



South Shore Estuary Cultural Survey

- A Project of Long Island Traditions -

TIPS FOR DOCUMENTATION

Finding Local Documents & Resources

Compiled by Varick Chittenden

Courtesy Traditional Arts of Upstate New York (<http://northcountryfolklore.org/rvsp/resources.pdf>)

In addition to interviewing people and going out in the field yourself, there are many resources available in any community to tell its story. Specifically, about landmarks you might find the following resources helpful:

Deeds or Abstracts are official documents that may provide accurate information about boundaries, locations of structures, clues to changes that have occurred over time, and the succession of ownership. Property owners may have them or copies can be obtained from the County Clerk's office.

Newspapers may well include news stories, feature articles, photographs, public notices, or advertising about public events, disasters, or other notable occurrences relevant to the landmark you are researching. Property owners or other local people may have saved clippings relevant to your research. Original newspapers or copies—on microfilm or digital scans—may exist in local libraries or historical societies. Information about such holdings on Long Island are available at your local library. In some instances, **books or magazines** may also carry articles about or references to the site you are researching.

Photo albums [or shoeboxes full of old photos] are often storehouses of local information about people, places and things. As for their usefulness in researching landmarks, there may be snapshots of public events at local sites or even candid shots of people with prominent views of the landmark. Local historians, historical societies or public libraries may have collections of local photographs. **Post card collections** are often good sources of pertinent photos as well.

Scrapbooks kept by individuals or organizations often include a rich variety of clippings, photos, and ephemera [printed matter of short term interest, such as posters, handbills, program booklets, etc.]. These can be especially helpful when you are asking questions of a narrator in an interview.

Correspondence, diaries and journals can give important insights to community, family or business history. Both facts and observations are apt to appear in these primary sources of information.

Business or organization records such as minutes of meetings, financial reports, and names of officers, members or employees can provide valuable historical information.

Student research papers—for college, high school or even elementary school projects—can be a good source of information, at least providing leads to local records or people who could assist you as well. In some instances, student research about local history or folklore may be the only time something has ever been recorded about it.

Artifacts and objects that are relevant to the history and local stories of the site you are researching may exist at the site itself or in the hands of family members, local museums, collectors or dealers. Such things as tools of a trade, advertising signs, architectural fragments, souvenirs, etc. can help to tell the story of a place over time.

Remember that most towns or villages have an officially-appointed historian; many have historical societies or museums and public libraries. These can be invaluable resources for you in local history research. If people there don't have the materials or the answers, they may well be able to refer you to others in their communities who do. Finally, Long Island Traditions has an extensive oral history collection of fishermen, bay house owners, boat builders and other maritime tradition bearers that are available for public research by appointment. Call us at (516) 767-8803 for an appointment.