

Newsday

LI life

Graduate students Erika Hendrix, left, and Rudie Hurwitz with Professor Gregory Hunter



Modernized history

AN LIU POST PROGRAM COLLECTS, DIGITIZES RECORDS OF LI'S PAST **E2**

act2 | Former NYPD detective brings crime to the screen **E13**

NEWSDAY / JOHN PARASKEVAS

N2

In this issue

In today's cover story, learn about the project helping Long Island historians — and residents — get a better picture of the past.

In Act 2, meet the retired NYPD detective who has co-written and co-produced his own Bronx tale.

And check out the Faith and Seniors calendars for virtual and in-person events.

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COVERSTORY

FOR THE RECORDS



VIRGINIA WINES / HALLOCKVILLE MUSEUM FARM

LIU Post is using a \$1.5M grant to preserve LI history for the digital age

BY JOHN HANC
Special to Newsday

Time which steals
our years away
Shall steal our
pleasures too,
But the memory of
the past shall stay
And half our joys
renew.

The words are those of the 16th century philosopher and statesman Sir Thomas More — famous for authoring the book "Utopia." But the passage was also a favorite saying of Virginia Wines. Born in 1921, she was descended from some of the earliest settlers in Southold, whose founding dates to the 17th century.

Wines grew up in the vanished farm community of Sound Avenue — now part of the Town of Riverhead hamlets of Jamesport, Laurel and Aquabogue — and devoted more than 30 years of her life to collecting, transcribing and organizing letters, diaries, church records, oral histories and other materials related to the history of that part of the North Fork.

Her son Richard recalls how — even after church on an Easter Sunday — she would be sitting at her old, gray Royal typewriter, set up on a table in the living room of the family's 1862 Victorian farmhouse. There she would transcribe old letters and diaries lent to her by descendants of other local families: Hallock was the most prominent, but the names

Among the items in the Virginia Wines collection is a photo of 11 women, above, wearing Victorian-era clothing. It is accompanied by a piece of paper, labeled "Sunday School Class," that lists the women's names and birth and death dates, noting they lived on Long Island from the mid-1800s to the mid-1900s.



At right, another page from Wines' collection includes a photo of a woman holding a baby in front of a house that is accompanied by notecards, one titled "Hallock - Dunn."

George Wines

HALLOCK - DUNN

This house was built for George Wilson Hallock (1834-1907), who m. Sophronia Anna Hallock Nov. 5, 1856. In 1869 they moved to Smithtown, and George's brother Zachariah IV and his wife Caroline (Terry) lived here. Mrs. John Dunn is holding James Dunn, born in 1903. The milestone "16 miles to Greenport, 14 to Wading River" was broken in a hurricane. The milestone and other debris was thrown into Hallock's Pond at Pier Avenue. A mile west, the milestone was a short distance east of the home of Will Benjamin, and a mile west of this, the stone was at the corner of Sound Avenue and West Lane. All milestones were south of the highways. October, 1946.

J. Edward Dunn, 83, prominent farmer of Northville died at his home. He had lived here about 45 years. Surviving are his widow, Mrs. Ella Dunn, sons James P. and John P. Dunn, and the Misses Kathleen, Mary and Helen, and two sisters, Mrs. Charles McNulty and Mary Dunn, Laurel.

VIRGINIA WINES / HALLOCKVILLE MUSEUM FARM



Graduate students Amanda Bayer, left, and Erika Hendrix scan from a photo album of the late William K. Vanderbilt at the digitizing lab at LIU Post. ■ Video: newsday.com/LILife

ON THE COVER. Gregory Hunter, right, director of “Digitizing Local History Sources” at LIU Post, is joined by graduate students Erika Hendrix, left, and Rudie Hurwitz in the lab where documents and photos are scanned.

included Wells and Young, as well as Wines.

“It became her mission in life,” recalled Richard, now himself a historian and director of the Hallockville Museum Farm in Riverhead. “She was eager to tell everyone about it.”

