

The History of East Hampton

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Introduction

The Incorporated Village of East Hampton was the area of initial settlement in East Hampton Town and remains to some extent the center of the town. The character of that seventeenth – century agrarian community established the character of the entire town well into the nineteenth century. The late-nineteenth-century resort development throughout the town was also connected to the major summer colony within what is now the Inc. Village. Understandably the account of East Hampton’s early history focuses on the Village of East Hampton.

Geography of East Hampton

The Town of East Hampton covers the eastern half of Long Island’s South Fork, and area of approximately 48,000 acres. The boundary separating East Hampton from Southampton to the west is Town Line Road which extends from Wainscott north to Sag Harbor. The Town is bordered to the south by the Atlantic Ocean and to the north by Gardiner’s Bay and Block Island Sound. The 3,300-acre Gardiner’s Island, which separates Gardiner’s Bay from Block Island Sound, is part of the Town of East Hampton.

The south shore from Wainscott to Amagansett is a flat coastal plain which has the best agricultural soils in the town. One or several lines of dunes provide a barrier between the fertile coastal plain and the Atlantic Ocean. Near the middle of the peninsula is a ridge with heights of 100 to 180 feet. North of this ridge the land is lower but more undulating than the coastal plain and the north coast is characterized by bluffs as well as marshland at the harbors and inlets. The soil north of the coastal plain is sandy and the land is primarily forested. East of Amagansett the sandy isthmus of Napeague extends to the highlands of Montauk. Along the south shore are inlets from the ocean at Georgica Pond and Hook Pond. A number of important harbors and inlets are along the north shore: Northwest Creek, Three Mile Harbor, Accabonac Harbor, Napeague Harbor and Lake Montauk. There are also a number of fresh water ponds inland.

The early history of East Hampton was governed to a great extent by this geography. The original 1648 settlement was on the fertile coastal plain adjacent to Hook Pond. Surrounding the core settlement of a common and dwellings were ample lands for cultivation and pasturage. Early roads led to meadows at the inlets and ponds, to the summer pastures at Montauk and to the harbors and landings for trade and travel. On the coastal plain to the east and west of the core settlement, at a distance where the land could not be conveniently farmed from the dwellings on East Hampton’s Main Street, developed the agricultural villages of Amagansett and Wainscott. Because of the good soil these communities prospered. North of the coastal plain at Northwest and Springs, land suitable for farming was usually found adjacent to the coastal inlets and therefore these areas were characterized by more scattered farms. Because much of the land was poor many of the farms were small subsistence operations. With access to the harbors and many Springs and Northwest residents supplemented their livelihood with fishing.

Seventeenth Century: Settlement

East Hampton was the third town established on eastern Long Island by New England colonists. It followed Southold, settled in 1640 by the New Haven Colony, and Southampton, also founded in 1640 by a group from the Massachusetts Bay Colony.

Settlement of the Town of East Hampton was preceded by Lion Gardiner's arrival on Gardiner's Island in 1640. Gardiner was granted the island as an independent manor in 1639 which it remained until after the American Revolution when it was annexed to the Town of East Hampton.

In 1648 the governors of the New Haven and Connecticut Colonies and their associates purchased from the Montauk Indians approximately 31,000 acres on Long Island's South Fork. The purchase extended from Southampton Town eastward to Nominicks, the first highlands of the Montauk peninsula. This group of investors in turn sold shares in their purchase to would-be settlers who originated from a number of different New England towns. The thirty-four original settlers obtained full title to the land in 1651 from the Connecticut governors and their associates. By this time the new town was known as East Hampton.

East Hampton's New England settlers retained their ties to that region. East Hampton adopted the laws of Connecticut Colony in 1653 and united with Connecticut Colony in 1657. Although annexed to New York Colony in 1664, East Hampton retained a primary cultural and commercial attachment to New England well into the nineteenth century.

The core of the original settlement was a broad common about a mile in length laid out on a plain north of Hook Pond. This common was flanked by thirty-four home lots, long and narrow divisions of eight to twelve acres each. The dwellings were constructed at the heads of the lots close to the common or Main Street. This compact settlement is typical of other Puritan New England towns. The thirty-four original settlers formed a proprietorship whereby they divided the land, shared in privileges of the undivided land and made and enforced laws to govern the community.

The division of land was of the greatest importance to the proprietors. Each of the thirty-four proprietors owned a share in the 31,000 acres of land, harbors and ponds of the town, and the amount of that share would be the basis for all future allotments of valuable land.

