

**Smith-Taylor Cabin:  
Shelter Island, NY**

**2.0 HISTORICAL DATA**

**2.1 Shelter Island: settlement history**

Benjamin F. Thompson, the eminent 19<sup>th</sup> century Long Island historian, described Shelter Island as:

... a fine island which constitutes a town of the same name, [which] lies between the northern and southern branches of Long Island, at the eastern termination or outlet of Peconic Bay, by which it is bounded on the north, south, and west, and on the east by Gardiner's Bay. The width of the strait on the north, is one mile, and that on the south half a mile, the current being very rapid in the narrower parts. The island is about six miles long, and four broad, but of a very irregular shape. It contains over eight thousand acres, divided into several valuable farms, some of which are quite large; the number of families is about eighty, and the population nearly four hundred. The general surface is undulating, the soil of a good quality, and the shores are indented with coves and small bays, covered with salt grass. There are some fine ponds of fresh water, one of which, Fresh Pond, occupies an area of more than thirty acres. Peat exists in considerable quantity, but owing to the abundance of fine timber on the island, it has been hitherto little used. There are many beautiful sites for building, possessing both variety and picturesqueness.  
[Thompson, *History of Long Island*, 1843]

In this brief description Thompson captured the island's enduring geographical qualities, significantly those that would attract later waves of settlement: its irregular and protected coastline, its relatively remote but accessible location, and its naturalistic beauty. Shelter Island was settled in the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century by a handful of wealthy New England merchants who appreciated its unique advantages, and the island's later history reflected the fact that its "valuable farms" were held by one of their descendants until well into the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

What Thompson didn't reveal in his description – a fact that may have been overlooked or even misunderstood when he wrote his *History of Long Island* – is that Shelter Island was acquired in 1651 as a provisioning plantation for the Barbadian sugar interests of four New Englanders: Captain Thomas Middleton, Thomas Rous, and two Sylvester brothers, Constant and Captain Nathaniel. As historian Mac Griswold has recently written:

The New England shipping picture of the 1640s makes it clear that

[this] Shelter Island consortium got an early start both in sugar planting, and on the West Indies provisioning trade... [and] though New Englanders had sporadically exchanged goods throughout the early 1640s, large-scale West Indian shipping only began in earnest in 1647, when planters had become ‘so intent upon planting sugar that they had rather buy foode at very deare rates than produce it by labour.’”

[Griswold, “The Sugar Connection: Barbados and Shelter Island,” Ms., 2001]

In fact, the island’s geography and deep harbor were especially favorable for the early sugar trade, in part “... because of its convenience as a stopping-off place between the West Indies and New England... with forty miles of coastline and many harbors that were only nominally part of the New Haven Colony across the Sound.” Furthermore, and perhaps more importantly, the island provided its owners with an opportunity for circumventing new tariffs which had been imposed on the sugar trade in the 1650s. While the origins of its name remain obscure, the “shelter” may well refer to the island’s intended role in protecting its investors from these tariffs! Of the original four, however, only Nathaniel made his permanent residence on the island; as a result, the sugar venture established the Sylvester family as major land owners on Shelter Island for centuries to come.

The interrelationship of the Sylvester family members in this early period sheds light on the complexities of 17<sup>th</sup> century settlement practices and the skills that were needed for success. In addition to Capt. Nathaniel and Constant, there were three other Sylvester brothers (Joshua, Peter and Giles) who settled on the island or in nearby Southold, and each was involved to some extent in the mercantile interests of the family. As Griswold points out:

The Sylvesters’ broad trade network followed a pattern typical of early transatlantic mercantile activity. Family links connected New England ports with Amsterdam, England, Madeira and the Azores, as well as with the West Indies. Members of the family moved around the Atlantic littorals as it suited their political and religious as well as mercantile purposes: Constant [Sylvester], for example, was fined for his Parliamentary sympathies when the Royalists took over Barbados in 1651 and may have left for sanctuary on the newly-purchased Shelter Island...

Another asset that the Sylvester brothers undoubtedly contributed to the partnership was their knowledge of Dutch language and society, useful in the mixed Dutch-English environment of the Atlantic world. The Sylvesters of the charter generation were born in the Netherlands... and may have been quite well-integrated into Dutch society.

[Griswold, “The Sugar Connection: Barbados and Shelter Island,” 2001]

Nathaniel Sylvester gained possession of the entire island in 1674 after its elevation to the status of “Manor” in 1666, and title to portions of Shelter Island would pass to Sylvester descendants and their heirs through marriage after Nathaniel’s death in 1680. Chief among these were the Nicolls, Havens and Dering families; by 1730, when the town was incorporated, it is said that only about twenty families inhabited the island. Inter-marriage with the residents of neighboring Southold Town, where Shelter Islanders worshipped until the construction of their own Presbyterian meetinghouse in 1743, would introduce new names into the island’s history; the Case, Conkling, Tuthill and King families represented this 18<sup>th</sup> century development. Descendants of the original settlers remained prominent, however, and all of the island’s inhabitants would suffer alike from the effects of the Revolutionary War, described by Thompson as follows:

This town was almost entirely deprived of its timber during the war of the Revolution, it being taken for the use of the British army and navy. Extensive depredations were also committed upon other property of the inhabitants, who were wholly exposed to the ravages of the enemy. The partiality of the people for the cause of independence left them no reasonable expectation of favor or even forbearance from the opposers of liberty.

