

# Introduction

**T**hough a relatively small town, Sag Harbor on the East End of Long Island, New York, has a fascinating history. Members of the Algonquin Indian tribe lived and summered here thousands of years ago. English colonists arrived nearby in 1645, found the soil ideal for farming and established some of the earliest settlements in the New World.

At one time, Sag Harbor commerce was busier than New York City's and led to establishment of the first Custom House on Long Island. Sag Harbor may be best known as one of the leading whaling harbors on the East Coast. At the industry's height in the 1840s, it was home port for some 60 whaling ships that roamed the world's oceans, supported by the village's rope works, coopers, blacksmiths, sailmakers, and shipbuilders. Revenue from the industry built distinctive homes that still line Main Street. The first Long Island newspaper was published here in 1791.

The Revolutionary War and Civil War affected Sag Harbor and its people like hundreds of other small towns in young America. The end of whaling in the latter half of the 1800s brought a period of decline, other businesses unable to keep up with modern advancements. In later years, writers and artists began coming here for respite from the City, and a freer, less expensive lifestyle. Now, close to, but still separate in spirit from the fabled Hamptons, Sag Harbor attracts visitors from all over the world.

These stories which originally appeared in the *Sag Harbor Express* over the last ten years create an intimate picture of some of the events and people that created the unique personality of an "American Beauty."

The author thanks *Sag Harbor Express* Publisher Emeritus Bryan Boyhan for his guidance and encouragement. Bryan approached me some ten years ago on Main Street as he made his rounds to check on the state of the village. He saw something I wrote and suggested that maybe I should try a regular column for the *Express*.

He further suggested that I should concentrate on the history of the old whaling village. Having been thoroughly bored by history while in high school, I wasn't sure I wanted to sign up for the job. But once I got into it and realized the wealth of fascinating information about Sag Harbor, I became thoroughly engrossed and felt lucky to get the assignment.

We decided to title the columns "Looking Back" which gave me lots of leeway, I could write about something that happened a year ago, or centuries in the past. Since I'd only moved to the Harbor 15 years before, I knew I was still considered a newcomer. Researching the Sag Harbor of yesteryear gave me new appreciation for the village that Dorothy Zaykowski called "An American Beauty."

Now while walking on Main Street and seeing a few tourists standing on a corner (they're easy to spot), I often stop to talk and to launch into a description of the many wonderful features of the village. Maybe I'm kidding myself but they always seem to appreciate the information.

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Sag Harbor  
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