

The Land Where the Library Stands

Researched and Written by Nan Peel, Director of the Center Moriches Free Public Library

*On October 19, 1993, while digging a hole on the Library's grounds in order to plant a flowering dogwood tree given to us by our Friends of the Library, our grounds-keeper discovered an antique horseshoe buried deep in the earth. To find out the possible origin of the horseshoe, we contacted Mary Field, co-author of *The Illustrated History of the Moriches Bay Area* and President of the Moriches Bay Historical Society. Mrs. Field told us that our Library happens to be situated on what was once a farm belonging to the Daniels family back in the mid-1800's. Additional information was obtained with the cooperation of Mt. Pleasant Cemetery, Estelle Trimble (who provided us with personal reminiscences of the Daniels family), and Joanne Brooks of the Suffolk County Historical Society (who provided us with genealogical information on the Daniels family). Original research was also conducted by searching through old, handwritten deeds recorded at the County Clerk's Office in Riverhead, microfilmed census records (obtainable through the Suffolk Cooperative Library System), and transcripts of the early records of Brookhaven Township (shelved in our Library's Local History Collection).*

William Daniels came to Center Moriches from Connecticut and in 1841 married a local girl named Angeline Robinson. Three years later, William Daniels had amassed the considerable fortune of \$1,800, which he used to purchase the 155 acres of land which would become his farm and land holdings (and, years later, a small parcel of which would become our Library's site). By the summer of 1865, William Daniels (age 57) along with his wife Angeline (age 48) were farming the land upon which our Library is now situated. The family's house was located just to the east of our Library building. Living with William and Angeline were their sons and daughters: William Jr. (age 22), Edgar (age 20), Julia (age 12), and Adeline (age 10). Also living with the Daniels, was their 23-year-old hired hand, a local boy named Gilbert W. Raynor.

The previous year had been a somewhat difficult one for farmers in this area, producing a harvest "of hay 1/3 less than former years. The drouth [sic] being quite severe in this region, though the late rain brought out corn and potatoes so that there were some good crops." In addition to the problems brought on by drought, it was recorded that "scarlet fever and diphtheria have prevailed to some extent..." Obviously, life was not easy in that era. The Daniels had already lost an infant daughter born shortly after Edgar, which had survived only to the age of eight months.

Every community needs a place for civic-minded and cultural-minded individuals to meet as a group, and community meetings were held in the Daniels family house in much the same manner that organizations meet today in our Library's Community Room. Early Brookhaven town records tell of a meeting of the Commissioners of highways, which took place "at the house of William Daniels at Moriches on the fifth day of Nov. 1851..." It was decided at this meeting that a nameless road (known today as Railroad Avenue), in use since 1777, would be officially surveyed, recorded, and maintained as a Public Highway.

When William Daniels died in 1886, the ownership of his land passed into the hands of his sons and widow. The elder son died four years later, unmarried and without heirs, and was followed not many years later by Angeline. Edgar, who had built a house of his own (which is still standing just to the west of our Library), inherited the land and, when he passed on, the land went to his two unmarried daughters, Mary and Grace. Gradually the daughters sold off various parcels of the land which had once encompassed their grandfather's vast holdings. When Mary passed away, Grace was left alone to live out her years in a small house on Railroad Avenue. Then Grace passed away in 1965, and it was learned that she had willed her remaining estate to various charities, organizations, and individuals in the towns of Center Moriches and East Moriches. One of the recipients of Miss Daniels' generosity was our own Library. Miss Daniels' legacy was used to purchase a much-needed extension to the little house which was our old Library building at 529 Main Street, which then served the community's needs for additional Library space until the Library had completely outgrown the old building.

It is interesting to note that, two decades after the death of Grace Daniels, a Guiding Hand would bring our Library to the original site of the Daniels family farm. During those years, the parcel of land had passed through the hands of various realtors - at one time being developed for an A&P shopping center. When the A&P went out of business, the land became a vacant lot. Finally the land was purchased by our Library's benefactors, the Mockridge and Runyon families, and given to the community to provide the site for the construction of our present Library building at 235 Main Street.

Discover the past – visit your Library!