Unlike her son — who has a doctorate in history from Brown University — Wines was not a professional historian. Although educated at Cornell University (and a crack typist, Richard added), she spent much of her working life as a server at The Modern Snack Bar, a popular eatery in Aquebogue. But she had a fascination with local history — and she seemed to know that, as More wrote nearly 500 years ago, time would steal away the memories of the past — if someone wasn’t willing to make the effort to record and

See COVER STORY on E4

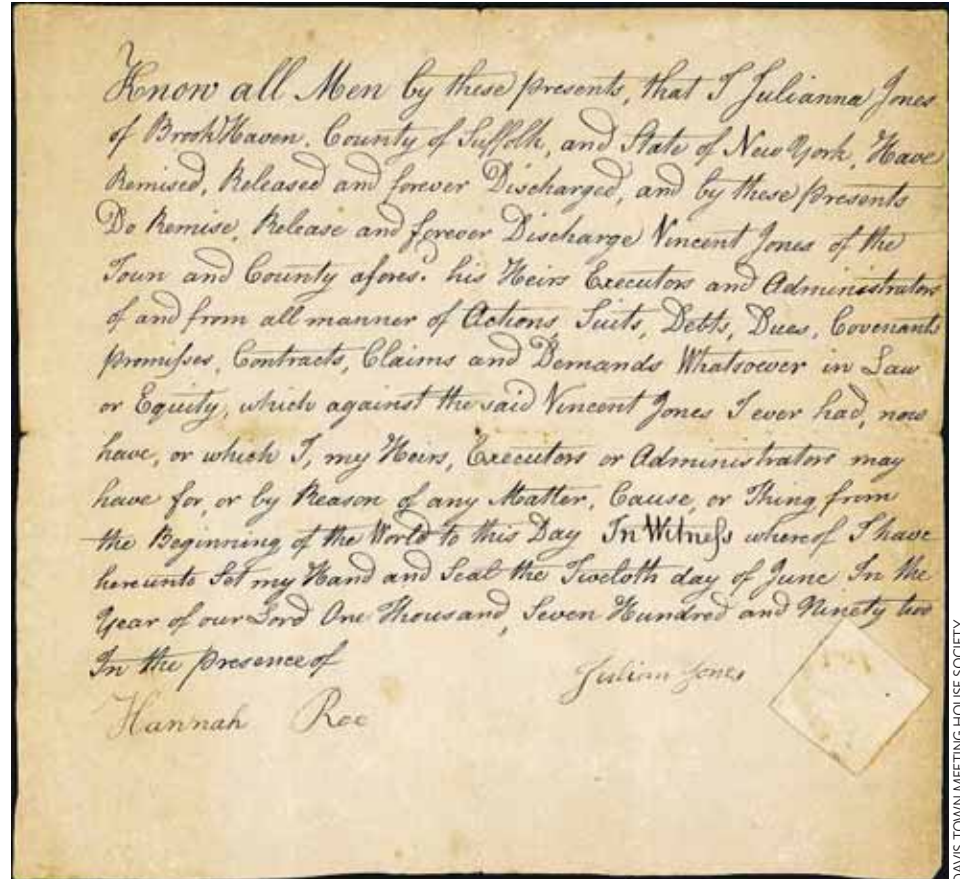
A book from St. George's Episcopal Church in Hempstead, one of the oldest houses of worship in today's Nassau County, records such events as the 1726 baptism of an enslaved child.



Four photos from the Bohemia Historical Society show Anton and Marie Feyk and family in the 1920s.



