

ISAAC H. GREEN, LONG ISLAND ARCHITECT AND HIS BROOKSIDE

by Constance Gibson Currie

The Suffolk County Legislature, with the encouragement by the Greater South Bay Audubon Society, recently purchased six acres of Sayville woodland and waterways. This purchase protects the waterway and establishes a nature preserve. Located on the north side of Brook Street near the Sayville High School, the property includes a small house, several large manmade ponds, dams, islands artistically set within the ponds, and a picturesque, concrete stucco surfaced bridge that originally led to a Tudor style mansion.

Once called "The Swamp" by Sayvillians, this land is in reality the headwaters of Green's Creek, the waters that ripple under streets, through backyards, and finally empty into the Great South Bay. All in all, the tract constitutes a perfect spot for nature walks and the study of wildlife. The house, once a gatehouse, will be used by the Greater South Bay Audubon Society both for meetings and as a facility to house their nature library.



ISAAC H. GREEN JR., AT THE HEIGHT OF HIS CAREER.

This property is also of historical importance to Sayville, the Town of Islip and Suffolk County as it was part of the estate of noted Long Island architect Isaac H. Green, Jr. (1859-1937). Many of Mr. Green's buildings remain in the area, enough to suggest that Green's architectural career had a major impact on the appearance of his native Sayville. A research trip through Great River, the Islips, Bayshore, Babylon and Brentwood allows one researcher to view many other Isaac Green, Jr., buildings scattered throughout the Town of Islip.

Between the years of 1879 to 1917, Isaac Green, Jr., designed five churches in the Sayville area, a school, the Oysterman's bank, at least three business blocks, the town hall and the fire house.



THE MANSION AND PRINCIPAL POND.

Green's summer cottages were constructed from Babylon to Montauk and, on the North Shore in Nissequogue, St. James, and Setauket. Many of his clients, such as W. K. Vanderbilt, Frederick Bourne, William Bayard Cutting, Frank S. Jones, John Ellis and Robert "Bert" Roosevelt, considered Green a friend. He met them at Village Improvement meetings and at St. Ann's Episcopal Church meetings.

There are currently several different Green designs on the National Register of Historic Places: Meadowcroft in Sayville, St. Paul's in Patchogue, The Reboul and Phyfe houses in Nissequogue, and some in East Hampton. One of the East Hampton houses recently received national attention in the magazine *Architectural Digest*. Green's East Hampton buildings were also included in Robert A.M. Stern's study of East Hampton architecture, *East Hampton's Heritage*, published by the East Hampton's Ladies Village Improvement Society in 1982.

While Isaac Green, Jr., was more than capable of competing in New York City, he chose instead to practice his career in his native Sayville. His heavy workload at the height of his career led him to hire several architectural assistants. Later in his career, the architect found it necessary to refer clients to Clarence Birdsall of Bay Shore, an architect who had started his own career in Green's firm.

The Sayville property is particularly significant since it reveals not only the close relationship between Isaac Green, Jr., and his father, but his life as father and husband. At its peak, the estate was a perfect setting to which the architect could invite his clients, friends, and business associates.

Brookside, a prime example of a nineteenth century "Water Park," was the childhood home of the Green children, Henrietta and Beatrice. It provided the background for parties, weddings and embraced "Ike," as Isaac was called by his friends, and his wife Emma in their declining years. Most of all, it was a serene, peaceful area where the



THE FAMILY OUTSIDE THE
MANSION; HENRIETTA,
EMMA, IKE AND BEATRICE.



EMMA ON ONE
OF THE ISLANDS.

Greens were able to relax. Family photographs show the couple on the pond's islands, drifting in the canoes or just enjoying the water as it coursed on its way to the bay.

The Sayville Greens were of English stock. They settled first in New England. Eventually they made their way to Huntington and the Town of Islip, where they were tenant farmers. After the Revolution, they purchased a large piece of the Nicolls Patent, which is now western Sayville.

Isaac Green, father of Samuel Willett Green, left eleven children. Following tradition, the estate was divided among the sons. This placed most of

what is now western Sayville into the hands of five men: Caleb, Isaac, Nathaniel Clark, Willett, and Samuel Willett Green.

