



## BITS OF HISTORY-MOSTLY LONG ISLAND

## VALLEY STREAM IN WORLD WAR II

by Al Mayernik

Part II of Douglas Anacreonte's Story of  
His Grandfather, Francis X. Fink, as a POW Continues

The Geneva Conventions list provisions for the treatment and care of the wounded and sick military personnel in the field and treatment of prisoners of war. They are to be cared for and treated in a humane manner. The Nazis were not following the rules of this agreement and, as a result, many lives were lost and bodies permanently injured.

Since F.X.F. had received very little treatment, his leg was now swollen to the above the knee. The castle was like a jail, cold, dark and damp. The men were separated and kept isolated from one another. In pain and alone, F.X.F. wondered if he would ever make it home again. The prisoners slept on the floor as there were no cots or blankets. The Nazis spoke no English and so the POWs could not communicate with their captors. At one point, the men were marched outside and guns pointed at their heads. But the triggers weren't pulled and they were brought back inside the castle. They didn't know what happen but were happy to be alive. F.X.F. remembers that after this event, he was never physically tortured, but was questioned by the Nazi Secret Service. He gave only his name, rank and serial number and no other information. He later heard that several prisoners had been blindfolded and shot after interrogation. He was lucky because he was still alive.

The days passed very slowly. He was cold, in pain and hungry - always hungry. "It was only with the food sent to us by the Red Cross that we managed to stay alive." The Nazis gave us some dry black bread and a bit of boiled cabbage when it was available. There were rats in the

castle that must have eaten well because they were as big as a good size cat. Another problem for the POWs was the lack of water. They were not allowed to wash and so body lice became a real health problem. Other diseases, such as malnutrition and hepatitis affected the men.

Weeks passed and F.X.F. was still kept in isolation, separated from the other prisoners. The winter was very cold and the food and supplies were becoming more scarce as the Allies were slowly defeating Hitler's mighty army. The prisoners were never allowed out of the castle, not even for a minute.

By the end of March, the POWs could hear the Allies bombing getting closer. They had to stay alive until someone could find them and set them free. The Nazis were starting to panic and one day the POWs were told to get ready to travel. On the morning of March 29, 1945, trucks were coming into the castle grounds. The Nazi soldiers fled and the men in the castle were finally liberated by the troops of General George Patton. They were taken to a hospital for emergency medical treatment and then flown to England. F.X.F. survived his hunger and pain and was at last on his way home.

The letter that tells this story on April 2, 1945 by Francis X. Fink was sent to his wife, Eleanor, from a hospital in England. All the men who flew in that B-24 were eventually freed from their prisons and returned home. F.X.F. was awarded the Purple Heart, Air Medal, Oak Leaf Clusters and four stars for his bravery and conduct during battle and imprisonment.

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Information on the Pupke family, was recently passed on to Marge Chvatal by Kathy Russo, daughter of Marie Pupke Charles who enlightened us on the roles of the four Pupke brothers during W.W.II. Marge Chvatal grew up next door to the Pupkes on Elmwood Street..

The following is from Kathy Russo:

**ERNIE PUPKE** Ernie was a Tech. Sgt. with the U.S. Army. His initial training was in radar in West Palm Beach. He spent his service in Marseilles, France, training soldiers. He entered the Army in 1942 and was discharged in 1945.

**BILL PUPKE** Bill entered the U.S. Marine Corp. at 19 years of age in January 1940. He served in the South Pacific Islands during the first offensive in 1942 at Guadalcanal. He was a Cpl. with the First Marine Division, and spent 2 1/2 years fighting in the Pacific.

Two telegrams were received in the Pupke home in December 1944. The first brought joy and relief because Bill was finally coming home. The second brought fear and dread. Bob, a merchant seaman, was missing, his Liberty ship having been sunk. Bill finally came home in December, 1944. Unfortunately he came home to find that his younger brother ,Bob , was missing. As it turned out, Bob, age 22, the brother whom everyone thought would be out of harm's way lost his life at sea. Bill was discharged in 1945.

