

Historical Marker Dedication Ceremony

“History of Lake Comegys and Silver Lake”

Rehoboth Beach

25 August 2014

10:00am

10:00am – Welcome and opening remarks

Stephen Marz, C.A., Director, Delaware Public Archives

10:10am – Remarks by legislative sponsors

Honorable Ernesto C. Lopez, Senate District 6

Honorable Peter Schwartzkopf, Speaker of the House, House District 14

10:30 – Remarks by state environmental official(s)

*Honorable David Small, Secretary, Department of Natural Resources and
Environmental Control*

10:40 – Marker unveiling and reading of text

10:45 – Photographs

From: "Dewey Beach History and Tales." 2nd ed., 2005,
Daugherty, Barbara Sullivan.

CHAPTER FIVE

Rehoboth City

written by Jean Abplanalp
edited by Megan Abplanalp

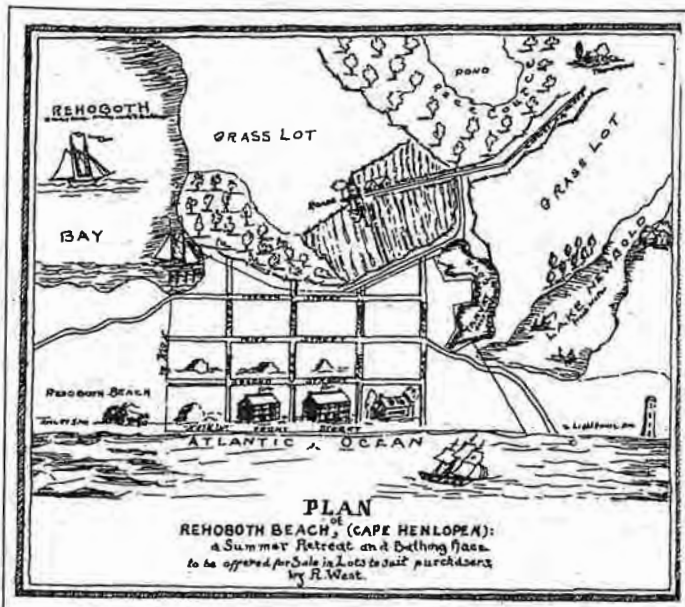
Since the publication of "Dewey Beach History and Tales" in 1996, we have received more extensive information through the generosity of the Hayes-Wilson family about the origins of Rehoboth City. They were one of the first families to obtain land, build, and maintain to this day what is considered the oldest house in the city. They have provided primary documents, pictures, and maps that have provided a clearer understanding of the various phases of development in that area.

According to this material, there were three stages in the early development of Rehoboth City prior to the later "Rehoboth-By-The-Sea" era.

The first was the "Plan of Rehoboth Beach (Cape Henlopen)" offered by Robert West on January 5, 1855. He and his wife, Clementine, had purchased 135 acres of land which we now call Dewey Beach and Rehoboth-By-The-Sea from John Roades for \$500. The area involved the land from what was known then as "Tan Bat

Cove" (Lake Comegys today) to Lake Newbold (Silver Lake as we know it now) to roughly a line even with Rehoboth Bay on the south. This was eighteen years before the organization of the Rehoboth Beach Camp Meeting Association, which became the nucleus of Rehoboth Beach to the north. *See the West map, page 14.

By August of that year (1855), Mr. West had developed a partnership with Joseph Comegys and Manlove Hayes of the Dover area. Prior to their contract, Comegys and Hayes had traveled from Dover to Lewes by train and then rode by horseback from Cape Henlopen down to Rehoboth Bay to survey the land for development. They thought the best land was that in Robert West's plan. The two men were well-known in state affairs. Joseph Comegys later became the Chief Justice of Delaware whereas Manlove Hayes, a State Senator who owned and managed several progressive farms, was a director of the Delaware Railroad. They selected lots and became the first owners of this preferred land.



This map is the earliest evidence of an attempt to develop a seashore resort at Rehoboth. It was prepared by Robert West in 1855. The property extended from the Southern edge of Silver Lake Southward along the ocean to approximately the Northern limits of Rehoboth Bay. The development never got started and was soon abandoned. plan courtesy of Bob Salin, Rehoboth Beach Historical Society

Manlove Hayes acquired his tract of oceanfront land from Joseph Comegys and his wife in 1856 for \$140. It is believed that they built their cypress-shingled house for \$1500. Descendants of Manlove Hayes, the late Edith Wilson McMichael and daughter, Connie Wahlig and family, have owned the cottage which has been moved over the years to its third location.

The house has been moved back at least twice due to erosion.

