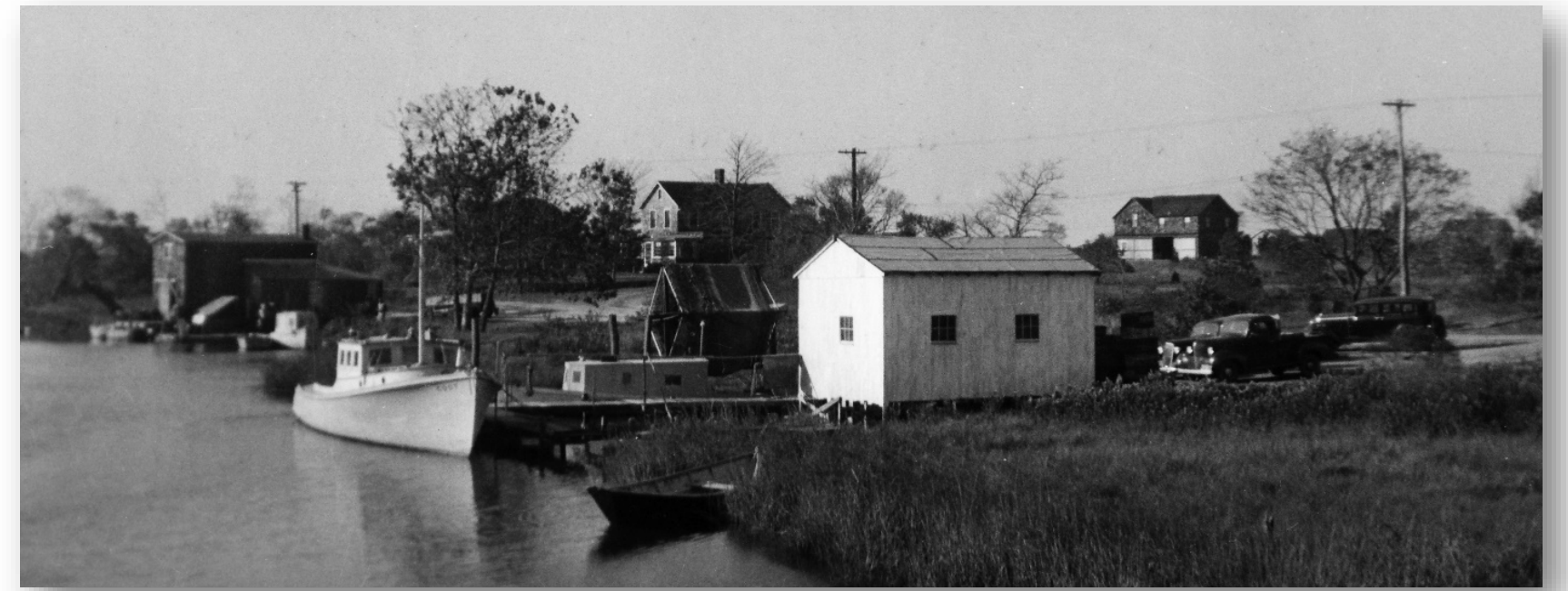


The Raynor Fish House: Legacy of a Fishing Family's History on Beaver Dam Creek

The barn-like structure in front of you on Beaver Dam Creek is a fish house built in 1939 by William Fletcher Raynor (see photo at right). Constructed partially over the water, and braced for support in heavy weather, the fish house was used to store fishing gear, provide shelter for fisherman and their equipment, and serve as a place to repair boats and nets between fishing expeditions. This fish house was used by "Fletch" Raynor and then by his son, Charles Marvin Raynor, until about 2014. The fish house and property were acquired by the Town of Southampton Community Preservation Department to be preserved as a reminder of a former way of life.



Raynor families lived on Beaver Dam Creek since the mid-1700s. Jonathan Raynor (1681-1741), who settled in what is now Westhampton Beach, acquired lands along Apaucuck Creek (Beaver Dam today) in 1712, when Southampton Town divided the 1666 Topping Purchase meadow lots, including Speonk Neck, Tanners Neck, and Apaucuck Neck (Apaucuck is Algonquin for "flaggy land," for the abundance of cattail flags or reeds used to weave mats and cover wigwams.)

Jonathan's son, Nathan (1716-1772) was reportedly the first Englishman to settle Apaucuck Neck near the head of the Creek in 1741. In 1746 the Town consented to damming of the Creek and construction of the first grist mill in the western part of the Town. The mill was completed in 1748 and located at the western end of Mill Road adjoining Nathan's property in what became known as the Beaver Dam settlement area. A church, a school, a stagecoach stop, a blacksmith, and a cemetery (now the Westhampton Cemetery) were also established in the settlement area. Although Nathan is said to be buried in an unmarked grave on Apaucuck Neck to the west of the Creek, many of his descendants are buried in the cemetery at Beaver Dam.



Raynor families continued to live along the Creek and were primarily farmers and fishermen who supplied food to their families and the community. However, in 1868 the Long Island Rail Road extended track through the Westhampton area, bringing new economic opportunities. Three Raynor families ran boarding houses for summer visitors on the Creek. Arthur Halsey Raynor used his boat *Helen* to take visitors to the beach. And more Raynors came to the Creek to make a living by commercial fishing now that their catch could be taken to market in New York City via rail.

The first Raynor fish house was built in the 1860s and was used to support several commercial fisheries. Sturgeon fishing became popular in the late 1800s and was practiced from the beach using gill nets during May and June; the nets were stored in the fish house during the rest of the year. When sturgeon fishing declined in the early 1900s fishing for cod using scroll lines, trawls and gill nets became popular, both from the beach and on Moriches Bay. The early 1900s photo above shows William Clark Raynor sailing up the Creek with supplies from the beach; the fish house is the building closest to the right. Freshwater carp were also raised in three fish ponds dug in the marshes near the fish house and then shipped to Manhattan when the price was right. Carp fishing declined after the '38 Hurricane opened permanent inlets to the Atlantic Ocean, increasing the bay salinity. Clamming and fishing for alewives, bluefish, eels, flounder, and striped bass continued in the 1940s and early 1950s, with the fish house used for fishing equipment storage and maintenance, as seen in the photo at right.



By the late 1950s commercial fishing had declined and the family used the fish house for crabbing, boat storage and boatbuilding until it was acquired by the Town of Southampton in 2020 for historic preservation. The fish house remains today as a reminder of our community's past.



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