

Throwback Thursday – The Pelican

The Pelican, photographed by Evangeline Pitts, 1951



Damaged open party boat *Pelican* sits behind clammer Ben Pitts, Pitts-Burke-Cullum Collection, Montauk Library Archives

The man clamming in the foreground of this photograph was known as Augustus Petitpas in his native Nova Scotia, and as Ben Pitts in the United States. The beached boat listing behind him in Lake Montauk was known as the *Pelican*, an open party boat that Long Island Rail Road passengers would eagerly jump aboard at Fort Pond Bay, hoping to return with gunny sacks filled with enough fish to eat for a week. The fare for a day on the water was just \$4.50.

On September 1, 1951, as a squall and engine trouble and then panic set in, the *Pelican* capsized within sight of Montauk Point, claiming 37 lives, including that of the captain, Eddie Carroll, well liked and respected by local Montauk skippers.

Many of the fishermen were regular customers and good friends of Captain Carroll; among them were war veterans, a taxi driver, a mason, a mailman, a jeweler, a husband and wife, and a father and son. Only one wore a life jacket; he was one of the fishermen who survived.

The *Pelican* had had 56 people on board in a time before the Coast Guard limited the number of passengers on boats of its size. Captain Carroll's brother, Howard Carroll, who ran the *Jigger*, said in an interview shortly after the incident that Montauk captains would welcome limits on the number of fishermen to be carried by party boats. "We often have to leave many people on the docks because we don't want to overload the boats and people take it as a personal insult," he told the *Nassau Review*. "At least 80 people were left on the docks Saturday afternoon."

Montaukers were profoundly affected by the disaster. Joan Lycke distinctly remembers standing at the water pump at her family's summer home in Ditch Plains when the fire whistle went off. "It just kept going on and on and on." Jean Ruggles remembers standing on the north side of Montauk Point, which was cordoned off, and watching police trying to right the boat to get the bodies out until she was shooed away. "Everybody pitched in and got things done," said Marshall Prado. "There was a lot of confusion in town – we barely had telephones." Two of his customers later told him they could hear cries from the water as they walked the beach that day.

Fishermen, police, and what emergency responders existed in Montauk at the time rescued survivors and searched for bodies both in the water and in the cabin of the *Pelican*, with temporary morgues set up at the town dock and Duryea's ice house.

Joan Lycke remembers relatives of those who were missing or dead walking around the harbor area wearing heavy rain jackets – "It was like they were in a daze," she said. "The newspapers were all out here ... It was an incredibly sad day."

"Montauk became known as the place where the boat rolled over," Marshall Prado said. "I remember the day that they put the boat on a truck and took it out of town."

Like Augustus Petitpas, the clammer in the photograph, Prado comes from Nova Scotian stock – whose pioneer spirit he credited with helping many in Montauk scratch out a living, often by fishing as much as possible in the summer and perhaps doing carpentry in winter.

“You lived a very real life,” he said of the era of the tragedy of the *Pelican*, adding that he didn’t know one person at the time who hadn’t lost at least one family member in some way or another.

“The next day you had to go to work,” he said. And so did Augustus Petitpas.

By Virginia Garrison

Photograph © Montauk Library and Dell Cullum

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Tagged: [Ben Pitts](#), [Eddie Carroll](#), [Howard Carroll](#), [Jean Ruggles](#), [Jigger](#), [Joan Lycke](#), [Marshall Prado](#), [Montauk Point](#), [Montauk Theater Building](#), [Pelican](#), [shipwreck](#), [tbt](#), [the Jigger](#), [the Pelican](#), [throwback Thursday](#)

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Throwback Thursday – Two Pools



Postcard of the Wavecrest Motel. Printed by Color Photog. Assoc., Glen Cove, NY, ca. 1960s. Photographers, Olga Bedorf and Mona Shelley. Montauk Library Postcard Collection. Montauk Library Archives



Postcard of the Blue Haven Motel, 1960s. J. J. Heatley, Smithtown, N.Y. Montauk Library Postcard Collection. Montauk Library Archives

Knowledge about Montauk's "Golden Age," the period of sportfishing and vacationing that pushed our sleepy village into boomtown status during the 1950s and 60s, is enhanced by the number of postcards that survive from that era. Motels and cottages dotting Montauk's watery shores were captured in vivid color by photographers who found that lodging was a lucrative subject matter, especially when printed on 3.5 x 5.5 card stock.

