

*George Washington's 1790 Grand Tour of Long Island's North Shore  
And The Spy Trail*

This brochure was created as an enhancement to our exhibit. It was published by the Manhasset Public Library History Center.

Maggie Gough, Library Director  
Antonia S. Mattheou, Archivist

2024



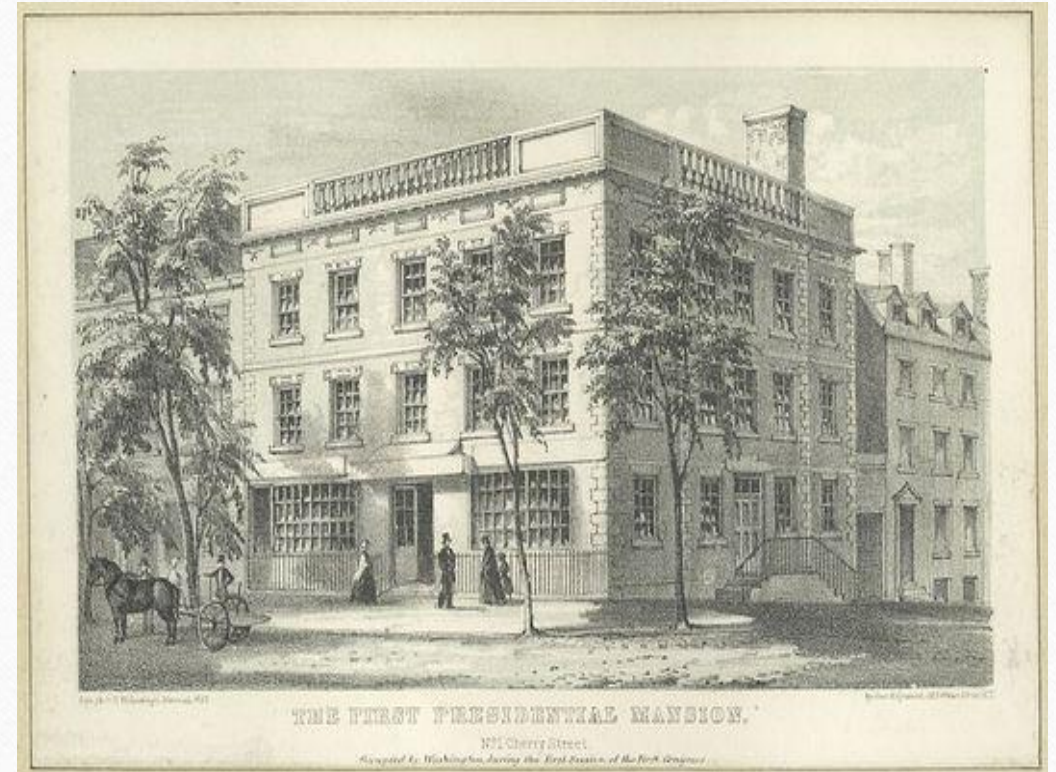
**George Washington's 1790 Grand Tour  
of Long Island's North Shore**



# Samuel Osgood House - The first Presidential Mansion

While Washington D.C. was still being built, George Washington resided and governed from New York City. The first Presidential Mansion was the Samuel Osgood House at 1 Cherry Street in Manhattan, which Washington occupied from April 23, 1789, to February 23, 1790. The Osgood House was in the most congested part of Manhattan, near the port along the East River and Washington found it cramped for his presidential household. He had been living there a week prior to his April 30, 1789, inauguration as first President of the United States.

This house was demolished in 1856.





## Alexander Macomb House - Second Presidential Mansion

President George Washington occupied the Macomb Mansion from February 23 to August 30, 1790, during New York City's two-year term as the national capital. Located at 39–41 Broadway in Lower Manhattan, it was one of three houses erected in 1787. The fifty-six-foot-wide mansion included four stories plus attic space. On entering, one found a large hall with a continuous flight of stairs to the top of the house. On each side of the hall were spacious, high-ceilinged rooms, which were always referred to by Washington as "public rooms." From the rear of the main rooms, glass doors opened onto a balcony giving an uninterrupted view of the Hudson River. The presidential household functioned with a staff of about twenty, composed of wage workers, indentured servants and enslaved servants. Slavery was legal in New York. Washington brought seven enslaved Africans from Mount Vernon to work in his presidential household: William Lee, Christopher Sheels, Austin Giles, Oney Judge, Moll and Paris. The last former presidential mansion, the Macomb House, was demolished in 1940.





While residing in New York City, President Washington embarked on a Grand Tour of Long Island, during which he visited his many friends and supporters who had fought bravely alongside him during the Revolutionary War, in particular, members of the legendary Culper Spy Ring.

President Washington had a great interest in agriculture as he himself was a farmer. He owned a large plantation at Mount Vernon, Virginia, and was known to experiment with new farming techniques. During the Grand Tour of Long Island in 1790, he traveled to several towns and noted in his diary the conditions of the land.

The Tour began in New Utrecht (Brooklyn) and route took them through the north and south shores of Long Island. Washington visited the towns of Hempstead, Copiague, West Bay Shore, West Sayville, Patchogue, Setauket, Smithtown, Huntington, and Roslyn. This presentation features his North Shore route. Washington's traveling entourage consisted of two gentlemen on horseback as escort, a coach with four horses in which the President rode, followed by his cook and the cook's wife in an old-fashioned chaise, drawn by one horse, with the culinary utensils suspended from the axle.



