



# Fire Place

Brookhaven Village Association

Fall 2010

Published for the residents of Brookhaven Hamlet.

## After the Dredge: Interview with Squassux Dredging Chairman Mike Murtha



*Mike Murtha at Squassux Landing*

**N**ow that the 2010 boating season is drawing to a close, I thought it would be good to interview the chairman of the Squassux dredging committee, Mike Murtha, to get his perspective on arguably one of the biggest and most complicated projects ever undertaken by the Brookhaven Village Association. When the center and western canals were dug in the 50s and 60s there were no permits required, no disposal fees needed; the process today is much more complicated. In addition we would like to acknowledge the many hours put in on a volunteer basis on behalf of the Brookhaven Village Association, and say thank you !

**Q:** How many hours do you estimate you put into this project?

**Mike Murtha:** Over 2000 hours over two year period.

**Q:** How do you know you put in that many hours?

**Mike Murtha:** I log my hours because I am self employed. I have to track my hours closely for my business and billing. So that's how I know.

**Q:** What kinds of tasks were involved in pulling this off?

**Mike Murtha:** Lots of phone calls.

**Q:** Who did you call?

**Mike Murtha:** Brookhaven Town, Army Corps of Engineers and NY State Department of Environmental Conservation

**Q:** Did you have help from anyone else?

**Mike Murtha:** Seth Jaeger did a lot of the groundwork 8-10 years ago. He got names of people in different agencies such as the Brookhaven Town, the Army Corps of Engineers, & New York State Department of Environmental Conservation. Dwight Isacksen got us the hydraulic dredging permit before he passed away. This was huge because now they are hard, if not impossible to get. To do it with only a crane only would have been much more expensive. I want to say that Isacksen Dock Building and Bodkin Excavation who are owned by local residents were outstanding in executing their contracts and went above and beyond to complete their work

**Q:** What is the difference between hydraulic dredging and crane dredging?

**Mike Murtha:** In hydraulic dredging a hydraulic pump and an auger are used to remove material from the bottom. It is then pumped to a spoils berm then dried out and then removed by truck. Crane dredging uses a crane to scoop up bottom material and load it onto a truck for hauling. It takes longer.

**Q:** What was the hardest part of the project?

**Mike Murtha:** All the phone calls to the various agencies, arranging and pushing through permit approval, getting tests passed (testing of spoils) were tedious and time consuming; Eight months from start to finish for the permit work; the permit work took four times as long as the actual dredging itself (four times is probably an understatement, up to six times as long)

*continued on back page*

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# A Brookhaven Education: Interview with Author Carin Clevidence

Carin Clevidence grew up in Brookhaven hamlet and now lives in Massachusetts. She is the granddaughter of the late naturalist, painter and author, Dennis Puleston and the daughter of Jennifer Puleston Clement.

**Q:** Congratulations on the publication of your novel, *The House on Salt Hay Road*. Residents of Brookhaven will certainly find the setting familiar. Did you pick the setting before you began writing or did it evolve during the creative process?

**Carin:** I don't think I ever imagined it anywhere else, but it wasn't necessarily a conscious decision. The novel started with a series of images, including the fireworks explosion. I always wanted to write something about the explosion that happened here in Bellport. For me the explosion was such a conjunction of beauty and violence, and a waste of all that potential beauty. The image was arresting and very early on I wanted to write about the explosion.

**Q:** The novel covers the Hurricane of 1938 from the perspective of young Clay caught on Fire Island. Did you hear stories about the Hurricane when you were young?

**Carin:** I don't think I did, but I remember very vividly hurricanes that hit Long Island when I was a kid. I remember lighting the kerosene lamps and candles and the coziness of it and the sense of excitement that the physical world is so present and so powerful. During one storm the pond overflowed, fish were washed into the field and in the morning my mother picked up the fish off the lawn and fried them for breakfast. One of the reasons I set the book in the past is because I think in the past there was a stronger awareness of the vulnerability of the human within the physical landscape. I think anyone who lives here feels that because we see the landscape change. Every time you go to the beach it's different.

**Q:** Do you think growing up in Brookhaven Hamlet has shaped you as a writer in any way?

**Carin:** Absolutely. I would not be who I am if I'd grown up anywhere else. I feel like this is the landscape of my heart. There's a part in the book early on where Clay is remembering being half asleep in the car. As the car turns onto Salt Hay Road, he senses a change, "As though it had been mapped into his bone." I feel as if this landscape has been mapped into my bones.

