

the fact that about 1,000 Indian artifacts have been excavated and authenticated from three locations in the community. One of these locations is Clay Pit Road. Additional evidence of Indian life is to be found in the writing of the late W.B. Tuthill. Remnants of an Indian Village existed on his grandmother's farm located on the west side of Fish Creek. Another encampment existed at the head of Fish Creek. All three of these areas are topographically related as Clay Pit Road follows a swale which becomes Fish Creek."⁹

Other archeological findings have been made in the Study Area as well. In the greenbelt area of the Speonk River, a prior Native American encampment is identified in the archeological report compiled into the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) associated with the approved Planned Development District (PDD) at the former Westhampton Dragstrip site permitting construction of a senior housing complex.¹⁰

In the archeological report compiled in the record for the change-of-zone petition for a retirement townhouse community entitled "Seabreeze Commons," the consulting cultural resource specialist indicated that a review of the available literature "had revealed that the study area was situated in a location that evidenced a higher than average potential for the recovery of prehistoric and historic Indian archaeological sites." For example, an 18th century wigwam site was recorded in the vicinity on the west bank of Beaverdam Creek in the 1740s.¹¹

Throughout the Study Area, human activity has greatly altered the Pine Barrens and adjacent land tracts over the last

300 years, through land clearing, timbering, fire, agriculture, introduction of exotic (non-native) species, mining, draining of wetlands, construction of railroads and highways and residential development.¹²

FROM EUROPEAN COLONIZATION TO THE PRESENT

The 1992 Speonk-Remsenburg Hamlet Study's "Historical Sketch" noted that "Speonk and Remsenburg located in the western extremity of Southampton Town, were not originally a part of the settlement that began in 1640." The western part of the Town (from the canal at Canoe Place) was purchased and settled much later, from 1712 to 1782.¹³

In "The History of Eastport," written by Eastport resident Leroy Wilcox in 1975, it was noted that "At the time of settlement, this area was largely an expanse of virgin forest inhabited by Indians and animals such as bears, wolves, beavers, wildcats, deer, etc. Roads at first were primitive as communication was mainly by water ... The first mention of a house in the Speonk-Eastport area was when William Smith of the Manor of St. George confirmed to the Trustees of Southampton Town in 1693 'all that piece of meadow that lieth on the north side of South Beach being on the east side of a certain house which Steven Boyer and Company built when they made a whaling company near to a place called Cupsoge' (the boundary between Brookhaven and Southampton Townships at the beach opposite Eastport.)"¹⁴

"Before the white men arrived, they sent their cows. As early as 1712, the meadows along the South Shore in what was "then" Speonk were leased to cattle owners from Southampton. Eventually, the cattlemen found it easier to build small houses near the meadows to tend the herds.

⁹1992 Speonk-Remsenburg Hamlet Study, "Historic Profile," p. 13.

¹⁰Stage 1A Cultural Resources Report – Westhampton Dragstrip PDD DEIS, dated 2002.

¹¹Stage 1A Cultural Resources Report – Seabreeze Commons PDD, dated 2003.

¹²Central Pine Barrens Plan, dated 1995.

¹³1992 Speonk-Remsenburg Hamlet Study, "Historical Profile," pp. 10-15.

¹⁴Adapted from "History of Eastport", Leroy Wilcox, 1975.

Most of the early residents came west from Southampton and Bridgehampton in the 1740s, built farms and cleared the forests of cordwood.¹⁵

The part of Southampton Town from Brookhaven Town line east to the Speonk River (Brushy Neck) was known as “Speonk” until 1845 and the part between “East Pond” and “West Pond” became known as “Waterville.” At that time, the area beginning about one mile west of West Pond in Brookhaven Town was called “Seatuck.” In 1860, the United States Postal Department, attempting to define hamlets using railroad stations when possible, asked residents of these two small hamlets (“Seatuck” and “Waterville”) to combine and be known as one name. Residents chose Seatuck, but were rejected by the postal department because the spelling was too close to Setauket (another village on Long Island.) Their second choice was “Eastport” - which now included a little more land just east of East Pond.¹⁶

Since 1860, this postal district boundary for the Hamlet of Eastport has been in effect and the community is joined at the town line of Southampton Town and Brookhaven Town at the Seatuck River.