Samuel W. Green requested that the bulk of his inheritance be cash with which to engage in business enterprises. While still living with his father, Samuel Willett worked as a clerk in the store of Wilson J. Terry. Terry was to marry Samuel's sister, Sally.

When Samuel Green married Henrietta Vail of Riverhead, they moved into a house on Main Street. It was then that he began to establish himself as a major land owner and employer in Sayville.

In 1888, the *Patchogue Advance* announced that Samuel Willett Green was making the wilderness bloom in the swamp of West Sayville, a property he called Rivulet Park. Samuel was digging ponds and stocking them with trout, a practice that was already being used by the Southside Sportsmen's Club and Robert Barnwell Roosevelt, a N.Y. State Fish Commissioner on his estate Lotus Lane, in nearby Bayport.

Isaac H. Green, Jr., was born in September, 1859. He was raised in Sayville and spent most of his entire life and career in the community. Isaac Green inherited what was to become Brookside from his father, Samuel Willett, whose entrepreneurial activities played a major part in the economic and social development of his native Sayville. The elder Green established the first Menhaden factory in Sayville, an industry that brought over a thousand dollars a day into the area, employing many local people and setting the example for other such businesses. "Bunker" Sam, as he was known, also built and managed a lumber yard, business block and dealt in real estate.

Samuel W. Green joined St. John's Episcopal Church in Oakdale. Encouraged by the Reverend Mr. Douglas, he helped establish St. Barnabas Chapel in Sayville. Further encouragement from the Reverend Mr. John Prescott, St. Barnabas' first rector and incorporator into St. Ann's, induced Samuel to serve as a Vestryman. Samuel Willett's brother Isaac H. Green, Sr., also joined the vestry. Isaac H. Green, Jr. was to follow suit by becoming vestryman, cemetery comptroller and ultimately senior warden. Because of their close association in business and social affairs, the uncle and nephew adopted the use of Senior and Junior to avoid confusion in the enterprises. Isaac H. Green, Sr.'s own son was named Ralph.

Samuel W. Green, Jr., was elected to Sayville's Board of Education and designed the school building (referred to as "Old 88"), which served several generations of Sayville's schoolchildren. Before it

burned in December, 1969, it had housed all grades, was used as a college, and ended its days as an administration building.

Mrs. Henrietta Vail Green, wife of Samuel Willett Green and mother of the architect, was an active member of St. Ann's Church. She died on December 29, 1877, and was survived by her husband, her eighteen year old son, Isaac, and four daughters, Harriet, Charity, Elizabeth and Rachel. After his mother's death, young Isaac entered into partnership with his father in the family lumberyard.

It was most probably during this time that Ike was being mentored in architecture by George Skidmore of Riverhead, a distant maternal relative. It was during this formative period of his career that he designed the rectory of St. Ann's for its Rector, the Reverend Mr. John Prescott. Isaac Green, Jr., began to design houses for lumberyard patrons, something Skidmore had been doing in Riverhead. In December, 1881, Samuel W. Green turned the lumberyard over to his son, who operated the business until 1887 at which time he sold the business to Terry and Raynor.

Prior to turning the business over to his son Isaac, Samuel W. Green remarried. In March, 1879, he married Harriet Hopkins in her Orange, New Jersey home. The Reverend Mr. Prescott traveled to New Jersey with Samuel W. to perform the marriage ceremony. In announcing the event, the *Patchogue* newspaper reported that though the

