

BVA history in a nutshell

Marty Van Lith

June 2006

*Presented to the Brookhaven Village Association
on the occasion of its 100th Anniversary*

Having recently confirmed with Don Garber, former president of the Affiliated Brookhaven Civic Associations, that the Brookhaven Village Association can lay claim to being the oldest civic association in Brookhaven Town, I give my congratulations and thanks to all those who over the course of the past century have given so much of their time and effort for the benefit of our beautiful community. Here are my thoughts on how the BVA came to be and some of its earliest members and activities.

About 250 years after the first settlers came down from Setauket to the Fire Place the community began to change from a primarily farming and fishing village to a place where NYC people would come to vacation, own second homes and where artisans came to live. The arrival of the South Shore Railroad in 1880 was largely responsible for this and the Brookhaven Station became one of the most important places in the village.

Throughout the 18th century the civic life of our community, like that everywhere in Brookhaven Town, was handled by the Presbyterian Church, with the mother church located in Setauket. Town government evolved from this and by the 19th century two other churches, Methodists and a small group of Congregationalists, sprang up here in the village. These three churches were the primary center of social life in the Hamlet. With the separation of church and town, Town Government took on the responsibility for laws and ordinances, police, bay constables, and roads.

With population of hamlets increasing in the early 20th century residents saw a need for local control of their community, the larger ones with businesses incorporated as villages and the smaller residential ones formed the new concept of civic association, which both influenced Town government in matters of their communities as well as doing things themselves for the benefit of the community. Bellport also has an "improvement association" circa 1906, which died out after a few years probably because they became an incorporated village. There is mention in the BIA's 1939 minutes that there was a Bellport Taxpayers Assoc, but the current Bellport Civic Assoc has no record of it. Bellport's current Civic Association was formed by Ed DeMateosianin in the 1960s.

While the idea of an improvement association was to make the community a desirable place to live by encouraging people to beautify their homes (there

were probably many run-down farm houses and cluttered lots at the time) the BIA only dealt marginally with this, giving awards during its first ten years. Its number one priority in 1906/7 was to have access to the river and bay. Beaver Dam Creek was not very deep and mostly unnavigable. The shoreline between Beaver Dam Creek and Carmans River was, and is, shallow, and the former Joseph Carman and Suffolk Club land at the end of Beaver Dam Road, previously accessible to the public, was bought by Carman Lush in 1906 and soon fenced in (cows). The BIA worked with Mr. Lush to give a right of way extending Beaver Dam Road to the river and successfully petitioned the Town to build a dock there, which was completed by 1908. The BIA also paid to have tree branches trimmed, bought a dozen oil lamps for the roads and had a sign made announcing Brookhaven Village along the main road.

There was mention in the Patchogue Advance that the BIA formed in June of 1906 the president was F. W. Post. I know of no "F. W. Post but this could be a typo and they meant Louise Wells Post, James' wife. Also McElroy and George Miller as Vps. However, this is not reflected in the minutes as no election was held and there was no mention officers in the 1906 minutes. The first recorded election was in 1907. The BVA's first president was Malcolm Fraser, Canadian born and an internationally acclaimed artist. 1st VP was James Post, who at the time was the president of the American Sugar Refining Company. 2nd VP was Impressionist artist Fredrick Kost. The secretary was Brookhaven schoolteacher and principal Jessie Johnson and the treasurer was Brook Store partner and assistant postmaster Forrest Reeve. Johnson would remain secretary for the next 20 years and Reeve would remain treasurer until his death in 1934. Other board members were Mrs. Wallace H. Swezey (Adeline), a farmers wife, William S. Swezey, a farmer, and Tom Morrow, Sr., a chemist with the Masury paint company. Innuendo from the minutes suggests that these first meetings were held at the (2 story) schoolhouse. Meetings were always held during the summer and on Saturdays.

