

CHAPTER I

SOUTHAMPTON

I: EARLY HISTORY

The early beginnings of Southampton, and the sort of community it was in the last part of the nineteenth century before the summer invasion, are important to describe here as they form the essential and irreducible backdrop to this story. It also is the historical context that the members of the new colony unavoidably encountered. They were to find Southampton both charming for its air of village antiquity with which they wished to identify and at the same time exasperating for its obduracy, its stubborn inability or refusal (as it seemed to them) to come to terms with the modern world, their world and its particular expectations. But nonetheless, the charms of its history, its extreme antiquity in American terms, certainly outweighed any obstacles to progress that might be misguidedly thrown up in their way.

In 1870, Richard Bayles, a writer and native of Suffolk County, had taken it on himself to bring up to date two earlier histories of Long Island.¹ By his own admission he found the project rather too daunting and scaled back his effort to cover only two-thirds of the Island, that is, only Suffolk County. The result was less the history claimed in the title than a lively contemporaneous account of the life of towns and villages that he encountered in his travels.² In three or four pages he gave us a description of Southampton as a small farming community with perhaps not very much to distinguish itself apart from its slightly greater age than other communities in the area. It was settled in 1640, beating Southold to the punch, its neighbor to the north, by a few months although Southold at the time of Bayles's writing still vigorously protested Southampton's claimed historical precedence and still does.³ Southampton antedated the five other Suffolk towns by no more than ten or fifteen years. It was a small farming village situated in a fertile plain stretching south to the Atlantic beach a mile from its center and in 1870 contained slightly fewer than one thousand inhabitants and less than one hundred dwellings. It was, Bayles thought, "a village of sober, industrious, well-to-do farmers."⁴ Earlier writers in Long Island history, Nathaniel Prime and Benjamin F. Thompson notably, had similarly observed that the lives of its residents were cautious, thrifty, and hardworking and attributed this to an abiding attachment to the discipline of Presbyterian religion.

The large majority lived along South and North Main streets, which ran from the ocean to beyond the new railroad that had come through in 1870 and ended in Long Springs, as well as on the east to west streets of the Shinnecock Road (now Hill Street) and the Bridgehampton Road (now simply the Hampton Road), which extended east toward Water Mill and Bridgehampton. The commercial center of the village was on Main Street between Job's Lane (a continuation of the Shinnecock Road) and the Bridgehampton Road. There were to be found several stores, three hotels or boarding houses, two churches (Presbyterian and Methodist Episcopal), a post office, and one of three schools (the Southampton Academy). Two district schools were located a short distance away and served the children of what were known as the North and South Ends of the village. Elsewhere, there were two or three blacksmith shops, a grist mill (on Windmill Lane), a machine shop, a railroad depot on North Main Street, and a hall for public gatherings on Job's Lane or Academy Lane, as it was called in the nineteenth century. There were two cemeteries; one off South Main Street dating from the mid-seventeenth century that had been used only sporadically since the 1720s and a larger cemetery in the North End of the village. According to Bayles, there were no saloons. He noted approvingly that the descendants of the Puritan or, more generally, Presbyterian settlers had continued to guard carefully "the moral purity of their society" but failed to remark that there was a little bar on Job's Lane owned by one of the Hildreths and known as John Hen's. There were also two pharmacies that dispensed alcohol and alcohol-based prescriptions, long objected to by a vociferous temperance movement led by the Methodist Church that finally managed to have a "no license" town excise board voted through in the 1880s.

The village, then, was strung out along two axes in a rough grid pattern, other streets within the interstices of the grid more or less conforming to this model. It was not something that had been deliberately planned but had emerged spontaneously and quite logically from an early decision to locate the village along the length of Main Street between the ocean beach and Long Springs. This decision had been made in the mid-1640s at several meetings of the general or town court. The first settlers had built a cluster of dwellings and a meetinghouse a mile to the east of what was in 1648 to become the Town Street (as Main Street was first called and sometimes still was by older residents). This location had been on high ground and near a spring or stream that intermittently fed into a long pond running down toward the ocean. It was named Farrington's Pond, after an early arrival who left within a few years, but later came to be known as Old Town Pond. The first inhabitants, having grown in number through increase and in-migration, evidently found these first quarters cramped and inconvenient and agreed that it was in their interest to establish new home or house lots on the eastern shore of the next pond over or at what shortly came to be known as Town Pond. In 1652, a new meetinghouse was erected a short distance down the new street leading to the ocean and a cemetery next to it.

The settlement arrangement reflected what geographers and human ecologists were later to call a dispersed or string village.⁵ This was quite common in early New England. Settlers often dwelled at a distance from each other and had only one focal point of communal gathering in the meetinghouse that served as church, town court, school, and

hostelry (or ordinary, as inns were then usually called). In such villages, cottages were not intimately clustered around a village green or common, mill pond, church, and burying ground as we are accustomed to expect them to be but dispersed in relatively large home lots of three or four and sometimes as many as six acres. The arrangement was functional inasmuch as almost all the planting fields in 1648 were to the east and south of the town street and thus within easy reach of the home lots of the freeholders. It clearly did not reflect any fear of Indian attack despite the fact that relations with the local Shinnecocks often were tense and mutually uncomprehending. But homesteads still were situated fairly close to one another and not scattered through the fields in isolated farms.

This arrangement also seems to have reflected the pronounced individualism of the settlers, a characteristic they shared in common with all other Puritan migrants in New England. While of necessity they began forming cooperative relations among themselves immediately on arrival in Southampton in order to survive in what must have seemed a strange and occasionally hostile environment—and before setting out on what was understood to be a collective enterprise had drawn up several documents outlining the rights and obligations of the members of the group—Southampton was by no means a fully solidary or cohesive community in its first few years. The settlers formed a church, built a small meetinghouse, hired a minister, and established minimal but effective civil government; but the main purpose of the enterprise was to allocate land to its subscribers for their productive use in an economically rational manner. Within a year or so of settlement land was thus divided in the immediate vicinity of Old Town, just to its east and south, and allotted to the first inhabitants. There was little that could be described as a communitarian impulse in this settlement pattern. Timothy Breen outlines a similar experience in Easthampton—initially an offshoot of Southampton—in the 1650s. There was, he argued, no “dense collective existence.”⁶ The town records in both cases show that social relations were often fragile and that problems of social control over individual behavior were encountered early. From the very first, individual economic motivations were paramount even if they did not override the need for collective security in dealing with the local Indians or, more tellingly, were subsumed under cooperative (and lucrative) arrangements once offshore and drift or beached whales had been spotted and their profitability recognized, a fortunate accident as Breen points out. This unexpected winter harvest gave the settlers early access to large markets. But even here communal arrangements to establish whale watches and a division of labor for processing whale carcasses quickly gave way to the development of small companies formed exclusively to hunt whales offshore for private profit.