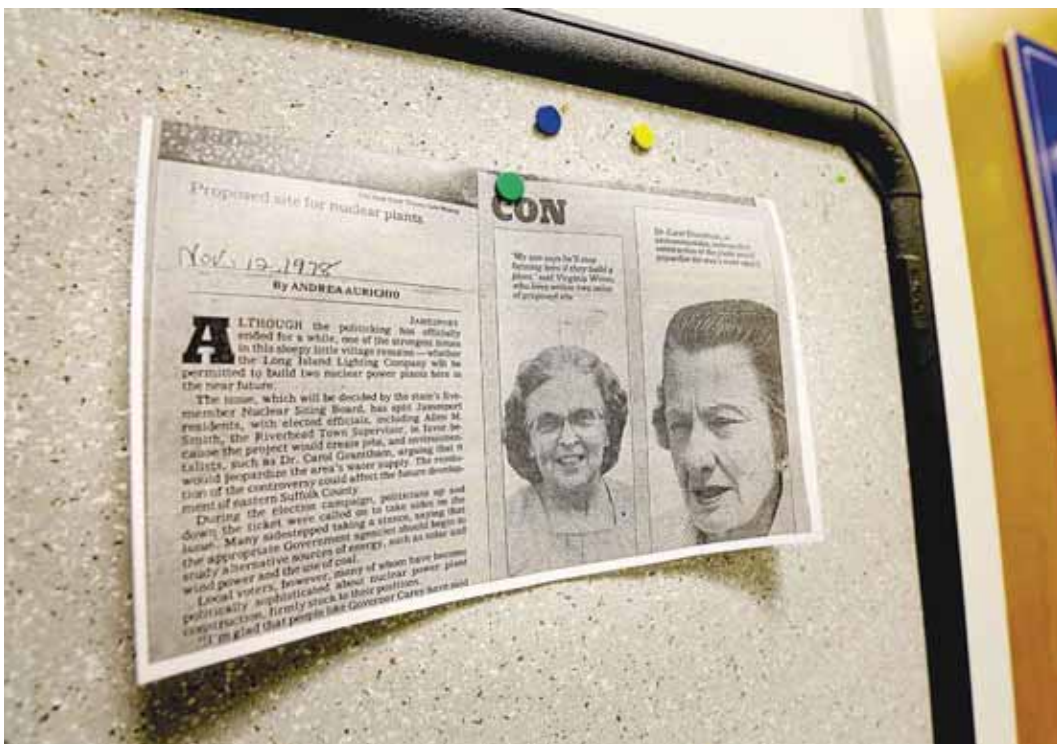
BOHEMIA HISTORICAL SOCIETY



Documents like this one from 1792 suggest that Washington's Culper Spy Ring used illicit trading, based out of Drowned Meadow — today's Port Jefferson — as a cover for spying.

DAVIS TOWN MEETING HOUSE SOCIETY

Building a trove of LI relics



A 1978 New York Times clipping with a photo of Virginia Wines, left, a self-appointed archivist, is pinned outside the lab at LIU Post to help put a face behind the historical items being digitized there.

COVER STORY from E2

preserve them.

Virginia Wines was that someone — compiling, over the course of three decades, 23 loose-leaf binders packed with material she doggedly collected and carefully transcribed. As the products of her research grew, she enjoyed weighing the binders. The last time she did so — not long before her death in 1993 — her son recalls that they tipped the scales at 181 pounds.

'IT'S MIND-BOGGLING'

On a recent Thursday morning, about half of those loose-leaf binders are lined up on the floor of a digital lab on the second floor of the Palmer School of Library and Information Science at the LIU Post campus in Brookville. There, a graduate student from Scarsdale named Patrick Grogan is scanning the collection — piece by piece: Part of a groundbreaking project in digitizing local history.

NEWSDAY / JOHN PARASKEVAS

"I'm seeing dates on records back to the 1600s," exclaims Grogan, when asked what he has scanned in the Wines collection. "I've read letters written during the Civil War and reactions to the assassination of Abraham Lincoln. It's mind-boggling."

Indeed, it is — not only the depth of the material that Virginia accumulated, but the sheer scope of "Digitizing Local History Sources," the name of the six-year program aimed at collecting and making electronic images of more than 70,000 pages of historical materials from 44 participating historical societies and museums across Long Island that will be available to the public through one website.

Funded by a \$1.5 million grant from the Robert David Lion Gardiner Foundation in 2017, DLHS is a huge boon to professional historians as well as those who are just interested in Long Island's long history. (The donation has funded fellowships for students work-



Graduate student Michele Besson scans pages of articles and photos amassed by Virginia Wines, whose collection of binders once weighed in at 181 pounds, according to her son Richard Wines.



A Swezey's Department Store Advertising Scrapbook, 1950-1954, shows a boy and his horse.



A glass-plate negative labeled "1910 Glenwood Hunter" from A. Noble Chapman of Patchogue.

ing on the project, as well as the scanners and high-tech digitization equipment.)

For some of those students, working on the project is not only an education in information and library science — it's a crash course on Long Island history.

"For a long time," said Erika Hendrix, a student at the Palmer School, "my knowledge

of Long Island was limited to the Hamptons, 'Grey Gardens' and 'The Great Gatsby.'" Since working on the DLHS projects, her understanding of Long Island, present and past, has broadened beyond the famous locales and the well-known representations of Long Island in film and literature. "I realize how much diversity there is here," said Hendrix, who lives

in Brooklyn. "It's much more interesting than I thought."