Landowner, Manlove Hayes' daughter, Edith, married Daniel Mifflin Wilson. Wilson and Hayes family members have lived in the house and in adjacent homes, in the original block, since 1856.



Wilson Cottage "Old Cottage," St. Louis Street built circa 1856 by Manlove Hayes. Cottage owned by Constance Wahlig
photo courtesy of Daniel Mifflin Wilson II

According to the late Hayes Wilson of "Wilson Dunes," "the house was jacked up and pulled by horses to a safer location." The last move occurred in 1982, when the cottage was moved to the adjacent lot on St. Louis Street to allow members to build the "Wilson Dunes Complex" on the oceanfront site of the family cottage.

Mr. Wilson recalled his great-aunt, Anna Bell Hayes, "would leave Dover by horse and buggy, spend the night in Milford, and then resume the journey to the beach cottage the next day."

During her childhood vacations at the cottage, Betty (Pat) Wilson Livingston remembers that life was somewhat more

primitive. "They pumped water, buried garbage, utilized an outhouse, and carried ice on the bumper of the car from Rehoboth Beach. They found arrowheads and Spanish coins in the sand and other artifacts over the years."

Livingston remembers her father, Richard Wilson, talking about a "tidal wave surging onto the Life-Saving Station in Rehoboth City about 1909. He was standing in front of the Station, saw the wave coming, and ran for cover in the building. He watched as it drove the rescue boat through the Station." All involved survived as did the Station.

Betty recalls the blackout and notes they used dark shades to keep the light from showing on the oceanfront during World War II. She remembers soldiers were posted to watch for submarines on the hill south of the family cottage. Betty and her husband, Bill Livingston, own a home on that very site today. Another old cypress-shingled oceanfront home on the northern side of the family cottage was the Van Trump/Mace/Speakman home. The property had a windmill to pump water; this may be the windmill in the picture of the Douglass House which was just north of the Van Trump/Mace/Speakman Cottage. Mr. Hayes Wilson bought the cottage from these owners in 1951 for just \$24,500.



Manlove Hayes circa 1862 1817-1910

photo courtesy of Daniel Mifflin Wilson II, whose family has been in Dewey Beach for ten generations

The Second Stage began in August of 1855, signaled by the name change to "*Rehoboth City*." Robert West, Manlove Hayes and Joseph Comegys were partners in this project. Others present for this transaction were John Roades, Asa W. Lofland, Walter Comegys, Robert M. Mustard and Elijah Roades. Robert West's original plot plan of roads were renamed from Front Street and Second Street to familiar Delaware names such as McLane, Clayton, Ridgeley, and Bayard. Despite the change, the Rehoboth City concept never developed as hoped. Perhaps the approach of the Civil War within six years impeded the sale of lots. Rehoboth City was so isolated and the "coming of the railroad" that would bring visitors was still twenty-two years away. Despite the slow development, Rehoboth City was still in existence in 1922 when land sold to Daniel Mifflin Wilson, Manlove Hayes' son-in-law, and father of M. Hayes, Richard, and Ralph Wilson (*all eventual property owners in that block*) by the Young Men's Christian Association (*the "Y"*) was considered, according to the deed, to be in Rehoboth City.

Before the sale to Daniel Wilson, the land and a two-story frame cottage, kitchen, ice house and other buildings belonged to the Missionary Society of Saint Paul the Apostle in the State of New York and was transferred to the "Y" in 1916 for \$2000. The Missionary Society secured this property from Emily Patterson in 1908.

Visitors to this area were typically local Delawareans who wanted to have picnics and bathe in the ocean. The "coming of the railroad" made the coast more accessible for those who lived outside the local area. Direct express lines authorized by the legislature were planned from Dover to Lewes, Lewes to Rehoboth Beach, and Kent Island to Lewes and would reduce the traveling time for trips from Philadelphia and Baltimore to Rehoboth City.

Stage Three began when another group of entrepreneurs, Directors John Fallon, Joseph Curtis, Francis W. Hughes, James Quiggle, and W.D. Comegys plus future stockholders incorporated in 1871 as the Rehoboth Association. They planned to develop and expand the existing



Four generations of Wilsons, 1943
M. Hayes Wilson, Jr., Daniel Mifflin Wilson holding
Daniel Mifflin Wilson II, M. Hayes Wilson Sr.
 photo courtesy of Daniel Mifflin Wilson II



Daniel Mifflin Wilson II, Sarah B. Wilson,
M. Hayes Wilson, Sr. at Wilson Dunes, 1984
 photo courtesy of Daniel Mifflin Wilson II

defunct Rehoboth City. The Association purchased five hundred acres, including the one hundred thirty-five acres that the now deceased Robert West had designated as Rehoboth City and the adjacent Dodd Farm. The land that was to be developed extended on the north to the Methodist Association's holdings in what we call Rehoboth Beach. The property went slightly past Hickman Street. On the west, the lands were about even with the two lakes, and

continued south to several yards beyond Bellevue Street in present day Dewey Beach. The Association's goal was to develop a "First Class Watering Place;" they anticipated that the direct railroad lines would provide better access to their investment at Rehoboth City.

