

Stop 10: Observe the wheel ruts and examine the condition of the road bed. These tell not only how old this road is but it also provides evidence of how thin the topsoil is. Notice the stones, sand and cobbles. Because all of the Northwest area is a glacial moraine, the soil is poor, whereas regions south of here--the Long Lane area, Wainscott, Sagaponack and Bridgehampton—are in the outwash plain, where fine silt clay washed out of the glacier and formed the beautiful and very fertile Bridgehampton loam which supports the East End's many farms and vineyards.

Stop 11: You are at the five corners, in the heart of the Grace Estate Preserve. W. R. Grace Jr., the son of the famous shipping magnate, bought 626 acres here in 1925 for \$30 an acre. There never was a manor house or an estate as we know it, just abandoned pastures and woodland. The land remained in the Grace family until Ben Heller, a real estate developer, bought it from the estate in 1985. Heller developed about 110 acres, and the Town of East Hampton purchased the remaining 516 acres by public referendum for \$6.3 million in the same year.

The Grace Estate Management Committee was formed to look after this wonderful preserve. It's taken a great deal of "faith," "hope," and "charity" to save this land for the enjoyment of future generations.

Ignore the intersecting trails and continue straight ahead. Cross over the paved Northwest Road and look for the trail at a slight diagonal to the right. Walk in from the road for 275 feet and look for a sharp turn left. Take this trail up the hill, following white and red blazes on trees. Keep to this trail until you reach the next intersection. Take a left turn.

Stop 12: Off to the right is the Van Scoy house foundation with the well just beyond it. In 1757 at the age of 25 Isaac Van Scoy married Mercy Edwards. He took his bride into the Northwest woods and cleared land for a farm. Mercy bore Isaac fifteen children, ten of whom survived to adulthood. Isaac provided for his family by raising livestock, growing produce and harvesting shellfish from nearby Northwest Harbor. By 1771 he had built a large two-story house, the remains of which are to be found here.

A favorite story about Van Scoy happened during the Revolutionary War, when the British fleet lay in Gardiner's Bay. Raids were often made on the Van Scoy farm, so Isaac kept a two-tined hayfork by his bed. When some

raiders entered his house one night, he fought them off with the pitchfork, killing one and wounding two more. He was arrested and imprisoned on a British warship at Sag Harbor to await trial, but with the help of friends he escaped. He managed to remain hidden in Northwest Woods until the end of the war.

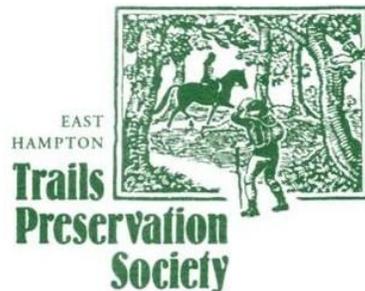
With the birth of his first child in 1758, Isaac planted a 5 foot oak tree in his dooryard. In 1934 the tree was 98 feet tall with a circumference of 17 ½ inches. Bits of the tree, which blew down in the 1938 hurricane, still lie on the ground here.

Stop 13 This little cemetery contains the graves of Isaac and Mercy Van Scoy and other early settlers. Isaac lived to be 84 years old. The last Van Scoy abandoned the homestead in 1883 and moved to Bridgehampton.

Stop 14 Directly across from the cemetery is the site of the Northwest's second schoolhouse. The original 1792 school was located near the entrance to what is now Cedar Point County Park. In 1827 the Town of East Hampton established six school districts and at the cost of \$250, relocated and built a schoolhouse here on Van Scoy land. The school was abandoned in 1885.

Stop 15 As you approach your vehicle, look for another fresh water hole just to the right of the parking area. Once a likely watering hole for Van Scoy livestock it is now another example of ecological succession.

So what have we learned? After 119 years the abandonment of the Northwest Settlement was caused by poor soil, the loss of fresh water sources, and the lack of a deep water harbor. As a result, the abandoned settlement is East Hampton's own true Ghost Town.



Webster defines ghost town: "a once flourishing town deserted as a result of the exhaustion of some natural resource."

East Hampton's Own Ghost Town by Lee Dion

written for the

East Hampton Trails Preservation Society

A 3-mile self-guided tour through the abandoned Northwest settlement

Historic Overview

Four years after the first settlers arrived in East Hampton, the East Hampton Town records of 1653 speak of a "cartway to ye Northwest meddow." The people went to gather salt hay and seaweed that was used for insulation, fertilizer, and cattle bedding. Northwest's special importance came from the fact that it was East Hampton's earliest "landing-place" or port.

In 1665, the ketch *Triall* out of Boston became the first merchant ship to land its cargo in this port. It did so without paying duty. Two years later, recognizing what was to become a significant source of revenue, the Town of East Hampton appointed Thomas Chatfield "Collector of Port" and established tax rates for all goods landed in Town ports.

During the seventeenth century travel and trade were conducted strictly by watercraft. Commerce was carried on with New England and the West Indies. Whale oil, bone, local furs, tools, horses, sheep, cattle, and cordwood were shipped out, while rum, molasses, cocoa, indigo, spices, and mahogany were just a few of the items brought in.

It is hard to believe that in the 1700's there were fifteen very large farms, a mill, wharves, warehouses, a pest house (a shelter for those with contagious deceases), a fish

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factory, a sawmill and, according to the trustee journals, a shipbuilding enterprise. A public school operated from 1792 until 1885.

