

# village view

by Andrea Leonard

When we left Lovell and his friends on Old House Grounds, Fire Island, New York, last week they has just spent two days gunning for birds in the waters of Great South Bay.

**Thursday, November 17, 1881, 7:40 P.M.**

"By poling hard over a glassy surface we at last arrived at the coy boat and got set about sunrise. Left Frank at the house, waiting for a boat to take him over to Patchogue. A light air had been blowing all night, but it died entirely away just before the daylight was visible over the Eastern Hills, and the moon was barely to be seen in the southern heavens.

"Soon after daybreak, Nate and I got in the box; we had some shots and killed a few birds; Frank came by us about 7:30 A.M. and we said goodbye over the waters. We were all sorry to see him leave us.

"At 11 A.M. we got breakfast and returned to the box again; in about an hour Baldwin got in the box while I returned to the boat with my first headache.

"The shooting was very very hard; even Baldwin missed about as many as I did (and Nate said more). We had a fine shot at four brant that came up close by us. I told Nate we must get all four. I shot one down and missed with the other barrel. Nate missed with both guns and away went the brant.

"I swore some, but it would not help matters."

"At sunset we returned to the house. It was calm for most of the day, and I never saw poorer nor harder shooting in all my gunning here. We have left the coy boat on the Ground and hope to get a good morning's flight.

"The wind tonight is fresh from the S.W. and I fear a storm tomorrow. The boat has gone over to Patchogue for a new gun which I ordered for Baldwin from William Reade & Sons of Boston. I hope he will like it. I think I shall soon retire.

"We have been laying in the line of flight of the coots and Old Squaws and I believe that explains why we have so many poor birds today."

Those of you who are familiar with Long Island's south shore will be imagining the lay of the land where the gunners are practicing their sport. You will recall the thousands of marshy islets that edge the north side of Fire Island, the broad reaches of open water between the shore of Great South Bay.

You'll be seeing in your mind's eye the Eastern Hills rolling out towards Montauk beyond Shinnecook and the Hamptons and will picture the long lonely beach of Fire Island stretching mile after mile, a slim barrier beach, skirting Long Island's southern shore.

Cape Codders who've never seen Fire Island and Great South Bay can best compare it to Monomoy Point if Monomoy ran east and west along the Cape's shore and formed a long bay and separating our south shore from Nantucket Sound.

Fire Island, however, separates Great South Bay from the open Atlantic, and wild winds, waves and great storms tear at the sand spit most of the year. During the week of their visit in November, 1881, Lovell and his friends were fortunate in having but one day of gales.

**Friday, November 18, 1881, 11 A.M.**

"At this moment Nate is frying some potatoes and ham for our breakfast. It has been a day, thus far, of disappoint-

ments, but we hope to do better before night.

At daylight we were 'laid out' on the Old Ground and had a cloudy fresh S.W. wind, just right for a gunning day. The sun rose in a mist of light clouds and above it went up a belt of fire away into the sky, a peculiar and beautiful sight.

"It looked grey in the north, and Nate thought it might rain, but as yet is has not come; I fear it will before night. We had very little shooting; in fact, no moving flight. Got six or eight shots in the first two hours.

"I tried Baldwin's new gun and found it shot very well and close. I killed four birds with it, and got off the box to let him try her. Seven brant ran up; Nate and Baldwin got five. Gus is ashore. He thought he would go over to the island and try there, but he did not go as we saw him outdoors shortly after sunrise. Shall go for him soon and take over to the north shore for the P.M. train.

"We have a small bag thus far and hope for better shooting this P.M. At 1 P.M. the boat returned from Patchogue, leaving Gus with three hours on his hands beore the evening train. Nothing like being early.

"The squall that threatened all the P.M. did not come and I think it will simply be a shift of wind. I hope it will come to the north as there are tens of thousands of birds along the north shore; if we could lay there, we should have great shooting.

"6 P.M. Tonight the sky is overcast with leaden clouds, and at sunset it was nearly calm. We gathered our rig and ran into the house. Tonight we shall dine on a brant and a canvas back. A great luxury. Nate and I are now alone and Frank and Gus' rooms are vacant. We miss them very much but tomorrow we also go.

"8 P.M. Had a magnificent supper of brant and canvas back, simply unsurpassed for delicacy and flavor."

For all my own personal sympathy for the birds the gunners sought, I can appreciate shooting them was a challenge, for birds are wily and fast-moving targets. Most of all I can appreciate their pleasure in eating them; there's no finer meal than wildfowl and I can add nothing to O.D.'s description except to say they're delicious.

**Saturday, November 19, 1881**

The daylight came over the hills, followed by a beautiful sunrise, and the waters of the bays were like a mirror. The smoke from the distant houses along the island shore ascended like pillars into the sky and the reflections perfectly duplicated the shores and boats on the surface of the water. The conversation aboard far distant boats was audible. A lovely morning with but few birds.

"We were rigged on the N.E. point of the island, Nate and I in the box, but few birds could be seen. Those there were would skim the waters and alight where the bay was deep. A coot came along and I killed him.

"Finally a little wind sprang up, and we got a few shots. At 10 A.M., had breakfast and went into the box again. At 12:30 P.M. we took up and went to the house, packed my trunk, and am now writing in the cabin (2 P.M.) over half-way across Great South Bay.

"This boat is very fast and we shall soon be over, although the wind is ahead. Nate, I have left behind; he will come up on Monday.

"This closes the fall shooting at this place, and a good week's sport it has been."

And so endeth the entry in the Shooting Record for November, 1881.