The Wavecrest sat on the oceanfront, with a well-manicured pool area. Chaise longues under wide-striped umbrellas invited long afternoons of leisure. Run by Franklin and Lucille Jarmain, the Wavecrest Motel offered "luxuriously furnished rooms with ceramic tile baths, free radios and T.V.," along with "electric heaters and maid service."

A more economical alternative was the Blue Haven Motel on West Lake Drive, owned by Teddy and Sherry Roth, who built the establishment in 1962. Located on "Beautiful Block Island Sound — adjacent to Montauk's Famous Fishing Fleet," the Blue Haven Motel had "country surroundings," yet it was "close to Montauk Village." It's easy to believe that the women sitting by the pool in this image are afternoon fishing widows, i.e., their husbands are out on the *Gannet* or *Rex*, catching swordfish or bass.

A comparison between the two postcards shows a marked difference in the photographers' approach to their subjects, and this affects the way we perceive the personality of each motel. Olga Bedorf and Mona Shelley were photographers, and perhaps colorists or film processors as well, who worked in "Ektachrome," Kodak film popular in the 1960s that allowed high-speed processing and rich, stable colors. This duo worked with a definite aesthetic. The Wavecrest diving board visually divides the almost vacant landscape, and is punctuated by the figure of the young man standing opposite. This reinforces the compositional structure of the image and speaks volumes about the artistry of the postcard's creators. We're aware of the architecture, the grounds, and the elegant décor. The visual message says "Cocktails at midnight under the stars."

Conversely, the Blue Haven Motel image, shot closer to the picture frame, is more informal and has a different expression. The pool is divided by a rope with floaters and there doesn't seem to be a diving board – but the lifeguard, draped casually over the pool ladder, is smiling. So are the guests. This image by J.J. Heatley of Smithtown concentrates on the people, and the message is clear: "Pool Party at 9 p.m.! BYOB."

The Wavecrest and the Blue Haven Motel are still going strong, although the Blue Haven changed hands, got an upgrade, and is now called Haven Montauk. Gone are the days when a T.V. with rabbit ears was considered an amenity, but a motel pool is a blessing forever.

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Tagged: [Blue Haven Motel](#), [Franklin Jarmain](#), [Lucille Jarmain](#), [Mona Shelley](#), [motels](#), [Olga Bedorf](#), [Sherry Roth](#), [tbt](#), [Teddy Roth](#), [throwback Thursday](#), [Wavecrest Motel](#)

Throwback Thursday – Buffalo Soldiers at Camp Wikoff



“Camp Wikoff, 24th Infantry (colored) coming to Detention Camp,” by photographer Dwight L. Elmendorf, 1898. African-American regiment arriving at Camp Wikoff in Montauk, N.Y. Montauk Historical Society Collection, digital image. Montauk Library Archives

It was August 1898 when Camp Wikoff opened to what quickly grew to be to be more than 20,000 sickened, injured, and weakened soldiers returning from the Spanish-American War. A hastily created patchwork of tents and infirmaries blanketed virtually all of Montauk, from Fort Pond Bay to Ditch Plains to Third House. It was intended to quarantine the soldiers and help them recover, although about 300 souls were buried before the camp closed only three months later.

Among the troops were Buffalo Soldiers, Black cavalrymen less celebrated, then and now, than the White Rough Riders led by Teddy Roosevelt who also recuperated or died at the camp. Like the Rough Riders, the Buffalo Soldiers – the first African-American troops in the history of the Regular United States Army – had just weeks before seen casualties, but also victory at San Juan Hill in Cuba. The site of a heavily fought and decisive battle, San Juan Hill eventually helped the glory-seeking Colonel Roosevelt rise to the presidency.

