

The Tottenville Historical Society presents...

**229 MAIN STREET
POP UP SPACE
A VIRTUAL TOUR**

Tottenville, Staten Island, NY

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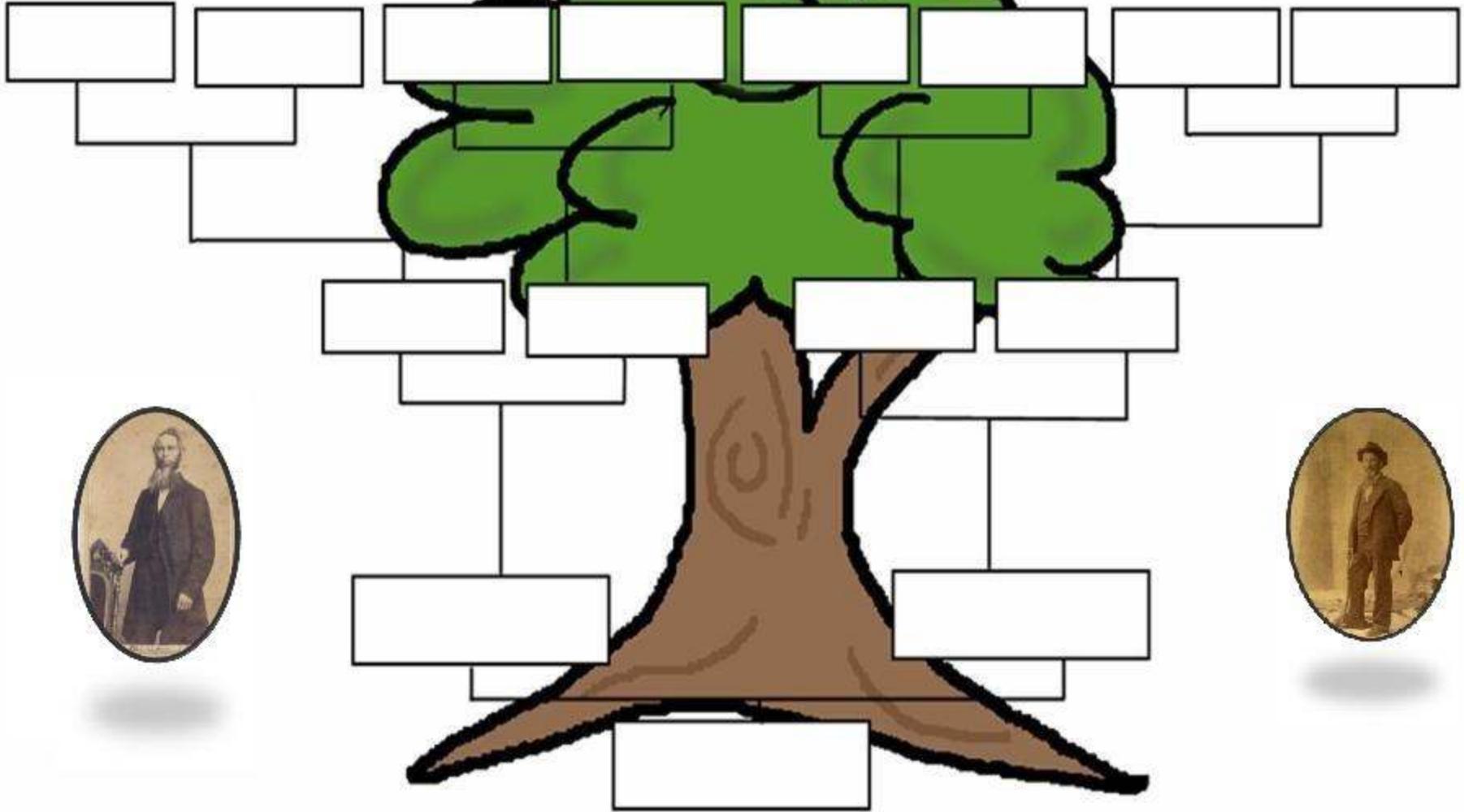
On August 3, 2013, the **Tottenville Historical Society** celebrated its *Grand Opening* at 229 Main Street, Tottenville after extensive rehabilitation of the storefront where for the next eight months we presented exhibits, programs and workshops.

This virtual tour will provide a glimpse of our second exhibit titled,
“October is Family History Month.”