Divided at an early date was the fertile land east and west of the home lots between the ocean and the inner dunes or sand hills: the Little Plain, from Georgica Pond to Lily Pond; the Great Plain from Lily Pond to Hook Pond; and the Eastern Plain, east of Hook Pond. These lands along with the home lots provided the base for the agricultural economy of the settlers. This area is also roughly what is now the Incorporated Village of East Hampton.

Other valuable lands were divided among the proprietors within the first years of the town. These included the meadows adjacent to Georgica Pond, Northwest creek, Three Mile Harbor, Accabonac Harbor and Napeague Harbor. Toads were laid out from Main Street to the nearby farmland and to outlying meadows and woodlots. Northwest Harbor was also the port for East Hampton, the point of all trade and communication with the outside world.

The proprietors also became interested in the rolling plains and fresh water ponds of the Montauk peninsula for pasturing their livestock. Pasturage rights were obtained from the Montauk Indians in 1658. From 1661 to 1687 different groups of East Hampton men acquired outright all of Montauk from the Indians, although the Montauks continued to live at Indian Field, east of Lake Montauk. The proprietors of Montauk shared in the rights to the land, which primarily was their privilege to pasture cattle, sheep, goats and horses there during the spring, summer and fall.

Raising livestock, especially cattle, seems to have been the predominant aspect of East Hampton's agrarian economy. Undoubtedly the thousands of acres of pasture at Montauk was the major resource for this economy.

The vast holdings of the proprietors (their home lots, fields and pastures on the plains, meadows at the harbors, pasturage at Montauk, and interest in the vast undivided lands of the town) provided the base for a prosperous agrarian economy. The large acreage owned by the proprietors also became the basis for the livelihoods of generations of their descendants.

Because the proprietors closely guarded their stake in the town, growth was slow and carefully planned. Prospective new residents who desired to purchase an interest in the town had to be agreed upon by all the proprietors. Nevertheless the settlement did grow and by 1700 home lots extended northerly along Main Street on either side of the Hook dreen to Lily Hill and Cedar Street and home lots were laid out on Newtown Lane.

But many of the new residents of the town were granted small parcels and did not share in the rights to the commage. Tradesmen, for instance, were often granted quarter-acre plots within the proprietors' large home lots for their dwellings. In 1686 nine East Hampton residents petitioned the Governor of New York Colony to force the East Hampton proprietors to allot them some arable land. The Governor instructed the Suffolk County Sheriff to have this done, which caused an effective rebellion against the Governor by East Hampton's landowners. The proprietors jealous guarding of their interest in East Hampton's resources probably accounts to a great extent for the slow and controlled growth of the town and for the fact that a number of the population owned only small parcels, could not share in the common resources and found it difficult to improve their position.

This theme is an important one in tracing the history and development of the areas of the town outside of the present Inc. Village of East Hampton. The land within the Inc. Village was owned primarily by the proprietors who built substantial houses on their Main Street home lots. Many of the tradesmen, laborers, subsistence farmers, fishermen, and at a later date freed slaves and Montauk Indians, lived on small lots on less desirable land outside the Inc. Village where they built relatively small houses.

It was not too long before the children of the proprietors began to branch out from the core settlement on East Hampton's Main Street to establish independent farms in areas that developed into separate communities. Two outlying settlements were established in the seventeenth century: Wainscott on the fertile coastal plain about three miles to the east of East Hampton's Main Street. These lands were too far away to be conveniently farmed by the East Hampton proprietors.

The first independent farm outside of East Hampton's core settlement was established in 1668 at Wainscott by John Osborn, the son of a proprietor. The farm included part of the meadows at Wainscott Pond which had been common pasture for cattle since 1652. This change in ownership of the meadows at Wainscott Pond marks the beginning of the trend in East Hampton from common to individual ownership and enterprise. By the end of the century, two other families had settled in the vicinity of Wainscott Pond.

By 1700 four families were living in Amagansett, all descendants of East Hampton proprietors. The original land holdings in Amagansett were quite large and the dwellings were probably widely spaced.

Early East Hampton was not exclusively an agricultural community. Fishing and especially whaling were an important part of the economy. Drift whales stranded on the beaches were the common property of the proprietors and an important source of oil. Soon companies were formed to pursue the whales off shore in small boats. Some of the wealthiest proprietors hired Indians to man these early whaleboats. Whale oil became East Hampton's major product for export.