Before they served in that war, the Buffalo Soldiers had fought in “the Indian Wars” – the quest to expel Native Americans from their land in the West, whether by brutal warfare under harsh conditions or by safeguarding the property of mostly White settlers: stagecoaches, the mail, cattle, and the like. Many Buffalo Soldiers were Civil War veterans who had not been welcomed in the East when their service to the Union, as well as slavery, came to an end.

Ironically, it may have been the Native Americans who gave the Buffalo Soldiers their name. Formidable opponents yet sadly, also de facto oppressors, the Black cavalrymen who defeated the Native Americans nevertheless earned their respect. In battle they demonstrated the qualities of the buffalo, an animal revered for its bravery. Admired and valued by Native Americans, the buffalo, with its distinctive fur, may have contributed to the Buffalo Soldier appellation.

The Buffalo Soldiers were proud, as well. Before desegregation ended separate regiments for African-Americans (starting in 1948), Buffalo Soldiers went on to become the nation’s first park rangers and to serve in military conflicts. They are said to have had the lowest desertion and court-martial rates of their time, and many won Congressional Medals of Honor in recognition of their valor and sense of duty.

by Virginia Garrison

Buffalo Soldier, lyrics by Bob Marley and Noel Williams:

*I'm just a Buffalo Soldier
In the heart of America
Stolen from Africa, brought to America
Said he was fighting on arrival
Fighting for survival*

*Said he was a Buffalo Soldier
Win the war for America*

The digitized, original silver negatives by Dwight L. Elmendorf from the Harvard College Library's Theodore Roosevelt Collection can be accessed at <https://library.harvard.edu/collections/theodore-roosevelt-collection>

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Tagged: [Buffalo Soldiers](#), [Camp Wikoff](#), [tbt](#), [throwback Thursday](#)

Throwback Thursday – Hither Hills State Park, circa late 1940s

Hither Hills State Park, circa late 1940s.



Postcard from the Montauk Library's Postcard Collection.

The pensive girl in the kerchief and the stone walkway lend a kind of European flavor to this thoughtfully composed image. Andrew Wyeth's "Christina's World" also comes to mind. Could the photographer be paying homage to a famous painting?

The image, which is from the Montauk Library's Postcard Collection, is dated "circa late 1940s." Although it wasn't widely used, color photography was indeed available at the time — in fact it had been, in a rather labor-intensive form, since the late 19th century. In the 1930s, Kodak introduced Kodachrome, which made it possible for even amateur photographers to snap color shots, then send the film away to be developed. The hitch was that shooting in color was more

expensive than in black and white, and it yielded less reliable results. It really wasn't until the 1970s, when prices had come down and light sensitivity had improved, that most people preferred to load a roll of color film into their cameras.

The setting for this lovely shot is Hither Hills State Park, for which we have Robert Moses to thank. In the 1920s, Moses wanted to include this tract of wild beachfront property – including the Walking Dunes to the north — in his planned grand network of New York State parks and parkways. Moses and the land's owners reached an agreement, but then the property owners discovered that Carl Fisher wanted to transform Montauk into a luxury resort, which increased the value of their land. They backed away from a deal with Moses, then he did what any self-respecting power broker and political ringmaster would do: He condemned the land, or at least the choicest 1,700-plus acres of it.

On Long Island alone, Moses managed at the minimum to procure property for parks from Montauk Point and Hither Hills to Fire Island and Jones Beach and many more, impressively stretching a starting budget of only \$1 million. “By the end of 1926, the beaches of Long Island, once reserved for the rich, were dotted with wooden bathhouses open to all,” Robert Caro wrote in *The Power Broker*, his Moses biography.

In hindsight it seems like a very good thing. Hither Hills to this day is an immensely popular campground, often with many generations of visitors forging memories that last a lifetime. Most likely the girl in the kerchief was simply one of those happy campers.

