

It is interesting to see how 20th century development obscures historic landscapes. And yet, if you look closely, you can sometimes uncover aspects of the past that you hadn't noticed before. This is the case with a house that, today, is surrounded by a post-1947 subdivision in Shirley on Sleepy Hollow Drive, north of Moriches-Middle Island Road. The current homeowner reached out to the Manorville Historical Society to learn more about the history of his property. And in turn, we learned more about 19th century history in Manorville.

Preliminary research suggests that the house was one of several rental properties owned by William Sidney Smith in the 19th century. William Sidney Smith was born in 1796 to William and Hannah Phoenix Smith. He inherited the Longwood Estate with properties extending from Middle Island and Yaphank to Manorville from his father, William Smith. According to Jean Lauer's history of Longwood, William Sidney Smith married Eleanor Jones of Cold Spring Harbor in 1823 and a year later they moved into the Longwood Estate with their three-month-old son William Henry.

The Longwood landholdings included farmland, pasture, woods, river fronts, ponds and swampy woods around the Peconic River. Like his father, William Sidney leased out farmlands and woodlots with homes to tenant farmers and other laborers. As a part-owner of a sawmill, gristmill and woolen mill in Yaphank, William Sidney was tied to many industries and resources from Yaphank to Manorville, relying on a diverse labor force that rented homes from him, as well as worked for him.

Because the archives at the Suffolk County Clerk's Office and the Town of Brookhaven have remained closed to the public through the pandemic, our research on the Smith house is limited to historic map research and archives available through online sources. The 1838 US Coastal and Geodetic Survey is the earliest map to show the house, which was constructed on the west side of North Street. At that time, the house was occupied by Abram Brown, a tenant farmer, his wife, and his children. According to Federal census records, the Brown family lived there in 1830 and 1840. By 1850, they had moved to a farm that they had purchased in Huntington.

After 1850, there are several families renting farmlands and properties in the area, but there is not enough information available to us at this time to identify the renters who resided in the Smith house on North Street. The house remained part of William Sidney Smith's landholdings until his death in 1879 and was subsequently inherited, along with the remaining estate, by his granddaughter Helen Smith. Helen Smith lived in Brooklyn and would vacation in the main house at the Longwood Estate. Although the house on North Street remained with the family for generations, it was apparently never inhabited by the Smith family.



The mysteries of this house- including who lived in it and its role in local economic activities- are further complicated by the changes that this building has faced. If you drive past the house on Sleepy Hollow Drive, which is its legal address, you will see the rear elevation of the house. However, the house was originally constructed to face North Street, which predates Sleepy Hollow Drive and the surrounding subdivision roads by more than 100 years. From the front elevation, you can see that this vernacular house sits on a fieldstone foundation and may

have initially been constructed as a simple house, two rooms wide and one room deep, with a side-gable roof and a single gable-wall chimney. Several additions were made to the house over the centuries, including a small dormer to the front and a larger dormer to the back, several additions to the rear of the house, an excavated basement under one of the additions, and two extensions off the sides of the house.

Although the house is obscured by 20th century development and repairs, and complicated by its modern orientation in the contemporary Shirley neighborhood, its presence is part of a legacy of farming in the Wampmissic area of present-day Manorville. We hope that further research on this property will shed light on the lives of tenant farmers, the networks of renters and landowners, and the landscapes of labor in 19th century Manorville.