

Thomas T. Jackson's Fresh Pond Farm: An Early Glen Cove Gold Coast Mansion and Summer Resort (circa 1850-1890)

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The Thomas T Jackson farm, located at Fresh Pond (modern-day Crescent Beach, at the northern terminus of Crescent Beach Road) in Glen Cove, Nassau County, New York was a popular summer resort for New York City residents during the second half of the 19th Century. An anonymous letter by a visitor to the Jackson Farm provides a poetic look at the summer idylls of a New York City gentleman in 1870.

The origins of the “Resort Era” in Glen Cove can be traced to the establishment of regularly scheduled steamboat service between the community (then a small rural village) with Manhattan in 1829. The steamboat service made it feasible for wealthy merchants, bankers, brokers, attorneys, investors, politicians and other businessmen to liberate their families from the suffocating, sweltering, reeking streets of New York City and place them in a safe, healthy rural setting for the summer season.

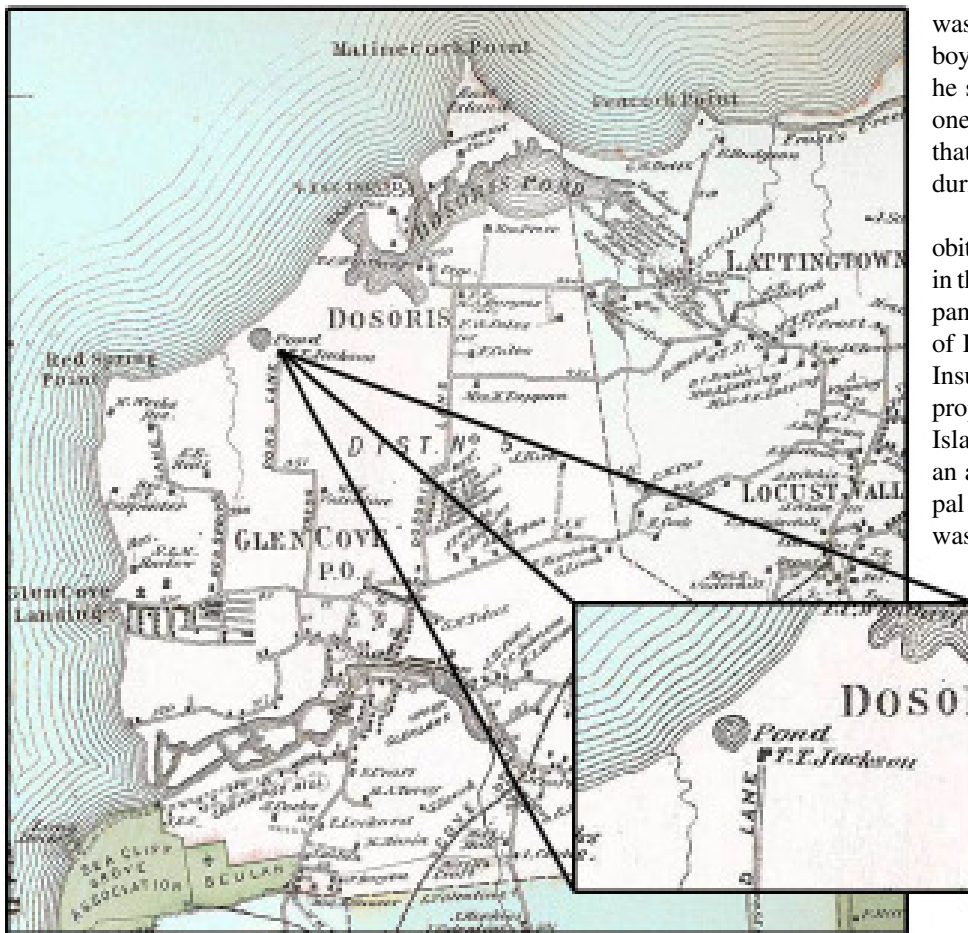
Compared to other existing methods of commuting to Manhattan from Glen Cove, namely stage coach and sailing ship, the steamboat was (at least by early 19th Century standards) a relatively dependable and fairly rapid method of travel. The commute by steamboat between Glen Cove and New York City took roughly two hours. Commuting was not, however, always a daily affair; most of the businessmen went into Manhattan on the Monday morning steamboat, then would return to Glen Cove on the Friday afternoon steamboat, all the while leaving their families in Glen Cove throughout the week to enjoy the summer in the country.