**BOB PUPKE** He was an oiler in The Merchant Marine during W. W. II. We recently have corresponded with a friend and



**As a WW II veteran, Bob Pupke's name has been included with those who died in the war on the plaque in front of Central High School**

survivor of Bob's ship, (as a result of our Internet search). He informed us that they were landing troops and supplies onto Omaha and Utah Beaches, during the Normandy invasion. On December 10, 1944, his Liberty Ship, SS DAN BEARD enroute to Belfast, Ireland to join a convoy to the U.S., was torpedoed by a U1202 (Thomsen). The explosion caused the vessel to rise out of the water and blew off the rudder and broke the propeller. This motion caused the ship to split in two. The complement of 8 officers , 32 men and 257 armed guards immediately abandoned ship into rough seas. Some jumped into the water, but most left by life boat. The #4 boat swamped and the #3 boat capsized in 30 foot seas. The # 2 boat landed in So. Wales. The #1 boat made landfall with 9 men. Coastal craft picked up the others. Three officers, 14 men and 12 armed guards perished.

**DON PUPKE** Don was a Cpl. in the Air Force during the Korean War. He was attached to a Bomber Wing and was stationed in Okinawa in 1951/1952.

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**MONTAUK LIGHT**

By Joan Duffy

On a recent trip to Montauk Point, we were impressed by the role of the Montauk Historical Society. After the Coast Guard automated the light in 1987, they leased the lighthouse to the Society for 30 years, supposedly for \$1. There were six members of the Society available on the weekday in early April when we were visited. One woman was working at the admissions booth (\$3 for adults, \$2.50 for seniors), and another manned the attractive and well-stocked gift shop.

Montauk Light is the oldest lighthouse in the United States, authorized by the second Congress under President George Washington in 1792. The original commissioning document signed by Thomas Jefferson is prominently on display. Construction began on the lighthouse in June, 1796 and was completed in November, 1796.

However, there is a legend that the Montaukett Indians built great fires there to call council meetings, and during the Revolutionary War, the British Royal Navy kept a huge fire burning on Turtle Hill, the bluffs on which the lighthouse stands, during the seven years that the British occupied Long Island.

**EXHIBITS**

The lighthouse museum is well worth a visit. The room which served as the Head Keeper's bedroom from 1860 until 1947, displays four dioramas depicting the devastating effects of erosion on the bluff known as Turtle Hill. This room was dedicated to Giorgina Reed who initiated an erosion control program in 1970 and developed

a patented method of reed-trench terracing.

Pictures of the early lighthouse keepers and of the site of the lighthouse itself from 1791 until 1939 line the walls.

The former oil room of the lighthouse contains the 3 1/2 Order Fresnal Bivalve Lens which was first placed in service in 1903 and removed February 3, 1987.

A fascinating room for children as well as for adults contains an exhibit "Lighthouses Surrounding Long Island." A 5 foot long and 4 foot wide model depicts all the lighthouses from the Statue of Liberty to Montauk Light. . Designate a particular light, for example, Execution Rock, and the miniature lighthouse itself lights up and an overhead panel describes the light and details its history.

Those with energy and strong legs will want to climb the 137 steps to the watch deck on the top of the lighthouse. From there, a visitor is aware how necessary it was to heavily fortify the area against a possible German submarine invasion in W.W.II. In fact, a German submarine did come ashore in neighboring Amagansett during the war. The Amagansett maritime museum will be the subject of the next column in the June Panorama.

There is no doubt that Montauk Light is a magical spot. As Walt Whitman, Long Island's own poet said: *I....spent many an hour on Turtle Hill by the old lighthouse, on the extreme point, looking out over the ceaseless roar of the Atlantic.*

( Some information from Long Island Our Story)

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**AMAGANSETT MARITIME MUSEUM**

by Joan M. Duffy

On our early April visit to Montauk, we had a private tour of the Amagansett Maritime Museum. A volunteer from the East Hampton Historical Society, which operates the house, opened the building for us after a request for an appointment. The usual hours are 10:00 a. m. to 5:00 p.m. daily in July and August, and the same hours on weekends in the spring and fall. The fee is \$4 for adults, \$2 for children. 516-324-6850

The main room on the ground floor contains whale boats, dories, and an Edwards Boat built in New London in 1876 and equipped for shore whaling.

In the stairwell, there is a remarkable assemblage of black and white photos taken by Doug Kuntz in 1981 to "preserve a disappearing way of life." There are numerous pictures of fishermen and their families, some in their own simple homes and having a very poignant quality.

Among the pictures are those of David Pharaoh, a Montaukett Indian involved in whaling, and his kinsman, Stephen (Talkhouse) Pharaoh, famous for his one day walk from Brooklyn to Montauk, his gift of gab and his local nightclub.

Everyone in the area was in one way or another involved in the whaling industry and the pictures depict members of the well known local families, including the Dominy family, best known as furniture makers, but who also helped at the lifesaving station.