[Thompson, *History of Long Island*, Vol. II, p. 221, 1843]

Recovery from the effects of war was slow, as it was elsewhere throughout Long Island, although Thompson points out “... [that] the wood grew again rapidly and has been abundant ever since, and great quantities have been cut and transported to other places.” The economy of Shelter Island also prospered in part because of local whaling and other seafaring trades. Nearby Sag Harbor, named in 1789 as one of New York State’s two official Ports of Entry by the new United States Congress, emerged in the period as a major whaling port and center for coastal and international trade. Its success was felt and shared by the residents of Shelter Island, where ship-building and related enterprises were also pursued. Numerous prominent ships’ captains emerged in the island’s history, among them Captain Smith Baldwin, a whaling captain who purchased the local windmill in his retirement in 1850, and Captain Benjamin Cartwright, who followed in Baldwin’s footsteps by acquiring the same mill twenty years later! Farming and harvesting cordwood remained an essential occupation and source of income, however, and the coming of the railroad to “mainland” Greenport in 1844 expanded the market for selling island produce.

The economic and social fabric of Shelter Island changed dramatically in the 1870s with the establishment of the Shelter Island Grove and Camp Meeting Association of the Methodist Episcopal Church in the northwesterly section of the island. Previously bought and named “Prospect” by land speculator Frederick Chase, the 300-acre “Heights” property was acquired in 1871 by a group of Brooklyn clergymen and laymen who coordinated or encouraged construction of over one hundred private “cottages” between 1872 and 1890. The chief architect for the plan, Robert Morris Copeland, also designed Union Chapel in 1875 as the focal and social hub of the community. Following the success of the enterprise, larger summer homes were also built in the 1890s and after

the turn-of-the-century, thus mirroring a trend of summer home and estate-building that encompassed Long Island's Sound and Ocean shorelines as well as both of its easterly "flukes."

Anticipating this trend, a consortium of Boston investors had purchased the area then known as Locust Point (now the Village of Dering Harbor) in 1872 from the Horsford family, descendants of the Sylvester family of Sylvester Manor. The Manhasset House, later known throughout the Eastern seaboard as an elegant hotel and desirable vacation spot, opened its doors in 1873. Private cottages were also built in the area that took on an entirely different feeling from those located elsewhere on the island. The hotel guests and property owners were wealthy yachtsmen who could safely moor their yachts in the secluded harbor. The New York Yacht Club established a station in the harbor, and the Shelter Island Yacht Club was founded in 1886. The first Manhasset House burned in 1896 and its replacement in 1910, never to be rebuilt.

Also typical of the period, both for Shelter Island and Long Island in general, was the creation of "Presdeleau" in the 1890s by Francis M. Smith, who assembled smaller tracts of land into an extensive country estate [see: **2.3.1 Francis Marion Smith (1846–1931)**]. The arrival of Smith, his family and other wealthy land-owners would signal a new era in Shelter Island's history. The trend was also reflected in the history of the Nicoll family, whose extensive holdings are preserved today as Mashomack Preserve.

## 2.2 Nicoll family & Mashomack Preserve

The Nicoll family on Shelter Island, descendants of William Nicoll the patentee of Islip, came into possession of a large portion of the island by purchase from Giles Sylvester, Nathaniel's eldest son. Giles had inherited the bulk of his father's estate in 1680 and acquired additional land on the island after the deaths of his brothers Benjamin (1689), Constant (1696) and Peter (1696) who had all died without issue. Giles sold approximately 2,000 acres, or one quarter of the island to William Nicoll in 1695. The tract included the area known as "Sachem's Neck," which would later become Mashomack Preserve. As explained by Thompson:

*Sachem's Neck*, and lands adjoining, were devised by the first *William Nicoll*, to his son *William*, commonly called *Speaker Nicoll*, but as he died without issue in 1768, the lands descended to *William*, commonly called *Lawyer*, or *Clerk Nicoll*, son of his brother Benjamin. He by his will of 1778, devised the same for life to his son, the late *Samuel Benjamin Nicoll*, with remainder in fee to said Samuel's eldest son in tail. On the death of said Samuel, and by the act abolishing entails, the lands descended to his oldest son, Richard F. Nicoll, in fee. He afterwards sold *Sachem's Neck* entire to his brother, Samuel B. Nicoll, Esq., by whom it is now held [1843], he being the fifth possessor of the Shelter Island Nicoll estate, reckoning from William the patentee in 1702.  
[Thompson, *History of Long Island*, 1843]