But in 1648, despite the collective agreement to relocate to a new town street, Southampton had few of the qualities of an integrated or solidary community. It had no collective past, a basic ingredient of any enduring social formation. That was to change in the 1660s and 1670s when it came under the jurisdiction of the new English colonial authorities in New York, but the original individualist and acquisitive impulse of the first settlers not only remained but also was considerably enlarged in consequence of this new political arrangement. This was very much the result of the town’s successful integration into the emerging market economy of New England and New York—the new Atlantic

world—that in great part had been made possible by the expansion of inshore whaling after 1660 and the growing demand for whale products. At the same time, Southampton emerged as a political community with a distinct political identity. Between 1664 and 1686, the town's leaders fought a steadily losing battle with successive colonial governors for its political independence. This, more than any other single collective experience, forged the sense of community that had previously remained relatively undeveloped.

We have used the term *village* to refer to Southampton, but the community was not a village in the 1870s in any official sense and had not been thought of or referred to by its inhabitants as a village since its seventeenth-century founding. The references to a town street or a town pond and the early town records that are replete with references to the business of the town should make this clear. The “village” was no more than the small initial settlement located in the much broader bounds of the town covering a wide area. This conformed to a pattern typical of New England town formation in the seventeenth century. Moreover, most New England emigrants lived in the town and were not village dwellers and thought of themselves as such, holding land of their own, as freeholders. Many also, as Virginia Anderson notes, were familiar with an urban market economy either as artisans (tailors, weavers, carpenters, shoemakers, etc.) or as yeomen or husbandmen with surplus produce to sell in local markets.⁷

Those from small manorial villages did, it is true, experience the dying impact of feudal restrictions on tenure but ancient feudal tenures were in the last stages of dissolution in seventeenth-century England and were abolished entirely by Charles II in 1660. Almost all tenures were reduced to money rents in free and common socage. Yet a relatively small minority of New England migrants did originate in open field villages that in the 1630s were still prevalent in the central and southern sections of England and in part remained feudally organized. In such villages, tenant farmers continued to owe service to the manorial lord and participated in manorial courts while tilling their strips or lots in the open or common fields. Some of Southampton's settlers may have come from such villages—the land system they established suggests this—but to have done so they would have needed sufficient capital to finance the trip and establish themselves and their families overseas. Some open field villages were, however, quite prosperous and located near thriving markets. This was particularly true of southern England. Researching the origins of migrants to New England, Sumner Chilton Powell examined the conditions of village life and the fortunes of tenant farmers in a small open field village in Hampshire and found that the most enterprising among them were well able to accumulate the funds necessary to underwrite such an expensive and adventurous voyage into what must have seemed an uncertain and unpredictable future. As might be expected they brought with them the patterns of life they were familiar with, patterns that included the organization of land tenures that had prevailed in the communities they had left.⁸ There is no reason to think that Southampton's settlers were different.

The small community of Southampton then was simply the administrative center, and the first area to be settled, of an extensive tract of land that circumscribed the area of the town and had always been known—or almost always known—as the Town of Southampton. Only after 1894 when the settlement was incorporated as a village under the laws of New

York State did it come to be called the Village of Southampton with some self-governing powers. Other places in the nineteenth century were called villages—Bridgehampton, Good Ground, Quogue, Speonk, even the largest village of all in 1870, Sag Harbor—but all these other settlements that had emerged slowly and for the most part well after 1700 had always been villages within the bounds of the town. None of them, except Sag Harbor, were incorporated until much later—and most remained hamlets as they are today—although by the late nineteenth century, all had churches and post offices.

But initially in the 1640s, the Southampton settlement was simply “the house-covered space” of the town situated in the wider context of the town’s land. Nineteenth-century historian Frederic W. Maitland described the legal geography of early English towns and their lands in this fashion, a fashion that would have been thoroughly familiar to New England inhabitants. The town, being house covered, was surrounded by broad lands that included arable and common pastureland, water meadows, woodland, and waste. The totality comprised “an agrarian commonwealth” of township and borough.⁹ Similarly, in seventeenth-century New England usage, settlements generally were referred to as the town plot (sometimes plat) or the town spot with the understanding that they also were surrounded by large and varied hinterlands that were under the settlement’s jurisdiction and could be divided into lots to be allocated to individual town proprietors.

When Southampton was settled in 1640 it was under the terms of a patent or grant from the Scottish Earl of Stirling who in turn had received a grant of lands from the Council for New England, a private land company chartered by James I in 1621. The Council disbanded in 1635 and distributed its New England lands among its members, one of whom was the earl. Stirling received Long Island, offshore islands along the coast of Massachusetts (Nantucket, Martha’s Vineyard, the Elizabeth Islands), and northern Maine or “the County of Canada.” His agent in New England responsible for disposing of these lands was James Farrett, a young Scotsman, who had arrived earlier in 1637 or 1638. Maine was all but ignored and later entirely forgotten by the Stirling heirs (the earl died in 1640), but Farrett set about selling rights to settle large tracts in the remaining lands covered by the Stirling grant and in particular on Long Island. He was only partially successful; but in the two years he spent here he managed to find patentees, or grantees, for part of the land that is now Southold, part of what was to become Oyster Bay, Gardiner’s Island (already purchased of the Montaukett Indians by Lyon Gardiner in 1639 but without the benefit of a patent), the offshore islands (later disputed by the Massachusetts Bay Colony) and part of Southampton east of Canoe Place. After Stirling died, Farrett, apparently short of cash, transferred the patent rights to the remaining lands of Long Island to a consortium of Connecticut speculators, led by the governors of Hartford and New Haven, in exchange for a three- or five-year loan of one hundred pounds sterling. He left for Scotland, never to repay the loan, and in due course the governors foreclosed and exercised their right to purchase the Stirling lands from different groups of Indians. Among those purchased were 30,000 acres acquired from the Montauketts that were later in 1651 to become Easthampton.

Farrett had been fortunate in 1639 in making contact with a group of settlers in Lynn, Massachusetts who were dissatisfied with the land allocated to them and were actively searching for somewhere else to settle. Very probably John Winthrop, several times governor

of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, had arranged for Farrett to meet with them. Before meeting Farrett, some twenty men had drawn up two documents outlining their plans to settle a new plantation, the means by which they determined to do it, and how they expected to organize themselves once there. These were the Disposall of the Vessell and A Declaration of the Company.¹⁰ There was nothing unusual about this in the Bay Colony in the late 1630s. The first Massachusetts settlements were filling up through heavy migration and new immigrants, anxious to acquire land but finding most of it already taken up, had few options but to form themselves into ad hoc companies, apply to the general court in Boston for a grant of land if they were to move within the jurisdiction of the Bay, and strike out to establish a new settlement where they could negotiate a land purchase with whatever Indians happened to live there. This “hiving out,” as it often is referred to, was an integral part of the process of “peopling and planting” whereby new groups were continually moving out into the wilderness from crowded centers of population to establish their land claims and improve the land they had been granted. Improvement signified possession and was essential to the Puritan conception of ownership.¹¹

The Lynn men followed this pattern. That they moved out of the Bay was not unusual either. Many before them had already moved to Connecticut and Rhode Island, frequently because of religious tension and disagreement, and some had even departed to establish towns in New Netherland in the western part of Long Island to place themselves under the relatively benign authority of the Dutch who professed none of the theocratic pretensions of many in the Bay Colony. There may have been such overriding religious motivations in some cases, but for the most part the reasons for searching out a new plantation were economic. There also were political motives in settling Long Island and Connecticut. Dutch territorial claims extended far to the east of New Amsterdam, and Bay authorities were anxious to counter that in the 1630s.