As early as 1668 a collector was appointed to Northwest Harbor to keep track of taxes on whale oil shipped out. In 1700 Abraham Schellinger was given permission to build a wharf at Northwest Harbor and in 1702 Samuel Mulford also constructed a wharf and warehouse at Northwest Harbor. The Schellinger family were active in shore whaling and Samuel Mulford had a whaling company of twentyfour men. While whale oil seems to have been the major item in East Hampton's early trade, livestock raised with the benefit of Montauk's pastures were also exported.

Northwest Creek was also the site of an early tide mill, built in 1653. The only other recorded buildings of the seventeenth century outside the core settlement were the "shelters" for the keepers who looked after the livestock grazing at Montauk during the spring, summer and fall. Also, in 1704 an East Hampton whaler was given permission to build a house at Montauk to pursue that industry. Small dwellings or shelters intended for seasonal use continued to be built in East Hampton into the twentieth century.

The town list for 1687 indicates a population of 502 people including 223 males, 219 females, 35 servants and 25 slaves.

By the end of the seventeenth century the core Main Street settlement contained approximately fifty to sixty principal dwellings with associated agricultural buildings, the smaller houses and shops of tradesmen, four public buildings (meeting-house, town-house, school and prison), a cemetery, a horse-mill and a windmill. Roadways led to the fields and pastures immediately west and east of Main Street, to the wharfs and storehouses at Northwest Harbor, to the few independent farms at Wainscott and Amagansett and to the meadows and pastures at Three Mile Harbor, Accabonac Harbor, Napeague Harbor and Montauk. It seems probable that during the seventeenth century there was already a class of laborers, whalers, fishermen and squatters who probably lived in small dwellings outside the core settlement. At this time there was also a settlement of Montauk Indians at Indian Field.

Early dwellings in East Hampton were undoubtedly quite small, with wood frames, thatched roofs and exterior chimneys with timber frames and mud and straw flues. By the fourth quarter of the seventeenth century the proprietors were building larger permanent dwellings. These houses with a massive timber frame usually had one room on either side of a central chimney and two chambers on the second floor. The Mulford House (12 James Lane in the Inc. Village) is the most intact surviving house of this type in the town. Three other Village houses retain seventeenth century framing indicating they were originally of similar construction. Outside the Village, one seventeenth-century building is thought to survive. This is the extensively altered Nathaniel Baker House on Amagansett's Main Street reputed to have been built in 1680 and to retain period framing.

The only other surviving seventeenth century features outside the Village are roadways and the sites associated with the early farms at Gardiner's Island, Amagansett and Wainscott, sites associated with the port at Northwest, and sites of the keeper's dwellings and Indian settlement at Montauk.

1700 – 1870: Expansion

The four maps of the United States Coast Survey for the period 1838-1846 are the basis for much of the description of the town during this period. The Coast Surveys show not only the buildings but also the fields, orchards, meadows and woodland. These maps show some farms to be large operations with extensive clearings and others to have only small clearings. From what can be documented by other sources, the delineation of the clearings appears to be quite accurate and these are used to assess the number of large and small farms in an area.

During the eighteenth century East Hampton matured as an agrarian township and communities at Wainscott, Northwest, Sag Harbor, Springs and Amagansett became well established. The most dramatic development in the town during this period was the growth of Sag Harbor following the American Revolution and its development from 1820 to 1850 into a prosperous whaling port (the Inc. Village of Sag Harbor is half in East Hampton and half in Southampton). The population in East Hampton tripled from 502 in 1687 to 1,549 in 1800. Most of this increase occurred in the communities developing outside the core settlement which is now the Inc. Village of East Hampton. From 1800 to 1860 the population rose by 718 to 2,267, but most of this growth probably occurred in Sag Harbor. The decade of the greatest increase, 408 from 1830 to 1840, corresponds with the period of greatest growth in the Sag Harbor whaling industry.

Expansion along East Hampton's Main Street was limited. This area, originally laid out in 1648 with 34 home lots, had by 1858 only approximately 80 dwellings. The fertile land surrounding the Main Street settlement, the Eastern Plain, Great Plain, Little Plain and Northwest Plain, was divided into fields and pastures owned by the Main Street farmers. There was apparently great reluctance to divide these lands for new home lots or farms. Nevertheless some independent farms were established close to Main Street on Pantigo Road, Egypt Lane, Toilsome Lane, Apaquogue Road and the Sag Harbor Turnpike. But as the sons of the proprietors and new residents looked for land to establish a home or farm. They usually had to look to areas well beyond the Village. But the Village of East Hampton remained the nucleus of the town and was the seat of government and the place of worship for the town's many Presbyterians.

