

## Einstein Wasn't Much of a Sailor

In September 1939 Hitler invaded Poland, starting World War II and inflicting years of suffering on the world. Only a couple of months earlier, Albert Einstein vacationed for the summer in a rented cottage on Nassau Point, across Little Peconic Bay from Noyac, not knowing he would play a reluctant part in ending the war. In July two refugee physicists from Hungary, Leo Szilard, then at Columbia University, and Eugene Wigner of Princeton, drove out to the North Fork to talk to Einstein. They had information that German scientists had smashed the atom and were working to develop a nuclear weapon. They feared that, if successful, it could well enable Hitler to dominate the free world. They wanted Einstein's help in convincing the Roosevelt administration to take action against the looming danger. Einstein met the two physicists and though concerned about the morality of creating such a doomsday device, he wrote a letter that eventually reached Roosevelt. It helped persuade him to order the secret American effort, called the Manhattan Project, to build an atomic bomb.

One of Einstein's pleasures that summer was sailing a 14-foot catboat called *Tinef* which means Junk in Yiddish, and according to Dr. Marilyn Weigold of Pace University, writing in the Summer 2000 issue of *Long Island Forum*, local boys came to Einstein's aid when he capsized the little boat in a strong breeze. One of the boys, Robert Fisher, gave Einstein boating advice but said that the 60-year old scientist never got the hang of sailing. The Nobel Laureate more enjoyed playing Bach on his violin, joined by David Rothman who ran the local department store. They discovered their mutual love of music when Rothman sold Einstein a pair of sandals. Walter Isaacson gives a similar account in his fine biography of Einstein.



































