# George Washington's coach carriage



Engraved according to Act of Congress, A. D. 1875, by A. D. CHAMBERLAIN, in the Office of the Librarian of Congress at Washington.

J. H. DANIELS del.



**Washington arrived at Setauket on Thursday, April 22, and stayed overnight at Captain Austin Roe's home and tavern. This establishment stood on North Country Road, now Route 25A west of Bayview Avenue.**

Roe, who had continued to manage the tavern after the Revolution, hosted the President during his night in Setauket. Tradition has it that Roe was so excited to see Washington, that he fell off his horse and broke his leg. Ironically, Roe had ridden thousands of miles as a courier in service of the Culper Spy Ring.

**Austin Roe's house and tavern**





## Widow Blidenberg's house

On Friday April 23, at 8:00 am, George Washington's entourage left Roe's House and travelled northwest 10 miles to Smithtown where they baited their horses at Widow Blidenberg's house. The Widow's connection with the spy ring was established based on a correspondence from Abraham Woodhull of Setauket. In his letter, Woodhull wrote that as of September 12, 1780, the Seventieth British Dragoons were encamped in Widow Blidenberg's orchard. Her proximity to the British made her a valuable informant for the patriot cause.





Continuing another 15 miles from Smithtown, at mid-day, the President and his party arrived in Huntington. The British occupied Huntington from 1776 to 1884 and during those years the residents had suffered greatly. They occupied the only Church that existed in the Town, turning it into a storage depot and stable. In 1782, British Col. Benjamin Thompson of the Queens Rangers tore the church down and used the timbers to build Fort Golgotha on the Old Burial Hill Cemetery. The church bell was taken and used on the British Warship, the *Swan*. Head stones from the Old Burial Hill Cemetery were used by the British soldiers to bake bread. During the occupation, Huntington residents who refused to take the oath of allegiance to the British King had to flee to Connecticut. Those who stayed suffered under the yoke of Tory oppression.



Arriving at the Town's center, known as 'Town Spot', Washington thanked the residents for their support during the Revolutionary War.

He dined at Widow Platt's Tavern on East Street, today's Park Avenue.

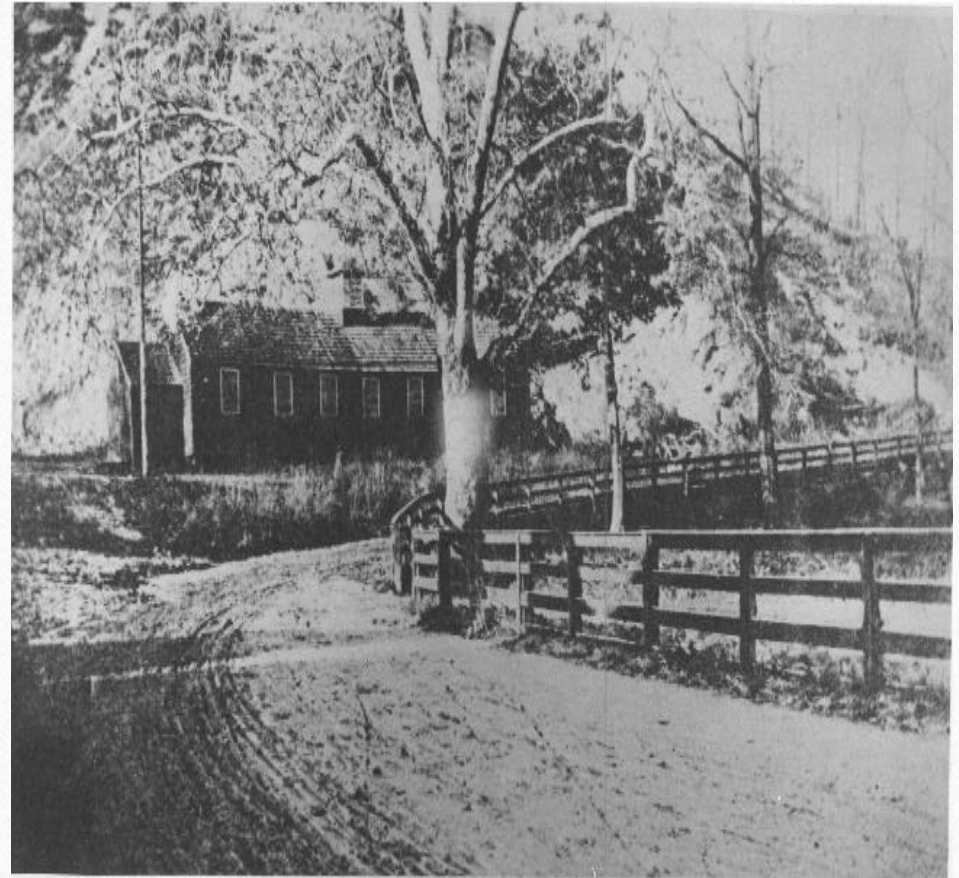


*Platt's Tavern*



Later that day, April 23, Washington passed through Cold Spring Harbor on his way to Oyster Bay. Noticing that the Bungtown School was under construction, he stopped, dismounted from his horse and helped the workers to lift one of the rafters. Washington, known for his thriftiness, generously left a dollar to treat the working men.

The school was torn down in 1898. A cedar desk-top 9 feet, 7.5 inches long, by 11.5 wide and 1.8 inches thick was saved and it is now on display at the present "Bungtown School". Cold Spring Harbor was a whaling port. Bungtown got its name from "bung" the wooden stopper for whale-oil casks.