Beginning in 1908 the BIA worked to have the roads improved, sidewalks installed and to build a gazebo and seats at the new dock. 1908 also saw our first land use issue as the BIA strongly opposed the Brooklyn Water Works' attempt to tap Suffolk's water supply for their use. Not all of the BIA's ideas worked well, such as the one in 1911 where Augustus Starke dammed the Beaver Dam Creek by the bridge with the idea of letting the rush of water clear the creek of debris. The rush of water washed away the bridge's foundation and a gate had to be erected to keep vehicles off until repairs were made.

Here are some other highlights of the BIA's first years:

- 1911 - acquired a small plot of land next to the railroad station for a park to be maintained by the BIA.
- 1913 - formed a committee to have the streets named and designated.

- 1914 - made its first major expenditure, spending \$280 for Brookhaven's first "fire apparatus."
- 1915 - appointed a committee to look into ownership of the land that is today's Squassux Landing.
- 1917 - made the local Red Cross committee a committee of the BIA. \$225 was appropriated to plant 150 trees along Hamlet roads. James Post purchased Squassux Landing from Carman Lush and quietly allowed the community to use it.
- 1921 - formed a committee to erect a war memorial near the Post Office, which was dedicated on July 4, 1923.
- 1923 - held the last official (minutes taken) meeting for ten years; the reorganization meeting was held July 1932. Reason not clear but attendance had fallen off in the early 1920s and the Aug 4, 1923 minutes said that because of poor attendance the board agreed to meet once a year in August. Also some of the founding fathers that were still the most active members had died, Tom Morrow Sr. in 1919 and Fred Kost in 1923. But mostly because, I believe, the attendance was so poor that, for example, election of officers had to be postponed. Incidentally, 1923 is the year the Fire Department officially organized itself. Both the Library building and the first Fire House were built in 1926.

1932 - 1945, second wind

1932- Reorganized under the name BROOKHAVEN VILLAGE ASSOCIATION. Mark Briney, president; W. E. Corrigan 1st VP; Raymond Perry 2nd VP; J. H. Morton secretary, Forrest Reeve treasurer; H. H. Reddall, James Post and Tom Morrow, Jr., trustees. The association resumed its advocacy of improving the roads and sidewalks, upkeep of the war memorial, trimming branches along the roads and cleaning up at the end of Beaver Dam Road. And now they were not only paying attention to water supply issues but also advocating certain town ordinance proposals to be enacted.

1933- Tom Morrow, Jr., president; Briney and Mrs. Dominy VPs; Reeve Treasurer and Raymond Perry Secretary. After the death of Forrest Reeve Mark Briney became treasurer. Garbage disposal discussed for the first time. Road names are being discussed again. Apparently some residents didn't like some of the names that were given circa 1910.

1934- Raymond Perry, president; Reddall and George Waldron VPs, F. Majestic Secretary and Briney Treasurer. Ogden Nelson, T. Morrow and John Ewing trustees. Typewritten minutes appeared Sept 1934. 130 people attended this meeting (this is in the "new" 1928 schoolhouse). Interest in obtaining beach property is often on the agenda.

1935- HH Reddall president, Warren Huston and George Waldron VPs, secretary Mrs. Emilie Perry, treasurer JM Ewing, Raymond Perry trustee.

Worked with the library for an art exhibit fundraiser. Major expenditures of BIA were for the war memorial and the RR park maintenance.

1936- Having annual meetings mentioned for the first time. President Maurice Huston, VP Alex Kosenkranous, treasurer JM Ewing, secretary, Mrs. Majestic, cor. secretary, Mrs. Emilie Perry.

1937- Eugenie tangier Smith gives permission to dredge the river. Brookhaven Civic Association exists along Bay Road. Many letters to local governments to improve conditions in the Hamlet. Nazi Camp Siegfried in Yaphank becoming a concern. Alex Kosenkranus president, Soper and Allan Baker VPs, Raymond Perry, Secretary, Mrs. Perry corr sec, John Ewing treasurer and Oliver Wellington trustee. Soper becomes president

1938- Once again attendance at meetings has dropped off. Sidewalks were a hot item on the agenda and a committee was looking into having a bathing beach at the end of Mott Lane (It seems that a Mr. Gorman had a pavilion there in the 1920s). Dr. Brancroft president, Mrs. Norman Nelson VP, Sec Mrs. Joseph Leskowitz, trustee Jacob Valentine. Still fighting NYC water efforts.