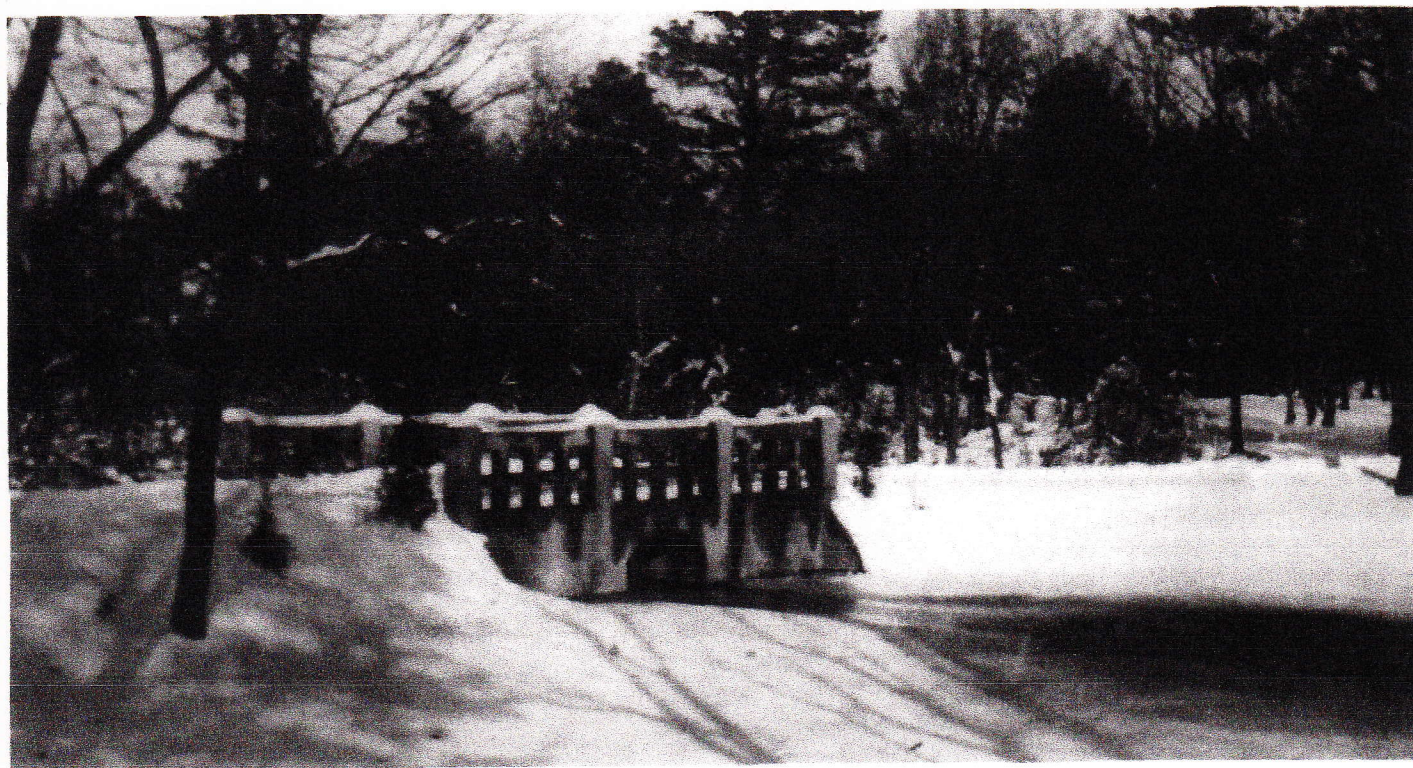
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THE BRIDGE AND POND IN THE WINTER.

actual wedding was a surprise, the friends of Mr. Green were expecting it.

No longer in the lumber business, Ike was well established in his chosen career. He had already designed the William Terry house. The designs appeared in *Architecture and Building*, Vol. 12, Nov. 4, January 18, 1890. This was a prestigious architectural magazine, the *Architectural Digest* of the day. These plans appealed to Dr. Herricks, a summer resident in East Hampton, who commissioned Green to design a structure identical to the Terry house. Well on his way to success, Isaac H. Green outfitted an office in the business block occupied by his father, on the northeast corner of Main Street and Greene Avenue.

In 1893, Samuel W. Green, having already divided his property among his family, passed away. Three properties came into the possession of Harriet Hopkins Green, who had separated from her husband and was living in Foxboro, Massachusetts. Joseph Wood, lawyer and maternal cousin of Isaac Green, traveled to Foxboro and negotiated a

Change of Dower which brought the property back into family hands. Isaac Jr. added to his holdings by purchasing property from other family members. Brookside was created from his consolidated properties.

After his father's death, Isaac Green continued to create a wooded, natural environment at Brookside. In May of 1893, the *Suffolk County News* reported that the spot was already regarded as the most attractive and romantic for miles around. Green designed a large Tudor style house on the property and later added a windmill. The construction of the house was placed in the capable hands of mason William Bason and builder Philip Ritch. The bricks for the new house arrived in port on the schooner *Romeo*, commanded by Captain Garrett DeGraff, in July, 1896. The Edwards Brother carted bricks to the site on the hill overlooking Brook Street. By December, the interior of the house was taking shape.