**The Bungtown School at Cold Spring Harbor**



**From the Town of Huntington, Washington rode another 7 miles west to Oyster Bay where he stopped and spent the night at Captain's Daniel Young homestead. It is possible that Young had played a part in the Spy Ring as a secret agent for the patriots.**





**At that time, Hempstead and Oyster Bay were considered parts of 'Queens County' as were the towns of Flushing, Newtown and Jamacia. Nassau County was established in January 1899. North Hempstead was separated from Hempstead in 1784 as a result of the Revolutionary experience. When the British occupied Hempstead, residents from the Northern part were sympathetic to the patriot cause and were treated harshly by the occupying militia in comparison to those in the southern part who supported the British Tories.**



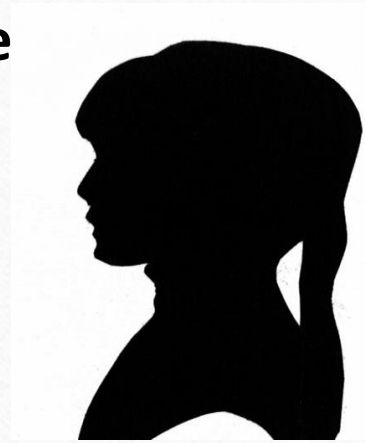
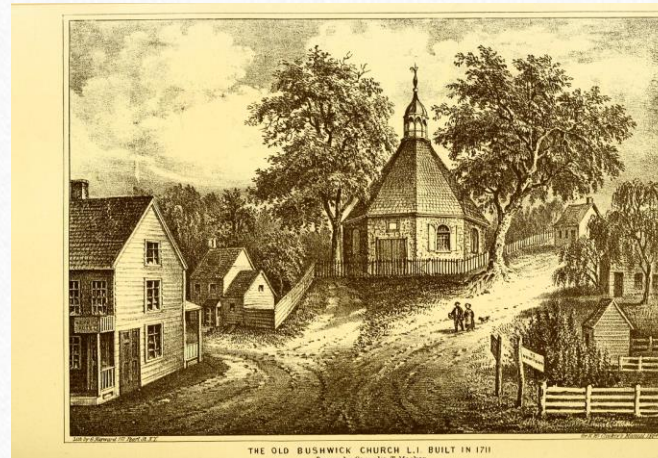
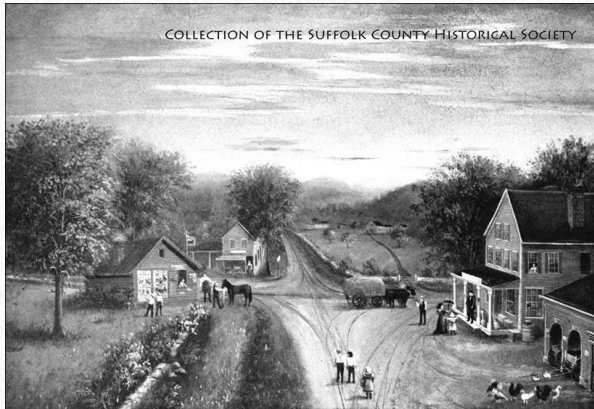
Daniel Young was a Captain in the local militia who signed on to support the patriot cause. He participated in the disastrous patriot loss at Battle of Long Island in August of 1776, resulting in seven years of British military occupation and seizure of local property and resources. He returned to the house and lands in Cove Neck (Oyster Bay area) that he inherited from his uncle. During the occupation, Young was coerced into taking the oath of allegiance to the British King and became a Captain in the Royal Militia (Queens County Militia). Why would Washington stay with this former loyalist? Tasked with obtaining fire wood and supplies for the British troops and traveling widely along the north shore, Young had ample opportunity to convey information to the Culper network. This would also demonstrate Washington's hope for the new nation putting aside old grievances and moving towards a new American future.



**Captain Daniel Young house**



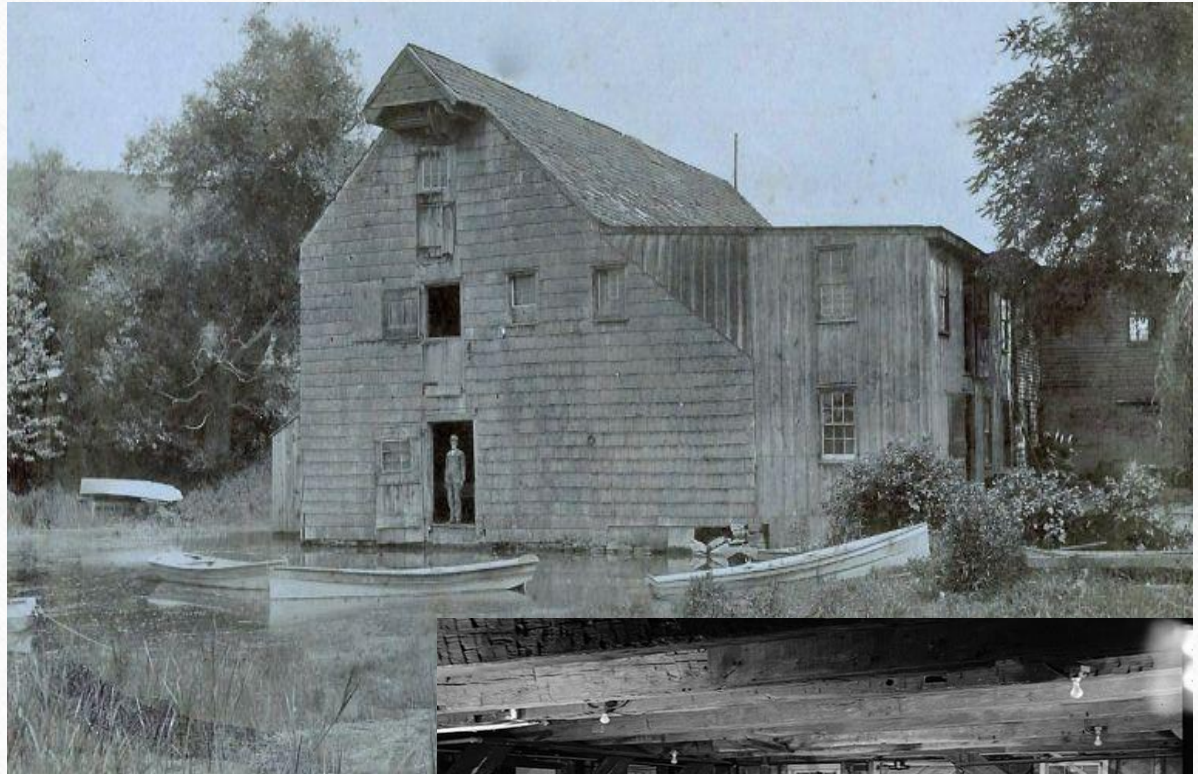
**On April 24, Saturday morning at 6:00am, Washington left Young's home. On his way out, Washington gave Keziah, Young's 17-year-old daughter, a grandfatherly kiss on the cheek.**