*Sachem's Neck* remained exclusively in Nicoll family ownership from the late 17<sup>th</sup> century until after the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, at which time several non-resident descendants began to sell off their inheritances. One of the first buyers was Francis M. Smith, who had already established his summer home on Shelter Island and is thought to have constructed what serves today as a Visitor Center at Mashomack. Part of Smith's purchase was Cedar Island, a small peninsula stretching off the main shoreline of *Sachem's Neck*, and future site of Smith's picnic shelter [see: **2.3.1 Francis Marion Smith (1846–1931)**].

Other buyers of the Nicoll land included Otto H. Kahn, a wealthy German financier and philanthropist, who bought Nicoll family holdings and other parcels that had been previously sold, thereby reestablishing the boundaries of the *Sachem's Neck* tract in 1925 for real estate investment. Due to the Stock Market Crash of 1929, however, Kahn's development scheme never materialized; in 1934, the Gerard real estate interests purchased Mashomack from Kahn's estate. The property was subsequently leased to several private hunting clubs, of which the most well remembered is the Mashomack Fish and Game Club. Most members of this exclusive club were wealthy Long Island or New York City residents who joined to hunt pheasant, duck and deer. An occasional fox hunt, complete with hounds and horses, was also held. The two fields in the center of the Preserve were converted into a skeet range and tennis court. The well appointed Manor House served as the Lodge. During the club's tenure a scheme emerged

to develop Mashomack into an exclusive housing area; a golf course, marina, and waterfront homes were planned, and investors for the project were secured. Luckily for the future preservation of this undeveloped property, the development scheme folded in 1979. It was at this point, after years of careful planning, that The Nature Conservancy stepped in and was able to secure Mashomack. Since the 1950's, the Conservancy had expressed hopes of preserving Mashomack because of its population of endangered osprey and rare plants. The Gerard family (Aeon Realty) and The Nature Conservancy came to a purchase agreement in 1979. On January 14, 1980, The Nature Conservancy took title to Mashomack with the support of local Shelter Island residents and Nature Conservancy members, foundations, and corporations nationwide.

### 2.3 Smith-Taylor Cabin: history of ownership

The island and its historic structure are associated primarily with the lives of two individuals who were prominent in local, state and national affairs. These two owner/occupants – Francis M. Smith and S. Gregory Taylor – were both associated with the preservation and conservation of Cedar (later Taylor’s) Island, as well as with the creation of the structure itself: first with the construction of a recreational picnic shelter (c. 1900) and later with the transformation of the original building into a habitable dwelling or “cabin” (c. 1940). A third occupant, Andrew Arkin, leased the property for over two decades (1957-1980) and is significant in the history of care and stewardship that he provided. Title to the property passed to the Town of Shelter Island in 1997 as a provision of S. Gregory Taylor’s will.

Francis Marion Smith (1846–1931), the first of the two property owners responsible for building the structure, was better known as “Frank” or by his colorful nickname, “Borax,” Smith. F. M. Smith was a leader in the mining and marketing of borax, a whitening agent that was popular in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. He acquired Cedar Island, as it was then known, in 1899 while assembling contiguous tracts of land for his Shelter Island summer estate, “Presdeleau.” Smith’s property would grow to encompass over 500 acres and was the largest land holding of its kind on Shelter Island in that period, comparable in size and setting to many of the renowned, turn-of-the-century country estates created elsewhere on Long Island’s scenic north and south shores. Cedar Island provided him with a picturesque location for constructing the original log structure, which served as a rustic shelter and destination for family clambakes, picnics and other outdoor excursions. Smith lost title to Cedar Island and much of his Shelter Island estate due to business reverses in the 1920s, however, and ownership later passed to a bank and several investors before its acquisition by a second owner who expanded the structure in the late 1930s for overnight use.<sup>2</sup>

The second owner of the property, S. Gregory Taylor (1888–1948), was born Soterios Gregorios Tavoulares. Taylor purchased the island in 1940. He was a prominent New York City hotel operator of Greek descent; born on the Island of Prikonnesos, Marmara, Taylor had immigrated to America in 1908 at the age of twenty. He started as a bellhop in the Manger hotel chain and learned the hotel business, rising to the position of manager prior to the demise of William Manger in 1928. Taylor’s career in hotel management and ownership began with *The Buckingham*, which he leased in 1925 from Manhattan developers Harris and Percy Uris. For over two decades, Taylor leased, owned, managed or developed a succession of important hotel properties in New York City while contributing his time and resources to Greco-American national and international affairs and many other civic causes.