A further key to understanding this process of out-migration is that in all cases the men involved formed companies to finance the venture and bought shares in them. As John Frederick Martin put it, they were plantation companies formed for the purpose of land development in the expectation of gaining a return on their investment; land being the principal capital of early New England and the point of acquiring it being to convert it to private ownership.¹² How much capital a man put in would ultimately determine how much land he would be allocated, an allocation that was moreover always in fee simple and thus heritable and transferable. Land was the pay-off for the initial investment.

Few writers on early New England today cite Max Weber and his analysis of Puritan asceticism and its connection to the ethical basis of capitalist activity—the spirit of capitalism as he called it—but it remains highly relevant. It was precisely the settlers’ desire for land and its possession and improvement that reflected those disciplined motivations that Weber thought were essential in accounting for the rise in the seventeenth century of what he called rational bourgeois capitalism. The small plantation companies springing up in the Bay Colony, of which the Lynn company (with its own charter or articles) was simply one of many, exemplified the early capitalist development that Weber sought to understand and explain.¹³ It was a rational economic enterprise in pursuit of profit and the accumulation of

capital in the form of improvement to the land and its productive use. In the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries men who subscribed stock in companies in pursuit of commercial profit in some enterprise abroad, for example cod-fishing off Newfoundland, were called adventurers, venturing, that is, their capital. The members of the Lynn company described themselves as undertakers, that is, they agreed to undertake and finance the establishment of a new plantation in return for which they would each receive freehold rights to land covered by the terms of the grant or patent according to the value of their shares or rights to the plantation's common land yet to be taken up and divided among them. It was a prescription for individualism. The members of all such companies were always defined as tenants in common of the land for which they held a patent, but this did not mean that they would pursue the development of the land's resources as a communal enterprise. Only in specific instances would they do so when collective labor became a necessity. This was the case in early whaling in Southampton. The entire company was divided into squadrons in the mid-1640s to watch for beached or close inshore whales and was organized to pursue them, cut them up, and render the oil. This arrangement, however, quickly gave way to private enterprise and the formation of small, chartered companies, a change Weber would have just as quickly appreciated and predicted.

Thoughts of establishing a town, a corporate political entity, were not in those formative years considered a priority or even a necessity. A town would have meant to most—coming from England as they did—a relatively large and diverse borough, perhaps possessed of a royal charter, a market and perhaps a manufacturing economy, a main center of commerce. Small early New England communities, such as Southampton with no more than twenty founding families, met none of these conditions of township. If there was such a thing as a town, it was simply understood to be in the form of a joint stock company, a business enterprise. The Farrett grant to the Lynn men contained only the barest reference to the establishment of civil government or a church. It would not, however, be true to say that the communal, legal, religious, and other “nonbusiness aspects” of town life were ignored. To the contrary, the earliest town records of Southampton show a lively involvement of the stockholders in the varied fortunes and problems of what was clearly understood to be a civic as well as an economic enterprise even if it was not yet quite a civil and political community. Yet in this connection, the early inhabitants did form some minimal administration of the town's affairs: They elected officials, kept records, insisted on attendance at town meetings, adjudicated disputes, clarified the responsibilities of stockholders in respect to land, livestock, the control of wild animals (wolves especially), formed train bands for military protection and, when new problems surfaced, elaborated collective responses to them—an instance of which was the discovery of the potential that whaling represented. As early as December 1641, the town court “ordered” that there should be four quarter courts and “one generall meeting” each year to be called into session by “the Magistrates,” an indication from the beginning that an administration of the town's affairs was thought to be an absolute necessity.¹⁴

Similarly, in regard to religion, there was never any question that the establishment of a church and the retention of a minister would not be a priority. Prior to setting out for Southampton, the leaders of the company arranged for a well-regarded Boston minister to

follow them. Abraham Pierson was a young Yorkshireman who had arrived in Boston with his parents in 1638. He had been educated at Cambridge, the holder of a master's degree, and ordained in Boston after which he appears to have settled in Lynn, the embarkation point for Southampton's settlers. That he was a fashionably orthodox Puritan, even something of a firebrand and theocratically inclined, must have seemed initially attractive to the little congregation that hired him. He joined the settlers in December 1640, six months after their own arrival and after they had already constructed a small meetinghouse in readiness. Yet it must be stressed that, pious though they no doubt were, this small band did not leave Lynn or the Bay in general for religious reasons as perhaps they had left England. They left for land. Pierson lasted a few years only, a division within the church over the question of whether church membership was to be a prerequisite for the election of town officials having led to his departure. The town was firmly against it but a small number of his parishioners departed with him. There was a second reason connected with his leaving. In 1644, the General Court decided to join with the Connecticut Colony in Hartford for reasons largely having to do with security. Pierson, however, favored an alignment with New Haven, a radically sectarian colony whose views on theocratic government accorded fully with his. But more moderate opinion prevailed and he left for a succession of ministries in Connecticut and New Jersey. His son, also Abraham Pierson, later became the first president of Yale College.

The projected group of settlers met with James Farrett, probably at first in Boston and then later in New Haven, and agreed that they should plant themselves somewhere on Long Island. Between 1639 and 1640, Farrett gave them two and possibly three deeds, each of them slightly different, the last of which provided for an extremely generous sixty-four square miles of land ("eight miles square") between Canoe Place on the west and a line to the east extending south from "Mr. Farret's Island" (Shelter Island) to the ocean. (Farrett had mistakenly thought that he had purchased the island for himself from its inhabitants, the Manhansett Indians. They later denied it claiming that they had merely let him live there.) This was a much larger tract than the Bay Colony was accustomed to granting, usually only six miles square or thirty-six square miles. The fortunate colonists then set sail from New Haven to North Sea Harbor in Peconic Bay with their families, belongings, probably a few servants, some essential livestock, building materials, and their copy of the Stirling patent. They arrived in June 1640. This story has been many times told and does not need repeating here,¹⁵ but there is sufficient complexity in the events prior to the settlers' arrival in Southampton, as well as some problems with the dating of them, to suggest that there were at least two if not three failed attempts at settlement in various Long Island locations before arriving in North Sea Harbor.¹⁶

The patent had given the settlers only the right to purchase the land from the Indians who occupied it, and whose right of possession was recognized by the crown under English common law, but not the purchase of the land itself. A sale was negotiated with the Shinnecock Indians, the inhabitants, and a deed drawn up and signed in December. It is highly unlikely that the Shinnecock, knowing nothing of the English law of property and having their own distinct ideas of land ownership, realized that they were transferring their land to the new arrivals. They had no sense of land as a commodity capable of being

exchanged. Much more probable is that they thought they were providing usufruct rights to the settlers in exchange for what must have been understood by them as gift goods as well as assurances that the English would provide them with security from potential attack by other Indian groups.¹⁷ This was not how the settlers saw it, of course, and it set the tone for what was to become an enduring pattern of continual misunderstandings and disagreements between the two groups that ultimately became increasingly embittered. That pattern has continued into the present.