He passed Mosquito Cove (the original name of Glen Cove) and enjoyed a breakfast of roasted shellfish with the Onderdonk (nee Underdonk) at the head of Hempstead Harbor (today's Roslyn).

Hendrick Underdonk had a grist mill and two paper mills in Roslyn. He established the first paper mill in New York in 1773. Washington was interested in the mills as he had grist and paper mills at Mt. Vernon. Washington visited the Onderdonk paper mill and took the opportunity to make a sheet of paper.

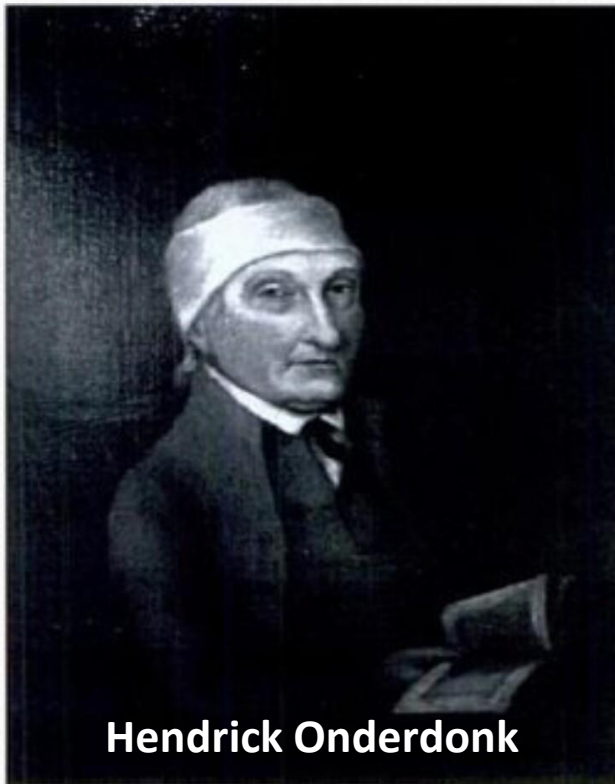


**Roslyn Grist Mill**





Hendrick Onderdonk arrived in Roslyn in 1752 and began his career establishing a country store. He was the largest property owner in Roslyn in the mid-1700s and owner of the adjacent Roslyn Grist Mill and the Onderdonk Paper Mill in Gerry Park. In 1769 he was elected supervisor of the Town of Hempstead and used his position to forward the patriotic cause.



**Hendrick Onderdonk**



**Hendrick Onderdonk's house**



The original house dates back to the 1750's. Passing through many generations of Onderdonks by the early 1900s, Hendrick Onderdonk's house became a restaurant named "Washington Tavern". It was later renamed "Washington Manor". The restaurant was renovated in 2012, and was given the name "Hendrick's Tavern".



**Hendrick's Tavern**



**Leaving Hempstead and the Onderdonks, President Washington rode west for about 12 miles to Flushing where he stopped and dined. From there he continued on to Newtown, then to Brooklyn Heights, and on to Manhattan by ferry. He was back in the Presidential home, Alexander Macomb House, before sundown.**