1939- Only 270 residents in hamlet. Composition sidewalks to be installed by the WPA. Incorporation as a village was generally opposed by the BIA membership but approved incorporating the association. Memorial park now maintained (grass cut) by county. Nov 1, 1939 Wertheim owns river and bottom, gives permission to dredge

1940- BVA incorporated (possibly for the first time) can now hold property and is looking into beach property at the end of Mott Lane. An ambulance (the first for the village) was purchased by ex-president Kosenkranus with the BVA temporarily taking charge until a Fire Dept vote. President Brancroft, VP George Waldron. Ambulance company officially begins.

1941 Poor record keeping in the 1912 BIA minutes left it unclear if the BVA owned the park by the RR station. In fact, August Starke did buy that property and turned it over to the BIA. Same officers as last year. Wins of war evident Sept 1941 minutes.

1942- John Ewing president, Ruth Peters VP. Mott Lane beach property hot on the agenda. Contributing to the war effort was foremost on everyone's mind. It seems we lost the RR park property because of tax liens (BVA gets it back later). Mr. Post's widow, Mrs. Louisa Wells Post, made a written offer to let the BVA use/administer Squassux Landing, BVA accepted. Also BVA purchased Beach property at end of Mott Lane through tax default. Trustee Jake Valentine died.

1943- Previous owner redeemed Mott Lane beach property. Adam Leskowitz president, George Morse VP.

1944- Mrs. James Post died in March and her three children have proposed giving Squassux Landing to the BVA. Lawyer discovers the BVA incorporation papers were not filed properly suggested easier to reapply. Wertheim agrees to let BVA use river bottom.

1945- George Morse president, Al Nelson VP (Dr Brancroft has been a trustee for many years...busy with war medicine). By-laws were written and a committee formed to lay out docks, Kosenkranius in charge.

1946- RR station in decline, letters from BVA to no avail. Special meeting held to address duck pollution of Carmans River.

1947 President Al Nelson, Alex Kosenkranius VP, Mrs. Leskowitz secretary and Robert Lyons Treasurer. Corrigan dies. George Morse in charge of Squassux committee. Idea of a garbage district for the hamlet started. Controversy over George Morse's inquiry into returning the hamlet's name to Fire Place.

1948- George Morse resigns as chair of Squassux. Al Nelson President, Alex Kosenkranius VP, Mrs. Leskowitz secretary, Louis Decker treasurer and Dr. Brandcroft trustee (along with Wellington and P.A.Hubert). 4 meetings/yr with annual held last Sat in June. BVA is still in charge of the war memorial (aka village green). BVA still looking to buy lot at the end of Mott lane for a community beach. Explores possibility of purchasing 27 acres of what is mostly today's Fire Place Nature Preserve at the west end of Bay Road. (note: Tom Morrow is a fire commissioner). Community opposition to a proposed ten-acre dump along Arthur Avenue.

1949- still only 28 docks spaces available at Squassux, more are being added. Apparently Bob Lyons, Sr., is in charge of Squassux Landing. Village green or memorial park needs work. Interesting comments about the Brookhaven Civic Association (homeowners between Bay and Edgar Rds).

1949- BVA still concerned about NYC tapping into our water supply. Dr. Thomas Johnson President, Al Nelson VP, sec and treasurer Leskowitz and Decker, trustee PA Hubert. The BVA seems to have taken the lead in finding a way for garbage disposal suggesting an incinerator was the best solution. Representatives of a dozen civic organizations were at the BVA's August meeting as well as the Brookhaven Town supervisor and other elected officials. Town announced that they have acquired the land where the current (2006) landfill is.

1950- 50 boat spaces at Squassux. Meetings to be held every two months. Arthur's or Newey Creek was originally dredged in 1928. Dennis Puleston's name mentioned for first time. Fill, provided by Brookhaven Town, has allowed the road along the river to reach Newey's Creek. Alex Kosenkranius

president, John Tuthill VP, Mrs. Morse secretary, Mrs. Decker Treasurer, Robert Lyons, Jr., trustee.