As a port, Northwest flourished from 1653 until 1761. As a settlement it lasted 150 years, from 1730 until 1885. What happened to the Northwest community is the subject of this self-guided walk.

Start: The starting place is the parking area .2 mile west of Alewife Brook Road on Northwest Road. After parking, cross the road to the Grace Estate site marker at the trailhead.

As you walk along the trail, look for the white blazes on trees trunks. They indicate that you are walking on a portion of the Paumanok Path, a trail winding more than 100 miles from Rocky Point to the Montauk Point Light.

Stop 1 Look carefully to the left and right. You will see a stream flowing under the trail south to north into Scoy's Pond in the distance. This stream is fed by springs and a small pond to the south called Little Scoy's Pond. This is significant as the first settlers in this area needed fresh water for themselves and their livestock. Much of the early settlements in East Hampton occurred around bodies of water.

As you walk farther along, notice the forest about you; it is made up of predominantly white and black oak with a small mixture of dogwood, sassafras and gray birch. The forest is not very old, less than 100 years; 150 years ago this area was all pasture land.

Stop 2 You will come to a side trail which leads to the very lovely Scoy's Pond. If you have time, take this ¼ mile side trip to view the lilies and wildfowl.

Stop 3 At the next trail intersection, the Paumanok Path veers left and another trail swings right. If you have time, take the trail to the right, around to the far side of Scoy's Pond. Bear right and you will come to a small bridge across a fairly fast moving stream. This is the outlet of Scoy's Pond, which flows into Alewife Brook. In the spring alewives, a herring-type fish, come up this stream to spawn in Scoy's Pond.

Scoy's Pond is a true pond as opposed to a kettlehole, which is a somewhat circular glacial depression with no inlet or outlet; it gets water by reaching down into the aquifer or by catching runoff. Retrace your steps back to the #3 marker and continue straight ahead on the original trail.

Stop 4 Here is scientific evidence that helps to prove pastures existed here. Look about and you will see a large number of cedar trees interspersed among the oaks. The theory of ecological succession applies here. The principle is that one species will first colonize an area. It is then succeeded by another species until the first species is completely eliminated. This proceeds until a climax species dominates, which you begin to see here. The cedar is one of the first wood species to colonize a fallow open pasture. It thrives in open space and sun. In this area cedars have not yet been completely crowded out by hardwood oaks.

Stop 5 Here is a good stand of locust trees. These trees were particularly beneficial to the earliest settlers as excellent fencing material. Locust, once peeled of its bark, resists rot and insect infestation. At the next trail intersection bear right and stay right.

Stop 6 Follow the small deer trail to the right for about 150 feet. You will come upon, "Cow Pond". It is filled with much detritus, which is part of the life cycle of a kettlehole. It will eventually fill in and become a swamp, then a bog, then dry land-- another example of ecological succession.

Stop 7 Here is Kirk's Place, with its ornamental linden trees, which are not native to the Northwest. You are standing in Josiah Kirk's front yard. Kirk bought the place in the mid 1860's and owned 391 acres. He was a fairly wealthy but obstinate Irishman who sued the town over seaweed rights. He tried to prevent people from carting seaweed from "his" beach as they had been doing from the early 1650's. The case was tried many times, appealed and re-appealed over 21 years of litigation. He eventually won his suit but spent his entire fortune of \$40,000 (a vast sum in those times) in doing so. His property fell into decay and was sold off to cover court costs. He died destitute in an almshouse in Yaphank.

Across Northwest Harbor to the north you will see the Cedar Point Lighthouse. In 1836 this lighthouse was erected on what was then Cedar Island and the main channel to Northwest Harbor was to the east of the light. A fish factory that processed menhaden into oil once stood here. The spit of land now connecting the island to the mainland was formed by the hurricane of 1938.

Retrace your steps to the first turn off to the right and take this to the next stop. As you go along parallel to the water, note that you are still walking in Kirk's front yard.

Stop 8: Walk out to the beach. Here you can get a feel for how large the Northwest area is. It runs from Sag Harbor, which can be seen in the distance, encompasses all of Russell's Neck (Barcelona Neck) to the immediate left, and beyond, all of Northwest Creek. It includes the area you are standing on, and continues all the way to Cedar Point to your right as far as Hedges Banks and all of the western side of Three Mile Harbor, which from this point is out of sight. Once this whole area was a busy port, attracting vessels from all over the world.

As time went on Sag Harbor succeeded Northwest Harbor as the major port of call. In 1770, the Long Wharf was built near a deep water channel that could better accommodate the larger vessels then being built. By the 1780's all significant commerce by water occurred at Sag Harbor (settled in 1730)

Turn around and continue straight up the trail.

Stop 9 At this point, turn around and face Northwest Harbor. Ask yourself if this was a good place to settle. Here are some clues: There was an abundance of fish, clams, crabs, oysters and scallops in front of you. There is a lovely fresh water hole to your left. Now full of phragmites, an invasive species, it was at one time a terrific watering spot for livestock. Still facing the harbor, walk 150 feet to your right and you will find the foundation of the Bennett homestead. It sat on this lovely rise with an unobstructed view of all the Northwest Harbor. It was surrounded by many acres of pasture, field, and garden. Notice the cedar trees.