

## Our History

### **A Sedge Called Happiness: A Brief History of Mantoloking Shores**

**Written by Lou Vetter**

In the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, an intrepid yachtsman named Addison Woolsey Bronson decided to chart Barnegat Bay from its northern terminus in his hometown of Bay Head, New Jersey, to the mouth of Toms River, eight miles to the south. Alone in his *Buccaneer*, the indomitable mariner indefatigably sailed into and out of every cove and tributary of nearly half of the bay dividing the mainland from a narrow 20-mile-long split facing the Atlantic Ocean. So accurate was his work that the U.S. Coast and Geodetic Survey used Bronson's charts as a basis for its official map.

About three miles south of the head of the bay, Bronson mapped a 17-acre mud flat, or sedge, extending westward from the narrow barrier island into the water. The sedge, labeled "Happiness" on the Bronson map, also included a section dubbed "Sherman's Tide Pond" and another called "Dutchman's Point." Little more than a minor protrusion into the vastness of the 150-square-mile bay, the irregularly shaped sedge was a marshy area that had been trod mainly by the Lenni Lenape Indians who once lived across the water. Robert Juet, a mate on Captain Henry Hudson's *Half Moon*, was the first European to record a sighting of Barnegat Bay and its environs. In his log for September 2, 1609, Juet described the bay as "a great lake of water, in length ten leagues."

By the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, as European colonization of the New World accelerated, a patent of 269 acres on both sides of the Manasquan River along the Atlantic Coast was granted to William Lawrence, a shareholder in the East Jersey Proprietorship. He bequeathed the barrier island portion to his seven sons and a grandson. In 1751 David Curtis purchased from the Lawrence family a parcel called Squan Beach, an area encompassing present-day Mantoloking, Curtis Point and the sedge called Happiness, now known as Mantoloking Shores.

Except for a handful of homes and life saving stations constructed by the Coast Guard in such places as Bay Head, Mantoloking, Chadwick and Toms River, the barrier island on which Squan Beach was situated remained largely pristine. Settlers, mostly English, moved into the area, which was designated as part of Monmouth County, a huge land mass extending from Little Egg Harbor northward to Raritan Bay. The barrier island was part of Dover Township, one of the largest communities in Monmouth County.

In 1850, Whig Assemblyman Joel Haywood persuaded the New Jersey legislature to sever the portion of Monmouth County south of the Manasquan River and from Ocean County, an entity that reached the southernmost point of Long Beach Island, another narrow split of land south of Barnegat Inlet. The same legislative act that created Ocean County also gave birth to the Township of Brick, which carved out of Dover Township.

As the 19<sup>th</sup> century drew to a close, one of the wonders of the new industrial age began to transform the sleepy barrier island. The lure of sandy beaches and cooling ocean breezes attracted the attention of well-to-do New Yorkers and Philadelphians, who began to make their way seaward during the summers. They were fortuitously abetted by the Pennsylvania-Long Branch Railroad, which built a single-track line in 1883. Starting in Camden, it traversed New Jersey, crossed Barnegat Bay on a drawbridge to Seaside Park and turned north through Lavallette, Chadwick and Mantoloking to connect with the Long Branch Railroad, which had been constructed to provide rail access from New York and northern New Jersey to Point Pleasant and Bay Head.

The mini building boom along the barrier island led to local pressure for independence from the mammoth municipalities of Dover and Brick. Bay Head and Point Pleasant Beach broke away from Brick in 1886. They were followed by Lavallette, which separated from Dover in 1898. Mantoloking left Brick in 1911. Point Pleasant Borough parted company with Brick in 1920.

All communities along the strip benefited from the construction in 1913 of Ocean Avenue, which eventually became Route 35, a two-lane road that accommodated the handful of automobiles driving between Seaside Heights and Point Pleasant.

While residential construction sprouted sporadically around it, the forlorn mud flat known as Happiness slumbered on into the 20<sup>th</sup> century, disturbed only by the occasional fisherman who might pitch a tent there to try his luck at angling in the bay.

The surging zeal to go “down the shore” when weather turned torrid in the cities was tempered only by the outbreak of World War II when gasoline rationing and restrictions on civilian travel put a brake on the incipient development that had taken place in the twenties and thirties.

Victory over Germany and Japan marked the end of one era and the start of a new epoch for the New Jersey shore in general and the 20-mile-long spit of land containing the sedge call Happiness, in particular. One of the harbingers of a trend that was to accelerate during the second half of the 20th century was the 1946 culmination of train service on the tracks running past the sedge. By the time the tracks had been removed in August, 1949, the number of lanes on Route 35 had doubled. The strip was bustling with new construction, the largest project involving hundreds of tiny two-bedroom cottages jammed onto postage stamp-size lots in Ocean Beach that sold for \$2,500.00.

Although there was no such activity on the mud flat protruding into Barnegat Bay, the potential for profit on the 17-acre sedge had not escaped the canny eye of Ramon LeCompte, a builder and developer who lived across the bay in Brick. He purchased the property from the Second National Bank of Red Bank, as trustee for the estate of Elnathan T. Field. According to records on file in the Ocean County Courthouse, LeCompte paid a total of \$200.00 for the two parcels that constituted the entire tract. However, local lore suggests that the transaction recorded on January 16, 1946, actually involved an amount in the neighborhood of \$20,000.00. According to another local

legend, LeCompte and the sellers concluded their negotiations in Peter Dolger's Tavern, an establishment on the westerly side of Route 35. The tavern is now known as Used To Be's, in acknowledgement of the various names it has borne during its many incarnations.

