

Shoreham - Wading River Tournament Tennis

Nineteen Ninety Four being the 70th anniversary of the start of the Shoreham Wading River Tennis matches, this account is published to help celebrate the occasion.

A friendly rivalry in sports has existed for many years between the neighboring villages of Shoreham and Wading River. The earliest recollections of this writer center on the Annual Fourth-of-July baseball games between the two communities. Following the mile long parade from the Shoreham Store (Woodville Road corner of Overhill Road) to the Ball Field (Woodville Road corner of North Country Road), the game would begin. Of course Mary Sini's field had been freshly cut to permit playing thereon.



The photo, circa 1914, shows the gathering in the field after the parade. Prominent figures are Dr. Campbell with his bagpipes and kilts and Mr. Erskine with megaphone. On at least one occasion during World War One the Fourth-of-July Parade was led by the Army Field Band from Camp Upton, currently the site of Brookhaven National Laboratories. These ball games continued into the thirties.

Tennis was a popular game in the early days of the Village. There were a number of courts in Shoreham; at the homes of Mattie Smith/Colonel Snyder, Harry Boehm, Frank Gridley, the Griffiths, Mrs. Finn, the Country Club (Its courts were in the grassy parking field immediately north of the Vermynlen property), and on the bluffs at Flavell's Shoreham Inn. Mattie Smith's house is the one on Beatty Road, now owned by Richard Rohman. The overgrown site of the old tennis court is plainly visible north of the road between Fitzgerald Road and Prospect Street. At Harry Boehm's house, later Harry Hughes' and currently Bob Reid's Sr., the court (perhaps there were two) lay west of the house, the house fronting on Tower Hill Road. Frank Gridley owned the property on Gridley Road between Tagliabue Road, and Wardencliff Road. The tennis court sided on Gridley Road, east of the house which is now owned by the Van Soestbergens. The Griffith house, later owned by Natalie and Jack Hunsicker, is situated just west of the present Linda and Ed Weiss home and its tennis court lay south of the house. After fire destroyed the

Hanan home on the bluff to her east, Mrs. Florence Finn bought the Hanan property and built a tennis court there.

It was erased when the present Pisacano house was built. There may well have been a court on the Kendrick property (now Butler) on Overhill Road west side, south of Beatty Road. The Inn courts lay north of the Inn itself between it and the bathing pavillion on the bluffs. Zeno's new house, "Ledgmere," on Briarcliff Road also sported a tennis court. Years [ater, when Donald Upham built his lavish home between Tower Hill Road and Briarcliff Road, a court was constructed there. It was later known as The French School Court by Tom Adams and John Bates in their early tennis years. I believe it was in the thirties that the land on Woodville Road at the corner of Briarcliff Road, on which the matches are played today, was deeded to the Village of Shoreham by a number of gentlemen who were Village homeowners and members of the Country Club.



The old Shoreham Country Club courts, circa 1933

L to R: Virginia Macy, Jack Varian, Natalie Finn, Wes Oliver

In Wading River, there were courts at the long - gone Greenbrier Inn, and others, such as those at Charlie Wood's and Jesse Heatley's houses. According to Ed Wattecamps, Charlie Wood's court on Wading River Manor Road and Parker Road was the official Club court in Wading River. It was the first court in the area to have a Hartrue surface. Jesse Heatley's court was on Sound Avenue, the fourth house on the left north of the Post Office / General Store complex.

The first Annual Tennis Match of record between the Villages was played on Labor Day weekend 1924. The Shoreham team was sponsored by the Shoreham Country Club and the Wading River team was under the aegis of the Wading River Polo and Croquet Club until 1930 and Wading River Field and Tennis Club ever since These matches have continued uninterrupted through the years and, consequently, appear to be the oldest continuous series of matches In these United States.



Standing L to R: Halsey Gosman, Stewart Dickinson, Gilbert Frei, Jesse Heatley, Randall Warden, Jr., Bill Davis, circa 1932

Although the Davis Cup matches predate our Shoreham / Wading River series, that competition was suspended during World War II for the duration, whereas our matches continued uninterrupted, according to Gilbert Frei and others who played. The gap in the records from 1938 to 1964 was caused by the fact that a trophy (or trophies) on which were engraved the only records, was stolen at some point from the home of Jesse Heatley of Wading River. Results for the 1958 tournament were found in a Shoreham Item of that year.

1958

Shoreham 4 Wading River 1

J Bates	defeated	Don Wilson	6 - 0, 6 - 0
J. Brandon	lost to	Chas. Ficken	6 - 2, 3 - 6, 6 - 4
H. Tastrom	defeated	Bo Hager	6 - 4, 6 - 4
J. Bates, H. Frei	defeated	Don Wilson, H. Gosman	6 - 3, 6 - 4
Bill Sedgewick, Jim Mc Crystal	defeated	Don Sayre, Creig Heatley	6 - 0, 6 - 1

After four new first class tennis courts were built at the southeast corner of Woodville and Briarcliff Roads, the old courts between the Club House and the Aldrich house (now Vermynen) were removed to provide additional parking space near the Club. All ensuing matches have been played on the new site. The Wading River Club /Shoreham Country Club Annual Inter Club Tennis Tournament Trophy lists the winners from 1924 to 1938. As mentioned above there is a gap in the records from then until 1964, where the Victor Heatley Tennis Trophy picks up and lists the matches through 1978. Victor Heatley was the enthusiastic Wading River team organizer for many years and the Trophy was given in his memory. 1979 through 1993 appear on the later Heatley Trophy in memory of Seldon W. Heatley.



Jack Hagenah, Herb Frei, Bunny Beatty, Gilly Frei, circa 1932

Gilbert Frei was the spirited coach / captain of the Shoreham team for many years until his death in 1992. His older brother Herb Frei played on the team in the early years. It is interesting to note that Gilly's son, Skelly, and Skelly's son Geordi, have followed in his "footfaults" and played on the Shoreham team as well. By the same token, there have also been three generations of Bates and Vermylens on the Shoreham team through the years. And there were several father - son combinations, including Jack R. Brandon and Jim Brandon, Warren and Mike Heeg, Jim and Derek Jehle, and Joe and Michael Abata.

The Wading River Team has been similarly blessed with family combinations. Jesse and Craig Heatley competed at various times. The Hager family spans three generations with Reid Hager, Bo, Charlie and Cris. There were also K.W. Gosman and Halsey Gosman, N. Wood and C. A. Wood, Ed and John Wattecamps, Al and David Prodel and finally the Lee family. Women's Exhibition Matches were played in connection with the Annual Tournament in 1974, 1977, and 1978. In 1979 the Frei Trophy was officially donated for Women's Shoreham - Wading River Tennis in honor of Gilbert Frei and it has met with enthusiastic competition since its inception. This story would not be complete without mention of the friendly enthusiasm of both sides. It has been traditional to hold a celebration party following each match. One year the party is hosted by Wading Rivber and the next year by Shoreham, very often on the grounds of the respective Clubs. Back in the 30's and 40's, the teams were toasted by passing around a loving cup of cold mint juleps. Currently these rites seem to have given way to the more ordinary form of cocktail party. Wouldn't it be fun to revert back to the more formal (or was it more informal) ritual? Can someone find another Sister Hapgood to breed the juleps?

Wes Oliver with suggestions by

Tom Adams, Ed Wattecamps & John Bates