**See accompanying map of the Association land and the larger map of the state from Camden, Delaware to Rehoboth City, page 15.*

The Association developed a design for additional plots, planned to improve roads, to build bath houses and a hotel, and to allocate one-third of the property for avenues and parks.

Shares were sold for \$40 per share. Ten shares would entitle the stockholder to one lot. The first offer to the public, however, was to bring forward forty-five 200 square foot lots located on the edge of Rehoboth Bay on part of the acquired Dodd Farm. Each lot was to be sold for \$1000. **See additional information in the accompanying prospectus, "The Proposed New Sea-Side Resort—Rehoboth City," pages 16 and 17.*

Despite the efforts of the Association, it seems that most of the land was not developed until Joseph McSweeney and Captain Nathaniel Quillen secured an option to buy the land from the West heirs to be part of their community called "Rehoboth By The Sea." Rehoboth By The Sea Realty was formed when other investors (*William Lynn, George A. McMabon, James McMabon, John E. Redefer*) joined McSweeney and Quillen in 1925, thus enabling them to purchase the land except for those lots sold previously. Another chapter in the book entitled "*The Vision—Rehoboth By The Sea*" outlines the development by this group.

First there was the Plan of Rehoboth Beach (Cape Henlopen), offered by Robert West in January 1855, followed by the name change to Rehoboth City when partners, Manlove Hayes and Joseph Comegys came on board. In 1871, the Rehoboth Association (*Directors:*

John Fallon, Joseph Curtis, Francis W. Hughes, James Quiggle, and W.D. Comegys) was formed while continuing to use the Rehoboth City name. Finally, the Rehoboth By The Sea eventually developed the land.

We appreciate the anecdotal information and pictures that were provided through the courtesy of Betty Livingston and the late Hayes Wilson. Thanks to family member, Bill Livingston, and the descendants of Manlove Hayes, including the late Edith Wilson McMichael, Connie Wahlig, Betty Livingston, and Daniel Mifflin Wilson II, who contributed directly or indirectly to this article. Special thanks to Daniel Mifflin Wilson II and Connie Wahlig for providing, in particular, old maps, the prospectus, and the plot plans as well as pictures. In addition, pictures were provided by Sarah B. Wilson, widow of M. Hayes Wilson, Jr.



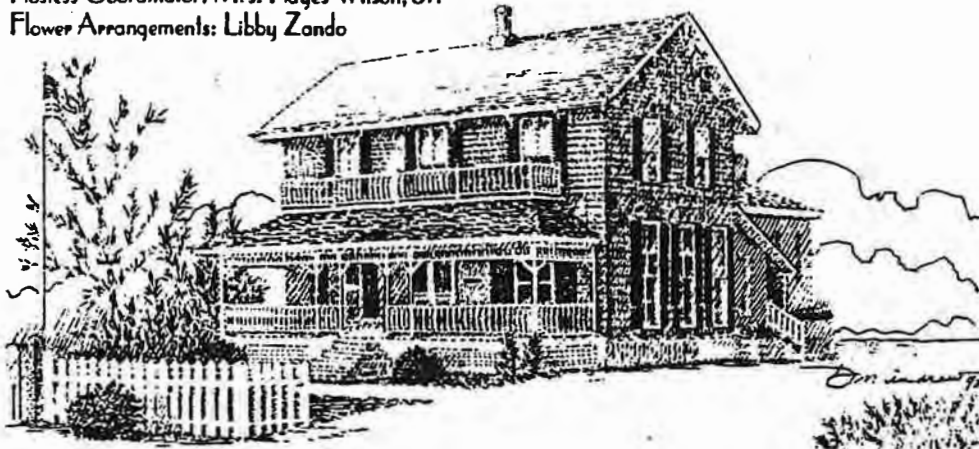
**Captain Nathaniel Franklin Quillen
May 1925**