Filed under: [Local History](#)

Tagged: [Hither Hills](#), [Hither Hills State Park](#), [postcard](#), [postcards](#), [Robert Moses](#), [tbt](#), [throwback Thursday](#), [walking dunes](#)

ORIGINALLY POSTED AUG12TH2021

Throwback Thursday – Hither Hills State Park, circa late 1940s

Hither Hills State Park, circa late 1940s.



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Throwback Thursday – Margaret Potts, Montauk Aviatrix, and her Powderpuff Derby Co-pilot, 1961



Margaret Potts and Viola Gentry (?) on their way to the Powderpuff Derby in California, 1961. Michael Potts Collection, Montauk Library Archives.

In early 2021, the Montauk Library Archives received a phone call from Patrick Hreachmark in Champaign, Ohio. Margaret Potts had taught him how to fly when he was a teenager living in Montauk (Hreachmark's father had been a commander at Camp Hero during the 1960s). Hreachmark remembered Potts' stories about WWII, and knew that she had been a member of the Ninety-Nines, an aviation group begun in 1929 by Amelia Earhart to support and advance licensed female pilots. The organization's name comes from the 99 women who responded to Earhart's invitation to join the group in 1929.

Hreachmark represents the Aviation Museum in Champaign, Ohio, an institution that concentrates its programs and exhibits on WWII. One section of the Ohio museum is dedicated to the history of women pilots. WASPs and WAFs, who already had long hours of civilian flying to their credit, were brought into the war effort and retrained as Army pilots, drilled relentlessly under military instruction. WASPs and WAFs then transported planes and supplies so airmen could concentrate on fighting battles over Europe.

Both Margaret and her husband George Potts were pilots. After the war, George became a fisherman, and the couple devised a brilliant strategy to enhance his catch: Margaret would scout for fish from her plane and radio back the location to her husband. Margaret also started a seaplane business, ferrying passengers to places within a few hours' flying distance of Montauk. Eventually switching gears, she became a teacher in the Montauk School. Her dedication to community affairs was revealed in her association with the Montauk Village Association, the Montauk Historical Society, and the Montauk Library. She was one of a core group to kick off the Library's oral history program in the late 1990s. She died in 2005, at the age of 90.

In 1961, Viola Gentry and Margaret Potts took off together for California, where they would compete in the Powderpuff Derby, sponsored annually by the 99ers. Potts had remained friends with many pilots who are now famous, like Viola Gentry, Potts' co-pilot during the Derby. Viola was called the "Flying Flapper of Freeport," but this gal was no powder-puff. With nerves of steel, Gentry had flown under both the Brooklyn and Manhattan Bridges in 1926.

The Powderpuff Derby was discontinued in 1977 because, as all the 99ers agreed, women had proven that they could fly. However, the Ninety-Nines are still going strong. Currently an international organization with 155 chapters, this support group provides networking and scholarship opportunities to women around the globe.

Women aviators played an essential role in World War II. Margaret Potts was one of them, and she will be inducted into the Aviation Museum in Champaign, Ohio in October 2021. This tribute honors her memory. By association, this tribute honors Montauk, as well.

<https://www.champaignaviationmuseum.org/>

<https://www.ninety-nines.org/>

Tagged: [Amelia Earhart](#), [aviation](#), [George Potts](#), [Marge Potts](#), [Michael Potts Collection](#), [Patrick Hreachmark](#), [Powderpuff Derby](#), [Viola Gentry](#)

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Throwback Thursday – Dog Days



“Marie and Chewy,” 2012. From the Mike Carlisi Collection, Montauk Library Archives.

We are in the thick of the “dog days” of summer. The reference comes to us from ancient Rome, when our brilliant forebears ascribed the excessive summer heat and humidity between July 3rd and August 11th to Sirius, the brightest star in the sky. Sirius is part of the constellation *Canis Major*, the “Greater Dog,” so this sun is also called the Dog Star. Sirius shines so brightly in the summer, in fact, that the “ancient Romans believed it actually gave off heat and added to the sun’s warmth, accounting for the long stretches of sultry weather,” according to the weather experts at the *Farmers Almanac*. Therefore, the ancient Romans (and Greeks, too, according to some sources) named these days the “dog days.”