The first purchase from the Indians, corresponding to the area outlined in the Farrett grant as running from Canoe Place to a somewhat indeterminate eastern boundary in the Wainscott plains, was always known as the Town Purchase. There were further purchases beginning in the late 1650s. Hog Neck or Hoggenock (now North Haven) was acquired from the Manhansett Indians of Shelter Island, and several individual purchases were made by Southampton men between 1659 and 1662 of the lands west of Canoe Place in what is broadly Quogue. Wyandanch, the sachem of the Montaukett, sold Shinnecock land to John Ogden in 1659 while in 1662 Thomas Topping purchased land farther to the west from the Shinnecock, but overlapping with Ogden's purchase. The area in question was much larger than the Town Purchase and ran as far west as the yet to be determined eastern boundary of Brookhaven, a town that had been settled in 1655 on land sold by different groups of Indians and apparently approved by the Connecticut holders of the residue of the Stirling patent or by a later group known as the Committee for Connecticut.¹⁸

The story of the Quogue purchases has been explored in detail by a recent historian, John Strong, and often is referred to as the Great Quogue Land Grab.¹⁹ These private and obviously speculative purchases caused great consternation in Southampton and led ultimately to the intervention of the colonial governor. New Netherland had fallen to the English in 1664 and Richard Nicolls, who had orchestrated the Dutch defeat, became the first English governor of what was now named New York. It had been so named for James Duke of York and Albany, the younger brother of Charles II, and the holder of a crown charter to all the Dutch lands. The patent lands of New York, which included the Long Island lands under the Stirling patent, were now virtually a royal colony and later would become one when James ascended the throne in 1685. Nicolls, anxious to deal with the English towns on eastern Long Island in order to bring them under colonial governance and seeing the necessity of putting some order into a turbulent Indian real estate market, ruled that Ogden and Topping must deliver their titles to the Quogue lands to Southampton in return for adequate compensation by the town. Thus, in 1666, Southampton more than doubled the size of its land base through this acquisition of what were respectively called the Quogue and Topping's Purchases. They were still called that at the end of the nineteenth century but this later fell into disuse.

The Town of Southampton then occupied approximately 170 square miles or more than 100,000 acres, an extraordinary amount of land for the time. It was far larger than Easthampton or its neighbor to the north, Southold, although nowhere near the size of Brookhaven, which was already through successive purchases 250 square miles by 1660. The small settlement, the "house-covered space" less than one mile from the ocean, perhaps occupied less than one percent of Southampton's area. By the late nineteenth century, the

village had expanded sufficiently to include almost four thousand acres. The town as a whole, however, extended thirty miles along the south shore of Long Island where the majority of its villages were located. These communities generally were situated on necks of land extending into a series of large land-locked, but interconnected, bays that were to be found to the east of the Great South Bay and also connected to it. The bays were to some extent protected from the ocean by a narrow ribbon of barrier beach that extended eastward from the Rockaways to a point just short of the village of Southampton. The beach was vulnerable to storms, particularly winter storms from the northeast, and was periodically breached by the action of the waves forming temporary inlets. Beyond Southampton the shoreline was unprotected except in a small way at Mecox Bay and farther east at Georgica Pond.

The town was geographically divided into two parts separated by hills and the narrow isthmus of Canoe Place. Here, the Shinnecock had once drawn their canoes across the half mile of low-lying land separating Peconic and Shinnecock bays. In 1882, the state legislature approved the financing of a canal connecting the two bays. It was opened a decade later. The Shinnecock Hills, the old lands of the Indians where village sites and burial grounds dating back several millennia were later found, constituted in the early years of settlement a true barrier to communication between the eastern and western sections of the town. The Hills, as they were always simply called, were a product of glacial action pushing debris before the ice sheet almost as far as the sea. They were once densely wooded but by the end of the eighteenth century had been virtually denuded of trees following a typical pattern of deforestation both to meet the demand for wood products and increase the area of grazing land. They had been used for pasture since early settlement times which suggested that there was always much grassland. Sheep, cattle, and horses were pastured on the Hills through the 1880s but then the practice abruptly ended when the land was sold to outside development interests. The road through them was always rough and winding, often impassable in winter, and possibly this contributed to a sense of social distance between the two halves of the town and the semi-isolation of the less developed western part from the older and wealthier east. Political power had always been concentrated in the east—Southampton was the seat of town government—and most of the inhabitants of the town lived there. It was not until 1882 that the political monopoly of the east was effectively challenged.²⁰

The northern boundary of the town was described by the Peconic River and estuary and by Peconic Bay. Beyond the river and the bay lay Southold and Riverhead. A low ridge of wooded hills, primarily of oak, ran along Southampton's northern perimeter, a residue of the retreat of the ice sheet twelve thousand years earlier. This was the Ronkonkoma Moraine that ran along the north shore of Long Island, beginning in Brooklyn, and falling into the sea at Montauk and its few outcrops in Block Island Sound. To the east was Easthampton beginning in Wainscott on a line between the two towns that was the subject of dispute between them until 1695 when it was resolved in committee.

There is a question, not a trivial one, about the naming of Southampton. A considerable body of opinion, represented by many generations of local historians, believed that Southampton was named either for the Earl of Southampton, a significant if not perhaps crucial figure in very early seventeenth-century efforts at American colonization, or for the port in England from where it is assumed that the Southampton settlers, bound for New

England, might have embarked. Neither seems particularly compelling. To take the second issue first: It would have been a remarkable coincidence if all Southampton's settlers, having arrived individually in Massachusetts Bay at different times between 1630 and 1637 and being unknown to one another, had set sail from the same port and that that port had been Southampton. There were any number of ports they might have embarked from—Plymouth, Falmouth, Bristol, Weymouth, Barnstaple, Sandwich, Great Yarmouth, Ipswich, Gravesend, and London—depending on their points of origin, usually no more than forty miles from the port of embarkation.²¹ That in 1640 (the first reference to Southampton in the town records is in 1641) a number of them who, let us assume, did embark from Southampton and approached the town court with the suggestion that what more appropriate a name for the town could there be other than this, even if none had any connection to Southampton except as a possible point of departure, is equally unconvincing.