Taylor’s introduction to Cedar Island is thought to have begun with his friendship with the Foultes family, who were also New Yorkers of Greek descent. The Foultes operated a seafood restaurant in Manhattan and owned a summer house on nearby Ram

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<sup>2</sup> As stated previously, it appears that the island’s second owner had acquired use of the property prior to his acquisition in 1940, as revealed by first-hand reminiscences surrounding the Hurricane of 1938.

Island. Taylor's ownership of the island ended with his demise on February 21, 1948, and he was buried on the island the following day. As a provision of his will, the use of the island was bequeathed to his nephew Stephen Stephano, with title passing to the Town of Shelter Island after Stephano's death.

For over two decades after Taylor's death (1958–1980), the island was leased from his nephew and maintained by Andrew Arkin, who occupied the cabin as well as two guest cottages that Taylor had constructed in the 1930s. Arkin's contribution as long-time steward of the island is especially noteworthy due to the vulnerability of the buildings and their island setting. The island and the cabin became the property of the Town of Shelter Island in 1997.

### **2.3.1 Francis Marion Smith (1846–1931)**

Francis Marion Smith was a figure of considerable state and national significance. In the development of Shelter Island, he was also one of the most influential figures of his time. He represents the lasting impact that wealthy, urban, non-native inhabitants had on patterns of local land ownership and lifestyle at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a phenomenon that swept Long Island from the 1880s through the Great Depression of the early 1930s. Estate-building in this period left an indelible mark on the Long Island landscape, not only in the form of major country houses and outbuildings set on extensive grounds, but also in a change in the socio-economic composition of the population as a whole. Smith's impact on Shelter Island was felt both as a result of his re-assembling numerous parcels of land and transforming a pre-existing 19<sup>th</sup> century dwelling into a country estate – in effect, reversing the contemporary evolution of land ownership which typically saw the subdivision of land holdings into smaller and smaller parcels – as well as in activities such as introducing exotic deer to create a private deer park and sponsoring charitable events to benefit local civic causes. His wife, Mary Rebecca (Thompson) Smith, for example, organized the annual harvest festivals that benefited the public library – social events that brought the local population and “summer people” together.

Smith had made his fortune elsewhere, however, by mining the mineral borax, which he processed and marketed nationwide under the “20 Mule Team Borax” brand that remained the industry leader for many decades. His influence on state and national history stemmed from his business interests and stretched over many decades, beginning with his prospecting adventures near Candelaria, Nevada, in 1872. Smith was born on February 2, 1846, on a farm in Richmond, Wisconsin, and left home after graduating from Milton College in 1867. He prospected for five years in Montana, Idaho, and Nevada before discovering what became the largest known deposit of borax and the source of his fortune:

“... looking to the northwest, he was able to glimpse the gleaming white surface of a place called Teel's Marsh... It soon turned out that Smith had found the richest borax deposit in western Nevada. By speedily filing his locations, he gained title to the marsh and before the end of the year had a small refinery in operation. This was the true dawn of the borax industry in the United States... During those years he pioneered borax mining in Death Valley, switched ore recovery to underground mining, and made himself a multi-millionaire.”  
[Hildebrand, Borax Pioneer, p. 6]

Smith was quick to secure his claim and begin mining the mineral, he was also innovative in promoting and marketing his product. In 1875, during a national depression, he opened a retail store and office at 185 Wall Street in New York City to expand the borax market. His advertising claims that borax would “clean black cashmere, cameos and coral,” “keep milk and cream sweet” and prevent “diphtheria, lung fever and kidney trouble” may have been exaggerated, but they helped to popularize the cleaning additive in a prime market and in a period when sales were slumping

nationwide. Smith's Pacific Coast Borax Company, having emerged as the industry leader in the 1890s as the result of such entrepreneurial instincts, would dominate both national and worldwide markets for the product until well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

To expand the processing of raw minerals that formed the borax product, Smith worked with the renowned engineer and reinforced concrete innovator Ernest L. Ransome, who designed two refineries for him in West Alameda, California, and Bayonne, New Jersey. Ransome's California refinery was built in 1889 and is recognized for being the first structure of its kind to be built with reinforced concrete. It was followed in 1896 by the concrete Ferry Building in San Francisco, an integral part of Smith's transportation system (described below). Soon after, the two men formed the Ransome Concrete Machinery Company of Dunellen, New Jersey. Having secured numerous patents for manufacturing and applying reinforced concrete in the construction industry, Ransome finally perfected and patented a novel system of concrete construction in 1902 that paved the way for modern-day, concrete-framed factory construction.

Ransome holds the distinction of being the designer and builder of the first two reinforced concrete buildings in the world and each was a borax refinery built for F. M. Smith: the first in 1889 and the second in 1897-98. The later of the two was Smith's Pacific Coast Borax Refinery in Bayonne, New Jersey, which employed Ransome's latest innovations in reinforced concrete technology:

“The time is so recent and reinforced concrete buildings are now so common [1912] that it is difficult to appreciate the boldness of the conception to construct a 4-story building, to sustain actual working loads of 400 pounds per square foot besides heavy machinery even on the top floor, out of a material until recently used almost exclusively for foundations, and considered capable of resisting only compressive loads.”

