



PRESERVING THE HOMAN-GERARD HOUSE: A 60-YEAR JOURNEY

On April 14, 2018, Preservation Long Island partnered with the Yaphank Historical Society and Suffolk County Parks Historic Services to host a behind-the-scenes tour at the Homan-Gerard House in Yaphank. Part of our new “Preservation in Progress” event series, the tour highlighted recent restoration work at the property.

This event was especially exciting due to Preservation Long Island’s deep relationship with the house, which began in the early 1960s with Philip H. Dunbar, our first executive director. Originally from Worcester, Massachusetts, Dunbar was a World War II veteran who studied at Dartmouth College and Yale University. Before joining the Society for the Preservation of Long Island Antiquities (now Preservation Long Island) in 1961, he served as assistant curator of collections at Colonial Williamsburg. Dunbar departed the Society in 1963 to start a 20-year career at the Connecticut Historical Society museum in Hartford.

During Dunbar’s brief but significant tenure with our organization, he collaborated with James Van Alst, an accomplished architect based in Centerport who restored Cutchogue’s Old House in 1939. Van Alst volunteered in 1961 to assist Dunbar with preserving the Bayles-Sweezy House in Setauket, a structure now owned and interpreted by the Three Village Historical Society. In 1962, Dunbar and Van Alst visited Yaphank to study the vacant Homan-Gerard House, which was then owned by Kenneth Hard and known as the Hard House.

Dunbar and Van Alst’s research on the property was later continued by Barbara Van Liew, a pioneering Long Island preservationist who prepared detailed surveys of historic buildings in Yaphank and across Long Island between the 1960s and



The Homan-Gerard House, May 1962. Front view of main structure (west facade) with entrance porch (Photo from Preservation Long Island’s archive).



The Homan-Gerard House, October 2018. Front view of main structure (west facade).

1980s (she also served as editor of *Preservation Notes* from 1965 to 2001).

Today, nearly 60 years after efforts to preserve the Homan-Gerard House began, we are thrilled that Preservation Long Island's archive of photos and research materials assembled by Dunbar, Van Alst, and Van Liew is providing valuable insight for the successful restoration of one of Long Island's brightest architectural gems.



Historical accordion lath revealed during interior restoration. This form of hand-split wooden lath was commonly used for plastering walls until about the mid-19th century.



Restoration underway at the Homan-Gerard House, April 14, 2018.



(Left) Participants gathered outside the Homan-Gerard House during our April 2018 "Preservation in Progress" event. We were joined by project experts and consultants who explained the detailed process of repairing and restoring the structure's irreplaceable architectural features and historic fabric.

PRESERVATION NOTES NEWSLETTER

Vol. LIII Nos. 1 and 2 Fall 2018
Iss 0885-7326
Sarah Kautz, Editor

Published by
Preservation Long Island

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Credo: It has become apparent that those of us who are interested in conservation and preservation need to be alerted to the destruction of the irreplaceable values and environments that comprise our heritage and to the actions proposed to avert such threats. These notes are designed to raise awareness.

Preservation Notes is listed in the Avery Index to Architectural Periodicals.



Restoration underway at the rear parlor/dining room interior, 2018 (Photo by William P. Steele, courtesy of the Yaphank Historical Society, detail).

REVISITING HOWARD C. SHERWOOD'S OLD JAYNE HOUSE

This year, Preservation Long Island celebrated its 70th anniversary with a new name, a new look, and a new exhibition on the life of our founder, Howard Cocks Sherwood (1870–1957), whose legacy continues to influence our work today. In 1948, Sherwood bequeathed to what was then the Society for the Preservation of Long Island Antiquities (SPLIA) his diverse collection of early American antiques and an archive of his personal papers, diaries, and photographs. He also left us his beloved 18th-century country house in Setauket, the Sherwood-Jayne Farm, which remains an important example of historical Long Island architecture and preservation practice.



Portrait of Howard C. Sherwood (1870–1957), 1900 (Gift of Howard Sherwood, detail).

