

GARDINER'S CREEK PRESERVE



Property Description

The Town and Suffolk County purchased the 4.9-acre property from the Dorsey family in 2009 to preserve lands fronting a sensitive waterway, Gardiner's Creek, feeding Dering Harbor, part of the Peconic Estuary. About two-thirds of the property consists of meadow and trees and about one-third creek side and marsh.

Access

The entrance to the property is from the easternmost portion of the cul-de-sac on Quail Hedge Lane, off North Ferry Road. Park on the cul-de-sac; a path leads from the cul-de-sac into the meadow; no formal trails are established. Public access for small groups for hiking and nature watching is permitted during daylight hours but assemblage of large groups is prohibited. Vehicles should not enter between the two stone pillars on North Ferry Road.

History/Prior Owners

The Preserve is located in an historic area; just to the north is the "Conkling-Griffing-Duvall Homestead" dating to 1828,³ that is directly across the Creek from "Creek Cottage," part of which was built about 1740 with materials from the original Manor at Sylvester Manor.⁴ The cottage housed Brinley Sylvester's private chaplain. Both are privately owned and are not open to the public.



The Preserve is part of the area between Chase and Gardiner's Creeks and Dering Harbor known as "Second Neck" which itself was part of West Neck Farm, an agricultural partnership established in the mid-1730s that owned the west side of Shelter Island from the Heights to Shell Beach. Thomas Conkling's 182-acre farm (basically, Second Neck) passed upon his death in 1782 to one of his sons, Shadrach Conkling. The property then passed in many steps through the Conklings, to Asenath Conkling and Moses D. Griffing, to Asenath Griffing and Ralph Duvall, and to Glorian Duvall Devereux who married a Dorsey.



In the late 2000s the Dorseys subdivided their 7.2-acre property into two lots, with the Town purchasing 4.9 acres of meadow and creek front, and the Dorseys retaining the remainder with its historic Homestead. That historic property passed out of the Dorsey family in 2016.

Part of the Homestead is the kitchen of an earlier house, existent at the time of the American Revolution. The kitchen was incorporated into the present building when Asenath Conkling and Moses D. Griffing built it in 1828 and an ell was added and the kitchen repositioned in 1854. The Preserve was part of the Homestead's farm and orchard area.

³ Duvall, History of Shelter Island, 1652-1932 (1932), p. 125.

⁴ Helen Otis Lamont, The Story of Shelter Island in the Revolution (1975). p. 30; Mallmann, Shelter Island and its Presbyterian Church (1899), p. 52.

Stories

- Alma Curtis Duvall, Ralph Duvall's mother, wrote that during the American Revolution British redcoats regularly stopped by the Conkling house for fresh water from their well, located well back from the Creek on the hill, requiring the mistress of the house to have a drink before they filled their casks (S.I. Historical Society Bulletin, June, 1924).

- Mrs. Duvall began her 1924 paper with the following poem by an unnamed author:

"No doubt a house absorbs a part of every soul within,

And dreads the day 'twill only be a place where
folks have been.

A house must miss the laughter and the music
and the tears

That echoed or were shed in it through sweetly
anxious years.

Yet what so e'er the cause of it – and who shall
tell me nay?

A house grows mighty lonesome when its
people are away."



- In an undated English Composition titled “My Home” Glorian Duvall described it in part: “The house is long and rambling and faces South like most colonial houses. To our sorrow it is not strictly colonial, for the doorway is not in the center of the house nor does it have above it a lovely fan window.” She went on to describe the interior and other features in careful wording and penmanship (SIHS 2018.10).
- William Johnston, who lives across North Ferry Road from the Preserve, believes that his house, dating to at least 1824, was moved to its present location from the Conkling-Griffing-Duvall property (Johnston-E. Shillingburg May 2021).



- Glorian Devereux Dorsey (1933-2019) and her children were protective of the history of the “Homestead” by setting aside the greater part of the Homestead’s property for the Town under its Community Preservation Fund program. She was an active supporter of the Island and its life as a summer and holiday resident. Her daughter, Rebecca Devereux Dorsey (1958-2012), an actor, model and vocalist, was a featured vocalist on the North Shore and regularly appeared during summers at East End venues, including the Ram’s Head Inn.