This week’s TBT is a beautifully composed portrait of Marie Sluri and her dog, Chewy, a Tibetan terrier mix, but it’s also a portrait of a perfect summer day in Montauk. This is the quintessential “walk on the oceanfront” shot. Marie’s son, Mike Carlisi, took this image with his camera phone in 2012. We included it in our “Montauk Pets” exhibit in 2019 and at the time, cited the location as a beach at Ditch Plains. However, Mike now says he thinks he shot the

image in the Hither Hills area. No matter which beach, the photograph perfectly captures the qualities that compel summer tourists to Montauk. We can almost feel the cooling breezes as Chewy and his owner make tracks along the sand.

For archivists, this camera-phone image falls under a category called “born-digital.” A born-digital photograph is an image that was created using a camera phone or digital camera, not a regular camera loaded with Kodak or other film. When an original photograph that was developed in a darkroom is placed on a scanner to create a digital image, it’s called digital reformatting, but it’s not considered a born-digital image. Some archives refuse to collect born-digital materials because of preservation and other challenges, but the Archives at the Montauk Library has been collecting born-digital photographs for years.

Chewy was rescued on a busy thoroughfare in the South Bronx. The dog was a stray, wandering aimlessly, no doubt terrified. Marie picked him up and brought him home. Love and devotion ensued. Chewy enjoyed rides in the car and walks on the beach. Also, rather unusually, he adored cats!

What’s notable about the Mutt and Jeff relationship in this portrait is that even though Marie and Chewy are walking away from us, their bond is obvious, in spite of our not being able to see their faces. When they met, their connection was immediate, a recognition between twin flames or stars, like the binary star Sirius. Sirius, with a Sirius A and Sirius B star system — a Mutt and Jeff team of two inseparable suns — would shine much less brightly without the existence of the much smaller “Chewy,” or Sirius B.

<https://www.farmersalmanac.com/why-are-they-called-dog-days-of-summer-21705>

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Throwback Thursday – Leisurama



Much as they like to talk about real estate, most people in Montauk these days wouldn't be referencing a 750-or-more-square-foot house with no AC or winter insulation on a 7,500-square-foot piece of property. The product of a late 1950s collaboration, the 200 or so prefab summer residences were designed by Andrew Geller and Raymond Loewy and marketed by All-State Properties — which had a model home at the 1964 World's Fair — at Macy's Herald Square in Manhattan, and locally by the Montauk Beach Development Company at the Carl Fisher office building in downtown Montauk.

With its modern-day appliances — the homes included a dishwasher and washer and drier, among other at-the-time luxe amenities for the middle class, which a summer home would have been in the first place — a prototype inspired a 1959 argument at the American National Exhibition in Moscow, called “the Kitchen Debate,” between then-Vice President Richard Nixon and Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev. Khrushchev reportedly said, “There is no more truth in showing this as the typical home of the American worker than, say, in showing the Taj Mahal as the typical home of a Bombay textile worker.”

As for the Leisurama's “leisure” element — a similar architectural illustration from the era depicts a wife and children exuberantly rejoicing at the arrival of the family breadwinner in a tail-finned vehicle, most likely for the weekend from his job in the city. In the early 1960s it would have been reasonable to expect the children to have been biking, swimming, and playing board games

with other kids in the summer colony while Mom kept them fed and watered and socialized over coffee or cocktails with her own friends. Ah, for the good old days!

Full disclosure: The majority of Leisuramas, most of which were built in what is called the Culloden Shores development near Block Island Sound, were not directly on the waterfront, and they did not include docks, boats, and the like. It is also unlikely that the full-scale vegetation seen in this illustration would have survived the salty, wind-blown environment.

However, they did provide easy living, access to a private beach, and came fully furnished from Macy's-issue sofas and beds, linens, cookware, and flatware all the way down to a toothbrush for each and every family member. The starting price for the basic model was less than \$14,000, with financing and as little as \$490 down. Today they go for close to \$1 million.