photo courtesy of Granville and Electa Kunsman

HOUSE NO. 1
OLD COTTAGE

Charles and Connie Wahlig
11 St. Louis Street
Dewey Beach, Delaware

Hostess Coordinator: Mrs. Hayes Wilson, Jr.
Flower Arrangements: Libby Zando



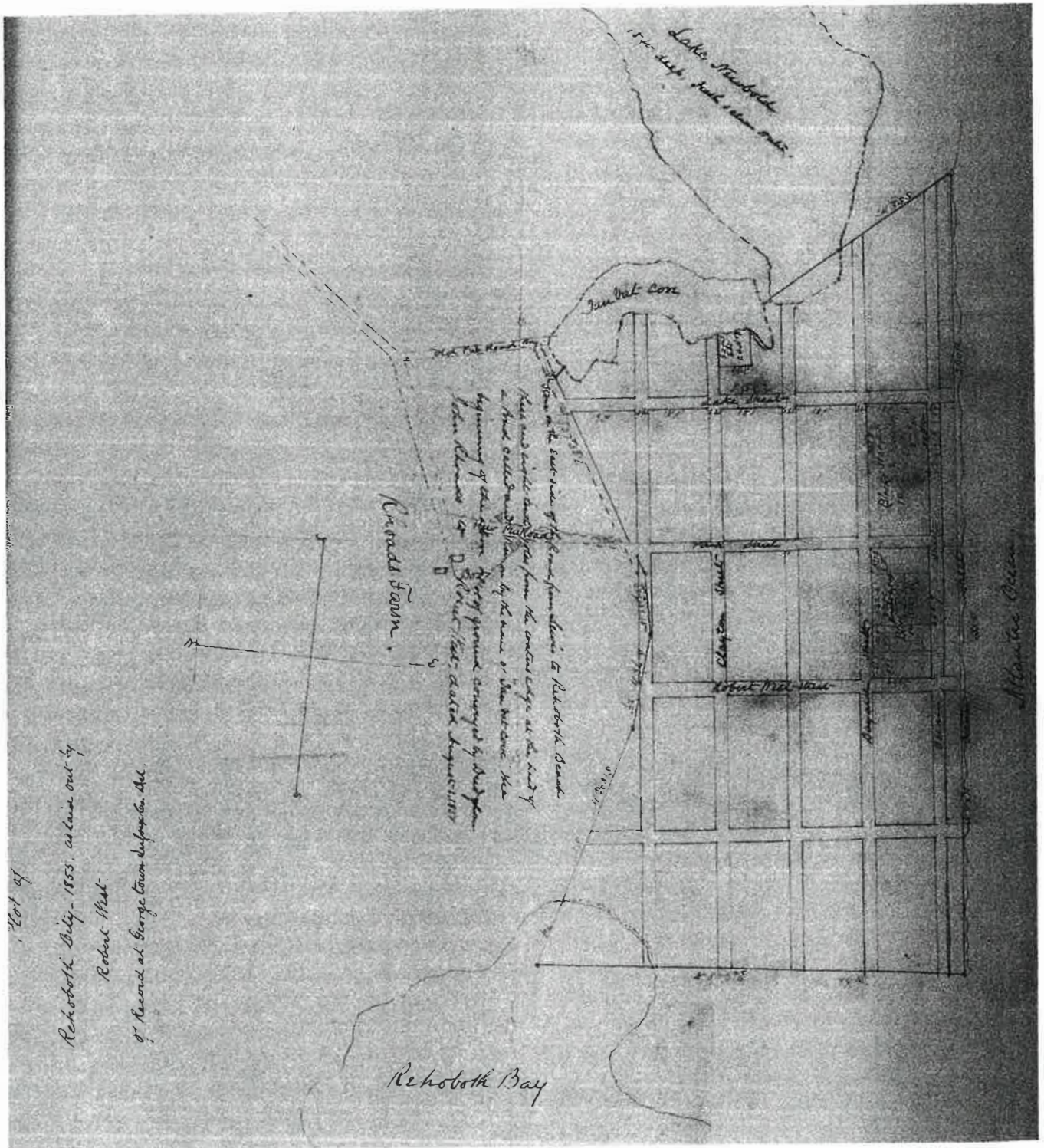
"Old Cottage," the oldest remaining resort cottage built in the Rehoboth area c.1856 by Manlove Hayes, remains in his family to this day. His great-granddaughter, Edith Wilson McMichael, and her daughter Connie's family summer here each year. The house has been moved back on the family property from the encroaching ocean it once faced, now resting safely in its fourth location behind the Wilson Dunes complex. Mr. Hayes' portrait can be seen in the dining room with other family memorabilia.

Impressive floor to ceiling shuttered windows and main door lend a grandeur to the cedar shingled walls. An L-shaped screened porch remains today of the original which wrapped completely around the cottage; the gingerbread detailing is a replica of that from earlier days. Behind the cottage is now a two-tiered deck and in front, a Victorian salt-air garden.