Initially, summer visitors boarded with local farmers, but rather quickly hotels and boarding houses were opened to cater to this new and rather lucrative seasonal trade. The most elegant of these hotels in the early Victorian era was the Pavilion Hotel, located conveniently near the Glen Cove steamboat landing in what is today Morgan Memorial Park. The duration of visits varied according to the tastes (and finances) of the sum-

mer visitor, and could range from days to weeks to the entire summer season. A host of recreational activities were available, including bathing, rowing, sailing, and fishing on Long Island Sound, lakes and ponds stocked with trout, and large tracts of open land for rambling. Local farms offered a bounty of fresh meat, dairy products, and produce to summer visitors.

Despite the success of local hotels, the use of farms as resorts continued throughout most of the remainder of the 19th Century. One of the more successful farms frequented by summer visitors at Glen Cove was that of Thomas T Jackson, located at Fresh Pond (today, that area of Glen Cove called “Crescent Beach” and “North Country Colony”, west of modern day Crescent beach Road and north of Valley Road).

“Fresh Pond” derived its name from a middling-sized freshwater pond which discharges into Long Island Sound (seen to the north and west of the Thomas T Jackson house in the map detail at left, dating from 1873). The name for the region was in use at least as early as the late colonial area, and like many of the colonial place-names in Glen Cove the external boundaries of the “Fresh Pond” area are rather nebulous. During the second half of the 18th Century, Fresh Pond had been the home of Barak Sneathen, who had been commissioned a Lieutenant in Dunbar’s Company of the Queens County Levies in 1760; this unit was part of the New York Provincial Regiments that served during the French & Indian War. (Muster Rolls, 1892) Family tradition states that he was present at the surrender of Montreal to the British in 1760. He saw service



was “taken with a cramp.” Although the boy was under supervision of a “nurse,” he sank below the surface before anyone could get to him. The article states that Frith was “sojourning at this place during the summer months.”

According to his New York Times obituary, Jackson was “chief bookkeeper in the employ of the Erie Railroad Company” as well as a member of the Board of Directors of the Glen Cove Mutual Insurance Company, one of the earliest property insurance companies on Long Island. (NY Times, 1892a). He was also an active member of St Paul’s Episcopal Church in Glen Cove. In 1868 he was one of three lay members of the

parish to attend the Long Island Diocese’s annual convention, held in Brooklyn, where the primary business was the election of a new bishop. (Anon., 1869). He also donated the land and building for St Paul’s Parish School in Glen Cove, a religious school “where the pupils might be trained up in soul and body for future usefulness in the Church and the world, and for

Captain. (NY Muster Rolls, 1892).

Nicholas Snethen, son of Barak, was born at Fresh Pond in 1769. He became a prominent Methodist preacher in the early 19th Century. One of Nicholas Snethen’s early biographers, his son Worthington Snethen, relates that as boy Nicholas helped work the Fresh Pond farm, and “to run a freighting schooner to New York, and to carry on milling operations, in all of which his father was engaged.” The family sold Fresh Pond circa 1790 and relocated to Staten Island. (Snethen, 1859)

The farmlands at Fresh Pond were acquired by Thomas T Jackson in the early 1850’s. Born about 1827 Jackson, like most of his summer guests, was originally a resident of New York City. Precisely when he moved to Glen Cove is uncertain; in the spring of 1854 he married Mary S Clements, daughter of Charles W. Clements, of Glen Cove, and is described in the local marriage notice as being “of New York.” (GC Sentinel, 1854) [This does not preclude the possibility that he relocated to Glen Cove prior to then, since the stigma of being “of New York” no doubt took awhile to wear off in a community the size of Glen Cove.] He was clearly residing at Fresh Pond in May of 1857, when the Glen Cove Gazette reports that one of his horses was killed in a freakish accident by being impaled on the poll of another wagon. (GC Gazette, 1857)

An 1859 newspaper article is suggestive that Fresh Pond was being used as a resort location at that early date, although it fails to identify Jackson directly. In August of that year, the young son of a Mr Frith drowned off of Fresh Pond after he

eternal blessedness in heaven.” The school was established about 1875 because there was a need for “an institution in the country where parents from the city might send their boys to be educated”. The school catered students from as far away as New Jersey, North Carolina, and Louisiana. (Anon., 1877). At the time of his death he was vestryman at St. Paul’s Church. (NY Times, 1892)

An 1870 letter, printed under the pen name of “Raymesk” in the Brooklyn Daily Eagle, describes a visit to Jackson’s farm at Fresh Pond. Rather than discuss the food, or the social life, or the living conditions in the farmhouse, the prosaic author dwells on the experiential aspects of summering in Glen Cove – a perspective that few other visitors offer in their accounts of resort life in Glen Cove. An abstract of the letter is reprinted below:

Fresh Pond, near Glen Cove, L.I.
Sunday, July 24th 1870

Dear “Eagle”:

Over me is a “spreading (walnut) tree,” behind me are illimitable miles of the Sound in length, and of what is variously estimated as from six to ten miles of the same waters in width, in front a yard filled with timber, some of it at least a hundred years old, and on the right and left, forests of considerable

thickness and boundless continuity of shade... It comprises several hundred feet of space – limbs larger than city trees shooting out from trunk whose dimensions the writer hesitates to estimate, for fear of being inaccurate, and for fear, even were he accurate, that incredulous city minds would reject the proportions.