# **The Spy Trail**



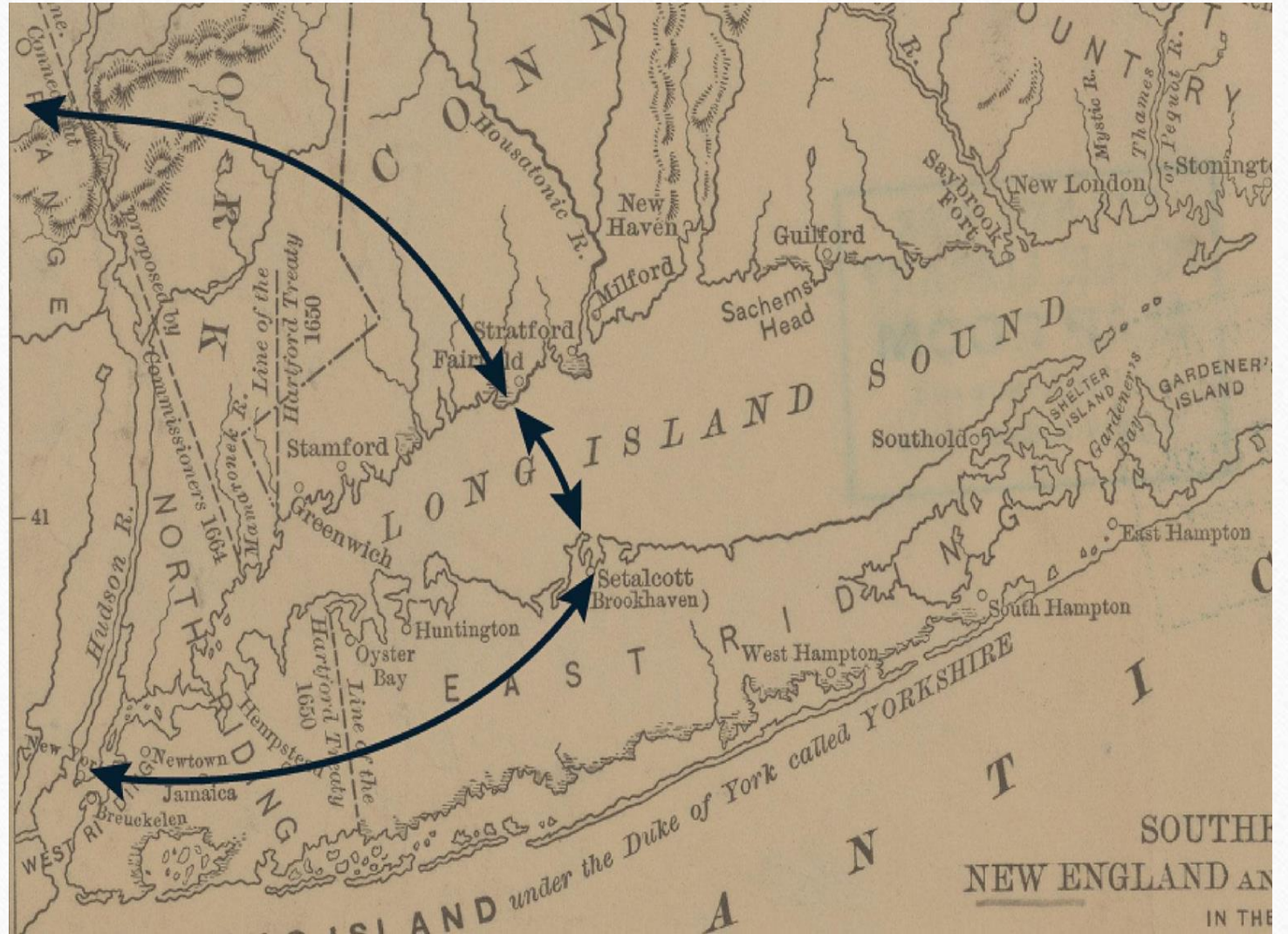
## **Culper Spy Ring Members**

**The Spy Ring consisted of core agents with numerous others operating as sub-agents, couriers, and support personnel. Ring members had much in common. They were New Yorkers – mostly from Long Island – and knew each other as friends, neighbors, or family. Most had suffered cruelties at the hands of the British. Collecting intelligence on British forces in New York City and Long Island, the Culper spies provided Washington with a wealth of secrets about British plans, unit strengths, and defenses. The discoveries aided Washington's war efforts and in keeping the Continental Army intact. After the Revolution, the names of the Long Island agents gradually became known, except for Robert Townsend known as Culper Junior. In 1930, Long Island historian Morton Pennypacker noted a similarity in the handwriting in Culper Junior's letters to Washington and Robert Townsend's letters found in a trunk in his Oyster Bay home.**



# Spy Route

Route used by Culper Spy Ring members to send intelligence to General Washington's headquarters in New York and New Jersey. This route was used by Washington to convey information to the Spy Ring members about the British activities in Manhattan and on Long Island.





# Code Names, Ciphers and Secret Ink

---

Washington code name for the spy ring was “Culper” an adaptation of Culpeper, the small Virginia community where he had worked as a surveyor in his youth. At Washington’s instruction, members of the spy ring fabricated letters and inserted messages between the lines using invisible ink that was invented by chemist James Jay, brother of John Jay. To prevent the British from decoding intercepted messages a number code dictionary was used substituting numbers for people, places, and things. Members of the Ring were subjected to intense British scrutiny, and though several were arrested during the course of the war, not a single member was ever unmasked.