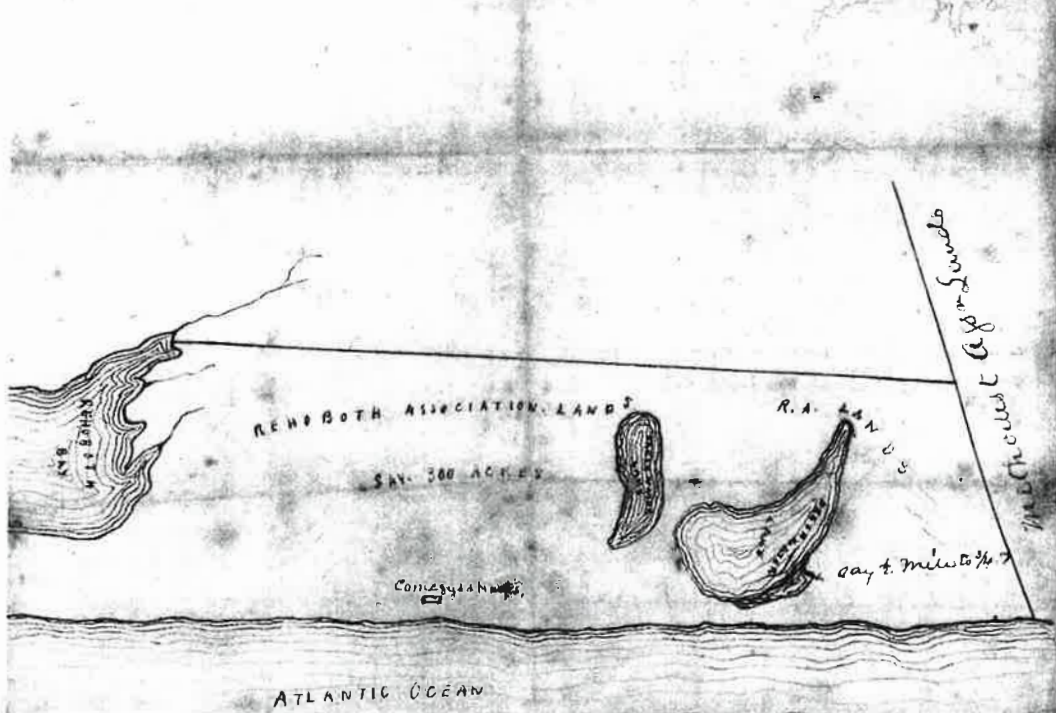
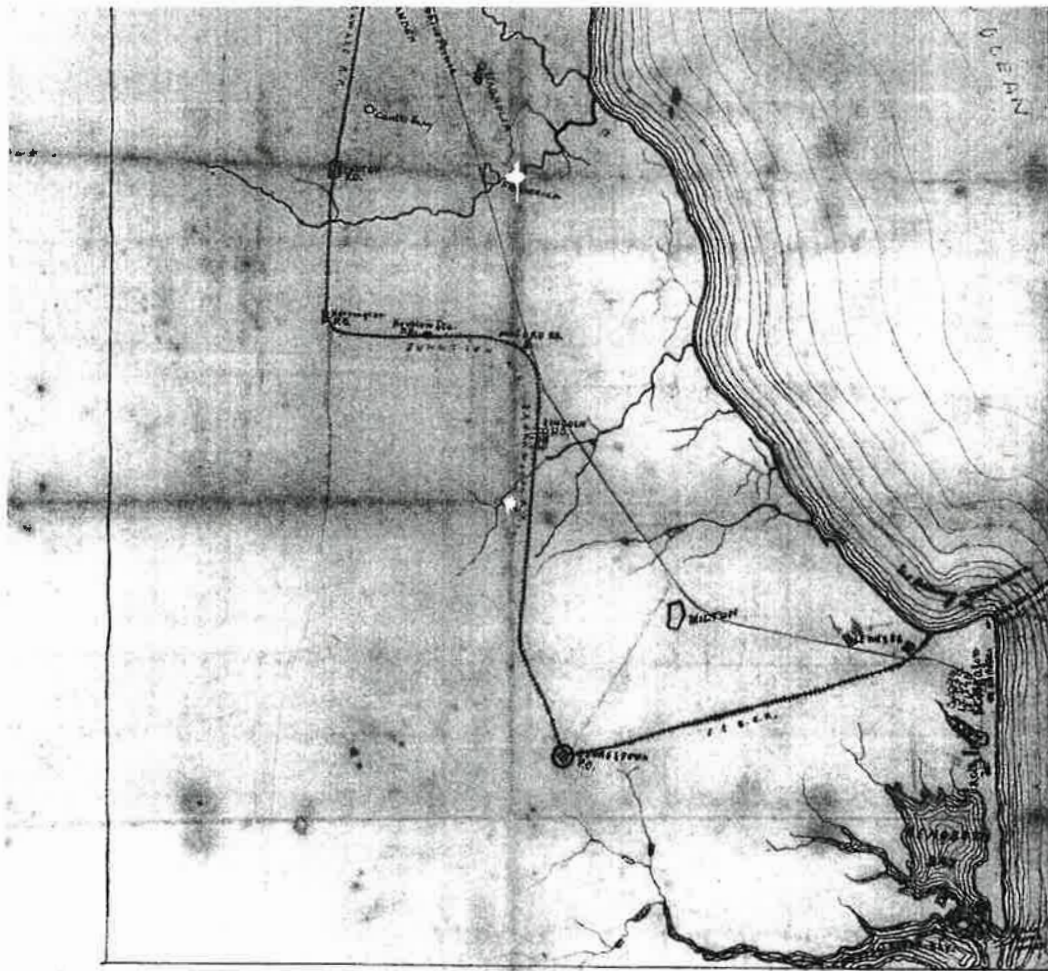
Inside, an oval foyer features an imposingly tall iron coat tree. The bare, wide-plank floors are original and were recently refinished. These, the tall windows, and the white walls throughout give the old house a modern ambiance. To the right of the front door are the dining room, the stairway to the second floor bedrooms, and the kitchen and family room at rear; to the left is the living room with its original, wood panelled fireplace over which is a charming oil on wood piece by Art Leaguer Betsy Edgeworth. Through French doors the porch can be accessed and a back hallway gives entry again to the kitchen.