During the eighteenth century the last division of land occurred. Between 1736 and 1747 the proprietors allotted 15,000 acres. The remaining undivided land was thought to have very little value and was claimed by the Town Trustees. This final division made the proprietors suddenly land-rich and allowed the sale of property in new areas of the town. This final division of lands undoubtedly facilitated the development of areas outside the present Inc. Village of East Hampton.

The most desirable land outside the Inc. Village was on the fertile coastal plain at Amagansett of Wainscott where substantial villages developed during the eighteenth century. These villages grew to resemble East Hampton in having dwellings on either side of a broad common or street and like East Hampton the fertile land provided a prosperous livelihood for generations of descendants of the early settlers.

Amagansett grew through the eighteenth century into the most substantial and prosperous community outside the Village of East Hampton. Spafford's Gazetteer of 1813 lists twenty houses in Amagansett. Amagansett had their first schoolhouse in 1802. In 1860 Amagansett

became the first community outside East Hampton to have their own Presbyterian Church. By this time Amagansett was a sizable community with a population of 270 according to French's 1860 Gazetteer and with 55 houses shown on the 1858 Chace Map. This was about half the number of houses in the Inc. Village of East Hampton.

The Wainscott settlement grew slowly as descendants of the early settlers built new dwellings and land was divided among children. Most of the new building occurred on the broad Main Street which crosses the plain just north of Wainscott Pond. Spafford's Gazetteer of 1813 lists fifteen dwellings in Wainscott. The 1858 Chace Map shows nineteen houses in Wainscott, of which twelve are on Main Street.

During the eighteenth century settlement also spread to the wooded necks of Springs and Northwest. Here scattered farms were established wherever suitable land could be found. This was most often adjacent to the meadows at the shores of the creeks, inlets and harbors. Some of the large farms on the better land prospered. But many were small subsistence farms on marginal land.

Two families began farming the northern tip of the Springs peninsula in the early-eighteenth century. In 1807 thirty-three families from throughout Springs joined to build a schoolhouse. The Coast survey (1838 and 1846) provides the earliest picture of development in Springs and shows a total of 65 houses. Four extensive farms are adjacent to the meadows at Three Mile Harbor and Hog Creek. Eight farms of fair size are along Fireplace Road across from the meadows on Accabonac Harbor. But the vast majority of houses appear on the map as small dwellings on small lots in areas of less fertile soil. These houses are clustered in the communities of Kingstown, Green River and East Side, and are scattered along Three Mile Harbor Road. Probably the owners of these small subsistence farms supplemented their livelihood with a number of part-time occupations including fishing, whaling, cutting cordwood for export and working as laborers on the large Springs farms or on Gardiner's Island.

The first farm was not established on the wooded Northwest neck until 1757. Enough families had settled at Northwest by 1792 to warrant construction of a schoolhouse. The Coast Survey (1838 and 1846) shows fourteen farms scattered throughout Northwest. These farms are either adjacent to the meadows found at inlets or at areas of more fertile soil in the wooded interior.

A small community of freed slaves began in the eighteenth century just north of East Hampton's Main Street settlement. This area became known as Freetown. Although the origin of Freetown remains obscure, Town Trustees may have chosen the site for its proximity to Main Street and its lack of value as farmland. Probably the inhabitants of Freetown continued to work as laborers in East Hampton.

Montauk continued to be used as common pasture throughout this period. Three houses were erected in the 1740s to shelter the keepers of the approximately 1,500 cattle, 1,400 sheep and 200 horses that were pastured there from April to December. These houses, which were replaced between 1797 and 1806, were known as First House, Second House and Third House. The three families occupying these dwellings and the keeper of the 1797 Montauk Point Lighthouse were the only families living at Montauk point other than approximately fifteen Montauk Indian families at Indian Field.