The place is beautiful for situation... But the pure, comfortable, unadulterated coolness is the thing I want, and am inadequate to suggest to your readers... The face is fanned by a breeze from almost every quarter. The eyes rest on water and land, the first dotted with skipping yachts, and the later with willow, walnut, oak, chestnut, and maple trees, towering out of grass everywhere, the undisturbed growth of nature which is here and there broken into hills and valleys and plains on a scale not so large as to fatigue and yet enough so to break up all superficial sameness.

“Fresh Pond” is a farm about two miles, or a little less, from Glen Cove Landing. Everyone knows that Glen Cove is some twenty five miles by water from Brooklyn, and that it is a beautiful firth of Long Island Sound. To me, a stranger, allusion is made is made of there being a Glen Cove Landing, and a Glen Cove Village further off. I don’t care. One does not come to the country to learn geography, but to loaf, and invite your soul. This Fresh Pond farm is a track of about 150 acres of varied woodland and arable land. It appears to be fertile, as are all the farms on the “North Side,” but the Summer boarding house where I am staying is the principal object of interest, of course, to those of us who are here. Its owner and conductor (as of the farm) is Mr. Thomas Jackson, not unknown to Brooklynites, and his house is full of people, some from one place, and some from another, Milwaukee being, I believe, the furthest off home of any here. Nature has done extraordinary for the beauty and salubrity of the place, and what man has done in the shape of structures, and what, I suppose, women are doing in the shape of creature comforts, are entirely in harmony with the constant coolness and life-giving air from the ocean in front, and the woods bowing to the ocean, in the rear. The Steamer Seahacka [Seawanhaka], from Peck’s Slip, at 4 PM., daily brings people to the landing, and drops them further city-ward of Whitestone, Sands Point, and other North Shore places. The ride down is perfectly splendid (several ladies make this observation simultaneously on each trip). A breeze is always sleeping somewhere on these waters. Every afternoon it wakes up and kisses all the pretty girls on the upper decks. We horrible creatures take as much advantage of it as possible. The same boat which lays to at Roslyn, touches at Glen

Cove Landing at 7½ (AM) and brings crowds of gentlemen to their business at New York, by 9½ – early enough for anybody who takes proper care of himself through this melting midsummer.

The proverb says: Satan always finds enough mischief for idle hands to do. Very doubtful that the gentleman in black would be put to it to devise any mischief on a country farm by the Sound shore in Summer time. Pleasure is leisure and life is laziness. Sleeping, smoking, reading, gazing, hunting for the shadiest spots, taking mental measurements of big trees, humming back the refrain of the katydid, soothing your ears with the murmur that rustles among the leaves, catching the choruses of birds from antiphonal fields, counting the number of yachts between yourself and the Connecticut shore, picking out the beds of gray and crimson and orange and blue in the sunset clouds, this is not exertion, not effort, it is only the reflex action of nature’s associations upon your own mind and fancy. If Satan comes along with his mischief, the placid perfection of this locality would possibly convert him... (Brooklyn Eagle, 1870a)

Bathing, or “sea bathing” was one of the principal attractions of waterfront communities like Glen Cove. In the context of 19th Century recreational activities, “bathing” meant wading, dipping and dunking in the ocean for refreshment. In the Victorian era, a considerable amount of printers’ ink was expended either denouncing bathing as a grave health risk, or exalted as the universal panacea for complaints of the human body and soul.

Many other sea-side communities bordered the open ocean, where heavy surf could making the bathing at best unpleasant and at times dangerous. (As one of England’s pioneer woman journalists wrote more than three decades later “I know the alleged reason for sea-bathing is that it makes you feel so well afterwards; but so does any unpleasant experience, merely by force of contrast.”) (Sharp, 1906). Glen Cove, instead, bordered on Long Island Sound, where heavy surf tends to be the exception during the summer. “Raymesk” commented:

When here a little longer I will bathe. Somehow or other, one generally lets a few hours pass over his head before he does the very thing, principally, for which he comes. The externals of a new place are mastered first. But untested as yet by me, there are good resources for bathing here.