The Tottenville Historical Society presents:

October is Family History Month



The “October is Family History Month” exhibit spotlights just a handful of the many individuals and families that have contributed to make our community a better place to work, live and play.

Some of these early 19th century settlers are mentioned in *Tottenville, the Town the Oyster Built*. Many of these families are perpetuated in our street names including Sleight, Sprague, Bedell, Wood, Fisher, Yetman, and so on.

As we work to make sure notable residents of the 20th century and their contributions are documented for the future, we also encourage you to connect with your own family roots.

October is Family History Month

BEDELL FAMILY

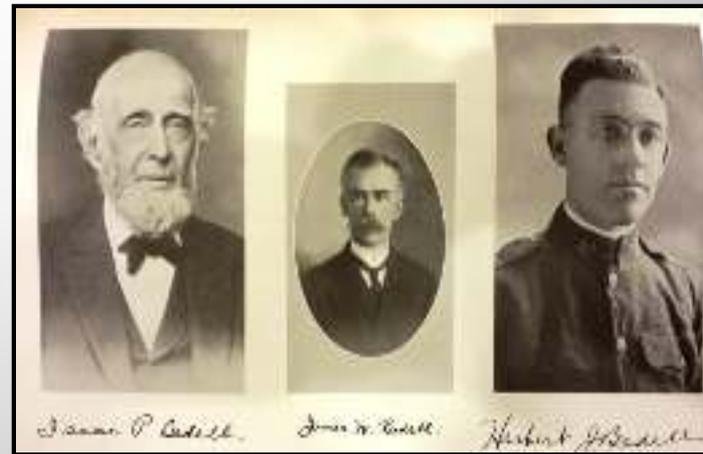
One of the earliest families that settled on the South Shore in the 18th century were the Bedells.

John, a shoemaker, and his wife Susan (Pray) Bedell resided near Pleasant Plains in the early 1800s. **Isaac P. Bedell (1816-1909)** was the oldest of their fifteen children. Isaac moved to Tottenville around 1840 when “the whole southern end of the Island was woodland.” Only a few houses existed in the area at the time. In addition to building numerous houses along Main Street and elsewhere on the South Shore, he is credited with constructing the original Bethel Church on Amboy Road in 1841. Isaac Bedell is considered to be one of Tottenville’s most important 19th century builders.

As a house carpenter and furniture maker, Isaac was frequently called upon to build coffins. With no undertaker in the area, he soon became engaged in the funeral and undertaking business. Established in 1842 as *I.P. Bedell - General Furnishing Undertaker*, the business remained family owned for more than 150 years. Following Isaac’s death in 1909, the next three generations carried on the tradition: James W.(son), Herbert J. (grandson), and Joseph E. (great grandson).



Isaac Bedell and hearse, circa 1880



Three generations ran the Bedell family business.

BEDELL

Notable South Shore Bedells and their relationship to Isaac:

James L. Bedell (1833-1917), brother;
carpenter and, later, funeral director

James W. Bedell (1850-1920), son;
grocer and, later, funeral director

John F. Bedell (1855-1920), son;
druggist

Benjamin Bedell (1916-1973), great
grandson; delicatessen (Main St.)

Local Places of Interest:

James L. and Lucinda Bedell House,
7484 Amboy Rd., Tottenville;
NYC Landmark (2005)
Bedell Street, Pleasant Plains
Bedell Avenue, Tottenville

Joseph E. Bedell (1916-1992) was one of the most widely known and beloved members of our community. A caring and generous businessman, compassionate, dedicated service. His gravestone epitaph speaks volumes: *He was a gentle man loved by all and a giant among men.*

Joe's cousin, Muriel Bedell, who had limited involvement in the family business, died in 2013. She was the last in a long line of Bedell family members to live in Tottenville.

Today, the family funeral and undertaking business is owned by Paul J. Pizzo and operated as the *Bedell-Pizzo Funeral Home.*



Joe Bedell atop the reproduction hearse handcrafted for the 150th anniversary celebration (1841-1991)

CORNELIUS D. SHEA



Cornelius D. Shea, prolific writer and publisher, was born in Richmond Valley in 1863, the son of John W. and Mary T. (Dissosway) Shea. He lived in Tottenville from 1877 until his death in 1920. He built the house at 218 Fisher Avenue around 1905 where he lived with his wife Matilda (Price) and two sons and two daughters. The house remains standing today.