Upstairs, in the largest of the three bedrooms is a massive wooden bedstead original to the house. A small spiral stairway leads down to the family room.

Rehoboth Art League Cottage Tour Flyer, 1992



Original plot of Robert West and history corresponding to original plot plan, 1855
Original map in possession of Daniel Mifflin Wilson II of Cleveland, Ohio
 map copy courtesy of Daniel Mifflin Wilson II



Map of lower Delaware with Rehoboth Association Lands, including those of Joseph Comegys and Manlove Hayes. The Rehoboth Association was formed in 1871. Original in possession of Daniel Mifflin Wilson II of Cleveland, Ohio
 map copy courtesy of Daniel Mifflin Wilson II



SPONSOR: Sen. Bunting & Rep. Schwartzkopf

DELAWARE STATE SENATE

142nd GENERAL ASSEMBLY

SENATE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION NO. 37

RECOGNIZING THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE REHOBOTH LAKES TO DELAWARE AND TO THE UNITED STATES.

1 WHEREAS, Lake Gerar, Silver Lake, and Lake Comegys are three freshwater lakes in the Rehoboth Beach area (the
2 “Rehoboth Lakes”) and have been recorded on maps and in aerial photographs since the 1930’s; and

3 WHEREAS, according to the Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control, the Rehoboth Lakes are the
4 only freshwater lakes in Delaware; and

5 WHEREAS, the Rehoboth Lakes have been a destination point for centuries beginning with Native Americans who
6 traveled at times many miles to hunt and fish along their banks; Methodist worshipers who established church camp meeting
7 grounds in their vicinity; and colonial sailors who used their waters to replenish their fresh water supplies; and

8 WHEREAS, the Rehoboth Lakes have provided a haven for many birds of various species as they are situated within the
9 “Atlantic flyway” for migratory waterfowl; and

10 WHEREAS, because of their size, location, and proximity to the ocean, among other things, the Rehoboth Lakes have
11 added to the rich diversity of the region in enumerable ways; and

12 WHEREAS, it is one purpose and intent of the General Assembly in adopting this resolution to highlight the Rehoboth
13 Lakes and to preserve and define the historic, natural character of the community surrounding Rehoboth Beach;

14 NOW THEREFORE:

15 BE IT RESOLVED by the Senate of the 142nd General Assembly of the State of Delaware, the House of Representatives
16 thereof concurring therein, that it does hereby recognize the significance of the Rehoboth Lakes to Delaware and to the United
17 States.

18 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Senate of the 142nd General Assembly, the House of Representatives thereof
19 concurring therein finds and declares that, due to their natural features, the “Rehoboth Lakes” are integral to the ambiance of
20 Rehoboth Beach and, as the closest freshwater lakes in the nation in proximity to the Atlantic Ocean, are natural treasures.

SYNOPSIS

This Resolution recognizes the significance of Lake Gerar, Lake Comegys, and Silver Lake (the "Rehoboth Lakes") to Delaware and to the United States and finds and declares that they are integral to the ambiance of Rehoboth Beach and are natural treasures.