A page from the number code dictionary

A	B	C	D	E	F			
a	1	behalf	62	date	120	embark	175	gunner
an	2	billed	63	day	121	employ	176	gunny
all	3	bottom	64	dead	122	exploit	177	gunpowder
at	4	bounty	65	de	123	enemy	178	gully
and	5	bondage	66	die	124	example	179	guinea
art.	6	borrow	67	damage	125	embassy	180	gallant
arm	7	bregade	68	doct	126	engagement	181	gasp
about	8	butcher	69	doct	127	evacuate	182	gratful
above	9	bullet	70	drum	128			glacier
about	10	battalion	71	doct	129			general
above	11	british	72	disput	130			garrison
advise	12			disput	131			gentleman
advise	13			disput	132			glorious
advise	14			disput	133			gradual
advise	15			disput	134			granadine
advise	16			disput	135			
advise	17			disput	136			
advise	18			disput	137			
advise	19			disput	138			
advise	20			disput	139			
advise	21			disput	140			
advise	22			disput	141			
advise	23			disput	142			
advise	24			disput	143			
advise	25			disput	144			
advise	26			disput	145			
advise	27			disput	146			
advise	28			disput	147			
advise	29			disput	148			
advise	30			disput	149			
advise	31			disput	150			
advise	32			disput	151			
advise	33			disput	152			
advise	34			disput	153			
advise	35			disput	154			
advise	36			disput	155			
advise	37			disput	156			
advise	38			disput	157			
advise	39			disput	158			
advise	40			disput	159			
advise	41			disput	160			
advise	42			disput	161			
advise	43			disput	162			
advise	44			disput	163			
advise	45			disput	164			
advise	46			disput	165			
advise	47			disput	166			
advise	48			disput	167			
advise	49			disput	168			
advise	50			disput	169			
advise	51			disput	170			
advise	52			disput	171			
advise	53			disput	172			



## *Nathan Hale* First American Spy

*Nathan Hale* was born on *June 6, 1755*. At the age of fourteen, he and his brother Enoch were sent to Yale College. Engaging in the struggle for liberty, he joined the Connecticut militia and soon was promoted to Captain. By September 8, 1776, Nathan volunteered to go behind enemy lines and report on the movements of the British troops on Long Island. Disguised as an unemployed Dutch schoolmaster and carrying with him his Yale diploma, he spent several days behind enemy lines. On the night of September 21, Hale was captured by the notorious Maj. Robert Rogers. Without due process of a court martial, he was hung as a spy the next day in British held New York.





## Mother Chick's Tavern, Town of Huntington

---

Nathan Hale was on his way to Manhattan to deliver British plans to General Washington's agents when he stopped at the tavern. In the morning he was captured.





**James Rivington** owned a Manhattan coffee house, a book store and a widely circulated Loyalist newspaper, *The Royal Gazette*, all popular among British officers and Tories. Robert Townsend, a silent partner in Rivington's business and contributor to his paper, recruited Rivington to spy for the Culper Ring. The coffee shop served as a cover for collecting intelligence. Fueled by their morning cup of tea, gossiping British officers would often discuss sensitive military operations. Among intelligence Rivington provided, was a British naval signal book that described how the British navy used its series of flags, lanterns and rockets to maneuver their ships during a battle. Having this information gave Washington's forces a significant advantage. Rivington was a complicated character; his main desire was to make money and continue living in New York City. Appearing as a Tory, none the less, he was pivotal in turning the tide of the war in favor of the Patriots. After the British evacuation, Rivington failed in his attempts to restart his new paper and was reviled and suppressed by Patriot leaders who he had offended. He died in poverty at the age of 78 in 1802. During his residency in New York City, President Washington visited Rivington and presented the former spy with a bag of gold coins for the invaluable intelligence he provided to the Continental Army.





**Benjamin Tallmadge**, born in Setauket, son of a minister like his classmate and friend at Yale, Nathan Hale. Young Benjamin Tallmadge was morally bereft due to the tragic loss of his brother who was imprisoned and starved to death on the notorious British prison ship HMS Jersey also known as “Hell”. By Spring of 1776, British suppression propelled Benjamin into action serving in the Continental Army as a senior officer in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Continental Light Dragoons, followed by command of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Legionary Corps, an elite unit of mounted and light infantry troops. In 1778, General Washington appointed the 24-year-old Major Tallmadge to oversee intelligence and create a network of spies and informers among the established commercial workers whose business connections encompassed Long Island, Connecticut and New York City. Tallmadge headed the spy network known as the ‘Culper Spy Ring’ and recruited its members from among his close friends and family. Among his feats, Tallmadge aided in uncovering Benedict Arnold’s treason and created the code book used for covert correspondence used by the Culper Ring, the only known spy network operating throughout the war. Using information delivered by Culper Spy Ring member Caleb Brewster, Major Tallmadge led his force of Dragoons across the Bay, in whale boats, landing at Old Mans (now Mt. Sanai) and marching 23 miles across the island, and attacked the British forces stationed at Fort St George. Tallmadge’s men successfully captured the Fort, and further disrupted British operations by burning 300 tons of hay destined to feed the British horses stabled in New York City. Remarkably, only one of Tallmadge’s men was lost in the battle. After the war, Tallmadge remained in Connecticut where he served as a postmaster and Member of Congress.





**Austin Roe** was a tavern owner and innkeeper in Setauket. During the Revolutionary War from 1779-1780, Austin Row served as one of the messengers of the Culper Spy Ring. He was the Ring's principal courier and an occasional collector of intelligence. As a merchant, Roe had a legitimate cover story for visiting Manhattan, using the pretense of purchasing goods for his business. He rode 55 miles from Setauket to New York carrying information regarding British activities on occupied Long Island all the while evading the dangerous British patrols and capture. In New York, he would go to Rivington's coffee house and meet with Robert Townsend of Oyster Bay and deliver the information for General Washington. After the war, Roe continued to operate his tavern in Setauket. In 1787 he became a captain in Lieutenant Colonel David Pierson's New York militia regiment in Suffolk County. By 1798, Austin, his wife Catherine Jones, and their eight children settled the area known as Patchogue. He opened an inn there, where for three decades he entertained his patrons with tales of his exploits during the war. He died in 1830 at the age of 81.