Similarly far-fetched is the idea favored by those with apparent royalist or aristocrat inclinations that, even while professing Puritan sympathies, it was in deference to the memory of the Earl of Southampton that the town was so named by the little company that planted itself there. Henry Wriothesley, third Earl of Southampton (1573–1624), was certainly a formidable and memorable figure in the Jacobean age.²² He was born into one of the great Catholic families of England but converted to Protestantism about the time of the accession of James I in 1603. He became an Anglican and was little touched by Puritan ideas (apart from some youthful instruction apparently in Paris), maintaining instead a moderate and circumspect stance on religious matters as well as considerable sympathy for the plight of Catholics, most of whom among the well-born he had known since childhood. He also was a strong royalist under both Elizabeth and James and had campaigned in Ireland in 1599, sent there by Elizabeth, in one of many attempts to subdue the Irish. In late 1601, the queen was thought to be not far from death and rumors were circulating through London that a cabal that included Sir Walter Raleigh was intent on installing the Spanish Infanta on the throne. Southampton joined with the Earl of Essex, a strong Protestant, and others to oust the Spanish faction from the Court and force Elizabeth to recognize James VI of Scotland as her heir.²³ This was the famous but abortive Essex Rebellion. Elizabeth moved fast and had Essex, Southampton, and the other conspirators imprisoned in the Tower. Southampton was lucky to escape with his head (Essex was not) but languished in confinement until after Elizabeth's death.

One of James I's first acts was to order his release. The new king then thought highly of Southampton (he was to revise his opinion), but they were never close and the latter spent little time at Court preferring a life of ease on his various estates (particularly the Isle of Wight in the English Channel where he had been appointed captain by James I in 1603 and spent many rewarding years there improving its defenses), the luxury of travel abroad, and an indulgence in the arts. In respect to this last pursuit, he became William Shakespeare's sole patron and perhaps is best of all remembered for this. He did, however, become involved with American colonization.

As early as 1602, he was much interested in the fortunes of the Catholic colony in Virginia. When that failed and the London and Plymouth Companies were folded into one Virginia Company in 1609, the Earl of Southampton was one of its many incorporators.

How deeply involved he was in the affairs of the company in the following years is not known, but in 1620 he was elected treasurer with James's approval. James I had never liked the Virginia Company and found its single-minded devotion to the production of tobacco—this “filthie noveltie” he had called it—unacceptable. He must have hoped that the earl would effectively diversify the colony's commercial activities. Southampton was by now a member of the Privy Council (having been passed over for many years), and James probably thought that the company would be in good hands. Yet he was apparently mistaken, for within a year, unhappy with the fortunes of the colony under the earl's stewardship, he had him arrested. In 1622, after his release, Southampton was again elected treasurer beating out the king's candidates by a hefty margin. James struck back. He cancelled the earl's substantial state pensions on which he had been heavily dependent. It was a vindictive blow from which there was little chance of financial recovery. Two years later he died of complications of a fever contracted in Holland. James had reluctantly—never fully trusting him—sent him there in command of a regiment to support the Dutch in the ongoing war with Spain in what was to become the Thirty Years War (1618–1648).

Shortly before his death, the Privy Council had instituted *quo warranto* proceedings against the Virginia Company's charter and revoked it thus ending any further contribution to the colonization of America that the Earl of Southampton might have made. Henry Wriothesly's legacy in America was scant. The Virginia town of Hampton was named for him—as was the harbor of Hampton Roads—but he did nonetheless lead a very remarkable and varied life, colonization activities perhaps representing only a smaller part of his accomplishments. Still, it was not the kind of life that, on the face of it, would lead a small group of Puritan settlers to exclaim that here was precisely the kind of man for whom they should name their new town.²⁴

The same could easily be said, if not with more emphasis, of the town of Northampton, Massachusetts. Perhaps the settlers there in 1656 never intended in their choice of a name any allegiance to the Earl of Northampton, a contemporary but possibly no friend of the Earl of Southampton. For a Puritan community to have done so would have been quite incomprehensible. In 1604, with James not a year on the throne, Southampton was summarily arrested amid wild rumors of plots against the king or plans to massacre the Scots who had trooped south with him (the Earl of Stirling, incidentally, among them) but then just as quickly released. No charges ever surfaced and the whole matter may have been hushed up, but it appears that the man who accused Southampton was probably Lord Henry Howard, Earl of Northampton. Here was a wily old conspirator well-schooled in the jungle politics of the Elizabethan court, a zealous Catholic, and possibly a Spanish spy. It does not seem possible that the godly citizens of Northampton would have chosen to name their little settlement in the wilderness in honor of a man (or any of his heirs) of so questionable a reputation.

Joseph Wood suggests in his analysis of New England villages that before 1675 settlers planted a considerable number of towns with the suffix “-field” (or “ham,” “hamp,” or “hamm”) in place-names. “Ham” refers to “a flat, low-lying pasture near a river.”²⁵ Springfield and Deerfield are Wood's examples, as is Northampton. In regard to the last, George Stewart

notes that the town “was at the time the most northerly settlement in that area, so that the name must have been considered partially descriptive” and discounts any connection to the earl, “a prominent Royalist.”²⁶ The term *ham* itself contains several references and suggests many examples. It can refer to a pasture or meadow enclosed with a ditch; a small plot of ground growing by the rivers or “Thames-side” (a 1617 definition); enclosed land; or as “home” shortened to “ham” where there are “several hams or home closes of meadows”; or, “the forests would be converted by degrees into common pastures or hams” (1796). The *Oxford English Dictionary* tells us that “ham” was sometimes meant in the sense of “town, village, or manor” and cites, with Hampstead, Hampton, Oakham, Lewisham, and also Hamm, a town in Westphalia, as examples. Examples of the same usage abound in New England and, it seems obvious, on Long Island. “Hams,” then, can refer to settled areas, communities, in the first instance. *Hamlet*, obviously, is a term still in use.

When in 1640, the small band of settlers disembarked in North Sea Harbor and made their way south through the woods to the plains bordering the ocean they found themselves in land capable of cultivation or utilization in some fashion as fields. They established their first small settlement there at Old Town Pond near these potential fields, in fact near one referred to early in the town records as “the old ground” or “the Indian field.” It became in time the Little Plain. In naming the town Southampton or “South Field Town,” it may have occurred to them that there could not be any more practical or appropriate name for their new home than this, a name not burdened with the memory of a past they had definitively left or, if it were, only very faintly. Then later, of course, there were the east fields of Easthampton and the fields between the towns in Bridgehampton (but it was to the bridge over Sagg Pond that we owe the name of that early village).