The Greens moved to their new home in March, 1897. On the seventh of March, they were

surprised with a housewarming party attended by family and friends— the I.G. Terrys, the Henry Greens, Miss Lila Green, the Misses Vanderhoof, Mr. Pete Bishop, Miss Mildred C. Hibbard, Dr. Merritt and Mr. Sewell Thornhill. There was one drawback to the new estate.

They had no sooner moved in than the property assessments for the town of Islip jumped. Samuel W. Green's estate went from \$6,950 in 1896 to \$23,550 in 1897; Isaac H. Green, Jr.'s, from \$550 to over \$7,000.

On May 6, 1898, the Town of Islip appropriated fifty dollars for the improvement of Brook Street. The money was to be used to take down the hill near Brookside and improve and widen the road. A December storm that same year blew two large evergreens down. George Howell raised and braced them. He also built a 22 x 38 foot carriage house in September, 1898. The estate was growing, the area changing. In addition to his architectural career, Green engaged in real estate activities.

On March 9, 1900, he sold a house and lot on Brook Street west of Cherry Avenue to Harry Rohm, a local machinist. This property had previously been known as the Jessie Still place. He was also renting a house to Henry Hiddink and family on Greeley Avenue.

Ike and Emma enjoyed euchre and belonged to an active club. They hosted a lively party at Brookside on November 30, 1900. The guests played twelve games. Mrs. John Bishop won the lady's prize, Dr. Merritt the gentleman's.

On July 24, 1908, Isaac Green, Jr. had the pleasure of giving his sister, Elizabeth Blanch, away in marriage to Mr. John Orr Van Cleft, Superintendent of the Southside Sportsmen's Club (now Connetquot State Park). The ubiquitous Reverend Mr. Prescott, who had watched the Greens grow up, performed the ceremony at Brookside. Henrietta, the Green's oldest daughter, was her aunt's maid of honor.

After congratulations were given, a bridal collation was served by Swain, a New York caterer. Among the gifts was a horse from the groom to his bride. After the honeymoon, the couple lived at the Southside Sportsmen's Club. Isaac H. Green made several important contributions to the club. He designed a barn and more importantly the annex, which added living space for the members of the Sportsmen's Club. He also worked on restoring the historic old mill situated on the club's property.

The twentieth century brought prosperity to Sayville. Once vacant areas were developed. As a large area of western Sayville and northeast West Sayville belonged to the Green family, the architect and his uncle Clifford, principal owners of the northern acreage, decided to lay out roads on which to place building lots for the market.

The January 8, 1909 issue of the *Suffolk County News* bore the headline, "How'd You Like to Live on Easy Street?" This was a reference to one of the two new roads the Greens were carving through their property. A new north and south road extending from the railroad to Tariff Street was named Roosevelt Avenue in keeping with the practice in that part of the village to use Presidential names for streets. Roosevelt was especially appropriate as branches of the family lived in Sayville and the President had visited his South Shore relatives in 1903. President Theodore Roosevelt, his son Theodore and two nephews rode over on horseback from Oyster Bay. The new Roosevelt Street roadway was to form the western boundary of the property that was occupied by William Vorpahl. North of that property and extending west from Greeley Avenue to the property of the Sayville Electric Company and eventually to Cherry Street in West Sayville, Easy Street was to be opened.