Talk about non-buyer's remorse!

By Virginia Garrison

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Throwback Thursday – National Pet Fire Safety Day



Trusty Dalmatian Guards Crates of Budweiser Beer during 1992 St. Patrick's Day Parade. Color photograph from the Herb Herbert Collection, Montauk Library Archives.

A favorite website is National Today, or nationaltoday.com. It's a day-by-day calendar, listing an event or activity that is celebrated on a particular day in a specific month, every year. According to National Today, "We keep track of fun holidays and special moments on the cultural calendar." One of the best things about National Today is the history that accompanies each holiday.

Some of the event days are no surprise, such as National Poinsettia Day, taking place on December 12th. However, there is also Pretend to Be a Time Traveler Day on December 8th. Not only will you learn the earliest mention of time travel; you can read a short discussion about particle acceleration.

For today, July 15th, a number of cultural phenomena are being recognized, but for our TBT we are choosing National Pet Fire Safety Day. According to nationaltoday.com, "National Pet Fire Safety Day takes place every year on July 15, and it's a day to learn how to keep your pet safe in a fire. ... It was started by the Kennel Club and ADT Security in 2009 to help pet owners learn safety measures to protect their beloved pets and homes from fire, and it's a great opportunity to learn how to keep your fur baby safe."

Have you ever wondered why Dalmatians are associated with firehouses? Here's what National Today has to say: "A few hundred years ago, dogs were trained to trot alongside horse-drawn wagons and protect their occupants (and horses) from harm. Dalmatians quickly became the ideal carriage dog for their strength, vitality, fortitude, and size. They also had a reputation for getting along well with horses and were known to have a calming effect while firefighters were battling a blaze. Over time, as motorized fire trucks replaced carriages, Dalmatians and other fire pups were seen less aboard fire trucks and more as on-site firehouse residents and mascots."

And now, finally, here's the human kindness factor described: "Today, many firehouses around the country still have Dalmatians as station dogs. However, Dalmatians aren't the only dog in the firehouse. It's become common for firefighters (and sometimes entire fire teams) to adopt dogs rescued from fires. These lucky pups, whatever their breed, become symbols of the resiliency, bravery, and fortitude of firefighters and the individuals they help. They also take important steps into education and helping firefighters demonstrate fire safety and emergency preparedness for schools and community groups across the country."

The Montauk Fire Department is known for its beautiful relationship with animals. Rescuing cats, dogs, and deer from the sea, burning buildings, and trees, our firemen have put their lives on the line to save our beloved pets.

Firemen, and the pets who have been known to warn their owners of a house fire (including the pet snake who saved a family's life!), deserve our thanks.

You can learn more about Pet Fire Safety Day, and other holidays, on this wonderful website: nationaltoday.com.

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Throwback Thursday – Cattle Drives



No, these cowpokes aren't headed to the Surf Lodge. They're hot to trot to Deep Hollow Ranch instead – after meeting up with some livestock about to arrive on the Long Island Rail Road.

Cattle drives were an enduring part of Montauk's history starting in the 17th century. Its grazing pastures were used to bulk up cattle, sheep, and horses owned by East Hampton's early proprietors, and the first, second, and third houses in town were built for livestock keepers and their families. First House burned down in 1909 (train sparks from the railroad were blamed), but Second House and Third House (or versions thereof) today stand as museums. Second House is run by the Montauk Historical Society, while Third House, now a part of Montauk County Park, is operated by the Suffolk County Parks system.

Montauk's cattle drives drew to a close more than 300 years later in 1925, but Frank Dickinson revived them in 1936 and they were re-revived after World War II. Toward the end they involved transporting about 160 head of cattle some 2,500 miles, from Texas to Montauk, then on to what must have been the exhilarating sport of herding them about four miles from the Montauk train station to the ranch.