Sag Harbor developed rapidly as a center for trade following the American Revolution and as a port for offshore whaling vessels following the War of 1812. In 1770 a wharf was constructed on the boundary of East Hampton and Southampton, with investors from both towns. Sag Harbor

soon replaced Northwest Harbor as East Hampton's port and was on its way to becoming the commercial center of the South Fork,

The rise of Sag Harbor was tied to the fortunes of her whaling ships. In 1785 whaling ventures to southern latitudes left from Sag Harbor. In 1817 the first Sag Harbor ship to whale in the Pacific returned with a large cargo and this was followed by a great expansion in the whaling enterprise. By 1847 at the peak of the whaling industry in Sag Harbor, 63 whaling ships were registered, 32 of which returned that year carrying one million dollars worth of sperm oil, whale oil and whalebone. Sag Harbor became an incorporated village in 1846.

Sag Harbor developed into a small, prosperous city which had a profound effect on the economies and architecture of the surrounding agrarian communities. Most prominent families in the neighboring villages were shareholders in the Sag Harbor whaling companies and directly benefited from the profits. Farmers supplied butter, cheese, hogs and ham for the voyages. Masters of vessels also came from East Hampton and Amagansett and sons of the less wealthy families in Springs shipped out on the whalers as did a large number of Montauk Indians who had been employed in shore whaling since the seventeenth century.

The 1858 Chace Map provides a picture of the Town of East Hampton at the close of this period. The East Hampton half of the Inc. Village of Sag Harbor has 110 houses, more than any other part of the town. The area within the present Inc. Village of East Hampton has approximately 100 houses.

Springs is the next most populous area with approximately 90 houses, but almost all of these are small houses on small lots. Another grouping of thirteen small houses is at Freetown. Amagansett has 55 dwellings, mostly substantial farmhouses. Wainscott has nineteen large farms. Eleven large and small farms are scattered throughout Northwest.

Buildings that survive from this period are primarily residences. Throughout the period dwellings represent a relatively few vernacular forms that were also common to houses of the same period in New England. In the first half of the nineteenth century houses began to show some stylistic details associated with the Federal period and later showed more sophisticated Greek Revival style and Italianate style features influenced by building in Sag Harbor. The dwellings built on the small subsistence farms and in the small communities of farmers, laborers and fishermen in Springs represent a small, vernacular house type with its own distinct evolution. This period is also represented by barns and other agricultural structures.

1870 – 1988: Development of a Resort.

Following the Civil War East Hampton began to be discovered as a summer resort and with the extension of the Long Island Railroad to Bridgehampton in 1870, East Hampton's beaches, cool sea breezes and quiet, rural environment became more easily accessible to residents of New York City. Initially summer visitors stayed with local families on the Main Streets of East Hampton and Amagansett. Many of Amagansett's old houses were remodeled inside and out during the "Boarding House Era."

The 1873 Beers Atlas shows no appreciable change in the configuration of East Hampton from the Coast Surveys of the 1830s and 1840s or from the Chace Map of 1858. The three coastal plain villages of Wainscott, East Hampton and Amagansett have expanded slightly. Woodland

separates these villages from the scattered settlements in Northwest and Springs. On Montauk remain the three houses of the livestock keepers and the Montauk Lighthouse.

At the time of East Hampton's beginnings as a summer resort, the agricultural economy was waning. Evidence of this is apparent in the disappearance of the approximately seventeen farms at Northwest between 1880 and 1910. In the Village of East Hampton the fertile land was sold in the 1870s for a development of summer cottages. A 250-year tradition of farming on Gardiner's Island ended in 1890 when the island was leased as a hunting preserve. Perhaps the most dramatic change was the 1879 sale of all of Montauk to the Brooklyn financier Arthur W. Benson. This marked the end of the common pasture system at Montauk which had been in effect for over 220 years and may have been the single greatest resource to East Hampton's agrarian economy.

The sale of Montauk resulted in the first significant resort development in the town outside of the Village of East Hampton. In 1881 Arthur W. Benson and seven New York friends formed the Montauk Association for the purpose of constructing a small summer colony on 100 acres on the bluff east of Ditch Plain. A site plan was drawn up in 1881 by Frederick Law Olmstead's landscape architecture firm. The Montauk Association contracted with the architectural firm of McKim, Mead and White to design a large clubhouse and seven individual cottages. These buildings, all designed in the developing Shingle style, were completed by 1883.

At about the same time a similar summer colony began at Wainscott. In 1880 and 1881 William Wood bought approximately 140 acres which extended from the ocean along the shore of Georgica Pond. Wood laid out roads through his property and began selling land and some of the six houses he had built to friends and acquaintances. In 1892 the Georgica Association was formed by William Wood and the other owners of his original property. The 1894 Beer's Atlas shows twelve houses in the Georgica Association. The early houses also show a developing Shingle style. But not enough is known about the individual houses of the Georgica Association to accurately assess their contribution to East Hampton's resort architecture.