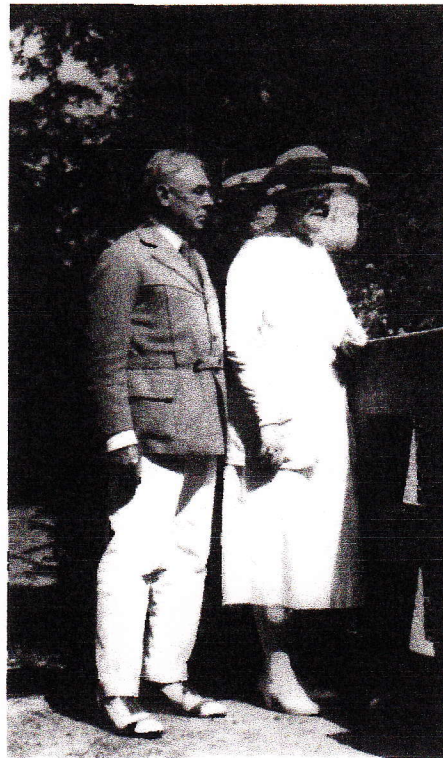
The winter of 1908/1909 was a cold one. The Brookside ponds froze over and soon became a Mecca for scores of people of all ages. The moonlit nights made the area particularly alluring, and the

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hill that led to the pond was alive with swiftly gliding sleds that "fetched" far out on the glassy surface. As romantic as it all was, there were accidents. Dr. Ross was called when young George Hawkins was cut by someone's skates. When Miss Josie Westerbeke fell through the ice, her friends pulled her from the icy water to a warm, dry place with no real harm done.

An event that must have had a great impact on Architect Green was the sale of his father's house and property on West Main Street opposite St. Lawrence's R.C. Church. The purchaser was Mr. John Hughes, general agent of the U.S. Steel Products Export Company, who had offices at 30 Church Street, New York. Mr. Hughes was a friend of Assistant District Attorney Frank X. McCaffrey of Brooklyn, who with Mr. A.S. Kennedy of the Hotel Kensington, engineered the deal.

The house was an old one, unoccupied for several years, but well built. It was eventually divided and moved around the corner, and it served as a boarding house. Mr. Hughes was interested mainly in the plot itself which extended from Greeley to Garfield Avenue, and had a frontage on Main Street of a little more than 600 feet and a depth of 450 feet.



IKE AND EMMA ON THE BRIDGE.

Green also owned a small house on Greeley Avenue which had been rented by Lewis Otto. When Otto vacated the building in early January, 1911, the architect decided to outfit it as an office. From his new quarters, Green could again look out of his office and see one of his own buildings, the school house, later to be known fondly as "Old 88." The Greeley Avenue cottage was one of Green's earliest designs. He remodeled it for business purposes including well-lighted office and drafting rooms.

Mr. Green's own office was particularly handsome with its woodwork finished in pure white. There was a fire place, hardwood floor, oriental rugs

and substantial mahogany furnishings. The walls were decorated with attractive photos of Green's buildings. Miss Jessie Hyer took the position of stenographer with Green.

Brookside took pride of place among Green's Sayville structures and was widely admired. Beautiful post cards were produced that picture what was considered by many to be one of Sayville's most alluring spots. The *Suffolk County News* of June 30, 1911, stated that "The residence of Mr. I.H. Green on Brook Street, which is one of the most beautiful in this vicinity, with its charming surroundings and pretty little lakes, winding drives, and artistic concrete bridges never looked so attractive as now. Just at present Mr. Green has some beautiful specimens of a rare variety of aquatic plant known as the Japanese Iris, which are objects of interest and admiration to many people."

Another scene of interest to many was the tower being built by the Telefunken Company off Cherry Avenue, north of the railroad tracks. In 1911, Green was engaged to design the power building which was being constructed by Mr. William Bason and Sons. Sitting on the hill in his backyard above Sayville, Green could watch the 500 foot iron Telefunken tower rise into the sky.



THE GREELEY AVENUE OFFICE/HOUSE
AS IT LOOKS NOW.

Green's two daughters were growing up rapidly. In early October, 1911, Henrietta spent several hours at the Garden City Aviation Field with the noted aviatrix, Miss Blanche Scott. Henrietta and Blanche had been students at Fort Edward. Scott, an early aviatrix, hoped to fly to every country in the world.

The girls entertained their friends, the Misses Ency Shattuck, Le Van Cowell, Mable Wilson, Dora Baker, Jessie Hyer, Hannah Edwards, Ada Herring, Lillian Gerard, and Jane Hoag at a Christmas party around the fireplace at Brookside. The house was decorated with greens. An advertisement guessing game was played, the novelty of which was that the "ads" were thrown on a screen by lantern slides, instead of being posted about the rooms.

