



Author of this article, Duo Dickinson, a Madison architect, by the Ells House.

happens is that when their parents get too old for the strenuous Island life, the children (now adults) step into the responsibility of running the cooperative. And since they have grown up together over all the summers of their lives, it is natural for them to continue the cooperative spirit that distinguishes the High Island experience."

Stony Creek has at its architectural core a sense of whimsy and playfulness that is seldom found in any town anywhere, let alone in tweedy New England. Because of this long-standing tradition of overtly proud homes (and its proximity to Yale's School of Architecture), over the years, a variety of architects have decided to live in and around Stony Creek. While contemporary architects have recently built expressive buildings to live in, there are also many remarkable antique homes that are virtually iconic in stature.

As with any New England town, the sense of "us" and "them" is pervasive between newcomers and old-tim-

ers. Typically, newcomers are deemed "new" for at least 30 or 40 years before they've had a chance to "settle in" and evolve into "Creekers."

Fourteen-year-resident Julie McClennan opines, "I love it here, not only because it is so incredibly beautiful with the picturesque Thimble Islands hugging its shoreline, but also because it is such a wonderful community, filled with interesting people — some who have been here for multiple generations and others, like myself, who are relative newcomers — but all united in their love of this place."

For outsiders (and perhaps for insiders as well), being a "Creeker" is virtually a synonym for "Swamp Yankee." Legend has it that the term "Swamp Yankee" derives from those hard-bitten, generally seafaring folk who were relegated to the lowlands on the coast — the place where storm and tide wreak havoc on day-to-day life. These ragged coastal lowlands were viewed as dangerous places, only suitable for

the hardy citizens who weren't committed to farming. Perhaps it's because Stony Creek was the first New Haven-area coastal community settled in the late 18th century that it lays a special claim to the crusty ethic of its resourceful indigenous people.

The irony is that all through New England, the rough-and-tumble shoreline habitat of the "Swamp Yankee" has in some areas been threatened by the transmogrifying impact of a growing boomer/yuppie moneyed class. Such is the case with Stony Creek, where many of its part-time residents have extraordinary wealth in comparison to those who have lived off of the harvesting of granite and lobsters for generations.

But The Creek has always had wealthy summer residents, and they built fantastic residences — mostly around the Gilded Age of the late 1800s and early 20th century.

These delightful antiques are set like small jewels amid the ragged landscape, compact village center and newer



Julie McClennan's house as seen from the water.

homes, all arrayed with the Thimbles in the background. The physical ambience of Stony Creek perfectly complements its zesty social image.

New and old, natural and built, commerce and culture all seem to have reached a simmering synergy here, in full view of smiling tourists day-tripping for a boat tour of the islands.

This sense of eclectic equilibrium is best appreciated in the Willoughby Wallace Library — renovated a few years ago by a proud borough and including a privately created museum dedicated to the history, culture and landscape of Stony Creek and all things Creeker. Its like is not often found in a hamlet of 2,500 — and manifests the pride and enthusiasm of the residents.

Whether it's the heiress whose spent several tens of millions of dollars buying about a half-dozen Thimbles in the last decade, or the retired couple wanting to walk to a small New England downtown, or a lobsterman who works his traps year-round, the depth of passion for Stony Creek is rare in a world

of bedroom communities and corporate transfers. The stories of these devoted lovers of The Creek are perhaps best told by the proud homes which illustrate this article.

THE PRATT HOUSE (AKA THE CLARK HOUSE OR VILLA VISTA)

This house of many names is on the National Register of Historic Places. Designed by Henry Austin and built in 1878 by William Judson Clark who was an inventor and manufacturer of machinery that produced bolts, nuts, washers and screws, it is one of the liveliest homes you can imagine. It was a summer house while its owner held a full-time job, but Clark moved there full time once he retired, a recurring pattern in The Creek. His daughter, Rosalyn Pratt, a respected artist, came to live there full time as well, and then her daughter, Olive, kept the home in the family until after death in 1956.

The house has changed little since it was built. Its tower and porches are the height of Victorian-striving exu-

berance, and its hilltop setting, close by other less dramatic hillside homes, make it a vibrant focal point for tourists and residents alike.

THE ELLS HOUSE

Ells House was built in 1883 as Lewis Cottage. In 1912, it was moved from the lot across the street to its present location — hopping over to a full-on coastal site. A stick-style Victorian (much akin to the Pratt House) with big porches and a tower, it is set off from Thimble Island Road and has a commanding presence.

Now owned by attorney Ted Ells, it has been in the same family since it was built. Attorney Ells' grandmother willed it to his mother who willed it to him — and it has remained virtually unchanged since it was built — except, thankfully, for the modernization of the kitchen.

It was used as a summer home until five years ago when Ted Ells could no longer resist the pull of The Creek and he relocated his law practice from Manhattan and became a full-time resident.