Noteworthy is that Kosenkranius was also on Fire and Ambulance Dept boards (our ambulance company also serviced Bellport). Oct minutes said that there was a waiting list for boat slips at Squassux.

1951- survey showed that 70 hamlet residents used the bus service. February- Squassux committee, headed by George Zukoski, decided to create what is now called the center canal at Squassux. Proposed to do 100' per year. Cost would be \$2 per foot or \$200/yr for each 50' x 100 iteration. Work began in 1951. Officers for 1951: Alex Kosenkranius president, John Tuthill VP, Mrs. Frank Mills secretary, Mrs. Decker Treas., Dr Brancroft trustee.

1952- Corporal John Ewing killed in Korean war. 60 slips rented at Squassux. Alex Kosenkranius president, Bob Starke VP, Elisabeth Post Morrow treasurer, Mrs. Mills secretary, PA Hubert trustee. Lyons and Zukoski in charge of Squassux.

1953- Alex Kosenkranius passed away on March 15, 1953. Private loan (from some directors) to the BVA to complete the center canal, approx 500' more. BVA attending zoning meetings to protect the hamlet. Bob Starke president, Al Hotchkin VP, secretary Mrs. Mills, treasurer E. Morrow, directors Bob Lyons, Jr., Betty Puleston, Will Strickland, George Zukoski and Budd Pollack. Betty Puleston formed a Junior Village Association with 50 members.

1954 BVA opposes change of zone for a domestic animal refuge (Bide-a-wee) and cemetery on 48 acres along South Country Road in hamlet. 20 willow trees planted at Squassux (what happened to them?). Bob Lyons, jr., resigns Squassux committee. Toddy Englehardt takes over as dockmaster for an annual salary of \$100. 87 dock spaces available. Bob Starke president, Hotchkin VP, Robert ("Andy") Anderson secretary, Mrs. Lyons treasurer. (for some reason they went back to the one, two and three year directorship). Dennis Puleston for 3 years. BVA membership boundaries discussed.

1955- officers same as 1954. Bud Pollack, PA Hubert and Dr Brancroft directors. Incorporation as a village discussed, three special meetings held.

(1956- No minutes found)

1957- BVA supports Fire Island National Park idea. Directors same as 1955 except RC Anderson now both secretary & treasurer. Seems Southaven was still a different mail district.

1958- Election: Starke president, Hotchkins VP, Ann Simpson secretary, Anderson treasurer. Trustees Phil Hubert, Dennis Puleston, Bud Pollack, Dr, Brancroft and Jack Floyd. Strickland and Zukoski continue as board members. Starke proposes BVA buy Fire Island Beach property, much time

and consideration given. Noteworthy is that there is no mention of the Brookhaven RR station closing.

1959- Wellington dies. A Fire Island parcel, which would ultimately become the Fire Place Beach Club, was found adjacent and to the west of the Old Inlet Club. Parcel is 300' wide by 650' long costing \$30,000. Legally, because the BVA is a membership corporation, it cannot buy this parcel. Bob Starke forms the Matthabank Land Holding Company (Starke told me that Matthabank is the native American name for Fire Island). Stocks, \$25, and bonds, \$100, and the corporation would aim to limit sales to people living in the newly defined BVA defined boundaries. The BVA would in turn rent the property from the Matthabank corporation, which it named the Fire Place Beach Club, and charge Beach Club members an annual fee. Beach club opened August 30, 1959. Bob Starke declined to run again as president. Al Hotchkins president, Jack Floyd VP, Arvid Friberg secretary and Ann Simpson treasurer. Bob Starke and Bud Lacey reelected trustees. Bud Pollack and Betty Puleston into 3-year terms.

1960- Zoning issues involving the Washington Lodge, Tiger Nursery and residential areas of the hamlet were a concern and the BVA attended hearings. Facilities (dock, boardwalk, bath house, etc) built at the beach club. There were 120 members of the FPBC, dues were \$15. Planning for the west canal begins.