Shea's Lane (today's Rossville Avenue) was named for this family. Members of the Shea family were highly regarded citizens and prominent businessmen in the Pleasant Plains community.

Cornelius Shea is celebrated for writing hundreds of short stories for *Wild West Weekly* under the pen name "An Old Scout" (see next page). In addition, he was a regular contributor to *Golden Hours*, a young people's weekly, as well as many other weeklies and dime novels. Just recently new information about Cornelius Shea was learned via the Internet. The *SFE (Encyclopedia of Science Fiction)* described Shea as a "writer for the silent screen and author of dime novels.....prolific in many categories but best remembered for marvel stories using a fairly consistent 'mythology' of dwarfs, subterranean eruptions, and stage illusion masquerading as supernatural magic. Shea's work was widely reprinted, often pseudonymously as *By the Author of The Wreck of the Glaucus.*"

Cornelius was very involved in the affairs of the community. He belonged to numerous fraternal organizations, served as president of the Tottenville Athletic Club for several terms and managed their baseball team for many years. Cornelius was a volunteer fireman and was twice elected Westfield town clerk.

WILD WEST

WEEKLY

A MAGAZINE CONTAINING STORIES, SKETCHES ETC. OF WESTERN LIFE.

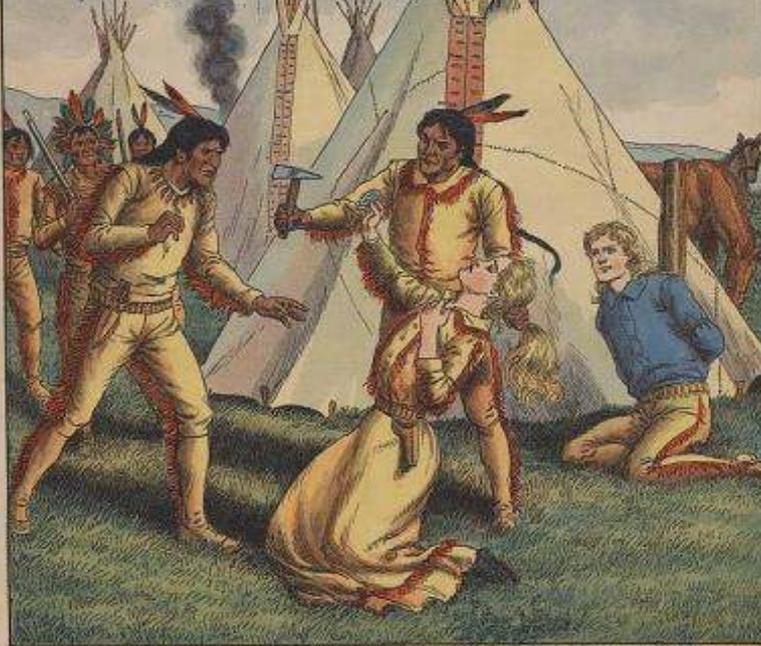
Sent Weekly—By Subscription \$2.50 per year. Application made for Second Class Entry at St. N. Y. Post Office.

No. 246.

NEW YORK, JULY 5, 1907.

Price 5 Cents.

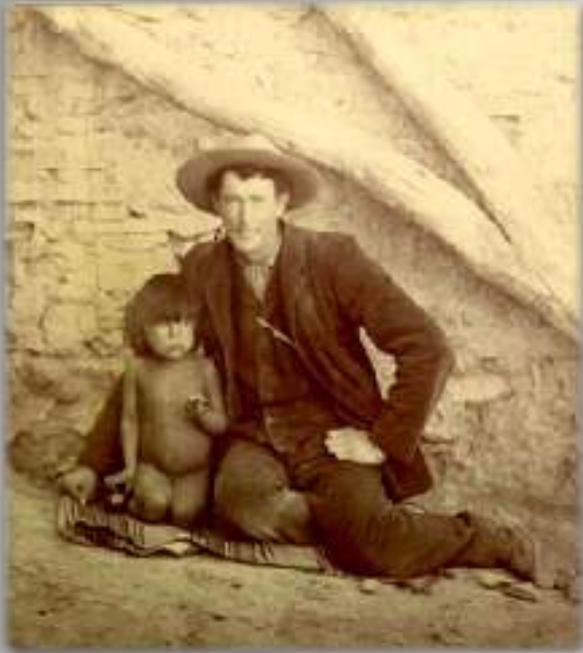
YOUNG WILD WEST AND THE SIOUX SCALPERS; OR, HOW ARIETTA SAVED HER LIFE. *By AN OLD SCOUT.*



"The scalp of the paleface maiden shall hang to the lodge-pole of Big Wolf," cried the Sioux chief, as the brave seized Arietta's golden locks and raised his hatchet. At that moment the brave girl drew forth the magic token.

