Quogue Schoolhouse built in 1822 and said to be the oldest surviving schoolhouse in Suffolk County.

Both the Westhampton Beach and Quogue Historical Societies are very appreciative of Mr. Jones' effort to save this little piece of history! It is even better that the



The Privy in its new home!

privy is now located only a few streets away from where it began its life more than a century ago. We are sure that this little historic structure is happy to be home in Westhampton Beach!

Message from our Society Presidents to Members and Supporters

We hope that our first newsletter of 2020 finds you and your loved ones healthy and adjusting to the many changes in our lives due to COVID-19. Like organizations all over the Long Island, we are hopeful that our summer roster of events and activities for adults and children will take place. The uncertainty of what lies ahead with this world-wide pandemic leaves everyone wondering how to proceed with vacation plans, family get-togethers, welcoming summer guests, and for our Society, our events and exhibit. We will keep you up to date as we get closer to the summer. In the meantime, while we are

proceeding with exhibit preparation, the Society's buildings are closed to the public until further notice. Upkeep and security for our buildings and the collections continues, so your membership support during this time is very important. We hope that you respond promptly to the recent membership renewal request and that you consider upgrading your membership level to help support our Society. If you have any questions, please contact us at (631) 288-1139 and leave a message. Thank you for your support and patience during this time.

Coronavirus 2020 – History in the Making

The extraordinary changes in our daily lives brought about by the coronavirus pandemic will be of great interest to future historians; the human perspective is a very important aspect of this event. Please join us in documenting your personal accounts, thoughts, and experiences during this time. Let us know how you are getting along, what you had to adjust, and what activities you and your family are doing to keep spirits up. Our Vice President, Marsha Kenny, has offered to collect and archive this information for the Society, which will protect and preserve it for future reference. Please email her at mken-

ny325@gmail.com with any information you would like to preserve and share with future generations. If you are uncomfortable with email, then please send a written submission to the Society at PO Box 686, Westhampton Beach, NY 11978. We ask that you include your name, if you are OK with that, and at least the name of the community in which you live so that these accounts can be referenced to the locale of the experience.

Thank you in advance for your support in documenting this significant event in our collective lives.

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Some Fun to Look Forward To . . .

An Antique Fire Muster and Apparatus Exhibit on the Great Lawn!

In conjunction with our Sons of the Beach museum exhibit, the Society plans to hold a live exhibit of historic firefighting equipment, apparatus, and techniques on the Great Lawn in July. This all-day event will be open to the public and will be coordinated by the Eastern Long Island Chapter of the Society for Preservation and Appreciation of Antique Fire Apparatus Association (SPAAMFAA for short!). A variety of historic fire-fighting equipment and apparatus will be on display and “musters” will be conducted to demonstrate historic firefighting techniques. Local firefighters will be on hand to teach fire prevention and provide details about firefighters, their experiences and equipment. Rumor has it that there will be antique horse-drawn equipment that will be pulled by real horses, steam-fired equipment, and other unique old stuff that should prove fascinating!



Please watch for more information about the Muster on the Great Lawn. Our plans are somewhat fluid at the moment, but should firm up once we can safely gather again. We hope that you will be able to join us on the Great Lawn this summer to enjoy this special live exhibit!

A Long Island horse-drawn fire engine in action!