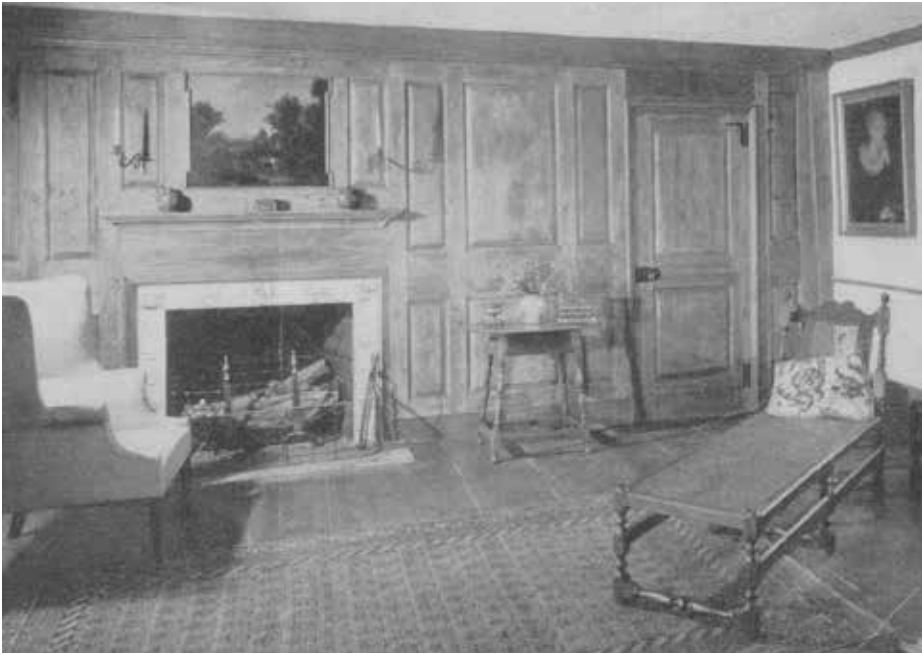
After nearly 200 years of Jayne family ownership, Sherwood purchased the “old Jayne house” from Lillie Jayne in 1908. Originally built around 1730 for Mathias Jayne (1686–1768), the two-story “salt-box” with integral lean-to experienced just one major alteration during the 18th and 19th centuries. Following the Revolutionary War, William Jayne (1732–1802), a Loyalist, returned to Setauket and doubled the size of the house, transforming it from a “half-house” into a more fashionable center-chimney house with flanking chambers. Shortly after moving in, Sherwood expanded the structure one last time, adding a new wing and dormer with the help of architect Arthur Nash (1987–1969), a classmate from Phillips Exeter Academy and Harvard College. Sherwood’s substan-



Preservation Long Island’s new signs were installed this year at the Sherwood-Jayne Farm, featuring the organization’s new name and new look created by Malcolm Gear Designers.



Howard Sherwood and his sister, Jennie Dickinson Sherwood (1869–1953), at the Jayne House around 1910 (Gift of Howard C. Sherwood, detail). The siblings often vacationed together and shared a home and an apartment. For almost 50 years, they split their time between Manhattan and East Setauket. Sherwood later removed the circa 1840 Greek Revival stoop in an effort to bring the house closer to its 18th-century appearance.



Southwest bedroom, 1947, *The Magazine Antiques*. Sherwood acquired this room's paneling from a circa 1750 townhouse at 29 1/2 Cherry Street in lower Manhattan, supposedly where George Washington's aides resided during his first year as president when New York City was the United States capital. Incorporating architectural relics with links to patriotic heroes enhanced the significance of Sherwood's home while downplaying its actual, less reverential Revolutionary War association with William Jayne, a British Loyalist.

tial new wing and dormer incorporated a modern kitchen, bathrooms, extra storage space, and bedrooms for staff. He was careful not to disturb the visual integrity of the historic facade, which retained its original circa 1785 windows, denticulate cornice, and Dutch double-door.

Like many antiquarians of his time, Sherwood's interest extended to interior elements, acquiring architectural woodwork salvaged from other historic properties to install at the Jayne House. In the living room, he added pine floorboards salvaged from Bridgehampton's "Old Wick's Tavern" (demolished in 1940), a pine corner cupboard from a center-chimney house north of Syracuse, and fielded paneling rescued from a nearby house purported to be the birthplace of Benjamin Tallmadge (1754–1835), General George Washington's chief intelligence officer and leader of the Culper Spy Ring. The Tallmadge house was located on the south corner of Gnarled Hollow Road and Old Town Road before succumbing to fire sometime after 1926.

For much of the interior work, Sherwood enlisted the expertise of noted Colonial Revival architect Joseph Everett Chandler (1863–1946), who had worked at the Paul Revere House in Boston (1906) and *The House of Seven Gables* in Salem (1917). Chandler advised Sherwood on the pine mantle he purchased in 1936 for the fireplace in the original lean-to kitchen, which Sherwood used as a dining room with bar—created by projecting the bay opposite the fireplace and repurposing additional pine from the Tallmadge house and a floorboard from the attic. Tallow candles and dried corn hung



(Above) Living Room, 2018. This room features paneling salvaged from a nearby 18th-century house thought to be the birthplace of Major Benjamin Tallmadge, George Washington's director of intelligence and leader of the Culper Spy Ring.