**Robert Townsend** was born in the family home in Oyster Bay, and like Benjamin Tallmadge and Nathan Hale, was a Yale graduate. The family operated a profitable mercantile business and Robert part owned Oakman & Townsend that served the British in New York City. During the British occupation Colonel John Graves Simcoe was quartered in the Townsend home in Oyster Bay along with Samuel Townsend and daughter Sally. Townsend's father, Samuel, was subject to cruelty; his property seized and his orchards destroyed. Meanwhile, his sister Sally was the subject of the Colonel's affections and the recipient of the first Valentine's Day card authored by Simcoe. Robert Townsend operated as a spy in New York City under the code name Samuel Culper, Jr. Townsend was one of the least-known operatives in the spy ring and once demanded Abraham Woodhull ("**Samuel Culper**") never to tell his name to anyone, even to Washington. Living in New York City, Townsend was a silent partner in a coffee house owned by James Rivington, whom Townsend recruited to spy for the Ring. Rivington published a Loyalist newspaper for which Townsend served as a journalist and reporter. Robert used that cover at social gatherings to gather information about British forces and plans. In addition, to build his pro-tory cover, he joined the Tory Militia group. Townsend, who maintained a pragmatic work ethic, advanced the work of the Culper ring and was instrumental in securing Washington's victory over the British forces all the while remaining anonymous and promoting his business interests. After the war, Townsend ended his business connections in New York and moved back to Oyster Bay. He never married and shared his family's home, and grew old with his sister Sally. Townsend died on March 7, 1838, at 84 and took his "Culper" identity to the grave. The identity of Samuel Culper, Jr. was discovered only in 1930 by the New York historian Morton Pennypacker. The Townsend home in Oyster Bay is now the Raynham Hall Museum.





**Sarah "Sally" Townsend**, the sister of Robert Townsend, was just seventeen years old when she started spying. Sally was attractive and vivacious, and earned the affections of Lieutenant Colonel John Graves Simcoe, who succeeded Major Robert Rogers as commander of the Queen's American Rangers. Simcoe established his headquarters in the Townsend home in 1778 while his 300 men occupied the Townsend orchard and other areas around Oyster Bay. Sally used her influence over Simcoe to learn British secrets, which she then passed to her brother. Like most women in the Culper Ring, Sally lacked a code name or means of identification.

There are no records indicating that Sally ever married or what she did after the war. Sally continued to live in the family home with her brother Robert. She died in December 1842 and is buried at the Townsend Cemetery. According to local lore, Robert (Culper Jr.) and Sally Townsend never met with Washington during the Long Island tour nor was their roles as spies acknowledged or officially rewarded.



SARAH "SALLY"  
TOWNSEND



## Abraham Woodhull

Major Benjamin Tallmadge recruited Abraham Woodhull as an agent for the spy ring. Woodhull was a 28-year-old Setauket farmer and businessman who, during the British occupation, collected information about British activities and sent it to Tallmadge using the code name **Samuel Culper, Sr.** Woodhull's family had suffered much at the hands of the enemy. In June of 1779, the British came to his house to arrest him for espionage. He was not home but the British found his father, beat him and robbed him. Also, his cousin, a New York militia general, had died in British captivity. Shaken by these incidents, Abraham recruited his friend, Robert Townsend of Oyster Bay, as chief agent of the Culper Spy Ring. Every few weeks he would travel 55 miles to Manhattan, passing check points and armed assailants, collecting information to be passed along to Caleb Brewster who in turn brought it across the LI Sound to Washington's headquarters. After the war Abraham married Mary Smith, had three children and serve as Suffolk County magistrate from 1799 to 1810. He continued to farm with the assistance of African Americans whom he freed before his death in 1826, a year before slavery was outlawed in New York State.





## Abraham Woodhull's Farmhouse on Dyke Road





**Caleb Brewster**, a friend of Tallmadge, was a whale boatman and smuggler/privateer who directly contacted Washington offering his reconnaissance assistance and support for espionage activities. To avoid capture, Brewster and his crew used their knowledge of the sound and bays to conduct raids on enemy holdings. In addition to reporting on British naval activities, he served as a courier, carrying messages from Long Island to Connecticut. Brewster was fearless in his operations, even refusing to use a code name. In December 1782, Brewster was seriously wounded, taking a musket ball through his chest during a naval engagement on the Long Island Sound. Thought to be dead, Brewster survived and returned to service a few months later. After the war, Brewster partnered with Benjamin Tallmadge to purchase 350 acres of confiscated Floyd family land. Brewster married Anne Lewis from Fairfield Connecticut and had eight children. He received a pension from Congress for gallantry and worked as a blacksmith till 1793. Then he became Captain of the cutter Active with the US Revenue Marine to enforce customs laws and smuggling. He died in 1827 and is buried in Fairfield.