Amagansett's first summer cottage was built in 1884 on Indian Wells Highway, but it was not until the 1890s that a small summer colony began to develop when five Shingle style cottages were built on Bluff Road, overlooking the dunes and ocean. The growth of Amagansett's summer colony was related to the extension of the Long Island Railroad tracks from Bridgehampton to Montauk in 1895. By 1916 fourteen cottages lined the north side of Bluff Road. Additional cottages were built on Further Lane and on Indian Wells Highway where the three-story Sea View hotel was also built in 1898 (this burned in 1924). A nine-hole golf course was laid out in 1899 on Indian Wells Highway and in 1903 the Namaganaset Field Club for tennis was established across the street. The summer residents built their own chapel, St. Thomas Episcopal Church, in 1907 and this was also designed in the Shingle style idiom.

The small groupings of summer cottages that developed from the 1880s to the 1910s in Montauk, Amagansett and Wainscott paralleled the growth of the much larger summer colony in the Inc. Village of East Hampton. All these resorts had cottages of similar size and design that were grouped together on suburban-sized lots.

The flowering resort economy of East Hampton brought with it jobs for the year-round population as tradesmen, storekeepers, and laborers. The period 1875 to 1910 saw a great expansion of year-round housing which occurred along established roads spreading out from the cores of East Hampton and Amagansett. These houses are typical vernacular Victorian period houses and most lack architectural distinction. An exception is a group of five ca. 1905 houses

grouped at the north end of Meetinghouse Lane. In the farming communities of Wainscott and Springs similar, but often larger houses with L-shaped plans, cross-gable roofs, and front porches usually have more elaborate treatment in their shingle cover, doors and windows, and porch trim.

The emphasis of resort architecture in East Hampton from 1910 to 1920 switched from modest, shingled cottages to large estates built for the upper class. In the Inc. Village much of this building took place on the as yet undeveloped Eastern Plain. This development spread eastward into Amagansett as evidenced by the French Eclectic style Edward E. Bartlet estate on Further Lane. Two estates of grand scale were built in Amagansett in the completely undeveloped woodland on Gardiner's Bay. Between 1908 and 1910 five businessmen from Cincinnati and New York built five immense Mediterranean Revival style houses on fifty acres overlooking Gardiner's Bay, which they named the Devon Colony. In 1916 Dr. Dennistoun M. Bell built a Colonial Revival style mansion, designed by Trowbridge and Livingston, on 155 acres on Gardiner's Bay. Bell continued to buy adjacent land, building his estate to over 500 acres and added many dependencies including a funicular leading down the bluffs to the beach. No other East Hampton estate has matched the Bell Estate neither in acreage nor for the number and variety of dependencies.

A new type of resort development on a scale never before seen in East Hampton was brought to Montauk in the 1920s by Carl S. Fisher. Fisher purchased 9,000 acres at Montauk and planned a complete resort community on the open pastureland. Fisher hoped to repeat his successful Miami Beach development which he billed as "America's Greatest Winter Playground" by building a companion summer resort also strongly oriented toward sports and recreation. Between 1926 and 1930 Carl Fisher's company achieved an impressive list of improvements including a network of roads, a hotel, approximately a dozen estate residences, a village of workers cottages, four commercial buildings, a school, two churches, and an array of sports facilities including a tennis auditorium, yacht club, casino and bathing pavilion, golf course and a polo field and stables. Carl Fisher's Montauk Beach development was ended by the stock market crash of 1929. The Great Depression which followed brought a halt to all resort development in East Hampton.

Throughout the period of East Hampton's development as a summer resort, the traditional lifestyles of farming and fishing generally continued to decline. In the early twentieth century Wainscott farmers adopted the single crop of potatoes which until recently has allowed them to survive and even prosper.

Following the lull in the resort economy during the Great Depression and the Second World War, building resumed in the form of small summer cottages in small-lot subdivisions. But beginning in the 1950s large-scale summer homes were again being built and East Hampton was revived as an affluent resort. Intense development, especially from the 1960s to the 1980s, dominated by the construction of second homes in large subdivisions, has completed East Hampton's transformation from an agrarian economy into a resort economy.