



## BY THE NUMBERS

# 145

Year anniversary being celebrated at Union Chapel Sunday

# 3

Candidates who have not previously run for public office but are seeking election to the Town Board in November

# 5-4-1

Bucks record through Tuesday with a game that was scheduled at home against Southampton on Wednesday evening

# 292

Dollars raised to benefit the Shelter Island Class of 2018 at last Thursday's Paint Night at the Center Firehouse

# 126

Vehicles on display at last Saturday's Fifth annual Car Show with proceeds benefitting the Shelter Island Historical Society's educational programs

# 73

Number of attendees at last weekend's George Blados Day at the Shelter Island Country Club to honor the former greenskeeper



AMBROSE CLANCY PHOTO

The interior of Shelter Island's Union Chapel.

# Simplicity and grandeur

Union Chapel | Where the past is present

BY AMBROSE CLANCY | EDITOR

A good rule of thumb is never to sit across the table from someone called "Honest John" when he's dealing cards.

But John French, a 19th century builder who did extensive work in Brooklyn — including the Brooklyn Academy of Music — came by his nickname, well, honestly. He was known by his contemporaries for "mixing mortar with conscience," according to an article in the Republican Watchman of 1876.

A religious man, who was mayor of Brooklyn at one point, Honest John most likely never shuffled a deck when money was at stake. He was the kind of man, the newspaper reported, who "delights to offer his devotions, the blue vault of heaven alone above his head, where he is not surrounded by pomp and vanity of this world ..."

His expertise in putting up structures that last, along with his piety and disdain for the ornate or the ostentatious, is on display in a Shelter Island jewel that has scarcely changed for nearly a century and a half, and is on the National Register of Historic Places.

Reaching Union Chapel through the winding, hilly streets of the Heights, the church announces itself quietly. And if it's possible for a building to have virtues, then honesty would have to be on the list — it is what it seems to be, a simple church, but the gray-shingled exterior of the Chapel, with its slim spire and bell tower, also represents the enduring



past of the Island.

After time spent with the place, inside and out, the austere nature of its plain, 19th century American appearance steadily informs you of its purpose and charm.

An example of the Chapel's continuing place in community are the eight lamps, four on each side, hanging from the ceiling that flank the center aisle and light up every day of the year at dusk and burn for several hours.

Jay Sterling, chairman of the Board of Trustees for the Chapel along with treasurer David Ruby recently gave a tour for a visitor, with Mr. Sterling noting that there

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A Sense of Place



PHOTOS: AMRBOSE CLANCY, JO ANN KIRKLAND

Top, the Chapel rising in the Heights; above, a detail of one of the 'marine mosaic' windows by Walter Cole Brigham.





AMBROSE CLANCY PHOTO

Board of Trustees chairman Jay Sterling and treasurer Dave Ruby at Union Chapel.

## SENSE OF PLACE

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had been an idea to save money by eliminating the nightly illumination. But the neighboring residents of the Heights wouldn't have it.

"You can see the lights when you come up the hill from the ferry," Mr. Ruby said, and that seemed reason enough to spend a little extra.

### THE PAST PRESERVED

The Chapel's life, beginning in 1875 when it was built, is a connection to what was then known as the Shelter Island Heights Grove and Camp Meeting Association, established in 1872 by Methodists, according to Island historians Patricia and Edward Shillingburg.

Now nondenominational, services have continued without a break since the original meetings with different speakers each Sunday during the summer. This Sunday, June 18, is the opening of the season, called "Homecoming," and Father Philip Dabney, rector of Mission Church in Boston will be speaking (see story, page A13).

Visitors in the days before the Chapel was built would come in the summer months to the Prospect House Hotel in the Heights or small cottages nearby — Honest John built several — and gather on Sundays in "the Grove," a natural amphitheater behind where the chapel now stands.

Mr. Sterling pointed to a large boulder in the open area, which is called "the preaching rock," a natural pulpit where ministers would deliver sermons to the faithful.

In those days, according to Stewart W. Herman, author of "God's Summer Chapel," a history of the place, "many families amiably paid a modest ground rent, pitched their tents among the trees and took their meals at the new restaurant pavilion which, with the passage of time, became the Chequit Inn."

The Island and the camp revival meetings were popular destinations in the last quarter of the 19th century. The year the chapel was built, Mr. Herman writes, there were two special trains leaving Brooklyn — \$2 a ticket — and two steamers "departed on alternate dates for the overnight trip from New York." There were also boats leaving New Haven bound for the Island, carrying New Englanders on vacation, to hear the gospel preached and also to learn about the social and moral issues of the day. Methodists had been involved in historic 19th and early 20th century movements that changed America, including the abolition of slavery and securing

voting rights for women.

Honest John did his part during the Civil War, according to Mr. Herman, ministering "to wounded soldiers at the front..." He was also present at Appomattox, when Robert E. Lee surrendered, slavery ended and the Union was preserved.

### GRANDEUR OF GLASS

One morning recently, Mr. Ruby pointed to the rough pine floor of the approximately 900 square foot first floor, calling attention to "the random width" of the floorboards, laid down in 1875 by Honest John's crew.

"They cut the wood by how big the tree was," Mr. Ruby said.