**Q:** When did you become interested in the history of the area?

**Carin:** I grew up interested in the history without consciously thinking about it because I grew up in a house where things were always referenced by their past owners or by a story that had taken place there. So in some way the landscape is always populated by the past.

**Q:** Scudder, Clay's grandfather spent his life rescuing people lost at sea, working as a Surfman at the Lifesaving Station at Smith Point. Did you find local sources and reference material about the Lifesaving Station?

**Carin:** I did a lot of research while working at Cape Cod on a fellowship. There's a lot of great history about the service here, too. I did research at the Brookhaven Free Library. They have a fabulous collection of Long Island history.

**Q:** Scudder's house was moved by barge down the river and onto Salt Hay Road. How did you get the idea to float a house into the hamlet?

**Carin:** In communities like this there are always accounts of houses being moved around. I remember my grandmother's barn being moved to its present location. There was something so surreal and strange about a house moving through the trees. I've never seen a house float down a river but I've seen a barn moved down a road.

**Q:** At one point in the novel, 12-year-old Clay takes his older sister, Nancy, out on the river to watch turtles. He's fascinated by the turtles, but she is not. Were you



*Carin Clevidence began studying turtles on Long Island at an early age.*

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interested in the wildlife, or did someone guide you and develop your interest?

**Carin:** Both! Some of my earliest memories are banding birds on the marsh with Grandfather. I remember him working them free from the mist nets. Once the bird was banded, I would hold this little golden crowned kinglet, and then he would let me have the pleasure of releasing the bird. It was such a thrill for me. I was raised to pay attention to the natural world and to respect and appreciate it. When I was a kid people would bring my grandfather dead birds and he would wrap them in whatever plastic bag was handy and it would go in the deep freeze among the peas and the butter pecan ice cream. He would use the birds as models and then he would do these incredible paintings with such precision.

My mother was always rescuing baby birds and saving them. People would drop them off. There was a baby quail that would perch on the hammock and practice the bobwhite call, "fee-fee-FWEET." I was raised to view the world as an interesting place, as a place full of wonder and with the sense that you could find something to observe and notice anywhere. There was not an artificial line between the human and the natural. I grew up feeling very much a part of a larger landscape.

**Q:** Do you have special childhood memories of Brookhaven?

**Carin:** My whole childhood is crammed full of special memories of Brookhaven, like the bay freezing over and walking all the way across with Mom and my sister. I remember vividly the Labor Day freak storm in 1998. We got caught out on the flats in the bay and the sky turned a terrible unnatural color of yellow. The whole bay was transformed. I used that in the book because here was this very familiar landscape in which I was used to being safe, but I was really scared. When Roy goes out and the wind lifted the water, he has the same unfamiliar experience.

I loved reading and I loved the library and I read all the time as a kid. I remember my mother telling me to put the book down cause we were going canoeing. My mom took us out of school to go to Westhampton to see a whale that was washed up on the beach. Once we went to see a leatherback turtle. The turtle might have been struck by a ferry because its flipper was damaged. Someone found it on the north shore. My mom took me to see it. I learned how big the turtle was and how the shell feels and the skin feels. Real life experiences always trumped traditional learning. Seeing things firsthand was best. (See photo at top.)

**Q:** The characters in the book fish, sail, farm and hunt as a way of life, a necessity, yet they know how to take pleasure in these activities. Do you see any similarities to life in Brookhaven in 2010?

**Carin:** Absolutely. Last weekend I had the pleasure of taking my kids crabbing on the trot line and seeing my daughter chase a crab along the deck trying to keep it from my mother's bare feet. It doesn't get better than that. My kids love the Hamlet Organic Garden. They love planting potatoes, then digging them up and eating the potatoes they helped plant. Last weekend my kids went to the dock with fish heads tied on string, nets and a bucket and they came home with dinner. My kids love the library and Jemma wants to go there as soon as she arrives. Clem is very conscientious now about picking up garbage---something he learned from walking with his grandma. This is something you see people doing in Brookhaven Hamlet. They love the trails at Wertheim Wildlife Refuge and Post Morrow. They're learning about birds from observing them here, just as I did. I feel really lucky in this day and age to have such a wonderful haven to share with them.