[Atlas Portland Cement Co., Reinforced Concrete in Factory Construction, 1912, p. 181]

Its inside gutted by fire in 1902, the reinforced concrete walls of the 1898 factory survived and were later retained in the reconstruction, thereby validating Ransome's innovative construction methods. Smith's association with the engineer extended to the domestic sphere as well; Ransome designed a graceful reinforced concrete, Japanese-inspired bridge on the grounds of Smith's Shelter Island estate, and it is thought that he also contributed his advice in constructing several outbuildings at “Presdeleau” and may have designed the first concrete sea wall that reinforced the elevated ground on Cedar (Taylor's) Island.

Great national and international success in the borax industry gave Smith the time and means to pursue other interests, including the creation of an integrated transportation infrastructure serving Oakland, California. He and his wife had built a mansion on 25 acres in Oakland known as “Arbor Villa” in 1893. Over a period of twenty years, he oversaw the creation of a multi-layered public transportation system linking Oakland with the neighboring metropolis of San Francisco by utilizing rail lines, electric streetcars

and improved ferry service that exploited the natural topography of the area.

“Borax” Smith and his wife, Mary, came to Shelter Island for the first time in the early 1890s, at about the same time they were planning their Oakland, California, estate “Arbor Villa.” Their introduction to the area was probably due to Frank Colton Havens, a business partner in Oakland, California, whose father Wickham Havens was a Sag Harbor resident and whose family had lived on Shelter Island for many generations. By the 1890s, Shelter Island had become a popular summer destination for urban dwellers, and Frank and Mary first stayed at the Manhansett House on Dering Harbor in 1892. Not content to remain as tourists, they soon bought property and began assembling the “Presdeleau” estate. Their first purchase was a 42-acre tract in the southwesterly area of the island that included a late 18<sup>th</sup> century house overlooking the water, then owned by Hannah W. Cartwright, the widow of Captain Maltby P. Cartwright. A sequence of acquisitions followed in the 1890s: a stretch of adjoining Nicoll family land, giving them control of the entire cove; and multiple parcels from the Clark, Cartwright, Rogers, Griffing, Conklin and Havens families, all descendants of longtime Shelter Islanders and many of whom had moved to Riverhead, Brooklyn and elsewhere. By 1906, Frank and Mary Smith had assembled nearly 500 acres: the “Presdeleau” estate, encompassing 260 acres on Clark’s Cove, and an additional 235 acres to the north of the highway on Sachem’s Neck. The latter was acquired in 1899 from the estate of Charlotte Nicoll and included Cedar (later Taylor’s) Island.

Frequent news reporting in the *Suffolk Times* during the late 1890s and after the turn-of-the-century reveals that Frank, his family and entourage traveled cross-country to occupy “Presdeleau” on Shelter Island during the summer months every year (June-October). Tragically, however, Mary died of a stroke in 1905. Frank, then aged 59, remarried his secretary, Evelyn Kate Ellis, and had four children with her between 1907 and 1913. Although life continued as before, Smith suffered severe business reverses in 1913 due to overextended loans and tightened banking regulations that caused the loss of his borax mines as well as land investments and transportation infrastructure in California. While the family continued to visit “Presdeleau,” it was not until the 1920s that Smith regained his fortune through the discovery of another borax mine in Nevada. But having parlayed his business connections and acumen once again into a controlling interest in the newly formed West End Mining Company, Smith suffered a series of strokes and left the firm in 1926, having amassed a second fortune by the age of eighty. He died five years later, in 1931.

Frank had already lost title to Cedar (Taylor’s) Island, however, which was only a small portion of the 235-acre, Sachem’s Neck property acquired in 1899. As part of a 1921 court settlement, the Central National Bank of Oakland (California) forced the sale of his real estate holdings in Suffolk County to resolve outstanding indebtedness dating back to 1913. The large Sachem’s Neck parcel was auctioned to satisfy Frank’s obligations to the California bank, although “Presdeleau” was held in his wife’s name and therefore remained beyond the reach of the courts. Title to Sachem’s Neck, including Cedar Island, was transferred to Ernest A. Bigelow of Oyster Bay who was acting on behalf of a land developer, Avalon Incorporated. The large parcel was then acquired by

Otto Kahn, the noted financier and philanthropist whose country estate, "Oheka," was located in Cold Spring Harbor. There is no evidence to suggest, however, that Kahn ever improved the property. Much of the Sachem's Neck parcel remained undeveloped throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century and is preserved today as the Mashomack Preserve. Cedar Island, having been partitioned from the larger holding, remained unaltered until its acquisition in 1940.