The persons we found where we came do a little bathing at least once a day. There is no surf. Thanks

for that. Like the youthful admiration for foreign institutions, I think violent surf assaults something which people recover their admiration of when they get older and more philosophical. If one wants to bathe, all right. Then let him go where he can master the water. If one wants to be battered – all right, too. Let him go where the water can master him... The partial pleasure of surf-bathing cannot be denied, but neither can it be denied that the sea re-resents invasion and knocks you around savagely... men like pleasure unmixed with pain, and it is a great deal nicer to plunge at will in still water, than to be an involuntary football for waves to vent their wrath on, and for profane outsiders to laugh at I've tried both kinds of bathing, and would rather have a quiet swim in a quiet stream, than have all the breath rocked out of me in the cradle of the deep. (Brooklyn Eagle, 1870a)



Stephen A Douglas (1813-1861) - Presidential candidate

One of the author's more interesting statements is that Stephen A. Douglas, the famed American politician, stayed at Fresh Pond farm in 1853:

In the days that are no more, Stephen A Douglas used to be here during the Summer. He came down to avoid being "buzzed," although that is a word which has come into being since he went out of it. It is questionable if he succeeded. Fame has its burdens, though none so great that folks are not willing to assume them and it, and the famous Douglas, in all probability, was invaded in his leisure and lounging by selfish and indefatigable politicians. (Brooklyn Eagle, 1870a)

("Buzzed" is apparently a period slang term for when a prominent personage or celebrity is surrounded by gawkers, well-wishers, favor-seekers, and other nuisances, much like a

flower is surrounded by buzzing bees.)

The claim that Stephen A Douglas stayed at Fresh Pond was echoed by the editor of the Brooklyn Eagle a few days later:

At "Fresh Pond Farm" near Glen Cove, from which the Eagle published a letter on Monday, is an enormous walnut tree, referred to by our correspondent summering underneath which in 1853 Stephen A Douglas thought out and wrote out the Kansas Ne-

OLDEST LONG ISLAND SUMMER HOUSE.

Bathing, boating and all country enjoyments at GLEN COVE. One cottage, very near the Sound, will accommodate six or eight persons, and the main building has capacity for fifty guests.

T. T. JACKSON, Glen Cove, L. I.

Refer to E. A. Johnson; Barney, Raymond & Co., 84 Broadway, New York.

braska Bill and the bill repealing the Missouri Compromise of 1820. George N Saunders (sic) was then his private Secretary and “assisted” in those measures. (Brooklyn Eagle, 1870b)

Douglas, also known as “The Little Giant,” was the US senator from Illinois and presidential aspirant who, in January 1854, introduced the Kansas - Nebraska Act into Congress. As the divide over the issue of slavery – and how to address whether slavery would be permitted in new US territories – grew more militant on both sides of the Mason-Dixon line, the Kansas - Nebraska Act formulated a policy of allowing the voters of new territories to decide whether or not to allow slavery. A contemporary sneeringly described Douglas as “a human anomaly – a Northern man with Southern principles.” (Sheahan, 1860) Douglas would run unsuccessfully for president against Abraham Lincoln in 1859.

A few years later, in 1874, Fresh Pond Farm was visited by William Whitty Hall, a physician who penned numerous popular books on health during the Victorian era, as well as wrote and published the monthly magazine “Hall’s Journal of Health”

GLENCOVE.

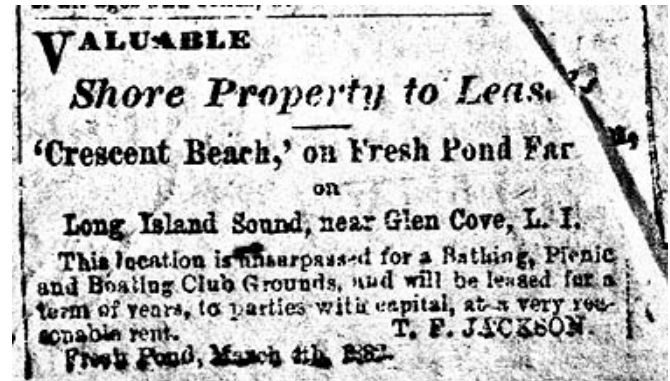
We passed the weeks of August at the delightful spot bearing this name, having our home at the residence of Mr. T. T. Jackson, near the water’s edge. A member of our family who had not been quite well for several months gained precisely one-third of a pound of flesh per day during our stay. She lived in the open air, exercised very freely by taking long walks, ate heartily, because the appetite was stimulated by the bracing air and the constant motion, and, also, because the food was of the purest and best, such as milk in abundance, butter made daily, vegetables gathered the moment before they were cooked, and “cottage cheese,” that most nourishing and flesh-producing of foods. The free use of the water of an iron-spring on the premises aided digestion, and rapidly built up the waist. We do not know of a more delightful summer resting place than Mr. Jackson’s. (Hall, 1874)