Carin Clevidence is the author of *The House on Salt Hay Road*, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, NY, NY, 2010.

Ellen Clyne



## Squassux Fall 2010



It's the last week in September, it's rainy, chilly and I miss summer. It was a real good summer, hot, dry and long. Plenty of great boating days. I'm saying to myself the same thing I say every year, "Next year I'm going to make more time for the boat, take more time off from work" we'll see next year.

We started the season a little late but it was worth the wait. The dredging of the canals and the parking lot: Wow! What can I say but another thank you to Mike and Mary Jane.

We had two thefts at Squassux this year. In the

early spring an outboard was stolen from the dock builders work boat. Last week an eighteen gallon fuel tank was taken. It was full and could not have been removed by foot. Maybe a locked gate could have prevented one of these thefts.

Dog poop is still a problem. Maybe it's just in front of my dock. Please pick up after your dog !!

All in all it was a good year. Can we skip winter and go straight to spring?

John Curiale, Chairman Squassux Committee



# Update on Our Historic Cemeteries Restoration Project

I would like to thank the more than 50 people who have contributed to the BVA's cemetery restoration fund, which, coupled with Caithness grant money, has so far allowed us to repair six of the seven historic cemeteries the Fire Place History Club felt could be restored.

The history of Brookhaven and South Haven, historically known as Fire Place, lives on in such irreplaceable sites as these family cemeteries that cradle the settlers who populated Fire Place for the first 200 years – farmers, fishermen and artisans. There are 18 such cemeteries in Brookhaven and South Haven, nine of them with ten or more graves (unfortunately, one, the Nathaniel Hawkins cemetery, is vandalized beyond repair). No generals or heads of state rest here, just ordinary people, but at least 13 fought in the American Revolution.

Here's a breakdown of the work that has been done over the past two years.

- **Rose Family Cemetery.** The Rose family was the first to settle Fire Place Neck; their family cemetery is located off Jared's Path. This was the first one restored, at a cost of \$2,885. In this cemetery lie several veterans of the Revolution, including Lt. Thomas Rose, who, in 1780, gave his life during the war.

- **South Haven Presbyterian Church Cemetery.** Interred here in one of the oldest cemeteries in our community are several prominent community leaders, including the Revolutionary War leader, Doctor and Reverend David "Priest" Rose, minister of the South Haven Church. The cost to repair this cemetery was \$2,640.

- **Carman Cemetery.** The Carman family, after whom the river is named, operated the Fire Place mills, an inn, store and post office in South Haven, circa 1780 to 1870. Cost of repair was \$2,250.

- **Corwin Cemetery.** Richard Corwin, a farmer whose house still stands along South Country Road, was present at the battle of Yorktown and at Cornwallis' surrender. George Washington once tested Corwin's fidelity as a guard by attempting to pass him in the night. But Corwin would not allow Washington to pass and afterward received commendations for his fidelity. The Corwin family cemetery is located between Chapel Avenue and Beaver Brook Drive and cost \$950 to repair.



- **David Hawkins Cemetery.** Located on the west side of Old Barto Road, this cemetery contains 22 headstones, all with the surname Hawkins. Several generations of this family farmed the peninsula between Yaphank Creek and Little Neck Run. Cost for repair was \$2,600.

- **Selah and Azel Hawkins Cemetery.** The Hawkins's were some of the earliest settlers in our area and were church and community leaders. Azel Hawkins built many of the houses here. The cemetery off Stillwood Road was repaired using \$975 of the BVA fund to repair the broken headstones and \$826 of the fund to install a fence around it.

We also purchased 8 interpretive signs for these cemeteries with \$726 from the BVA fund.

The next cemetery to be repaired will be the Barteau Cemetery, which contains 40 headstones. We are waiting for Brookhaven Town to clear the access road to the cemetery so that our stonemason, Hollis Warner, can get in with his equipment.

Marty Van Lith, BVA Historian



# Dock Master

We had a successful season and I thank so many of the boaters who expressed appreciation at the end result of the dredging, road work, and clean water. We can all be proud of our much improved marina. Of course, to insure Squassux remains what it has become, out of necessity there are rules that need to be followed. I do not enjoy acting as an enforcer, but I do what is required to keep the yard pristine and safe for all.

First, I have noticed that the “doggy” pick up bags located by the launching ramp are working. While there are still some offenders, I believe most people walking dogs are picking up their dog’s waste.