### 2.3.2 S. Gregory Taylor (1888–1948)

S. Gregory Taylor, who enlarged and converted Francis M. Smith's log picnic shelter into a habitable dwelling, is significant primarily as a successful New York City *hotelier* who became prominent in the years leading up to World War II. Unlike his predecessor Smith, however, who traced his ancestral roots to an early American family, Taylor was a Greek emigrant who came to New York City in search of a fortune and found it in the hotel industry. Like Smith, however, Taylor found opportunity in the New World and through hard work and an entrepreneurial spirit, developed considerable personal wealth.

Taylor emigrated in 1908 at the age of twenty, worked his way up in the hotel business from bellhop to manager, and in 1925 leased a fifteen-story residential hotel named *The Buckingham* located at 57<sup>th</sup> Street and Sixth Avenue. It was the first of several New York hotels that Taylor would later own or manage; in 1928, he opened *The Montclair* on Lexington Avenue between 49<sup>th</sup> and 50<sup>th</sup> Streets. Following these business ventures, Taylor opened the *Hotel Dixie* on Broadway between 42<sup>nd</sup> and 43<sup>rd</sup> Streets (1930) and the fashionable new *Hotel St. Moritz* on Central Park South and Sixth Avenue (1930), which boasted numerous terrace apartments, penthouses and a dancing salon on the 31<sup>st</sup> floor. The *Hotel St. Moritz* was one of the most advertised hotels of the period, appearing often in the *New York Times*' notices as having a fashionable nightclub (the *Café de la Paix*) and magnificent views of Central Park (the so-called *Sky Garden*). Taylor's European background evidently led to his inspiration to transform Sixth Avenue into New York City's "*Champs Elysees*." In 1940, he sponsored the planting of 292 trees along Sixth Avenue from 59<sup>th</sup> Street to 8<sup>th</sup> Street; his vision, although never fully realized, included construction of an arch patterned on the *Arc de Triomphe* at the Sixth Avenue entrance to Central Park.

Taylor's civic interests and influence focused on national and international levels. As a successful Greek-American, he expressed concern for his fellow countrymen both in the United States and in his home country. In November 1940, he led the American effort to raise aid for Greece during World War II and organized employees of the *St. Moritz* to join the effort. He also founded the Greek War Relief Association that year, and in 1941 raised funds for Greek air-raid shelters with First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt's assistance. In 1942, Taylor was honored at a luncheon at the *St. Moritz* attended by King George II of Greece and the Archbishop Athenagoras for his contributions to the war effort; at the time, he was serving as president of the Hellenic Cathedral and Federation of Hellenic Churches of the City of New York. Taylor continued to distinguish himself in civic affairs after the war by dedicating time to the Greek War Relief Association of which he remained chairman, and in service to the Greek Mariners Club, of which he was also chairman of the Board of Directors.

S. Gregory Taylor acquired Cedar Island from Shelter Island Developments, Inc., on April 21, 1940. His address on the deed was given as the *St. Moritz Hotel* in Manhattan. It is speculated that Taylor learned of the island through his friendship with fellow Greeks, the Foultes, who summered on nearby Ram Island and operated a

restaurant in New York City. Taylor died of a heart attack on February 22, 1948, at the age of fifty nine. He was buried on his island overlooking the harbor. In 1944, as a stipulation of his will, he had left a life interest in Taylor's Island to his nephew, Stephen Stephano, with the condition that title would ultimately pass to the Town of Shelter Island. It would seem that the young Stephano, a resident of Philadelphia and only fifteen years of age at the time of his uncle's death, had little use for Taylor's Island. The property was essentially abandoned for a decade, until its chance discovery by its next occupant, Andrew Arkin.

### 2.3.3 Andrew Arkin

For many years following Taylor's death, the island was occupied and maintained by Andrew Arkin (1958 – 1980). Arkin was a New York City dress manufacturer and business executive who discovered Taylor's Island in the late 1950s while searching Shelter Island by air for a summer place [see: **6. Appendices**]. Arkin recalls the circumstances as follows:

I found Greg Price, [a] capable, blind realtor, assisted by his wife. He researched and reported the Island's status: It had long been owned by J. Gregory Taylor, a Greek-American who had built the St. Moritz Hotel in New York. He owned the Island for many years, loved it, and planned to be buried there. He had willed it upon his demise to his young nephew, Steve Stephano, his sister's son, for Steve's lifetime and then to Shelter Island. He had arranged a trust fund to keep up his grave, but a few months before his death had moved the funds into a share of a Greek tanker and never replaced them. During the ensuing years the Island had fallen into severe disrepair.

[Arkin, manuscript, n.d.]