The eye is soon drawn from the simplicity of the gray walls, the exposed rafters 15 feet from the pine floor, and up to the grandeur of stained glass windows in the apse, alive with color and light on a summer morning. This is the work of Walter Cole Brigham, who lived for a time on Winthrop Road and became an instructor at a summer school of art on the Island. Mr. Brigham employed a unique stained glass technique, which he dubbed "marine mosaic," using seashells and pebbles scoured from beaches in conjunction with Tiffany-style glass.

Brigham's windows flank a large one in the center of the Chapel's back wall representing a Celtic cross on a field of lilies. The Brooklyn Daily Eagle of August 13, 1902 said it "was presented by the relatives of the late John French of Brooklyn."

The Eagle didn't mention that written in the glass is that it's in memory not just of Honest John, but also his wife, Sarah.

On either side of the green cloth-covered pulpit sit two brown stones that could have come from the same beach where Brigham found his materials. There's nothing symbolic or religious about the artfully placed stones, Mr. Sterling said, but they have more to do with old-fashioned Protestant practicality. He said that during warm summer Sundays, two doors at the front of the Chapel are opened, and often a breeze will disturb a minister's notes for the sermon.

"We've had dogs wander in. And a squirrel," he said with a smile, indicating it was no cause for worry, since all are welcome at Union Chapel.

On this morning one door was open, but no visitors were seen scurrying in. It presented a view out to a street in the Heights, and a partial view of the grove and the preacher's rock, unchanged from another time.

## WATER QUALITY

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What appears likely, from the discussion at the meeting, is that a sliding scale based on income would be established to determine the size of individual grants. The septic systems are estimated to cost \$15,000

'You have to decide what is within your scope and what isn't within your scope.'

LAURY DOWD  
TOWN ATTORNEY

to \$17,500 and prices are expected to drop, Public Works Commissioner Jay Card Jr. told the committee.

One hurdle the board faces is how to ensure installation is properly completed and how to discover that those receiving grants are maintaining the new systems year to year, said Town Attorney Laury Dowd.

Ms. Dowd suggested hiring a professional sanitarian to handle that job,

but questioned whether CPF money could be used for such a hire or if it would fall on the Town Board to come up with the money for inspections.

The board needs to determine whether grants should go to those with entirely new construction who generally put in updated septic systems, or just to those with established aged systems in need of replacement. Would grants go to those required by the Suffolk County Department of Health Services to upgrade systems because of an addition to a house or just to those who are replacing more than 50 percent of their existing property?

All of that has to be worked out between the board and the Town Board, Ms. Dowd said.

"You have to decide what is within your scope and what isn't within your scope," the attorney advised.

Mr. Card told the board he is focused on three projects — installation of the new septic system at Wades Beach, work at Crescent Beach and the possibility of improved septic in the Bridge Street area.

The board's next meeting is Thursday, June 15 at 6 p.m. at Town Hall.

## POLICE

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bump along a private drive; someone lost a wallet; and a loose dog in the Heights ran off when an officer tried to catch it.

The Highway Department removed an overhanging limb from Menantic Road on June 10 and later a couch dumped along a Ram Island road. Bay constables removed a small sailboat that washed up on a Westmoreland beach and retrieved floating debris. Officers responded to a dispute, domestic in nature; advised drivers to move cars parked at a blind corner; got a noise complaint from Hay Beach that turned out to be coming from Greenport and another regarding loud music at a Center location shortly after 11 p.m.

There was no sign of criminal activity early June 11 in the Heights when an officer spotted an open door on

an unoccupied parked vehicle. Later a dog that escaped its enclosure was rounded up; an intoxicated person was escorted home; there was a report of a verbal altercation and someone found a standup paddleboard.

A Silver Beach resident turned down the music right away when a neighbor complained early on June 12; there was a false burglary alarm in Dering Harbor; the owner of a dog left to bark all day was warned that future nuisance could lead to a ticket; two dogs were at large in the Center; and parties to a dispute in West Neck over what can be planted on a right of way were told the matter was civil, not criminal in nature.

### AIDED CASES

Shelter Island Emergency Medical Services teams transported aided cases to Eastern Long Island Hospital on June 7 and June 12.

## PETRY

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really just say that?" sense of humor won her some influential fans. The Island eventually claimed her as one of its own, her family recalled.

She always remembered a warm welcome from Evelyn Curry, wife of Dr. Donald Curry, Gracie and Stelvio Silvani, and many others who became friends, her family said. In later years, they said, she always looked forward to Thanksgiving spent in St. Maarten with Jackie and Tut Tuttle.

Edie was no newcomer to the region since her mother, Mildred Weed, came from a rich ancestry on the East End, including Josiah Stanborough, a distant relative who left Lynn, Massachusetts in 1640 and landed on what is now known as Conscience Point. Mr. Stanborough would become an original settler of Southampton and built a house in Sagg, today known as Sagaponack. Edie's ninth great-grandparents were Thomas Halsey

and Elizabeth Phoebe Wheeler, whose house, "The Halsey House," is now a museum in Southampton.

In addition to her husband and sons, Edie is survived by her sister, Jacqueline Frost, and grandchildren, Seneca, Ella, Jem and Todd who knew her as "Mimi."

There will be a wake Thursday, June 15 at Shelter Island Funeral Home from 2 to 4 p.m. and 7 to 9 p.m. The funeral is scheduled for 11 a.m. on Friday, June 16 at the Union Chapel.

In lieu of flowers, the family suggested donations to the Animal Rescue Fund of the Hamptons or East End Hospice.