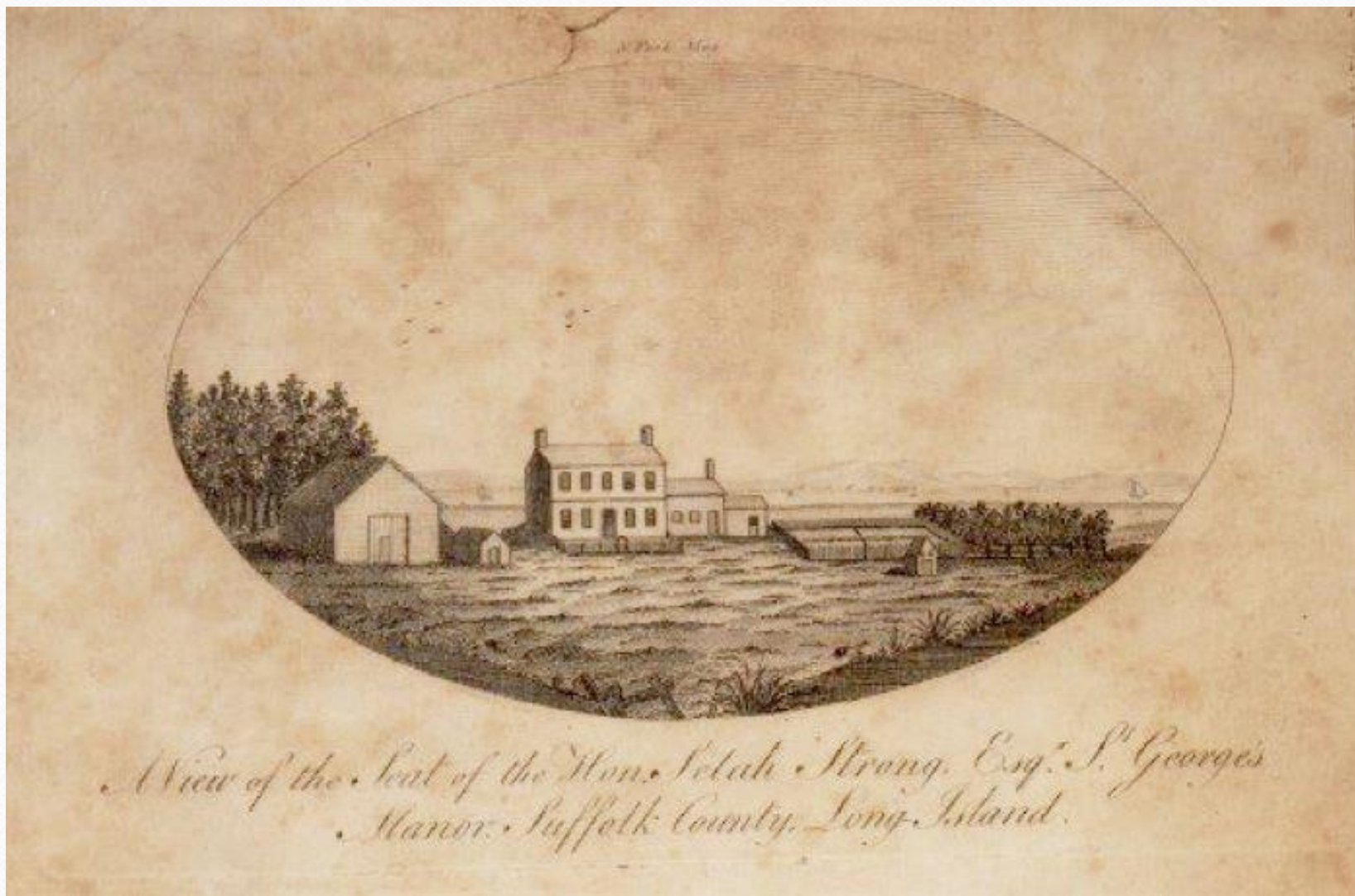


**Anna 'Nancy' Strong** was a neighbor of Abraham Woodhull who operated an essential communications link in Long Island for the Culper Spy Ring. She coordinated the delivery of messages between Woodhull and Caleb Brewster. From Brewster's base in Fairfield, Connecticut, he used a telescope to watch the laundry that Strong put up to dry. When a report was ready, through pre-arranged, signals a black petticoat and handkerchiefs indicated which cove or inlet Brewster was to land his whaleboat to retrieve the report. Once collected, Brewster returned to Connecticut where mounted troops carried them to Tallmadge and Washington. Anna's husband was Selah Strong, a former member of the Provincial Congress who had been imprisoned aboard the notorious British prison ship, HMS *Jersey*, and one of the few who survived. Anna died in 1812 and Selah in 1815. They are buried at the Smith-Strong family graveyard.





## Anna Strong's house during the Revolution





# Credits

- Bleyer, Bill (2021). *George Washington's Long Island Spy Ring-A History and Tour Guide*. South Carolina: The History Press.
- Currie, Catherine (1990). *Anna Smith Strong and the Setauket Spy Ring*. Drawings by Audrey Swanson Marlow. Printed by Taproot Workshops, Inc.
- Grasso, Joanne S. (2018). *George Washington's 1790 Grand Tour of Long Island*. South Carolina: The History Press.
- Hilton, Ted; Busby, Betty; Streeter, Barbara; Taylor, Benjamin; Hilton, Helen, editors (1990). "*Bungtown School*" *The First Two Hundred Years - The History of West Side School, 1790-1990*. New York: Cold Spring Harbor.
- Hinkemeyer, Arlene and Imperato, Eleanor M., Village Historians. *A History of the Incorporated Village of Plandome Heights*
- Kroplick, Howard, North Hempstead Historian
- Library of Congress Manuscript Division
- National Counterintelligence and Security Center exhibit webpage
- Philbrick, Nathaniel (2011). *Travels with George: In Search of Washington and his Legacy*. New York: Viking Press.
- Roslyn Landmark Society
- Three Village Historical Society
- Wisconsin Historical Society



For more information please contact:

**Maggie Gough, Library Director**

**516-627-2300 x 348**

**[mgough@manhassetlibrary.org](mailto:mgough@manhassetlibrary.org)**

**Antonia S. Mattheou, Archivist**

**516-627-2300 x 223**

**[historycenter@manhassetlibrary.org](mailto:historycenter@manhassetlibrary.org)**