Arkin's timely intervention in the repair and maintenance of the island and the little cabin that occupied the site may well be the reason that the building remains standing today. As Arkin explains:

Through Greg Price, I contacted nephew, Steve, from a well-known Philadelphia specialty cigarette making family. I secured a five year lease on the property for zero dollars--with two provisos: I would restore the Cape Cod house and the small generator house- also, Steve's mother, Taylor's sister, could visit the her brother's grave when she wished. Thus began my twenty-two years of stewardship...

[Arkin, manuscript, n.d.]

The family of Constantine and Stephen Stephano, makers of the popular *Rameses*, *Stephana* and *Smiles* cigarette brands, had emigrated from Epirus, Greece, in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. The Stephano brothers first sold cigarettes on the streets of New York, worked in tobacco shops, and then settled in Philadelphia to build their own business. They became one of the most prosperous private cigarette manufacturers in America. S. Gregory Taylor's sister Martha married Stephen Stefano's son, Constantine, in 1932; their son, also named Stephen, was Taylor's nephew and it was he who inherited a life interest in Taylor's Island with his uncle's death in 1948. The young man evidently had no use for the property, however, and left it unimproved or maintained for a decade before Andrew Arkin's arrival in 1958.

Arkin terminated his lease in 1980, and after the death of Stephen Stephano, title to the island reverted to the Town of Shelter Island in 1997. The Taylor's Island

Preservation and Management Committee was then formed to provide the Town with direction and support in the future preservation of the island.

## 2.4 Cabins & shelters: 19<sup>th</sup> & 20<sup>th</sup> century context

The structure on Taylor's Island, which originated as a simple log shelter assembled c. 1900, was enlarged c. 1940 into a 2-bedroom cottage or "cabin" with a central heating system, electricity, indoor plumbing and a 3-story tower. It was conceived only as a rustic retreat for picnicking and entertainment, however, and in its original form embodied the characteristics of the Rustic or Adirondack style that was popular immediately before and after the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Distinctive features of the style typically included: authentic log wall construction; unfinished cedar poles employed as porch posts, beams and rafters; an over-scaled stone chimney and hearth; and architectural details that incorporated bark-faced twigs and branches.

As first built, the single story structure incorporated no amenities other than that of providing shelter from the elements. Four decades later, however, with its original architectural features intact, the shelter lent itself to the needs of a new owner and was enlarged as a cabin with bedrooms, bathrooms and a kitchen with running water and a heating system. The original space was preserved and saw continued use as an all-purpose living and dining room. The c. 1940 program transformed the building into a habitable dwelling, and the architectural elements associated with the additions are characteristic of the later period of construction. Notable features include the simulated log walls that employ rustic cabin siding, a contemporary form of exterior cladding that was not only sympathetic in design to the original building but also characteristic of its construction period. Other architectural details that are characteristic of the period are the reproduction 18<sup>th</sup> century style door hinges and thumb latches, brass lighting fixtures and diamond-paned casement windows. A design feature that is also indicative of the period is the stylized profile of the balusters which are cut in the form of fish silhouettes. These are preserved in both the interior tower stair and on the exterior balcony railing. Like the original c. 1900 shelter, the c. 1940 expanded cabin preserves architectural fabric that is characteristic and expressive of its construction period.

Few American architectural forms are as iconic as the log cabin. In a country that is dominated historically by wood-framed construction, the log cabin symbolizes the most rudimentary – and often heroic – of all structural forms, having associations with northern European settlers who transported their building traditions and technologies as they spread out across the western frontier. It has been said that "no other architectural form has so captured the imagination of the American people as the log cabin." By the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, the form took on even greater social significance:

Political supporters of 1840 presidential candidate William Henry Harrison appropriated the log cabin as a campaign symbol. The log cabin was birthplace and home to young Abe Lincoln, as well as other national figures, and assumed by many 19<sup>th</sup> century historians to be the very first type of house constructed by English colonists.

[Bomberger, *The Preservation and Repair of Historic Log Buildings*, 1991, p. 2]

Although the mythic origins of log cabins and log construction were proven

untrue by 20<sup>th</sup> century historians, the misconceptions persisted. The rustic form was revived in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century as Americans in greater numbers began to enjoy the great outdoors, in particular the State and National Parks, which consciously employed the building form for visitor centers, cabins and even large hotels:

In the 1870s, wealthy Americans initiated the Great Camp Movement for rustic vacation retreats in the Adirondack Mountains of upstate New York. Developers such as William Durant, who mused natural materials, including wood shingles, stone, and log – often with its bark retained to emphasize the Rustic style – designed comfortable summer houses and lodges that blended with the natural setting...