(Right) Living Room, 1947, *The Magazine Antiques*. Founded in 1922, *The Magazine Antiques* brought early American antiques and design to a wide audience. The Jayne House appeared in its June 1947 issue, proclaiming: "The old character of the house is enhanced by the old furniture, fabrics, and decorations with which Mr. Sherwood has furnished his Long Island farmhouse."



from faux rafters and hand-wrought furnishings filled the room meant to evoke a colonial-era kitchen.

When he removed layers of old 19th-century wallpaper in the circa 1785 parlor and chamber above, Sherwood uncovered one of the structure's most significant decorative features: hand-painted murals on plaster featuring leafy vines, roses, and neoclassical swags and tassels. Likely inspired by ancient Roman frescoes and done for William Jayne by an itinerant painter, the murals were a less costly alternative to imported French wallpapers. Recognizing their significance, Sherwood commissioned painter Emile Gruppé (1896–1978) to restore them in 1916.

Forty years after he bought the Jayne House, Sherwood spearheaded the creation of our organization in 1948 to preserve it for future generations. Today, Preservation Long Island remains the proud steward of its founder's beloved Setauket homestead, where visitors enjoy great examples of 18th-century architecture and design assembled nearly a century ago by one of Long Island's early advocates for historic preservation.

*-by Lauren Brincat, Curator
Preservation Long Island*



*Sherwood-Jayne Farm, 2011 (Photo by Bruce Campbell). The magnificent black walnut tree (*Juglans nigra*) in front of the house is one of the largest on Long Island. After it suffered some limb breakage during a severe ice storm in 1940, Sherwood had the branches wired to prevent future damage. Based on its enormous size, this tree was most likely planted well over 200 years ago during the late 18th century, around the time William Jayne expanded the house.*



(Above) Dining Room, 2018. While working on the house in 1916, Sherwood uncovered striking hand-painted murals dating to around 1785.



(Left) Free Hand Wall Decoration 1935/1942, by Michael Lauretano, watercolor and graphite on paperboard, Index of American Design, 1943.8.7772 (Courtesy of the National Gallery of Art). Lauretano visited the Jayne House murals in the 1930s to create watercolor renderings for the Index of American Design, a Depression-era initiative of the Federal Art Project (1935–43) that supported artists through the documentation of early American design and craftsmanship.

LONG ISLAND'S LATEST NATIONAL REGISTER LISTINGS

This year, eight sites in Nassau and Suffolk Counties were listed on the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) as of October 2018, including:

•**The Brentwood Motherhouse of the Sisters of St. Joseph.** Purchased in 1896, this 211-acre site includes the former 125-room Austral Hotel. Today, the property features a convent, chapel, college, and other significant structures.

•**Smith-Ransome Japanese Bridge, Shelter Island.** Designed by Ernest L. Ransome, an engineer and inventor, this 1905 bridge is one of the last traces of the estate of Francis Marion Smith, owner of the Pacific Coast Borax Company.

•**Wading River Radio Station.** A historic house used as a secret FBI radio transmission station between 1942 and 1945 during WWII.

•**Amagansett U.S. Life-Saving and Coast Guard Station.** A shingle-style structure built in 1902; operated by the U.S. Life-Saving Service (1902–1915) and the U.S. Coast Guard (1955–1944).

•**Pine Hollow Cemetery, Oyster Bay.** A late 19th- and 20th-century cemetery used by the Pine Hollow AME Church and local communities of color.

•**Hempstead Town Hall.** An interconnected complex of Colonial Revival and Modern structures. Built in 1918, with additions in 1929 and 1950, it re-



Wardencllyffe Laboratory, early 1900s (Courtesy of the Tesla Society). The tower at Wardencllyffe, built in 1901 for Tesla's visionary experiments in wireless transmission, was demolished in 1917.

flects the historical development of the town and its civic architecture.

•**Wardencllyffe Laboratory, Shoreham.** Designed by Stanford White to accommodate Nikola Tesla's unique scientific needs. Tesla conducted experiments here between 1901 and 1915.

•**Mitchel Air Base and Flight Line.** One of the largest and most important American military aviation bases of the 20th century.

Congratulations to this year's NRHP nomination sponsors, supporters, and property owners!

The NRHP plays a key role in preservation planning and cultural resource management. In addition to honorific recognition, listed sites are eligible for certain federal tax credit programs and grants for historic preservation. Owners of NRHP-listed properties may also be eligible for a 20% investment tax credit for the certified rehabilitation of income-producing certified historic structures such as commercial, industrial, or rental residential buildings. For more information about the NRHP, please visit Preservation Long Island's website.

NATIONAL REGISTER LISTING SPOTLIGHT

We are pleased to welcome two nomination sponsors as guest contributors to introduce their newly listed NRHP sites.