Author: Senator Bunting



Sunrise on Lake Comegys: Photo by Peggy Douglas

History of Rehoboth's Freshwater Lakes

Silver Lake, Lake Comegys, and Lake Gerar have long been considered to be unusual because freshwater lakes are not normally found so close to the edge of the ocean. The truth is, the edge of the ocean has receded back to its proximity to the lakes. Meanwhile, the soils containing the depressions for the lakes (and containing the fresh water aquifers that feed them) are remnants of the alluvial flow that followed from the receding glaciers of the last Ice Age.

The Lake Gerar area, until the 1930's, was basically a swamp -- with shallow water in rainy periods. A branch of the DuPont family, with homes on the north side, agreed with the City of Rehoboth Beach, to clean up the wetland and make it a proper lake, in exchange for nearby lands. Until about 200 years ago, Silver Lake and Lake Comegys were conjoined. The separation took place early in the 1800's, at which time the Comegys extension was already known as Tan Vat Cove.

Early European visitors to this part of Delaware found that no American Indians were permanently living around the lakes, but that the Nanticoke tribe, whose home base was on the north shore of Indian River Bay, had regular summer encampments around Silver Lake. The purpose of these visits was to gather shell fish (clams and oysters) from the Ocean. These were then smoked over open fires for drying. The meats could then



last into the winter but were also used for trading purposes with other tribes further inland. In this trade, a sought after item was Pennsylvania Jasper, a stone hard enough for Indians here to turn into tools, including arrow points. Such artifacts have been found along the shores of Silver Lake.

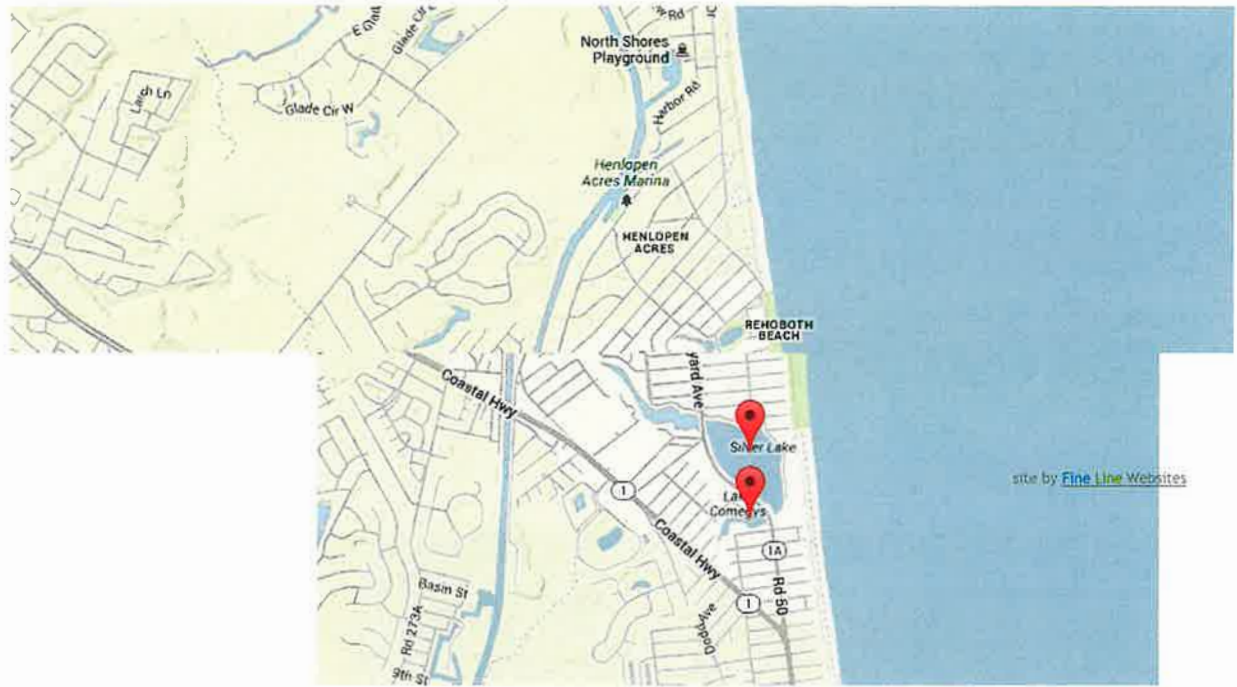
The earliest name applied by English settlers to Silver Lake was Rhodes Pond. This was for the John Rhodes (Roads) family that acquired a Duke of York patent (grant) to the nearby land, beginning in 1676, and ultimately surrounding the entire lake. Over the years thereafter, the land in the patented area was gradually sold to others, but no part of the lake was included in the sales. This factor appears to have contributed to the situation today wherein no party or jurisdiction has claimed the lake.