The postal service plays a pivotal role in the history of the Hamlet of Speonk-Remsenburg as well. In the “Historic Profiles” report completed in connection with this Area-Wide Planning Study, local historian Ron Michne Sr. recounts the story about “How Remsenburg Got Its Name.” The southern portion of Speonk, now known as Remsenburg is defined via postal district lines -- “the northern border is an imaginary line dividing property lines, barns, houses or whatever falls on ‘a line parallel to the Montauk Highway

but 500 feet south of it.’ It is bordered on the south by the Atlantic Ocean, on the east by the Speonk River, and on the west by the Remsenburg Fire District line, starting at the Seatuck Creek (East Branch) and running north to a point 500 feet south of the south line of the Montauk Highway.”¹⁷

According to the historical record, “The name ‘Remsenburg’ evolved from a relatively small group of inhabitants, either living in the southern portion of Speonk or spending summers there, signing a petition presented in February 1895 by the newly installed pastor, the Reverend Minot Morgan. Three months prior to this, he was a real estate salesman having just graduated from college. At first he called for a name change from Speonk to Oak Beach, but most life-long residents ridiculed the name because of the shortage of oaks and beaches. A short time later, Mr. Morgan tried a different approach. Dr. Charles Remsen, a wealthy summer visitor from New York City, liked the area so much he contemplated erecting a library, public building or possibly a church there. The pastor promised Dr. Remsen that, if he provided money to build the memorial church, not only the frail building, but the entire village would be a memorial in order to exalt his name. Dr. Remsen agreed under one condition that no objection be made by the people. Mr. Morgan then solicited signatures to a petition to the Postmaster General, explaining to the citizens that Dr. Remsen’s proposed gift was conditional upon the new name.”¹⁸

“Soon thereafter, notarized counter petitions were entered on several occasions ‘to oppose any change of the name of the Speonk Post Office’ with opposition led by brothers Lewis and Elias Tuttle and Ernest A. DesMarets. Long-time Speonk residents bearing the names of Rogers, Tuthill, Phillips, Halsey, etc., signed the petitions in opposition citing

¹⁵Adapted from *Newsday*, “History of Long Island,” Tom Morris, 1998.

¹⁶Adapted from “Historic Profiles of Eastport, Speonk-Remsenburg, Westhampton,” January 2004.

¹⁷*Ibid.*

¹⁸*Ibid.*

‘church influence.’ These three documents and two other letters of appeal had little influence on the postal authorities, and the name of the Post Office was changed from Speonk to Remsenburg in October 1895. Eighteen months later, another petition was filed ‘To the Hon. Post Master General: Washington, D.C. Sir, we the undersigned residents of the village of Speonk, Town of Southampton, County of Suffolk, and State of New York respectfully request the Postal Authorities to restore the name of our Post Office from Remsenburg to Speonk, the name which it bore from the beginning. And your petitioners will ever pray. Dated at Speonk, N.Y. this 10th day of May, 1897’ followed by a list of 109 signatures. This petition also fell on deaf ears.”¹⁹

“Although the name of the post office was changed to Remsenburg, the Long Island Railroad refused to change the name of the station located in Speonk. The U.S. Postal Department had no authority over the Railroad, and could not order them to change a name. Railroad policy was to name the station, however, after the nearest post office. In June 1897, pressure from the Postal Department, which gave a lucrative contract for postal rail service, finally caused the Railroad to change the name from Speonk to Remsenburg, but this lasted just over one month. On July 9, 1897, a new post office was established, called by the old name ‘Speonk.’ Because this new post office was located closer to the railroad station, being ‘only a stone’s throw away,’ the Speonk sign was restored to the train station. In an attempt to keep everyone happy, the Speonk-Remsenburg area was now serviced by two post offices – one named ‘Speonk’ and the other named ‘Remsenburg.’”²⁰

At this point in time over 100 years later, where the hamlets of Eastport, Speonk and Remsenburg meet, the actual lines are nebulous, depending upon whether one chooses school

¹⁹*Ibid.*

district lines, postal delivery lines, railroad property lines or private property lines.²¹

King’s Highway, built in 1704, was the first public road leading from Brooklyn to East Hampton. In Eastport, Speonk, and Westhampton, King’s Highway established the route of the present day Old Country Road. Montauk Highway had not begun to be constructed until 1772.²²

Roads were cut into the forested areas for purposes of cutting wood, making charcoal, hunting deer and traveling to Riverhead, which in 1790 was little more than four dwellings, a court house, saw mill, and grist mill. Clay Pit Road in Speonk was established in 1782 (also known as Clay Pits Road and Brick Kiln Path) and once connected to Bald Hill, three miles north of Old Country Road, where bricks were made for homes. This area is in the protected Pine Barrens Preserve north of Eastport and the clay pits have since filled in with water and fragments of bricks.²³

Bicycle travel was very popular in the 1880s and 1890s. A loam path was created from Old Country Road, 510 feet east of Bay Avenue, traveling northerly to connect Eastport to Riverhead. It is still visible from the north side of the Sunrise Highway approximately two miles east of County

²⁰Adapted from “*Historic Profiles of Eastport, Speonk-Remsenburg, Westhampton*,” January 2004. In “*Then and Now*,” published by *The Landpaper*; it was also noted that “*The Old Speonk Post Office was in service from 1897 until 1953. Postmaster Estelle Wilcrewski ran the post office from her home until a new post office was built in 1968. Mrs. Wilcrewski retired in 1983. A long addition was added to the original Speonk post office which served as a local bar called “Candy’s Magic Pub” until the early 1990s. The building was demolished when a new retail complex called “Village Square” was proposed for this site and the adjoining nursery property and construction began in 2001.*”

²¹“*Historic Profiles of Eastport, Speonk-Remsenburg, Westhampton*,” January 2004.