Fresh Pond Farm was the scene of local entertainments during the winter months. Typical entertainment among the local “gentry” were the “Glen Sociable” soirees, a series of dances which rotated from stately home to stately home in the community. One of the “Sociables” given at Jackson’s mansion was described by the local press:

The fourth of a series of Sociables was given at the hospitable mansion of Mr. Thomas T Jackson by his accomplished daughter Miss Flora. A large number of the members and their friends were present, and were elegantly entertained by the host and hostess and their daughters. Both young and old “tripped the light fantastic toe” to the strains of Allen’s mu-

sic, and all agree in pronouncing it a happy and social event, not to be soon forgotten. (GC Gazette, 1876)

In 1882, Jackson offered to lease “Crescent Beach” on Fresh Pond Farm to anyone interested in operating a bathing, picnic or boating club at the site. Whether there were any takers for the offer is unknown.



According to one account, the Fresh Pond farmhouse burned down circa 1883, and a new farmhouse/mansion was constructed on the same site as the original building. (Brooklyn Eagle, 1898) No contemporary account of a fire on the property has been located. However, John C F Davis, then editor-emeritus of the Glen Cove Echo, recorded his recollection of the fire in 1930:

One of the Jackson boys rode up to the village bare-back to give the alarm. Old Pacific’s (Pacific Engine & Hose Company, Glen Cove’s first fire company) apparatus was dragged out and hauled the two or more miles by man-power. There were no automobile trucks. Later horses were used. But in the early days there was a double line of rope that unwound from a drum on the engine, by which the firemen dragged the apparatus. The Jackson home was reached in time to save it from total destruction, a bear by pond furnishing an ample supply of water.

A private school for young men was conducted by Mr Jackson, and he used to have a lumbering stage coach, similar to those used in the west, which made its rounds daily to the homes of students living in Glen Cove.

When the house was being rebuilt after the fire, one of the painters working there, named Tut Dayton, had a pet monkey, which attracted the curiosity of us boys, and we used to visit the place to see the monkey. (GC Echo, 1930)

A period advertisement, dating from 1885, describes the farmhouse as having the capacity for 50 guests, and that a cottage was also on the property, near Crescent Beach, with a capacity for six to eight guests. Whether this is representative of

the farm's capacity before the fire and reconstruction of the mansion is uncertain.

Mary Clement Jackson died in April, 1885. (NY Times, 1885) Thomas T. Jackson died in January, 1892, of pneumonia, leaving behind two sons and two daughters. (NY Times, 1892a). One son, Thomas Charles Jackson, died soon thereafter on May 14th, 1892 at the age of 31 (NY Times, 1892b).

Just prior to his death, in late 1889 or early 1890, Jackson sold the Fresh Pond farm to a group of businessmen that consisted of Edmund Wetmore, Edward H Kidner, Arnold W. Catlin, MD, Jerome A King, Walter L. Wellington, William P Sands, Lawrence E Sexton, Phillips Abbott, John C Milligan, Henry F Noyes, Thomas W Strong, Jr., J A Billings, Walter H Crittenden, and William B Tubby. (Brooklyn Eagle, 1890b). Spurred by Charles Pratt's initial purchase of 700 acres in Glen Cove to be developed into estates for himself and his seven children, it was their intention to develop the farm as a "cottage colony" — an enclave of mansions on smaller parcels of land than were usually associated with the Gold Coast estates of Glen Cove and environs. Such "cottage colonies" were usually governed

by elected or appointed boards, traditionally composed of colony residents, which levied assessments on member-residents for the maintenance of private roads and common areas internal to the colony, and frequently had the power to make certain that future construction and property uses within the colony boundaries were in keeping with the tastes and sensibilities of its residents.

For the first few years of its existence, the new colony would be referred to as "Fresh Pond Colony" and "North Country Colony", until in 1898 the official name "North Country Club" was decided upon. (Brooklyn Eagle, 1898). Part of the property was developed as the Queens County Golf Club, precursor to the Nassau Country Club. While newspapers reported in 1892 that "the Jackson mansion, which is included in the purchase, is to be remodeled and used as a club house" (Brooklyn Eagle, 1892) the mansion was instead being used as the private residence of J Shaw of Brooklyn in 1898. (Brooklyn Eagle, 1898).

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