For their professor, the project is also a way to honor those who have amassed and written that history.

"I think of that line from the musical 'Hamilton,'" says Palmer School Professor Gregory S. Hunter, who is direct-

See COVER STORY on E6

ARCHIVING 101

When historian Howard Kroplick was researching a book in the early 2000s about the Motor Parkway, he visited the Vanderbilt Museum & Planetarium — former home of William K. Vanderbilt, the driving force behind the now mostly vanished toll road that once stretched across much of Long Island.

Kroplick, president of the Long Island Motor Parkway Preservation Society, had already compiled a considerable amount of material. His idea was to spend a little time going through the museum's archives to see if there was anything he'd missed.

"I thought it would take a couple hours," he said with a laugh. "I ended up spending five years there."

What Kroplick was doing was what professional historians engage in on a regular basis: Combing through primary documents to piece together the past's puzzles.

"Primary documents," said Natalie Naylor, emeritus professor of history at Hofstra University and a prolific researcher of Long Island history, "are the gold standard of historical research."

Baptism and burial records, court proceedings, letters, censuses: These are the raw materials historians use to assemble a detailed picture of long-ago people, places and things. While the physical documents are often useful, and in some cases preferred, not every researcher can travel to archives or libraries in other parts of the world. Especially during the pandemic. Besides, some documents are too fragile to handle.

Technology has provided a couple of options.

First, historical researchers can use a scanner — the same basic technology one might use on a home printer-scanner to save bank statements or other important personal documents. At LIU Post's Palmer School of Library and Information Science, Professor Gregory Hunter says, they use the preservation-standard Epson 12000XL — essentially a supersized version of the home scanner — to archive documents and photographs.

Some of materials, however, aren't suitable for a scanner. They might be bound, fragile or oversized. In that case, he said, "we use the second option, a high-resolution digital



The project's Digital Transitions DT Atom digital scanning camera cost \$65,000.

camera system, to capture the images."

Thanks to their grant from the Robert David Lion Gardiner Foundation, LIU Post was able to buy such a system — one similar to those used by archivists at such institutions as the New-York Historical Society and the Smithsonian Institution. The DT Atom, a system manufactured by Digital Transitions of Manhattan, is capable of capturing millions of color options for each pixel. (Its price tag was a whopping \$65,000.)

"The original images also are captured without compression, so no data are lost," explained Hunter. (Each image captured on the DT Atom is more than 300 MB, he adds — enough computing power to watch about 1,000 hours of Netflix on a smart TV, according to one website.)

Hence, the vivid sharpness and clarity of the thousands of images of Long Island history that have been amassed as part of the Digitizing Local History Sources project.

To explore the DLHS collection visit, liu.access.preservica.com.

Keep in mind, however, that while the actual images are stunning, the system can be cumbersome to navigate. Hunter says that this summer he will be working with Preservica — the historical preservation software that provides the interface with the digitized images — to make the DLHS archive easier to use. In the meantime, armchair historians with a little patience can still explore the history of Long Island in a way they never could.

"It's great that all of this material is now online," said historian Richard Wines of the Hallockville Museum Farm in Riverhead. "We need to get it out there so people can find it, use it and dig deeper into local history. That's why I'm so excited about this project."

— JOHN HANC

LIU project scans LI history

COVER STORY from E5

ing the project. “Who lives, who dies, who tells your story.” The massive DLHS portal, he says, is the vehicle through which these stories, collected by such historians as Virginia Wines, over many decades, can now be told to a wider audience. “It’s the people who built these collections that we’re honoring here. It’s their legacy.”

And of course, it’s not just Virginia’s corner of the North Fork that is being brought to light through the access provided by this project. The collections are remarkable for their breadth, covering all parts of Long Island and seemingly every era.

WIDE RANGE OF IMAGES

They include 600 images digitized from negatives held by the Southampton History Museum of the work of photographer Bert Morgan, who documented life among the rich and famous in Southampton in the mid-20th century.

There are scrapbooks of families who emigrated from what is now the Czech Republic and helped establish the Suffolk County community of Bohemia (these from the collection of the Bohemia Historical Society).