July 5, 1907 "By An Old Scout" (Cornelius Shea)

GEORGE H. PEPPER



George Hubbard Pepper (1873-1924) was born in Tottenville to Alice and David Joline Pepper. George's father ran a grocery business in a Main Street building that came to be known as *Pepper's Hall* (today's *Cracker Barrel Deli*). Even at an early age he exhibited a strong interest in

archaeology. Just barely out of his high school, Pepper had already been excavating and documenting Indian shell heaps, middens and gravesites along the South Shore waterfront.

After completing his education in Tottenville, Pepper studied at the Peabody Museum at Harvard University. In 1896 he was appointed assistant curator of the Department of the Southwest at the American Museum of Natural History in New York City. He spent the next ten years studying, conducting excavations, collecting and photographing the ruins, rituals and handwork of the Indians of the American Southwest, Mexico, and Ecuador. At age 23, he directed the excavation of one of the wonders of the American West – Pueblo Bonito, the 800-room Native American brick complex built more than 1200 years ago in the Arizona desert.

George H. Pepper died in 1924 in Manhattan at the age of 51. His collections are deposited with the Smithsonian Institute, the National Museum of the American Indian, the American Museum of Natural History, Tulane University, and others. A rediscovery of George Pepper's amazing work was recently exhibited by the New Orleans Museum of Art.

BUTLER FAMILY

The Butler family genealogy of Staten Island is as voluminous as the Totten, Sprague and Cole family histories. During the 18th century, James, Thomas and Nathaniel Butler were among the first to settle near Tottenville in the area surrounding what is now the Mission of the Immaculate Virgin at Mount Loretto.

David C. Butler (1834-1913), born in Tottenville, was descended from Thomas Butler. He was widely known as “D.C.” Butler. D.C. and James W. Sleight operated the *Butler & Sleight Ship Building & Repair Yard* located at Ward’s Point in Conference House Park beginning in the 1850s. Later Butler became the sole proprietor. It was recently learned that D.C.’s son Joseph was a ship carpenter’s apprentice in the shipyard, learning the trade from his father. Joseph’s untimely death in 1880 at the age of 18 must have been devastating.

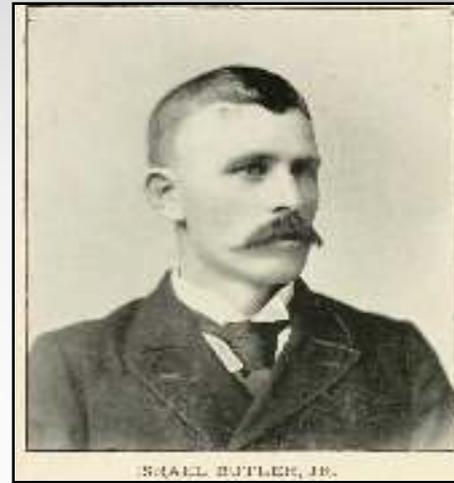
D.C. had a strong commitment to education. He served as president of the board of trustees of the local school district, Westfield District School No. 5, and was instrumental in building the new school, *Bay View Academy* (today’s P.S. 1 Annex), in 1878. The building was designated a NYC Landmark in 1995 as the oldest public school building still in use in the five boroughs.



A pious man, D.C. Butler was superintendent of the Sunday school at St. Paul’s Church, Amboy Road, for 22 years. In 1884, when the congregation had outgrown the school building, he covered all expenses for a new larger building. D.C. also served as a member of the board that established the Richmond County Bible Society.

BUTLER

Israel Butler Jr. and **David J. Butler**, sons of Israel Butler Sr. of Richmond Valley, followed their father's footsteps as carpenters. Together they established *Butler Bros.*, architects, contractors, and builders, in 1889. Their reputation as one of the leading firms in the town of Westfield is supported by their extraordinary building projects which include Nielson's Hotel in Kreischerville, Amicitia Hall in Pleasant Plains, Aquehonga Athletic Club in Tottenville, Elmer T. Butler's coach house and stables at Butler Manor, and Arthur W. Browne's residence in Pleasant Plains (former home of Dr. Herbert Berger).



