

The First Blue Point Oyster

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Who planted the first Blue Point oyster? For, according to leading authorities, there were no wild oysters in Blue Point in the early days. "oysters in this sound were confined almost wholly...to the waters east of Blue Point, known as Brookhaven Bay" wrote Ernest Ingersoll in *The Fisheries and Fishery Industries of the United States*, in 1887. This passage was quoted more fully in the Long Island Forum for December 1940 by Dr. Lewis Radcliffe, Director of the Oyster Institute of North America, who is recognized as the country's leading authority on this subject.

But whether or not there were wild oyster growing at Blue Point during colonial times, it is a matter of record in our family that my great-grandfather, Captain Joseph Avery, made the first planting of "foreign" oysters at Blue Point a few years after the War of 1812, and he was the first man to cultivate and market them and to call them Blue Points, a name which since then has encircled the earth as designating one of the most delectable of shellfish.

This Captain Avery was the son of Humphrey Avery (born July 12, 1753) and Joanna Smith, the daughter of Ananias and Desire Smith of Swan Creek (East Patchogue) where Humphrey and Joanna were married in 1787, immediately after the Revolution. The Avery's were among the first settlers of that section and the name Humphrey has been used repeatedly in the family down to the present day.

Humphrey took Joanna to live on the extensive Avery tract at Blue Point, whose homestead, known as the Shore House, overlooked the Great South Bay. Here Joseph was born May 8, 1790, and he continued to make his home with his parents as he grew up and attended school, such as it was, and worked on the bay as most every man and boy in those parts did.

On June 30, 1811, Joseph married Elizabeth Beebe and immediately thereafter commenced the erection of a home of his own which stood, and might still stand for all I know, on the north side of the South Country Road, a short distance west of Suydam's Corner in Blue Point. But before the house was completed the War of 1812 broke out and Joseph joined the colors, while his wife Lizzie continued to make her home with his parents in the old Shore House.

This Shore House, be it known, stood close to the bay on the west side of Blue Point avenue, about where, many years later, Frank Avery built his hotel, known as Five Mile Look. Here Joseph found his bride when he returned from the war and without delay he completed their home on South Country Road where

henceforth they lived for many years, Joseph finally passing on at the ripe old age of 81 on March 19, 1871.

After the war Joseph returned to the bay, fishing and clamming and, at times, joining the oysterman who operated at Bellport and Brookhaven, some miles to the east. In the fall, with other baymen, he went to the beach opposite Blue Point to harvest salt hay which was brought to the mainland on flatboats and used as fodder and bedding for livestock. Some of these baymen spent their winters on the beach in what was called shore-whaling, but my great-grandfather found employment during winter months running oysters from Chesapeake Bay to the New York markets.

It was while thus engaged that he conceived the idea of transporting a sloopload of Chesapeake oysters to Blue Point. He has seen the same thing done in the Chesapeake where baymen planted oysters from other points along the coast. So one winter he brought several hundred bushels home in his sloop and planted them in the Great South Bay, a short distance off the old Shore House. And here they multiplied and Captain Joseph became not only the first planter of Blue Points, but the first to market them under that now famous name. And thus the Blue Point oyster industry was born.

My sister and I believe that the name of Captain Joseph Avery should therefore be perpetuated in the history of Long Island, and we know of no better medium than the Long Island Forum to bring this about.