LeCompte and his partner, Judge Albert Larabee of Lakewood, allowed the land to lie fallow until 1956, when the first of 12 subdivision maps was filed for lots at the northern end of the tract in the Bay Lane area.

Between 1956 and 1976, when the final map was filed, LeCompte had dredged out the muck to create lagoons, and filled in the adjacent mud flats to form more than 300 building lots on which Mantoloking Shores was built. LeCompte reportedly drew sand from the bottom of Barnegat Bay to complete the landfill process. Because of federal and state legislation severely limiting the type of dredging and filling done by LeCompte, it would be virtually impossible to replicate Mantoloking Shores today.

Meanwhile, lots were being sold and homes erected in the newly created subdivision. One longtimer Cutter Lane resident recalls buying a lot in 1961 for \$3,600.00 with a \$20.00 down payment. A home on Brigantine Lane sold for \$31,000.00 the same year. Prices for homes in the area remained in the \$20,000.00 - \$30,000.00 range through the sixties but rose to the \$50,000.00 level in the seventies.

The new residents of the fledgling community wasted little time in forming an association to maintain the standards of the neighborhood. A Certificate of Incorporation of the Mantoloking Shores Property Owners Association was filed on June 27, 1960. Signers were Michael and Katherine Buyukas, Carl W. Johnson, J.A. Cuthbertson and R.W. Bradley.

The association lobbies the governing body of Brick across the bay. The streets remain privately owned, as well as the bulkheads at the ends of the lagoons. Over the years, the M.S.P.O.A. has unsuccessfully tried to have Mantoloking Shores annexed to Mantoloking, our neighbor one mile to the north. However, because Brick has been reluctant to let our people go and Mantoloking has not extended a welcome mat, the area remains part of Brick- and a major contributor to the township treasury.

Although the last subdivision, on Pointe Drive, was built in the late seventies, LeCompte remained in the area. Unlike other developers who build homes and then depart for their next project, LeCompte stayed around. He owned and occupied several homes in the development, using each as his base to enforce personally the 16 restrictions he had inserted into each deed. For example, no home could have less than 960 square feet of living space, perhaps reflecting LeCompte's concern over the way Ocean Beach, with its minuscule bungalows, had evolved. Nor could any home be higher than two stories. Clotheslines and trash cans had to be concealed from view. Signs were prohibited on any property. Docks more than five feet from the water line were banned.

LeCompte's last home in Mantoloking Shores was on Dutchmans Point Road. He left the area in the early nineties; reportedly to move to Florida. His partner, Judge Larabee, had died in 1972.

The major catalyst to the growth of the area was provided by the Garden State Parkway, which opened in 1954 and afforded northern New Jerseyans and New Yorkers swift access to the beckoning beaches "down the shore." Brick's population quadrupled between 1950 and 1960 from 4,319 to 16,299 and then doubled to 35,057 in 1970. The 27-square-mile community had 53,629 residents in 1980, 66,455 in 1990 and 76,119 in 2000.

To appreciate how dramatically the area's population has exploded, one must consider that on almost any given summer weekend, the population of Mantoloking Shores, with its 300 homes, probably equals or exceeds the 1940 Census Bureau numbers for the entire township, which had only 1,376 residents on the cusp of World War II.

As the 20th century melted into the 21st, values of properties in Mantoloking Shores rose steadily, with periodic dips caused by national recessions. The trend was clearly upward, as available land became scarcer and more desirable. Prices of homes went into six figures, with some, particularly on Dutchman's Point, topping the million-dollar mark.

Mantoloking Shores has become an oasis of civility and comity in a world buffeted by conflict and contention. The sedge called Happiness has provided second homes to those who spend their work weeks in the maelstrom of the marketplace and first homes to those who have withdrawn from the rat race and to those who still commute to jobs in the cities.

If there were a motto to describe the leisurely lifestyle in Mantoloking Shores, it arguably could be "Live and let live." There is something for everybody's taste: the lagoons leading to Barnegat Bay satisfy the mariners and anglers among us....bathers have a choice between their lagoons and the ocean, with some fortunate few having access to pools on their properties. And those who prefer to be left alone find their wishes fulfilled somewhere on the 17 acres developed by a visionary named Ramon LeCompte on a sedge once called "Happiness".

## **Sources**

Colie, Frederick R., "An Exercise in Nostalgia: Mantoloking, 1880-1920"  
Compton Press, Morristown, NJ 1970

Jahn, Robert, "Down Barnegat Bay: A Nor'easter Midnight Reader"  
Beachcomber Press, Mantoloking, NJ 1980

Miller, Pauline S., "Ocean County: Four Centuries in the Making"

Ocean County Cultural & Heritage Commission, Toms River, NJ 2000

**Research Assistance**

Thanks to Mantoloking Shores residents Charles Dino, Richard and Cheryl Mansfield, Albert Martin, George and Eleanor Murphy, William Porter, and Ed Rapoza, who shared their time and memories to make this history possible.

Thanks, also to Willie DeCamp of “Save Barnegat Bay”, Gene Donatiello, historian of Brick Township, Jean Bronson Mahoney, who proved immensely helpful in the preparation of this account of how we came to be where we are.

Page URL: <http://www.mantolokingshores.com/history.htm>