There are records of St. George’s Episcopal Church in Hempstead — one of the oldest houses of worship in what is now Nassau County — including the 18th-century baptismal certificates of people enslaved in the households of church members.

And consider the remarkable collections donated by the Patchogue Historical Society. The LIU project has digitized about 2,000 black-and-white photographic negatives taken by A. Noble Chapman, a commercial photographer, from 1898 to 1915. They had been given to the society by the photographer’s family decades ago. Now they’re available with a few taps on the keyboard. The Patchogue Historical Society also contributed to the DLHS project about 40 scrapbooks of advertisements, photos and marketing materials for the iconic Swezey’s Department Store, a fixture from the 1940s to the 1980s.

All of this has been collected



Celebrity photographer Bert Morgan documented mid-20th century Southampton’s rich and famous.



Photos from the Suffolk County Vanderbilt Museum & Planetarium collection of the late William K. Vanderbilt show his world travels and life at home, such as in his car on the beach on Long Island.

during the past few years (the progress of the effort, slowed during the pandemic) by Palmer School staff and students who have fanned out to the Island’s historical societies and museums, in some cases using portable scanners to capture images of often-fragile materials. (In partnership with the National Park Service, scanning briefly took place in a ferry terminal to save students from traveling to and from Fire Island by boat.)

In other cases, such as the Virginia Wines collection, materials were brought back to the labs on campus, where the high-end digitizing equipment Hunter acquired for the project through the grant renders images of startling depth, resolution and clarity.

“What we’re hoping to create here,” says the enthusiastic white-haired Hunter, a professional archivist before becoming an educator 32 years ago, “is a mega-archive of Long Island history.”

CULPER RING DOCUMENTS

And it’s already yielded Long Island historical discoveries. In one case, a Revolutionary War-era letter turned out to reveal a hitherto unknown fact about the famous Culper Spy Ring. A researcher at Drowned Meadow Cottage Museum in Port Jefferson who was analyzing a collection of Digitizing Local History Sources materials discovered a letter that seemed to suggest that Gen. George Washington and his spymaster Benjamin

Tallmadge used illicit trading — operating out of Drowned Meadow, today’s Port Jefferson — as a cover for the Setauket-based espionage ring.

The potential for such discoveries has gotten Long Island’s historical community buzzing.

“It’s very exciting,” said former Town of North Hempstead historian Howard Kroplick. “It’s a real service for preserving the history here on Long Island.”

Kroplick himself was impressed when he looked through some of the 2,300 images from Suffolk County Vanderbilt Museum & Planetarium that are now part of DLHS. Those images, said the Vanderbilt’s archives and records manager, Killian Taylor, included

images of William K. Vanderbilt’s family and his Eagle’s Neck estate, but also his travels around the world. And his many passions, which included racing cars. Kroplick, who has written about the Vanderbilt Cup races that “Willie K.” (as he is known colloquially) sponsored on Long Island, knows the museum’s collection well (see sidebar). But when he looked at the digitized images, he exclaimed, “I saw a couple of photos that I’ve never seen before!”

Interpretation of the digital archive is the next phase of the project. That will largely be the work of historians and others as they begin to dig into the vast but raw resource that is being compiled.

“They’ll be able to add additional content and provide further linkages and provide context,” Hunter says during the tour of the digitization labs. As public access to the site has been available for only a year, he says, “we’re still learning from the public and the historical societies on how we can enhance access to the materials.”

In the meantime, the methodical work of Hunter and his students continues — along with their appreciation of the generations of local historians, like Virginia Wines, who assembled the collections they are now helping to digitally preserve.

“God rest her soul, I wish I could have talked to her,” says Grogan, the Palmer School graduate student who has spent many hours digitizing the fruits of Virginia Wines’ life work.

While Wines herself is long gone, the students found a photo of her from a newspaper article. A photocopy of that picture — with Wines smiling warmly — hangs outside one of the labs at Palmer.

Wines had another favorite quote, her son says — based on a stanza of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow’s poem “A Psalm for Life.” She often inscribed her books with these words — words that are an apt tribute to those, like Virginia Wines, who have dedicated much of their lives to preserving Long Island’s past and whose work, thanks to the DLHS project, is now accessible to all.

Earthly records leave Behind us

Footprints on this Ball of Sand.