In September, 1912, the Green sisters entertained on "Wild Island." This was the largest of the islands in Brookside's ponds and it provided an ample, secluded place for parties. Japanese lanterns

were hung all about. Supper was served to eleven guests, followed by peanut and potato races. A talk-fest around the campfire ended the night.

In July, 1913, Henrietta Green threw a birthday luncheon party for her sister, Beatrice. Tables were once again set under the trees of "Wild Island."

In March of 1913, Dr. Edward K. Dunham, a bacteriologist from the Carnegie Foundation, spent a weekend as a guest at Brookside. Dr. E. K. Dunham and brother Dr. Carroll Dunham were both clients. Ike had designed Dr. Edward K. Dunham's Seal Harbor, Mt. Desert Island, Maine, house as well as Dr. Carroll Dunham's estate Hillside at Irvington, New York. Both men were well known and highly regarded for their work at Bellevue Hospital, New York.

In September, 1913, the elder Greens announced the engagement of Beatrice, their youngest daughter, to Mr. Edward H. Rogers of Westhampton Beach. The groom-to-be was a young and successful contractor. The couple were married at Brookside in October, 1913. Following the family tradition, their first home was built by the groom and designed by the bride.

Brookside was attractive in all seasons. The pond and hill were particularly lovely in the winter snow and ice. On January first of 1915, the Greens held a traditional "open house" with a log fire burning continually in the fireplace. Delicious refreshments were served to keep the inner fires stoked. All the better after ice skating.

In 1916, Henrietta announced her engagement to I. Howard Snedecor, a member of an old Bayport family who worked in the family business, I.H. Snedecor and Sons. The store was later renamed Shands, which ceased operations recently.

The wedding was held at Brookside in late October, 1916. Fifty guests stood in the large hall and living room and watched the bride and her

maid of honor, school friend Miss Jane Scott Maxfield, descend the broad stairway. The bride held her father's arm. They proceeded to the arch between the hall and living room, where they were met by the groom, best man, and Reverend Mr. Prescott. There, they said their vows. Brookside had seen its family grow and the children leave.

Isaac Green was still working in the Greeley Avenue office when he had to enter Roosevelt Hospital in December, 1917, for a hernia operation. His recovery was slow. In June, 1918, Wild Island again became the scene of a picnic birthday party. Beatrice Rogers returned to all of her childhood haunts for the celebration. That November, the elder Greens left for a winter in San Diego, California.

Green was now retired and he and his wife enjoyed a leisurely stay at Brookside with more and more picnics for family and friends. In April, 1920, the *Suffolk County News* reported the couple's return from Cuba and West Palm Beach. In December, 1920, they returned to San Diego. At the same time, the cottage on Greeley Avenue was being rewired and changed from an office to a dwelling.

During the winter of 1922, the Greens sought another retreat from the Long Island winters of this time in southern France. They sailed on the *S.S. President Garfield*. Their vacation took them through France, Italy, Switzerland and England.

The Greens had a REO coupe that Isaac Green loved. In late April of 1928, it was hit by a truck. Mrs. Green was driving. No one was hurt. The car sustained damage to the running board, nothing major. But the architect must have decided that it was time for a new car. He was soon driving a Flying Cloud coupe.

But Isaac's health was in irreversible decline. When the Greens returned from California in 1936, Ike had to enter Southside Hospital in

order to recuperate from the exertions of the trip. He died in March, 1937, at the age of 79 in a hotel in the city.

Emma Louise Green died in August, 1945, at the New Weston Hotel in Manhattan. She is buried next to her husband in St. Ann's cemetery. The house at Brookside had previously been sold to Roscoe Clock and his sister, Evelyn Clock.

In early December, 1970, the mansion at Brookside burned, taking the life of Mrs. Evelyn Clock Zwissler. The story of Brookside as a private estate was over. It is now in the hands of the Suffolk County Parks Department Office of Historic Preservation and the Great South Bay Audubon Society to preserve the area and story.

Constance G. Currie, a contributing editor of the Forum, writes frequently about Sayville and its environs.

All photographs are from the author's collection.

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Many thanks to Ruth Schroeder, who at ninety years young visited Brookside with the author and recounted memories of the 1920's when she lived there as the caretaker's daughter.