II: THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

The population of the Town of Southampton in 1860 had almost exactly doubled since the first federal census in 1790. It stood at 6,803, up from 3,408 in 1790, and had steadily increased in the intervening seventy years. By comparison, the first detailed census of inhabitants in 1698 gave a population figure of 973, including 83 slaves and 152 Shinnecock Indians, indicating that the increase in population more than tripled in the eighteenth century and then somewhat slowed after the Revolution.²⁷ The reasons for this may in part be attributed to the town’s decreasing capacity to absorb immigrants after the eighteenth century, its internal needs for labor and skills having stabilized at a more or less optimal level. Nonetheless, it was a period of steady if unspectacular demographic growth from the beginning of the nineteenth century until 1860. The next big increase occurred between 1880 and 1910 when the population again almost doubled, this time to more than eleven thousand from an 1880 figure of 6,352. This coincided with a period of heavy ethnic immigration from New York and New Jersey beginning in the late 1890s—Polish, Ukrainian, Italian, Irish, particularly—attracted by the possibilities of farm work and eventual farm ownership. It also partly reflected the rapid growth of the summer colony after

the mid-1880s. Summer residents obviously were not included in the decennial census, but the demand for labor that the colony represented in the shape of construction trades, service, and retail clearly was.

Earlier however, between 1860 and 1870, the number of inhabitants declined considerably. The 1870 census showed a net loss of nearly seven hundred in the decade after the previous count and only a slight gain between 1870 and 1880. Still, the 1880 census showed a net loss of 450 in the twenty years after the 1860 count. In the 1870s, the town's population had in effect sunk to a level not seen since 1840. The figure is striking inasmuch as the population of all other Suffolk County towns suffered no such decline or showed a slight increase over the same decade. The much smaller town of Easthampton, for example, experienced a net gain of one hundred for the period.

Some of this sharp decrease might be accounted for by losses incurred in the upheaval of the Civil War. According to the town records, upwards of five hundred men from Southampton served in the war (this figure included large numbers of substitutes from elsewhere—perhaps as many as half) and at least fifty-five were either killed or died of war-related causes.²⁸ Yet, other towns would have experienced similar losses. A more significant factor, however, was unquestionably the decline or near collapse of the whale fishery, already well underway before the Civil War. Many young men previously engaged in whaling left for the California gold fields after 1848—there appeared to be a general exodus of 250 in 1849 and more left through the 1850s—not all of whom returned to Southampton. Of all the villages in Southampton, Sag Harbor was the most affected by the virtual end of the whaling industry and by the exodus to California. It was a community of merchants, shipbuilders, and seafarers whose livelihood was severely affected by what was to many an economic catastrophe.²⁹ By the 1860s, Sag Harbor had become what one writer described as “a ship-less bay with an abandoned wharf.”³⁰ It also was by far the largest village in the town with more than two thousand inhabitants and accounted for nearly one-third of the total population. Any substantial reduction through out-migration from Sag Harbor would be bound to have an impact on the overall census figures.

But by far the most significant element accounting for population decline, and this was generally true of rural communities throughout the northeast, was the general fall in agricultural prices beginning after the Civil War and accentuated by the long depression of the 1870s. Since the opening up of eastern markets to western farmers through the development of new transportation routes in the 1830s and 1840s, Long Island farm production, which on a limited land-base had always been small scale, had become much less competitive. The Erie Canal, completed in 1827, and the complex of associated waterways connecting with Great Lakes shipping dramatically reduced freight rates for western produce well before the Civil War. Railroads, introduced in the 1840s, had a similar effect and produced an important added advantage: a reduction in transportation time. The beneficiaries ultimately were farmers in western New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and as far west as Michigan, Indiana, Illinois, Iowa, and Wisconsin where crop yields and farm sizes by the 1870s were higher and larger than in New York and New England. Eastern farmers came increasingly under pressure from the combined effects of falling prices, improved productivity from larger and more efficient farms in the west and their better access to the major eastern markets.

Falling prices and competition, however, were not the sole or immediate causes of a marked fall in the farming population of rural towns like Southampton. The Homestead Act, passed by a Republican Congress in 1863, was a major catalyst triggering western migration from New York and New England to the Ohio valley and to states like Illinois and Iowa; both of which advertised extensively in the east for new settlers. Homesteading was specifically geared to attract eastern settlers to establish farms on relatively large tracts in the underpopulated western states. A secondary, but clearly important, reason for the legislation was to reduce the impact in eastern cities like New York of an emerging industrial working class in a period of rapid industrialization and European immigration. The Republican party of the 1860s and later emphasized the importance of individual upward mobility and economic independence and feared the development of a permanent European-style proletariat, a class of wage laborers endemically hostile to capitalism. Republicans were committed to policies of free soil, free labor, and free men epitomized by homesteading legislation, but it also was reflective of their earlier embrace of Emancipation. Southern slavery, as a condition of radically unfree labor, was not equivalent to formally free industrial labor in the north but there were sufficient similarities, enough for Republicans to fear their consequences. Homesteading was meant to avoid or at least ameliorate the effects of institutionally segregated labor in the cities by promoting opportunities for independent farm ownership and artisanship in the west. It was to be the path to democratic citizenship and an open and prosperous society. It had, however, little impact on New York and other industrializing and immigrant cities. Those who struck out for new opportunities in the west were those who left their farms or left farm labor, forced out by economic conditions. Not many were from the urban working classes.

Between 1870 and 1890, two-thirds of New York towns lost population as, similarly, did three-fifths of New England villages. In Massachusetts alone in the same period fifteen hundred farms were abandoned and overall in the northeast 300,000 people were estimated to have migrated in search of better opportunities in the west.³¹ Overwhelmingly, these were poor farmers with small holdings unable to compete with larger and more productive farms in western states. Estimates indicate that western farms of five hundred acres or more increased by 40 percent between 1880 and 1890 suggesting a growing demand for farm labor with much of it coming from the east. How seriously this affected Southampton and other Long Island towns beginning in the 1870s depression cannot be established easily, but small farmers in the East End must certainly have felt the pressure to move away. In Southampton, and particularly in the traditionally poorer western section of the town in the Quogue and Topping's Purchases, times must have been especially hard for the baymen and farmers eking out a living on small lots along the shores of the bays and relying on those bays to supplement their incomes. As seen later, this specific social group became politically active in the early 1880s as outside economic interests began to exert pressure on their limited resources. However, by the 1890s, Long Island farmers with substantial holdings in land fared better. Unable to compete with large-scale corn, wheat, and beef production in the West, they diversified their own production specializing in varied seasonal crops for sale in New York markets. This prefigured a later pattern of truck farming that, in the twentieth century, came to define much of the agricultural production of eastern Long Island.