The name of Rhodes Pond gave way, in the late 1700's, to Lake Newbold, for John Newbold, the third of the six husbands of Naomi Hinham (who first married the fourth John Rhodes). At some point in the 1800's, Lake Newbold was renamed "Lake Charles." The reason for this remains a mystery. About 1924, the name "Silver Lake" was applied, as part of the promotion of the development, "Rehoboth Heights" "Tan Vat Cove" gave way, about 1871, to "Lake Comegys," the name of a major director of the organization promoting the sea-side development then named "Rehoboth City." The name, "Lake Gerar" was applied to the third lake in 1872, by the Methodist Camp Meeting Association.

Early in Colonial days, ship captains knew that Silver Lake was a handy place to secure fresh water before heading out into the Atlantic. The settlers of Lewes, however, tried several times to prevent pirates from filling their casks by sending armed men here to drive them off.

During cold winters and before the production of manufactured ice, local farmers cut blocks of ice from Silver Lake to help keep their foodstuffs from spoiling too soon. Today the lake's surface covers a total of forty-five acres.

By Warren H. Macdonald, noted local historian



From Sallie/Cape Gazette article:

Throughout the history of Rehoboth Beach, resort residents have appreciated the beauty of the area's lakes including, from north to south, Lake Gerar, Silver Lake and Lake Comegys. We have long known these bodies of fresh water so close to the salty Atlantic are also rare geographical features. Concern for Silver Lake, threatened by silting at its western end, unfiltered storm water runoff, erratic flushing and ownership confusion, sparked creation of the Save Our Lakes Alliance 3. That organization decided to take an activist role on behalf of the health of the lakes. Its efforts, to the lakes' benefit, have brought a great deal of attention to the myriad challenges faced by these geological gems. At the recent War of 1812 celebration, the role Silver Lake played in the bombardment of Lewes once more came to the fore. SOLA3 isn't the first group that has fought for the lakes. Before Rehoboth Beach was any kind of settlement, Silver Lake was known as Newbold's Pond.

By the time the war came, mariners from all over the world who sailed the coast of North America knew there was a source of freshwater just over the dune, within easy reach of navigable waters. When the citizens of Lewes denied British Commodore John Poo Beresford's request for food and fresh water and repelled his efforts to bomb the town into submission, Beresford sent a landing party south to Newbold's Pond. Col. Samuel Davis, commanding defending forces at Lewes, received intelligence from observers along the coast about what was up and sent troops. Once again the enemy was stymied, and the locals kept the fresh water supply to themselves. It's time the strategic importance of Silver Lake and its two cousins be recognized visibly and permanently. They deserve a state historical marker describing their geological significance and the 1813 skirmish that evidenced their value as a resource worth fighting for.

From SOLA3 Website:

- 40 acres
- Between Rehoboth and Dewey
- Known as one of the closest fresh water lakes to the Atlantic Ocean on the East Coast
- Designated as a waterfowl preserve
- Prior to the State of Delaware becoming owner of Silver Lake in 2012, no entity had claimed ownership of or responsibility for Silver Lake and Lake Comegys.
- Thanks to the advocacy of the Save Our Lake Alliance, much-needed improvements have been implemented.
- Silver Lake and Lake Comegys are the only freshwater lakes in the state and are closer to the Atlantic Ocean than any other lake on the Atlantic coast.
- May 13, 2004 – Delaware Senate and House of Representatives passed concurrent resolution No. 37 which recognizes that lakes are natural treasures to Delaware and the United States.
- The earliest name applied by English settlers to Silver Lake was Rhodes Pond after the John Rhodes family who acquired a Duke of York patent in 1676 to the nearby land and later, the land surrounding the entire lake.
- Though the land surrounding the lake was gradually sold to others, no part of the lake was included.
- Until about 200 years ago, Silver Lake and Lake Comegys were conjoined. The separation took place in the early 1800s, at which time the Comegys extension was already known as Tat Van Cove.

- ① Holland, R.J. Delaware's Destiny Determined by Lewes F174.LL
- ② Brittingham, W.D. Lantern on Lewes: where the past is present, stories of historic Lewes, Delaware F174 LL B75 1990
- ③ Moore, K.N. Lewes, Delaware: celebrating 375 years of history F174 LL M166 2006
- ④ Lewes, Delaware 350 years F174.LL.LL71
- ⑤ Cornstalks and cannonballs F174.LL M53 1980
- ⑥ History of Lewes, Delaware: with historical guide to Lewes and vicinity Cullert, V. F174.LL CA

* Check Rehoboth history

- ① no info
- ② no info.
- ③ no info.

* Pictorial History: no info.
by James Marvill
F174.LL M391