WADING RIVER RADIO STATION

Originally built in the early 1900s, Wading River's secluded Benson House stands near a soaring bluff overlooking the Long Island Sound. The house is now part of Camp DeWolfe, a retreat center and Christian summer camp owned and operated by the Episcopal Diocese of Long Island since the 1940s.

While exploring Camp DeWolfe's history to commemorate its recent 70th anniversary, staff uncovered the building's covert past as the Wading River Radio Station, a top-secret WWII-era FBI communications site. Inspired by the discovery, they continued to investigate the site with help from Jennifer Betsworth,

a Historic Preservation Specialist at the NYS Historic Preservation Office, and Dr. Ray Batvinis, a historian from the Society of Former Special Agents of the FBI. The team's research led to a successful nomination for the NRHP in the spring of 2018.

Between January 1942 and June 1945, a group of FBI agents and radio technicians secretly lived and worked at the house, transmitting communications designed to confuse Axis leadership about Allied operations. Their broadcasts helped deceive Nazi high command about the details of the Allied invasion of Normandy on June 6, 1944, while other messages misled Imperial Japanese forces about American military activity in the Pacific. Although the FBI's secret radio station faced some practical difficulties at the Benson House, these challenges were managed by Richard Millen, an agent



Benson House, a.k.a. the Wading River Radio Station, 2018 (Courtesy of Camp DeWolfe).

expertly trained in radio engineering. To avoid drawing unwanted attention from the local power utility, Millen camouflaged the radio equipment's high energy consumption by installing a diesel engine in the basement, which effectively sup-



Richard Millen, ca. 1940s (Courtesy of Camp DeWolfe). FBI Special Agent Millen oversaw the secret WWII communications program at Wading River's secluded Benson House.

plemented their energy needs. He also attached a car muffler to quiet the engine noise, along with a hose to vent the exhaust out a window.

You can learn more about Millen and the FBI's clandestine 1940s radio station in Wading River by visiting the Benson House at Camp DeWolfe, where a variety of new displays about the site's exciting role in WWII are on view.

*-by Matthew Tees
Executive Director, Camp DeWolfe*

MITCHEL FIELD AIR BASE AND FLIGHT LINE

In May 2018, Mitchel Field Air Base and Flight Line Historic District was added to the National Register of Historic Places, officially recognizing its role as one of the largest and most important centers of American aviation from 1918 until 1961. The Cradle of Aviation Museum sponsored the district's successful nomination, working closely with Jennifer Betsworth at the NYS Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation, towards listing on the National Register.

Situated in the central portion of East Garden City, a hamlet of the Town of Hempstead, Mitchel Field's location attracted early aviation pioneers thanks to its proximity to New York City and favorable winds along the flat terrain of Hempstead Plains. Throughout the 20th century, its landscape and architecture evolved together with advances in aeronautical technology and changing military needs, such as anti-submarine air patrols along Long



Mitchel Field, October 31, 1932 (Courtesy of the Cradle of Aviation Museum). Aerial view of the Bachelor Officers Quarters and surrounding area under construction.

Island and fighter wings to protect New York City during WWII. Today, a total of 110 Colonial Revival-style structures built at Mitchel Field between 1928 and 1932 survive in remarkable condition. These include base housing for military personnel and officers, an enlisted men's club, an officer's club, a non-commissioned officer's club, as well as an operations building, hospital, brig, and 23 other structures.

After the U.S. Army closed Mitchel Field in 1961, new construction for Nassau Community College (founded in 1959) transformed the 1,117-acre airbase. Many historic structures were adaptively reused for college classrooms, including the former Continental Air Command Head Quarters. Other buildings were also repurposed for Nassau County's Museum Row, which now includes the Cradle of Aviation Museum, the Long Island Children's Museum, and the Nassau County Firefighters Museum. Museum Row's Reckson Visitor Center, a four-story glass atrium, was added between Hangars 2 and 3 in the 1990s, introducing modern architecture to the base's iconic structures.

Mitchel Field's distinguished place in American aviation history is celebrated at the Cradle of Aviation Museum, as are the lives of the men and women who once served and lived there. Since the museum first opened in 1980, many children of military parents have visited and asked



Mitchel Field's namesake, John Purroy Mitchel (1879-1918) (Courtesy of the Cradle of Aviation Museum). A former New York City mayor, Mitchel died training for the U.S. Air Service during WWI.

about the location of Mitchel Field's hospital, hoping to see where they were born. They are always delighted to discover the hospital building still stands virtually unchanged. In fact, all of the buildings within the newly listed historic district remain essentially intact, providing a time capsule of Long Island's outstanding aviation heritage.

*-by Gary Monti
Director of Museum Operations
Cradle of Aviation Museum*