Nonetheless, conditions in Southampton were aggravated by the specific pattern of landownership that had developed in the town since the seventeenth century. Essentially, the major and best part of the town's land was in the hands of approximately no more than 250 individuals. Briefly considered here (and discussed later), these were the descendants of the original settlers and others who had later bought shares in the purchase of the town. This small minority, 5 percent of the town's inhabitants in 1880, owned about 80 percent of the land in sizable although often scattered parcels through the town. Ownership of shares in successive purchases of the town's lands—the Town Purchase in 1640 and the Quogue and Topping's Purchases in 1666—effectively conferred rights on shareholders to participate in drawing lots as land was progressively divided in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In consequence, land was accumulated in the hands of a small number, passed on from one generation to the next and rarely sold to outsiders. This proprietary system had caused much dissension in the early years of the nineteenth century and continued to fuel political tensions in the community into the 1880s. Its effect had been to confine small farmers to largely marginal land. Combined with the long-term downward pressure on farm prices, this historical and apparently permanent inequity in land distribution may have driven many to leave. Just how many is uncertain but there are scattered indications in local newspaper reports that some did leave the area. But those fortunate enough to control prime farm land in the town managed to weather the worst effects of agricultural depression between the 1870s and the 1890s and felt no particular pressure to look for new opportunities elsewhere.

A last but not major factor contributing to the population exodus in the 1860s and 1870s was the opening up of the national economy after the Civil War, in particular in New York City. Economic growth was extremely rapid despite financial panics and severe recessions (the first of which began in 1873) and the opportunities in what was essentially an emerging new economy were a powerful attraction to young men in the provinces. The old New York mercantile economy based on the profits of financing Southern cotton production and the demand for European imports was in steep decline after the defeat of the Confederacy and was partially in process of being replaced by the developing manufacturing sector. New York was a good place for young men to be, particularly if they were educated as many were in Southampton. A few from the town would seek their fortunes in the city or in other urban locations in a gradual process of rural-urban migration.

Geographically, the surface area of the town, and its consequent resource base, consisted of level lands of light sandy loam interspersed with what the 1860 *Gazetteer* of the State of New York described as “sterile plains or barren sandhills” or sometimes as brushy plains. There was no native rock except that left by glacial action, but woodland was abundant south of the Peconic estuary and river and along the narrow escarpment in the northern part of the town fronting Peconic Bay. The most noticeable feature of the town's lands was the extent to which they were covered by water. The inland bays east of the Great South Bay in Brookhaven covered almost 20 percent of the town's total area of just over 109,000 acres. Besides the bays, the many fresh water ponds and other bays on both the north and south shores of the town (Mecox Bay, Cold Spring Pond, Bullhead Bay, and North Sea

Harbor particularly) increased the amount of land under water to 22 percent or 19,968 acres.³² The waters of the town and the Atlantic Ocean were and always had been a major source of the town's wealth and profitability.

In fact, the products of these waters became an indispensable and central part of the town's economy from the earliest years of settlement and remained so into the twentieth century. A flourishing shellfish industry, locally financed by small private companies, grew up in the middle of the eighteenth century and provided for both domestic and external consumption needs. Clams, mussels, scallops, eels, and especially oysters were a lucrative business. After the Civil War, the market for oysters in New York increased exponentially with the city's growth and led city investors in 1882 to buy up the most productive of the bays. The hundred-plus acres of Mecox Bay had traditionally contained the richest of the oyster beds as its fresh waters were periodically nourished by the ocean through opening the beach to form a temporary inlet. But outside investment on such a large scale was unheard of in Southampton at that time and the sale of Mecox, as well as of the other major bays, provoked a predictable backlash in the town and eventually led to a classic court battle between the town trustees and the oyster company.³³ There was, besides shellfish, an immense floating fishery in the waters surrounding the town in both the ocean and Peconic bays. This also obtained for Shinnecock Bay, the largest body of water in the town, insofar as an adequate outlet to the sea could be maintained. This was not always possible, however. Occasionally, as was the case in the 1880s, tens of thousands of fish died in waters that had become stagnant.

Yet there was no organized fishing industry in the town to take advantage of the inshore abundance and variety of the fishery, particularly striped bass, fluke, and bluefish. Until the 1850s, fishing had been almost exclusively understood as confined to the whale fishery. Cod fishing, like whaling also out of Sag Harbor, began to develop after the beginning of the nineteenth century but then sharply declined in the 1850s. In 1860, less than two hundred tons of cod were taken in inshore fishing, but a decade later that figure had increased to more than fifteen hundred tons indicating a revival. Evidently, much of the fishing fleet had stayed in port in the 1850s while the crews went off to California in search of easier and less dangerous ways—as they must probably have thought—of making a living.

Fishing for menhaden or moss bunkers, a branch of the herring family and essentially a waste fish, was another matter entirely. It was a migratory fish that moved in vast schools northward from southern waters in the spring and returned in the fall. Most of this summer fishery was taken between Cape May and Narragansett Bay. By the early 1870s, it was the most important fishing interest in eastern Long Island. Menhaden had been taken for fertilizer and spread over farm fields since at least the middle of the eighteenth century. Reports from the 1790s indicate that large quantities of menhaden were taken with seines in the waters of the Peconics as well as inshore off the ocean beaches. As many as 250,000 fish in one haul was not uncommon. Other uses for menhaden were discovered later. By the late 1840s, it was found that the oil from this fish could be used for tanning and dressing leather, for rope making, and for paint as well as for various other products. It became a major if relatively short-lived industry. The oil was extracted by boiling the fish in large

iron pots and skimming the oil from the surface of the water. The first pot-works—as they came to be called—was set up in Jessup’s Neck in 1847 or 1848.

Over the next two decades, fish factories were established along the shores of the Peconic Bays and Gardiner’s Bay—in Southampton, Riverhead, Southold, Shelter Island, Greenport, East Marion, Amagansett, and Napeague. By 1874, there were sixty-four such factories employing almost one thousand men and more than fifteen hundred fishermen in 283 sailing vessels or steamers. The catch that year was an astonishing half billion fish (492,878,000) and the amount of oil rendered almost 2.5 million gallons; enough, one might have thought, to ensure the extinction of this lowly but highly valuable fish. That was not to be the case, but the catch was slightly lower seven years later in 1881 and the quality of the fish taken was said to be “unusually poor.”³⁴ Thereafter, the menhaden fishery declined. This probable result of overfishing had not, however, deterred investors in the late 1870s, almost all of them local and all of the investment in fairly small pot-works. In 1881, the numbers of factories had increased from sixty-four to ninety-seven, the number of men employed to more than five thousand throughout the East End, and the capital invested from \$2,500,000 in 1874 to \$4,750,000 in 1881 (if these last figures are to be believed given the inflated valuation of companies in this overextended business era). But the oil rendered from the fish taken was only half that extracted in 1874. By 1884, the catch was estimated as down to 176,500,000 (this was still a prolific fish) and the quantity of oil retrieved under 1 million gallons. Still, the value of the product processed in pot-works on Gardiner’s and Peconic Bays was thought to be slightly more than \$600,000. Employment in this large-scale industry may have alleviated the plight of many a small farmer and bayman reduced in circumstances by the fall in farm prices.