The second floor of the museum provides a crash course in the fishing industry. There are innumerable dioramas, pictures and models

all tastefully organized and labeled. One exhibit, entitled, "the Bayman's year" illustrates the different types of fish caught at different times of the year. Exhibits cover haul seining, lobster traps, harpooning,, use of the dragger, aquaculture, and how shellfish, univalves, bivalves and mollusks are harvested. A wetlands factory display demonstrates the food web. Trap fishing hasn't changed since Indian days. A picture illustrates ice fishing off Gosman's dock in Montauk.

The back yard of the museum contains a Dominy whaleboat, Great South Bay catboat, a lobster boat and a gunning shanty from the Indian Field Club.

No maritime museum is complete without reference to shipwrecks and there is a wall at the Amagansett Museum which tells the sad stories through illustrations, maps and photographs.

A children's center demonstrates knot making as well as providing games, books and puzzles relating to the sea.

**AMAGANSETT IN W.W.II**

Amagansett is etched into Long Island's history of W.W.II. It was on June 12, 1942 that the German U-boat Innisbruck settled onto the bottom a few hundred yards off Amagansett beach. When four of the Germans went ashore, they were met by a young Coast Guardsman, John Cullen. The Germans never did accomplish their mission of blowing up installations. Instead, all eight Germans from the submarine were quickly apprehended.

(See Long Island Our Story)

**LIGHTHOUSE EXHIBIT**

"Lighthouses of Long Island" runs through Oct 31 at the History Museum of Stony Brook 751-0066.

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**COLD SPRING HARBOR MARITIME MUSEUM**

by Joan M. Duffy

*The following article is a continuation of a series of columns on Long Island maritime museums.. Through last spring, we wrote about the Sag Harbor Museum , the Amagansett Museum and the Montauk Light Museum. This issue we will discuss the Cold Spring Harbor Maritime Museum, an easy day trip from Valley Stream.*

The Cold Spring Harbor Museum is dedicated not only to exploring the whaling industry of the past but also to educating the public toward the conservation of today's whales.

The museum gears its exhibits to every age group. It is possible to take a self-guided tour with an audio tape.

Robert Cushman Murphy, a curator of the Museum of Natural History was in possession of a genuine 19th century whaleboat which is 30 feet long, came from the whaling ship Daisy and was built in Setauket in 1872.. This extremely valuable artifact is now one of the principal exhibits at the Cold Spring Harbor Museum.

A tour of the museum begins with an excellent diorama of the town dating from 1850. Many questions are answered on the audio tape, such as why Main Street was once called Bedlam Street. It is interesting to discover that whaling was one of the first fully integrated industries in America.

In the 1800's at least 48 women from Long Island sailed with their husbands on whalers or other vessels. The difficult journeys were the only alternative to possibly several years separation from their husbands.

The dramatic contrast between A whale's skull and that of a mouse is on display in the Wonder of Whales room. Information is provided on the two kinds of whales, with and without teeth.. It is possible to listen to the sounds of a humpback whale.

Cold Spring Harbor Museum contains a model of the whaling ship Bartholomew Gosnold and visitors can learn a great deal about life on a whaleboat as well as the meaning of whaling expressions "There she blows" and "Nantucket sleigh ride"

The art of scrimshaw is on display in the main room as well as art created from shells.

Videos on whaling are available and there are weekend programs for families in the education room.

The past is brought to life at the Cold Spring Harbor Museum when whaling was an accepted means of earning a living. The last vessel sailed from Cold Spring Harbor in 1858. The following year oil was discovered in Pennsylvania.

**DIRECTIONS:** Take LIE to Exit 49 north (Route 110) . Go north to 25A (Main St. in Huntington Village). Make a left and go west to the Cold Spring Harbor Museum on the right

The museum is open daily 11:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. June to Sept. After that it is closed on Mondays. Fee \$2 ages 6-12 Over 65 \$1.50

Sources: Long Island Our Story  
Exploring Long Island

Bill Stris, Central High School Trustee donated 1999 yearbooks from Central, South and North and South High Schools to Pagan - Fletcher Restoration.

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**SAGAMORE HILL**

By Joan M. Duffy

We had not been to Sagamore Hill, Theodore Roosevelt's home for many, many years, so we decided to take three of our grandchildren for a visit early this summer.

Tickets are purchased at a new visitors center which has a good selection of books and mementos about the President. All visits now are in the form of guided tours run by members of the National Park Service. I remember wandering through the house by ourselves, but the guides provide interesting anecdotes and insights. Visitors gather on the porch to form groups of about 14.