Notable South Shore Butlers:

Isaac Butler, Tottenville; operated the ferry from Amboy Rd. to NJ from 1788 until 1828

James T. Butler, Tottenville; house carpenter and architect

Daniel Butler, oysterman, Butler Ave. in Tottenville is named for this family

Local Places of Interest:

Butler Avenue, Tottenville

Butler Street, Richmond Valley

Butler Boulevard, Butler Manor



HADKINS



Frank L. Hadkins (1863-1941)

John H. Hadkins (1832-1872) established the Hadkins beverage bottling business in New Jersey in 1863. He later abandoned the New Jersey plant and began bottling carbonated beverages entirely from his newly built establishment on Craig Avenue in Tottenville.

When John H. died in 1872 at the age of 39, his son Robert, then age 17, took over the management of the company. In 1887, Robert's brother Frank became a partner and they renamed the company *R.H. Hadkins & Bro.* Upon Robert's death in 1889, Frank assumed control of the company and continued to bottle beverages in the same location in Tottenville until the 1940s.

Frank L. Hadkins, born in Perth Amboy, NJ, died in Staten Island on November 28, 1941 survived by his wife Annie L. (Hopping) Hadkins and daughter Marion (Hadkins) Martin.

The Tottenville Historical Society is fortunate to have several Hadkins bottles from different periods in the company's history in its collection.

DR. HERBERT BERGER



In 1957, **Dr. Herbert Berger**, a Tottenville physician who, as chairman of the New York State Medical Society's committee on narcotics and alcohol addiction, addressed the American Medical Association's 106th annual meeting with charges of indiscriminate use of stimulants by professional and amateur athletes including school children. He set the international sporting world on its ear.

Dr. Herbert Berger arrived in Tottenville in 1934 when, according to his autobiographical book, "Did This Really Happen?", 65% of the town's population was receiving government financial aid. "Finally, I found Staten Island, at its farthest end, a little town called Tottenville. Here at last was what I was seeking," wrote Dr. Berger. He goes on to describe his first office "an old dental office" and reveals that "During my first month in practice I earned twelve dollars."

Dr. Berger maintained his practice here for more than five decades before retiring in 1988. He also served as chief of medicine at the former Richmond Memorial Hospital. He lobbied throughout his career for the humane treatment of drug addicts and was a pioneer in the use of methadone to treat heroin addicts.

Dr. Berger suffered a stroke in 1995 and died in 2003. Dr. Berger's estate at the corner of Amboy Rd. and Bloomingdale Rd. in Pleasant Plains, which he and his wife Sylvia purchased in 1946 for \$25,000, was reportedly sold to developers for over \$7 million after his death.

NICHOLAS KILLMEYER



NICHOLAS KILLMEYER.

Nicholas Killmeyer was born in Prussia in 1822. Nicholas immigrated to the United States in 1849, settling in Woodbridge, NJ before relocating to Kreischerville, Staten Island.

Nicholas established a grocery business and tavern in Kreischerville in 1859. Later, in 1863, he was appointed postmaster of the village, a position that was held by both Nicholas and his son Albert for nearly thirty years.

In 1879 Nicholas Killmeyer and his eldest son William bought the West End Hotel at the foot of Main Street in Tottenville. They sold the hotel in 1886 and soon began expanding the Kreischerville establishment; Kreischerville was thriving and so was their business. By 1891, Killmeyer's *Union Hotel* had been refurbished with an enlarged dining area, second floor hotel rooms and "...the handsomest bar and billiard rooms on the Island."

Following Nicholas's retirement around 1895, his sons Albert and Theodore ran the store and the hotel, respectively. The *Union Hotel*, though modified, still operates today as *Killmeyer's Old Bavaria Inn*, a German restaurant and beer garden, and is located at 4254 Arthur Kill Road.

TOTTEN



Is this William H. Totten?

Although the Totten family is well documented in the book, *Tottenville, the Town the Oyster Built* by Barnett Shepherd, the history of Tottenville's notable persons would not be complete without mention of this family. **Capt. John Totten** (1801-1872), also known as John Totten Jr., built a dock and general store at the foot of Main Street around 1834 that sparked the development of Tottenville.

Capt. Totten's son, **Abraham Cole Totten** (1804-1877) was a successful sea captain who resided with his wife Mary Ann (Brackett) in New York City. Evelyn B. (Totten) Button, mother of Olympic figure skating champion Dick Button, is the granddaughter of Abraham and Mary Ann.