1961- Incorporation as a Village was bought up again. Much concentration on Squassux Landing and Beach Property. Al Hotchkin president, Jack Floyd VP, Ann Simpson treasurer, A. Friberg secretary. West canal mentioned (6/24 p3), when was it built?

1962- Arvid Friberg president, James Still VP, Ann Simpson treasurer. Claire Pongonis secretary. Al Hotchkin, Bob Starke, Betty Puleston and Bud Pollack were trustees.

1963-1969- minutes missing. However, a list of directors, the 1968 Matthabank dissolution papers and some other misc papers from this era were in the file. In short, The Fire Island National Seashore began in 1964 and unincorporated areas within its boundaries were condemned and bought by FINS including the Old Inlet and Fire Place Beach Clubs. However, both Old Inlet and FPB were allowed a 5-year lease-backs with a \$500/yr rent. Lease expires at the end of 1973.

1970- Bud Pollack president, Michael McKeown VP, May Strickland secretary, Ann Simpson treasurer. Squassux Landing and the FPBC are the main things on the agenda.

1971-72- only one set of minutes for each year, not much on agenda except Squassux and the FPBC. Pollack still president.

1973- Dick Watson president, Charles Quappe VP, May Strickland secretary, Ann Simpson treasurer. Bud Still, Ed Reilly, Ben Savage, Frank Simpson, George Zukoski, and Bud Pollack trustees. Preservation, in particular the Carmans River, becomes an important issue with the BVA.

1974- Lease for the Fire Place Beach was extended for a year, by verbal agreement, same for the Old Inlet Club. Officers: Dick Watson president, Ben Savage VP, Strickland and Simpson secretary and treasurer, Marilyn McKeown, June Hudis, George Zukoski, Budd Pollack, Charles Waldron, James Still, Ed Reilly and Bob Starke.

1975- Ben Savage president, Nancy Schafer VP, Ann Quinn Secretary, Jack Floyd treasurer (for the next 17 years). Directors Marilyn McKeown, Ed Reilly, Bob Starke, George Zukoski, Bud Pollack, June Hudis, Dick Watson, James Still and Charles Waldron. Stanley Negreski making trouble at Squassux, pointed a gun at Ron Kinsella. Stanley's dogs also receiving many complaints. Landfill issues begin. BVA promised by commissioner the landfill will not go any higher.

Apparently no lease back renewal for the Fire Place Beach Club. However, as a gesture of good will, FINS will leave the Old Inlet Beach Club dock, boardwalk and building for general public use until nature claims them.

1976- directors same as last year. Application made to do maintenance dredging in the center canal. Much vandalism at Squassux, decision to hire a guard. Gate at entrance with lock installed. Almost the whole year was dedicated to Squassux.

1977- Nancy Schafer, president, Marilyn McKeown VP, Ann Quinn secretary, Jack Floyd treasurer. Directors: G. Zukoski, Bob Quinn, Jim Hurst, Dick Watson, James Still, Charles Waldron, Ben Savage, Ed Reilly, and Bob Starke. Again, the year was almost entirely preoccupied with running the Landing. Of interest, the County had taken over the maintenance of the war memorial many years ago and it was now in disrepair as reported in the minutes. A letter to the county received action. However, within a few years the Fire Dept will take responsibility for it.

1978- Toddy Englehardt becomes dockmaster again. Board: Nancy Schafer president, Marilyn McKeown VP, Floyd treasurer, Quinn secretary. Directors Ben Savage, Jen (nee Puleston), JEB Barry, Jim Hurst, Dick Watson, James Still and C. Waldron. Many questions about the landfill. Incorporation, as well as not for profit status, was being explored again (JEB).

1979- Jim Hurst president, Charles Waldron VP, Quinn secretary, Floyd treasurer. Directors: Nancy Schafer, Ron Kinsella, John Bland, Ben Savage, Jen Puleston, JEB Barry, Dick Watson, Betty Fuka, and Bob Quinn.

1980- Jim Hurst president. Don Zimmer, John Bland and Ton Giammarino join the board.

Landfill issues dominate the next 12 years. I will end here because the past 25 years is relatively recent history and because the minutes are in good order, have been digitized and are included with this summary.

--Marty Van Lith