²²Adapted from “*The History of Eastport*,” written by Leroy Wilcox, 1975, and the 1992 *Speonk-Remsenburg Hamlet Study*, “*Historical Profile*”.

²³Adapted from “*The History of Eastport*,” written by Leroy Wilcox, 1975.

Route 51. A Westhampton Path was established in 1897. Both were not much used after 1915.²⁴

In 1908, main roads were oiled down to prevent dust. In 1915, the roadbeds were made concrete. The Sunrise Highway was extended from Patchogue to Eastport by 1963. By 1972, the Sunrise Highway was extended from Eastport to Hampton Bays.²⁵

In the beginning, fishing and farming was of utmost importance to early settlers in terms of subsistence and economic vitality, but later each of the hamlet areas seemed to go in different directions.

About 150 years ago, the Study Area was considered a remote place where duck farmers, baymen and craftsmen resided and “city people” came to visit “the country.” In the 1870s, with railroad infrastructure now in place, trains brought a tide of summer visitors who would change the economics and the character of the community, in particular the Village of Westhampton Beach, which began to orient to tourism, summer homes, and resorts for the wealthy. Many area residents of Westhampton and Remsenburg took in boarders and set up seasonal lodging accommodations for the “summer people.” Warm summers and close proximity to ocean beaches led these areas to gradually evolve from farming pursuits to conversion / construction of residential homes, with increasing market demand for vacation homes and year-round residences for retirees and incoming families moving east from the city boroughs and other locales upisland to enjoy the quality of life in “The Hamptons.”

The inhabitants of Eastport continued raising ducks as its mainstay for decades. At one time this hamlet, although it’s

²⁴*Ibid.*

²⁵*Ibid.*

barely 1-1/2 square miles, was known as the “Duck Capital of the World.” “In fact, no less than thirty duck farms lined the shores of the creeks and bays of Eastport, Speonk, Remsenburg and Westhampton ... In the late 1940s, Long Island produced 6.5 million of the ducks going to market. Penny postcards and early photographs depict men “picking” the ducks, and women plucking the birds before they were shipped ... Though there were other farms in East Moriches and Speonk, many farmers brought their ducks to Eastport for processing.”²⁶

In 1929, Feather Sales built a Feather Factory on North Phillips Avenue in Speonk and by 1960, almost two million pounds of feathers were processed annually. In the 1940s, the Eastport Duck Packing Plant, with over 85 employees could process 3,000 ducks per day. In the 1960s, the Long Island Duck Farmers Co-Op, owned by a group of eight duck farmers, modernized a new plant that at its peak processed 20,000 ducks per day with approximately 200 workers. In the last twenty years, however, practically all duck farms have been phased out. More stringent government sanitation regulations have led to the closing of all small farms. Water pollution remediation systems, taxes and other costs were the final blow to most duck farm operations. The descendents of these hard-working farmers have sold their valuable waterfront property for residential development. The last remaining duck farmer, Chester Massey and his son Paul, own and operate the former Gordon Farm, which spans both the Southampton and Brookhaven sides of Eastport.²⁷

²⁶Adapted from “*Historic Profiles of Eastport, Speonk-Remsenburg, Westhampton*,” January 2004 and *Newsday* “*History of Long Island*”, Tom Morris, 1998.

²⁷Adapted from “*Historic Profiles of Eastport, Speonk-Remsenburg, Westhampton*,” January 2004.

“Now antiques reign where ducks once roamed This hamlet has evolved into what local merchants refer to as the ‘Gateway to the Hamptons.’ Today, both sides of Main Street in Eastport are lined with antique shops, with one stained glass studio, and Montauk Highway is lined with quaint old houses and the former residences of these duck farmers.”²⁸

In Westhampton too, although a few historic farmhouses remain, gone are the Atlantic Duck Farm, Ocean Duck Farm, and Culver and Raynor Duck Farm and in their place – million dollar waterfront homes along Brushy Neck Road, South Road, Tanners Neck Lane, and Baycrest Avenue.