According to the book *Prominent Men of Staten Island (1894)*, William H. Totten, the son of Capt. John Totten, was born in 1825 and succeeded his father in the family grocery business in Tottenville upon John's death. The book erroneously records John's death as 1866. From census records we learn that William H. Totten was born circa 1831-2 and that he relocated to Ohio with his family sometime around 1865. It seems likely that *Prominent Men* simply got it wrong. More research is needed!

TOTTEN

Olympic figure skating champion Dick Button,
Totten descendant



Capt. John Totten (1801-1872)
“Founding Father of Tottenville”



STREET NAMES

We can learn a lot about the history of our town from the street names. Many were named for prominent families who were successful business people or civic leaders and owned large amounts of land. Now that we have a better understanding of the history of our town and the people who came before, we'd like to share with you what we've learned about the families they were named for:

Arents Ave. - Craig Ave., between Johnson Ave. and Main St., was named for Stephen D. Arents, master sail maker. Arents's house was located on Johnson Ave. and, if still standing, would be in the middle of Craig Ave.

Aspinwall St. - Some streets were named for property owners who owned large amounts of land but never actually lived here. Aspinwall and Satterlee Sts. are examples.

Barnard Ave. - Owen H. Barnard built and owned a silk mill on Richmond Valley Road. Although he lived along the waterfront near Allentown Lane in Charleston, he also owned acreage near today's Barnard Ave., Tottenville, where his daughter Belle lived after his death.

Butler Ave. - Daniel Butler, oysterman, resided at the corner of Butler Ave. and Amboy Rd., and owned several acres here.

Elliott Ave./Craig Ave. - The section of Craig Ave. between Bentley St. and Amboy Rd. was formerly named Elliott Ave. Walter T. Elliott who was an educator, surveyor, and businessman. His house at the corner of Bentley St. and Craig Ave. was demolished in 2008. The "modern" section of Craig, from Amboy Rd. to Hylan Blvd., was constructed in the late 1920s about the same time Hylan Blvd. was built. It was named for Mayor Hylan's Comptroller, Charles Craig.

STREET NAMES



Ellis St. - Jacob Ellis established Tottenville's first shipyard on the Sound, between Main and Tyrrell Sts. Jacob's brother, Cornelius C. Ellis, another Tottenville resident, was a tug boat captain and harbormaster for New York City.

Fisher Ave. - Members of the Fisher family arrived in Tottenville in the early 1800s and owned many acres of land. It is written that the earliest Fisher house (which still exists today) was built to face the Arthur Kill, but later turned to front the newly opened road known today as Fisher Ave.

Hopping Ave . - The Hopping family, related by marriage to the Tottens, were prominent residents and business people.

Johnson Ave . One of Tottenville's earliest families, the Johnsons were large landowners, mariners, and oystermen, who lived near the water's edge on the Sound as early as the 18th century.

Joline Ave . - Formerly called Central Ave., Benjamin Joline, farmer, settled near the Raritan Bay circa 1830 where he owned copious amounts of land.

Lee Ave. - Formerly Center St. and later named for the Robert Lee family, builders, who constructed many homes along this street and the surrounding streets. Robert Lee and family resided at 7372 Amboy Road.



J.S. Ellis & Son Shipyard (1857-1920s)

STREET NAMES



Rev. John L. Lenhart

Lenhart St . - Named for Chaplain John L. Lenhart, Amboy Rd. resident, who was the first naval chaplain to die in service to his country in 1862. Rev. Lenhart drowned aboard the USS Cumberland. A monument to his memory was erected in Bethel Cemetery, Tottenville and still stands today. Formerly called High St.

Madsen Ave. - Danish immigrant Hans Madsen farmed the land and distributed bottled milk from his Richmond Valley property.

Main St. - Originally named Totten St. until 1897. Totten St. led to Totten's Landing on the Sound, and became the business center of the village from the mid-1800's through the late-1900's. It was a showplace of handsome homes built by wealthy seamen and merchants.

Page Ave. - Originally named Beach St., it renamed in honor of world-renowned artist William Page who had built an eight-sided house near today's Hylan Blvd. in the 1860s.

Sleight Ave./Sprague Ave. - Many streets were named for the early families that lived here for generations, among them, the Sleight and Sprague families. Andrew Sprague and John Sleight were both in the oyster business.