One unavoidable by-product of the menhaden fishery was that it was an extremely malodorous business, so much so that all the towns involved eventually demanded that pot-works be established only at a safe remove from centers of population. In Easthampton, for example, the factories were confined to the dismal and unpopulated stretch of land along Gardiner’s Bay in Napeague. Apart from Jessup’s Neck, the only other Southampton fish factories were on the north shore of Shinnecock Bay in the Shinnecock Hills, where almost no one lived, and east of Canoe Place on Peconic Bay. Shelter Island was another matter. Its two great hotels—the Manhanset House and the Prospect House—had gone up at the beginning of the 1870s catering to tourists and Methodist revivalists from New York and Massachusetts, but Shelter Island was a focal point of the menhaden industry. There were no fewer than a dozen fish factories on this small island. There were inevitable complaints and resulting town ordinances. In Southampton in 1874, the town’s board of health ordered that “the proprietors of Fish Oil works desist from the manufacture of Fish Oil, Guano, and Scraps within one hundred rods of any village,” a distance equal to three-quarters of a mile.³⁵

These various fisheries as a large-scale industry were a relatively late development in the economic history of Southampton. All of the original Suffolk County towns—Brookhaven, Easthampton, Huntington, Southold, and Southampton—had always been cattle towns. As late as 1860, and including the later and smaller towns of Islip, Riverhead, Smithtown, and

Shelter Island, Suffolk County was home to more than 7,000 horses, 13,000 working oxen, almost 11,000 cows, and 28,000 sheep, not to mention 20,000 swine. Southampton's share of the total livestock of approximately eighty thousand in the county was close to thirteen thousand or about 16 percent. As celebrated by Jeannette Edwards Rattray, Easthampton was always romantically projected as the great cattle town of the East End because of its famed cattle drives to the pasturelands of Montauk.³⁶ Legend has it that cattle were driven east from as far away as Patchogue, but there is little reliable evidence that this was the case. There was excellent pasture in Brookhaven and in the nearby Hempstead Plains in Huntington and no reason to drive cattle fifty miles (and back) that they might graze in Montauk's fattening fields. Yet Easthampton, with a smaller land area and population than Southampton, possessed large herds of livestock and played host to farmers in Bridgehampton desiring summer pasture. Bridgehampton seemed to be the westerly limit of the cattle drive.

Raising horses, sheep, and beef cattle had been a profitable business in Southampton since the late seventeenth century. Horses, beef, hides, and pork were staple exports to the West Indies, especially to Barbados, along with sheep, corn, and wood products (staves, shingles, planking, hoops). Other export products were furs, skins, feathers, tallow, and candles. Ships returned with their holds filled with molasses, sugar, and rum. There was a similar trade with the wine islands of Madeira and the Canary's as well as an active coastal trade with New England and the Middle Colonies. The export of horses to the Caribbean was particularly prized as their mortality in tropical climates was unreliable and necessitated a constant replenishment of the stock.³⁷ One medical report claimed that horses lost their hair on arrival, and an 1842 government inquiry in Barbados reported that mortality rates were as high as 25 percent, noting that the island's entire stock needed to be replaced every four years. Stockbreeders in Suffolk County were surely aware of this unfortunate circumstance. In 1860, more than seven thousand horses were raised in the county with Southampton the third largest producer after Brookhaven and Huntington.

In crop production, corn, potatoes, and wheat were the most widely cultivated, as were barley, rye, oats, and hay. Orchard products—particularly strawberries, peaches, and apples—were an important part of the local economy, as were poultry and dairy products. Commercial duck farms were beginning to make an appearance in the middle of the nineteenth century, and there were few farmers who did not raise at least some ducks for market. It was, despite falling prices, a well-rounded and stable agricultural economy, fortunate in its proximity to the New York market, and employing in the 1870s approximately 70 percent of the town's labor force. Twenty years later, William Pelletreau bemoaned the fact that the introduction of summer wealth from New York into Southampton had seduced its young people from the farms and into domestic service (they may have had few other options given the severe depression of the 1890s) but the fact remained that the town remained essentially a farming and fishing community well into the twentieth century.³⁸

Other significant products of Southampton in the nineteenth century were cordwood, fired bricks, and cloth. The great expanse of pine plains in the northern sections of Brookhaven and Southampton west of Canoe Place provided much of the fuel needs of New York after the 1780s. Brookhaven particularly was able to export 100,000 cords annually

for this purpose but Southampton was not far behind. The extensive woodland between the Quogue Plains and the Peconic River was divided into large wood lots in 1782 (the so-called Last Divisions in Quogue and Topping's Purchases) and much of the timber there cut over the next fifty years. This profitable business, however, ended suddenly. Forest fires in 1844 and 1845 consumed thousands of acres of the remaining woodland. The fires were a probable result of lightning strikes on land and vegetation dried out by decades of systematic deforestation.

Cloth weaving also had always been a central part of the Southampton economy whether for immediate consumption or export. The production of wool and flax was a side business for most farmers, and it was rare that a family farm did not possess a loom for manufacturing cloth. In 1778, half of Southampton men out of a total of 544 who signed a loyalty oath to the crown authorities in New York (possibly exacted under duress) described themselves as farmers. But among those who signed, fully one hundred of them reported that they were weavers. This is a surprisingly large number—20 percent—but the sample may not be representative of the general population that then numbered 3,408. Nineteenth-century censuses did not break down town populations by occupation, nor did they go further than list the numbers of those engaged in various broad economic pursuits such as agriculture, mining, commerce, manufactures, navigation and trades. In 1840 for instance, the male working population aged twelve to sixty-five was approximately 1,900 (of a total population of 6,205) of whom 1,233 were farmers, 294 engaged in manufactures and trades, and 436 in navigation either on the ocean or in the bays. The 1870 census is no more revealing. It is impossible to tell from these figures how many of both categories were engaged in the production of wool or cloth whether part time or full time. Nonetheless, there is no question that it was an important cottage industry well into the nineteenth century.

But that Southampton—even in depression years and given the existence of sizable numbers of small farmers—was a relatively wealthy agricultural town in the 1870s there can be no doubt. This had in fact been the case since at least the late eighteenth century when the fortunes of the town took off with the second whaling boom. The first offshore whaling enterprise beginning in the 1660s had gone into a sharp decline by 1730, as Atlantic right whales were becoming increasingly scarce, whereas deep-water whaling did not begin in earnest until fifty years later when larger and sturdier vessels capable of lengthy voyages over great distances were designed. They were constructed in shipyards up and down the New England coast including facilities in Sag Harbor and Greenport on the North Fork.

However, Southampton's prosperity was only partly dependent on the profits of the whale fishery. Individual wealth always had been measured in terms of land ownership, the productivity of land, and the livestock and buildings in the possession of the owner. Between the late 1640s and 1782, almost all of Southampton's common lands, that is, the lands of the town belonging to the first purchasers and their heirs and assigns, had been divided and allotted among them. There were forty such divisions made over this period covering most of the town's quite vast area. As each new division was laid out, only those with rights or shares in the purchase of the town (rights that were both heritable and transferable to others) were eligible to receive lots. The lots were drawn in a town meeting and those