Many noteworthy Montauk residents took part in these dramatic expeditions. Among them was Craig Tuthill, whose family donated the photo collection that includes this snapshot from the 1950s. Mr. Tuthill was a dedicated volunteer with the Montauk Fire Department and other organizations, and his ancestors included Capt. Edwin Baker Tuthill, who developed a fishing operation on Fort Pond Bay sold in 1931 to Perry B. Duryea Sr.

Pictured in this photo, in addition to Craig Tuthill, are Phin Dickinson, Judy Smith King, Dick White, John Lycke, Al Holden, Arthur Wiggins, Nancy Dickinson, Jimmy Hewitt, Frank Tillinghast, Robbie Wilson, Judy Schellinger, Frank Dickinson, Barbara Dickinson, Bettie Duryea, Stanley Mort, Barbara Borth, and Bill Nichols.

Can you spot them?

By Virginia Garrison

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Filed under: [Local History](#)

Tagged: [Al Holden](#), [Arthur Wiggins](#), [Barbara Borth](#), [Barbara Dickinson](#), [Bettie Duryea](#), [Bill Nichols](#), [Capt. Edwin Baker Tuthill](#), [cattle drive](#), [cattle drives](#), [Craig Tuthill](#), [Deep Hollow Ranch](#), [Dick White](#), [first house](#), [Frank Dickinson](#), [Frank Tilinghast](#), [Jimmy Hewitt](#), [John Lycke](#), [Judy Schellinger](#), [Judy Smith King](#), [Long Island Rail Road](#), [Nancy Dickinson](#), [Perry B. Duryea Sr.](#), [Phin Dickinson](#), [Robbie Wilson](#), [Second House](#), [Stanley Mort](#), [third house](#)

Throwback Thursday – Friends of the Montauk Library Book Fair



Photo collage of Book Fair volunteers, ca. 1996-1998: Starting in the top left-hand corner: Mary (last name unknown), Angela Lambriola, Robert Schorr, Christine Langerfeld, Judith Rade, Bob Mautschke, June (last name unknown), Charlotte Schorr, Eileen Mautschke, Doris and Frank Donahue, Suzanne Gosman, and Elaine Kahn



Photograph of Bob-e Metzger, Chairperson of the Friends' Book Fair, looking over boxes in the storage area maintained by the organization, ca. 1990s



Photograph of Christine Langerfeld, President of the Friends of the Montauk Library in 2011, and Bob-E Metzger, smiling for the camera on the Montauk Green, ca. 2000s

As much as American flags and fireworks, the Friends of the Montauk Library Book Fair has long been a staple of the Fourth of July weekend. These photographs recall the event in its heyday, when an army of volunteers would commandeer the Village Green to sell books by the pound, as well as baked goods, plants, white elephant items, toys and children's games, crafts and jewelry, refreshments, and much more.

The fair was started by community members to raise money to create a library — back when Montaukers still had to rely on visits from the Suffolk County bookmobile. Running for 35 years, the fair expanded to a point where it involved finding hundreds of volunteers, a pursuit led with determination by Bob-E Metzger, according to Sally Krusch, the current president of the Friends of the Montauk Library. The presence of about 90 volunteers was required at the cordoned-off fair premises alone, while others – in some years, they included U.S. Coast Guard officers – had to lug tons of books from the library to the Green.

The event attracted throngs of visitors during Montauk's busiest holiday weekend and raised thousands of dollars each year, peaking around 2010. By 2016, however, it had grown more difficult to find volunteers, parking had become problematic, and the fair seemed to have lost a bit of its community flavor. Now scaled back, it has been relocated to the Montauk Library, where parking is easier and there is far less book-moving to be done.

Thanks to the Covid-19 pandemic, the Friends did not stage a book fair in 2020. Nor will there be one this Fourth of July, as the Montauk Library building is in the process of being renovated and expanded.

Ms. Krusch said the organization hopes to do “something particularly nice” in terms of a book fair next year, and that plans are also in the works for several events to celebrate the library’s reopening this fall.

Still, she said of the Fourth of July tradition on the Green, “I think it was a fabulous community event.”

By Virginia Garrison

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