From the turn of the century through the 1920s, Gustav Stickley and other leaders of the Craftsman Movement promoted exposed log construction. During the 1930s and 40s, the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) used log construction extensively in many of the country's Federal and State parks to build cabins, lean-tos, visitor centers, and maintenance and support buildings that are still in service. [Bomberger, *The Preservation and Repair of Historic Log Buildings*, 1991, p. 3]

It was against this historical backdrop and in this period that Francis and Mary Smith built their log shelter on Cedar Island. They had vacationed in the Adirondacks in the 1890s prior to their first visit to eastern Long Island, where they evidently drew inspiration for the structure. The great camps and other “rustic” architecture that they saw in upstate New York would have provided ample precedent for the small recreational building that they later constructed in the naturalistic setting of their Long Island estate. The building may have even conjured up memories of Smith's own rustic, hand-built cabin that he and Mary had lived in while prospecting borax in Death Valley, California, a facsimile of which he had reconstructed on their Oakland estate in the 1890s. The log shelter constructed at “Presdeleau” c. 1900 was therefore not only architecturally suited to its time, place and purpose, but also a highly personal expression of Francis M. Smith's own frontier experience.

S. Gregory Taylor preserved the log shelter that his predecessor, Francis M. Smith, had created c. 1900 by incorporating it into a larger dwelling to serve as a rustic, naturalistic retreat from the glamour of metropolitan New York City. By 1940, when Taylor acquired the property, he was at the height of his career; owner and manager of the *Hotel Dixie* on Broadway and the fashionable *Hotel St. Moritz* on Central Park South, he enjoyed an affluent, urban lifestyle that rewarded him for nearly three decades of hard work in the hotel industry. The tiny island off the shore of Shelter Island, which was surrounded by Coecles Harbor, views of intermittent land masses and other bodies of water, and a largely undeveloped cedar forest was likely a “paradise” of a different sort for Taylor. While his business affairs immersed him in an urban lifestyle – which included many friends, family and business associates – his modest country property, set as it was in a seemingly remote landscape, was the perfect complement to urban living and enabled him to leave city life behind.

The cabin coincides with the beginning of the vacation or second home market on Long Island, a phenomenon that has steadily grown over the last half century and now constitutes the region's second largest "industry" (after tourism). While the preceding half-century (1880s-1930s) had witnessed the profound architectural impact of the Great Estates (of which Smith's "Presdeleau" was a prime example), the balance of the 20<sup>th</sup> century saw the construction of a highway network (e.g., the "Sunrise Trail") that not only facilitated access from suburban houses to metropolitan work places, but the "reverse" commute of seasonal vacationers and second home-owners. The trend continues unabated today. Taylor's converted dwelling is as expressive and characteristic of its decade as the original log building was of the earlier time period. The converted dwelling dates from the outset of the vacation home trend, whose owners sought to exploit what they discovered of Long Island's naturalistic features – its bays and ocean frontage, its woodlands and farms, and its "quaint" historic villages.

The circumstances surrounding the date of Taylor's addition to the log structure c. 1940 were recorded by Jim Nestor, whose father Alex served as its first caretaker:

... my parents and I enjoyed several summers (on the island) in the late 1940s. My father was a Greek employee, and I believe a distant relative of Gregory Taylor, who gave my father his first job in the USA working in the kitchen of the St. Moritz Hotel during the 1930s. During the late 1930s and into the 1940s my father worked summers on the island for Gregory Taylor, which included helping to build the sea wall. My father had put his initials, "AN" for Alex Nestor, on the top of the seawall using either pebbles or seashells, I don't recall which.

In the big hurricane of 1938, when the island was badly flooded and heavily damaged, my father was alone on the island and very nearly had to use one of the doors in the main house as a raft to survive... Fortunately, the storm subsided before that was necessary. If I recall his story correctly, the water flooded the whole island, including the main house.

[Jim Nestor, ms., collection of Taylor's Island Committee]

Through this account, it is known that the additions to the c. 1900 log structure were completed soon after Taylor's acquisition on the island in 1940.

As an urbanite of European origins, S. Gregory Taylor may have regarded the remote and rustic log structure on Cedar (Taylor's) Island as an especially evocative, "American" creation. As originally built, however, the log shelter was inadequate to function for overnight use. Lacking systems of any kind, it was a simple structure that had transformed the island into a picturesque destination while serving visitors only as a protection against the sun or rain. To inhabit the structure, Taylor enlarged it and installed plumbing, heating and electricity. Realizing the potential of its remarkable site, he also constructed a narrow, three-story tower that exploited commanding views of the surrounding bays and land masses. Despite these alterations, Taylor preserved the original building by attaching his new additions to the back; further, he finished the exterior of the new additions with cabin siding that simulated the appearance of the original log shelter, thus maintaining its rustic charm. He drew upon contemporary design

prototypes such as those illustrated in the Southampton Lumber Company's "Summer Cottages and Camps" [c. 1937] to expand the existing log shelter into something suitable for overnight stays, and by doing so, followed the precedent of countless other Americans in this pre-war period. Taylor's cabin typifies the private camp movement of the time and remains an archetypal example of its form.