Next, the speed limit seems of late to be recognized as essential for the safe operation and preservation of Squassux. If we all go slowly (5mph), the roads will last longer and remain flatter. Initially, the new roads seem to have encouraged higher rates of speed, especially when compared to the speed bumps we had last year. Most boaters have come to respect this new rule and adjusted their speed accordingly.

The last scofflaw has to do with gate security. Most of the time I drive to Squassux, I find the gate open. Fortunately, I have had no reports of stolen property since a motor was stolen from a work boat before we opened this year. I am aware that locking the gate is often inconvenient, but it does help safeguard everyone’s vessels and gear. Weekends bring more traffic, and the gate seems to be open more due to the feeling that more people are about, but the same rule must be in force. Also, if you launch your boat, please lock the ramp afterwards as well.

For next season, if you plan to acquire a differently

sized boat, please call me as early as possible so I can help accommodate you. Importantly, any vessel’s beam is very important to know since most of the docks are fairly narrow, having been initially designed in an era when boats were skinnier, between five and seven feet. Now, some 18’ boats have beams of 8 ½ ‘, which creates problems in fitting in somewhere.

It is this problem that has resulted in a duty I sometimes need to perform that is unpleasant for me every time, to request that a boater move his or her boat into a narrower slip so I can accommodate a wider boat. There are a few boats in Squassux whose beams are narrow when compared to the width of the slip. If I have a suitable narrower slip available, I might need to move a boater who had possession of a wider slip for many years. Naturally, boaters become attached to their slips and come to regard them possessively, resulting in hard feelings when asked to relocate. I understand these emotions and would move someone only into a comparable slip and only after consulting the Squassux Committee Chairperson for confirmation. Happily, this is a rare occurrence and is done to accommodate a community member who also wishes to enjoy Squassux.

In closing, I wish to thank all the boaters for their patience this year with the dredging project, the care with which they treat the marina, and the kindness they have shown to me which has made my job enjoyable.



Andy Rubin, Dock Master

**NEW MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION** — Resident membership in the Brookhaven Village Association is open to individual and family residents of Brookhaven Hamlet, as defined in the BVA ByLaws. To become a member, complete this form and send it, along with your annual membership fee to:

**BROOKHAVEN VILLAGE ASSOCIATION • P.O. Box 167, Brookhaven, New York 11719**

Membership Category: \_\_\_\_\_ Family, \$15 annual fee      \_\_\_\_\_ Individual, \$10 annual fee

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Other family members at this address: \_\_\_\_\_

*List areas of special concern on back*

**Contributions Enclosed:**

- Dennis Puleston Environmental Fund: \$ \_\_\_\_\_
- BVA Tree Fund: \$ \_\_\_\_\_
- Virginia Brown Scholarship: \$ \_\_\_\_\_
- Cemetery Fund: \$ \_\_\_\_\_

## ANNOUNCEMENTS:

Mark your calendars! Fall Cleanup; please come out to help keep our community clean:

Saturday October 16, at Brookhaven Firehouse

Sunday October 24, at Brookhaven Elementary School

Please visit our website at:

<http://www.brookhavenvillageassociation.org/>

*Mike Murtha continued from front page.*

**Q:** What was the most satisfying part of the project?

**Mike Murtha:** That a 20-year project finally came to fruition and that we will have a viable landing for a long time to come. It was being discussed by the BVA board about 20 years ago.

**Q:** Did the end result end up being what you had imagined it would be?

**Mike Murtha:** The end result was better.

**Q:** Why was it better?

**Mike Murtha:** Because as a byproduct we were able to redo the entire parking area and roads with DEC approved berm material and still keep to the budget we

## BVA BOARD MEMBERS

**PRESIDENT:**

Kathleen Scheibel

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**DOCKMASTER:**

Andy Rubin

**HISTORIAN:**

Marty Van Lith

The BVA Board meets on the second Wednesday of each month at 7:30 pm at the Post Morrow Annex, 16 Bay Rd. Meetings are open to the public.

discussed. We also planted indigenous spartina grass on previously erosion weakened banks.

**Q:** What would you do differently if you had to do it over again?

**Mike Murtha:** I would do it again because it's been so satisfying.

**Rick Mohlman, Fire Place Newsletter Editor**

## Fire Place

*A Community Newsletter from the  
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Brookhaven, New York 11719*

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