William Page, artist (1811-1885)

STREET NAMES

Wood Ave. - There were numerous Wood families residing in Tottenville early on. Wood Avenue was laid out in 1868. Elias P. Wood, oysterman, owned much of the land surrounding this street.

Yetman Ave . - This street was named for Hubbard R. Yetman, teacher, justice of the peace, state assemblyman, and first Borough Superintendent of Schools in Richmond County. Yetman lived at 5336 Arthur Kill Rd., at the southeast corner of Yetman Ave. The house was built by William Joline, Yetman's father-in-law, ca. 1845. Yetman Ave. was originally mapped as William Street, possibly to honor Joline. In the 1890's, it was popularly referred to as Hogan's Alley. The street was graded and paved in 1896, more than a year earlier than the town's most important road, Main St.



FAMILY TRIVIA



Mary Davis, born in England, was traveling to Tottenville aboard the Titanic to visit her sister. In 1913 she married John Wilburn (Wilburn & Matheson Hardware, 175 Main St.) in Tottenville. Mary Davis Wilburn died in 1987 at age 104, at the time **the oldest known survivor of the Titanic.**

The Grodzinsky and Friedman families of Tottenville operated *Mary's Five-and-Dime Store* from 1927-1986.



The list of names of the men and women who have worked tirelessly for the betterment of our community during the past 150+ years is endless. They include Scout leaders, educators, civic leaders, clergy and lay people, businessmen and women, and citizens from all backgrounds. They are usually volunteers and have a common goal: to make our community a better place to live. *“Thank you!”* to everyone for making a difference in our lives, whether in the past or present.

Several of our outstanding citizens have been recognized already in our published books including Janice Rose, Jim Josey and Louise Thompson. We received important biographical information on some of them as well as for the individuals below. There are many others, and we encourage you to submit documentation on their behalf so their contributions will be recorded in the annals of our history.



Edwin R. Peterson (1921-2003) was born in Tottenville. Ed’s grandparents, Nils and Betsy Johnson Peterson, immigrated to the United States from Sweden in the 1870s. Nils Peterson was an oysterman and shipbuilder.

Ed Peterson and his family later relocated to Massachusetts, where he and his brother founded an auto service and parts supply company. Much of their business initially consisted of servicing and replacing engines at construction sites in the Northwest where they became “alarmed” at the number of deaths and injuries caused by heavy equipment in reverse. In the 1960s, Ed Peterson developed and patented the first back-up-alarm warning system for commercial vehicles that is sold today as Bac-A-Larm. Quite a life-saving invention!



Nick Kenny, songwriter, poet, columnist, was born on Long Island. His family moved to Staten Island in 1918, first to Grant City and later to Pleasant Plains. Nick Kenny worked as a reporter for several New York newspapers including the *Staten Island Advance*, and was radio editor for both the *New York Daily News* and the *New York Daily Mirror*. Nick published several books of his poetry. He and his brother Charles wrote songs - about 500 songs before getting one published - but their biggest hit came in 1931, "Love Letters in the Sand." Originally recorded by Gene Austin, "Love Letters" was popularized with Pat Boone's gold record hit in 1957



During the 1960s, **Sarah E. Hall**, Tottenville resident and chairwoman of the YWCA Staten Island Advisory Board, was instrumental in establishing a "Y" branch office in Tottenville, aided by Dot Kroeger, Ida Plumb and others. The official opening of the *Young Women's Christian Association (Y.W.C.A.)* office at 7423 Amboy Rd. took place on October 13, 1968.

Grand Opening, YWCA, 7423 Amboy Rd.
Sarah Hall, front right

During the past 40+ years, Tottenville resident **Fran Okeson** has served our community, especially our youth, in many capacities: Boys Scouts, Girl Scouts, civic organizations, pageant director, Little League, library association, women's club founder, public speaking moderator, and much more. *(Red) Hats off to Fran for her dedicated service!*



**THE TOTTENVILLE HISTORICAL SOCIETY GRATEFULLY ACKNOWLEDGES THE FOLLOWING SPONSORS
AND VOLUNTEERS
WHO HAVE CONTRIBUTED TO MAKE 229 MAIN STREET A SUCCESS:**

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Tina Kaasmann-Dunn	Irene Wuethrich
John Leary	

(list to be updated)

We also wish to thank all the donors of artifacts and information to the collections of the Tottenville Historical Society that were used in this exhibit.