In “History of Long Island,” compiled by Tom Morris and published in *Newsday* in 1998, the following is said about the Village of Westhampton Beach and surrounding area:

The Westhampton area of today is a far cry from the one first settled in 1666 as part of the Quogue Purchase. Then it was a quiet, sleepy community that experienced its first real estate boom in 1675 when buying land there for investment purposes became very popular ... It didn't take the English Colonizers of Southampton long after their settlement in the eastern part of the Town to figure out that the west end was valuable real estate too. Their first deeds were to the part west of the Shinnecock Canal (Canoe Place) in 1640. The five or six miles west of Canoe Place were apparently explored by the settlers early but controlled by the Shinnecoeks. It became involved in conflicting ownership claims before being awarded to Southampton Town by the Governor in 1666. That deal

²⁸Adapted from “Historic Profiles of Eastport, Speonk-Remsenburg, Westhampton,” January 2004 and *Newsday*, “History of Long Island”, Tom Morris, 1998.

*was known as the Quogue Purchase. The Indians were paid 70 pounds in British money plus a few trinkets, historians say. Indians called the purchased area “Catchaponack” or “Ketchaboneck,” which means “place where large roots grow.” It covered land that now includes the Village of Westhampton Beach and surrounding areas including unincorporated Westhampton.*²⁹

*Before 1890, there was no electricity, no telephone and no autos. However, the Long Island Railroad had built a new branch out to Sag Harbor in 1870, making possible a four hour trip from New York City instead of 24 hours by horse drawn stage coach. The principal means of transportation to the beach was the sailboat. At that time there were no inlets at Moriches or Shinnecock. The bays were fresh water and the fishermen chased carp, white perch, bass and eels.*³⁰

The first Westhampton church was built in 1742 and the first school in 1795, but the area remained a backwater of farming, fishing and crafts for nearly 150 years. It was not until the 1870s, when the railroad arrived, bringing a tide of summer visitors who would change the economics and the face of Westhampton area. “Money got off the trains,” historians say. People began spending summers here and the community’s character and local economy was altered. As the Village of Westhampton Beach and the surrounding area began to develop into a flourishing summer resort, real estate kept pace with the changing times and values increased considerably. In the same era, agriculture lost importance as the local people found new occupations. The once-prosperous farmlands were sold to make way for summer homes and hotels. The first hotel, the Howell House, was built in Westhampton Beach in 1868 with the

²⁹Adapted from *Newsday*, “History of Long Island”.

³⁰*Ibid.*

financial backing of colorful entrepreneur P.T. Barnum. The Oneck House and the Ketchaboneck House followed, as did crude bathhouses on the oceanfront at the foot of Beach Lane, now the site of Rogers Beach Pavilion.³¹

COMMUNITY CHARACTER TODAY

The historic, small town charm of Eastport is important as the gateway to Southampton Town for visitors and residents alike.

Historic structures, picturesque narrow lanes and large estates lining South Country Road throughout Remsenburg provide country ambiance and highlight the architectural beauty of turn-of-the-century homesteads.

The majestic Pine Barrens forest framing Sunrise Highway, Speonk-Riverhead Road, and Old Country Road provides a scenic route and helps to highlight to visitors that they have entered a special place, both environmentally and historically.

Much of Old Country Road in Westhampton, Speonk, and Eastport still provides a scenic route reminiscent of the days when small family farms dotted the landscape.

The Atlantic Ocean, Moriches Bay, creeks, ponds and other waterfront vistas throughout the area are community assets that should be treasured together with greenbelts, parkland areas, and hamlet heritage resource areas.

HAMLET HERITAGE RESOURCES

The Southampton Town Code defines “Hamlet Heritage Resources” as “man-made objects at least 50 years old that are connected to human activity. These resources could be any buildings used to house human or animal activities, e.g., homes, sheds, garages, mills, barns, agricultural buildings, offices, schools, churches, commercial and public-use buildings. It could be structures such as bridges, canals, roads, docks, fences, monuments and sculptures. It could also be burying grounds, trails, archaeological and commemorative or historic sites. These resources, when grouped together, help convey the special heritage of an area.”

A “Hamlet Heritage Resource Area” is “an honorary title bestowed in recognition of the special character of a neighborhood, hamlet or area. It honors the properties and the community that has cherished its historic heritage. Properties selected as hamlet heritage resources retain the same current Town rights, uses or regulations. Properties selected as part of Hamlet Heritage Resource Areas are not designated as Town landmarks or Town historic districts. The Hamlet Heritage Resource selection is for honorary purposes only.”³²

A Historic District, under Town Zoning Code, is a designated area where additional regulations apply to various properties within the area and alterations to properties and demolitions require additional review by the Town’s Landmarks and Historic Districts Board (“Landmarks Board”). In a Historic District, a building permit cannot be issued until a Certificate of Appropriateness is approved by the Landmarks Board concerning the proposed construction activity.

³¹Adapted from *Newsday*, “History of Long Island” and “www.hamptonstomontauk.com”

³²Section 330-5, “Definitions”, *Southampton Town Code*.