The property on the hill at Cove Neck was purchased by Roosevelt in 1883 for \$30,000. He had learned to love the area where both his grandfather and his father had spent vacations. Roosevelt built the house after his first wife, Alice Hathaway Lee died and his daughter, Alice, was born. After Roosevelt married his childhood playmate, Edith Kermit Carow, he named the estate "Sagamore Hill...after Matinecock Indian sagamore, or sub-chief, Mohenas, who had signed away his rights to the land."

The 23 room Victorian structure, is much the same as it was when the family occupied it. The furnishings, emphasizing a very masculine décor, are mostly original furnishings, owned and loved by the Roosevelt family. Only the drawing room shows Edith Roosevelt's feminine touch. The house is replete with elephant tusks, bearskin rugs with snarling heads and the mounted heads of American and African buffalo.



There are also white-tailed deer, elk, bison and antelope. It is paradoxical that Roosevelt the big game hunter was also a conservationist.

Before 1901, the only way to reach the Roosevelts by phone was to call a drugstore in Oyster Bay and a boy on a bicycle would carry the message up the hill.

It was at Sagamore Hill that Roosevelt met separately with the envoys of warring Russia and Japan in 1905 and then brought them face to face on the Presidential yacht Mayflower in Oyster Bay. The resulting Treaty of Portsmouth, which ended the conflict, earned Roosevelt the Nobel Peace Prize.

Sagamore Hill was the summer White House from 1901-1909. Roosevelt reveled in strenuous activities and games with his five children. Once in 1904, Edith Roosevelt heard Archie playing outside the White House singing, "I'm going to Sagamore. I'm going to Sagamore.." Roosevelt Field was renamed in 1917 for the President's son, Quentin, who died in W.W.I in France.

Visitors now have access to Old Orchard house built in 1938 for General Theodore Roosevelt which is a treasure trove of family and political pictures and features an excellent movie shown continuously

Directions: L.I.E. to Exit 41 north (N.Y. 106) Take this road to Oyster Bay and follow signs.

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**ANTHONY MELILLO**

By Joan M. Duffy

One of the Valley Stream Historical Society's most devoted members, Anthony (Tony) Melillo has amazing stories to tell of his experiences in W.W. II. He was born in Padula, a province of Salerno in Italy, August 1, 1921. His mother was an American who married his father, an Italian, and consequently lost her American citizenship. Tony's mother had returned to Italy with her own mother and two siblings when Tony's grandfather died in the States.

Tony grew up in Italy, and when the war started, he was called into the Italian Army in 1941. His mother had already emigrated to the United States in 1937 when her citizenship was restored after her husband's death.

In the Army, Tony was in the Signal Corps and as a telegrapher was called a Marconista. Soldiers were needed in North Africa, so he went there to head a radio station. He fought with the Italian Army across North Africa from El Alamein in Egypt to Tunisia where he was captured by the British forces. In a prisoner transfer arrangement, he went to an American P.O.W. camp in Algeria.

Two G.I.'s came to the camp looking for imprisoned cousins. Tony gave them his mother's address in Brooklyn and they took two pictures of him. He retrieved those pictures years later, as well as a Red Cross card that he sent to his half-brother in Italy affirming that he was okay. Two months ago his sister returned the card to him.



Photo by Joan Duffy

After the Allies landed in Italy, they asked for cooperators and 90% of the P.O.W's signed up. Tony unloaded ships in Algiers and later in Leghorn. The ships carried everything from needles to tanks. Sometimes, Tony hid cigarettes in his gloves and chocolate bars in his shoe

One day Tony talked to an American merchant seaman and asked him to deliver a letter to his mother in Brooklyn. Initially, the seaman refused but then returned to Tony and said that he would take the letter. When the seaman exited a trolley car in Bensonhurst, he met young woman and asked directions. She was Tony's cousin and said, excitedly, "That's my aunt."

He also worked KP assignments and met a Jewish G.I., Abe Watzman. After the war, when Tony arrived in the United States, in 1947, he met Abe on a staircase in a N.Y. City subway.

Tony worked for 20 years, until he retired, at the Brooklyn Museum. He traveled all over the world as a technician assigned to the curator of the Egyptian exhibit and was involved in installing exhibits in Greece, Tokyo, etc..

Tony's wife Adele worked with his mother in Brooklyn. They are married 51 years and have two sons. Tony and Adele set up the coffee and cake after every meeting.

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