

BROOKHAVEN TOWN

Magazine features students' research on Yaphank decoy maker

BY CARL MACGOWAN

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The story of a 19th-century Yaphank naturalist and his passion for making duck decoys has landed on the cover of a national magazine — with the help of students from Longwood High School.

An Ohio author enlisted 15 Longwood students to help research his story about William Jones Weeks, a man of many talents who built his own house and a school, raised award-winning cranberries, served as a dentist and justice of the peace — and created decoys known for their realism and artistry.

The students viewed some of Weeks' decoys at the Swezey-Avey House, a Yaphank history museum, spoke to local historians and transcribed pages from Weeks' diaries from online sources.

They found that Weeks — who was related to the Jones family, for whom Jones Beach is named — lived a full life that included beekeeping, architecture and long walks through forests that now

likely are occupied by the students' neighborhoods.

"We came in there thinking it would just be ducks, ducks, ducks," said Darlyn Joseph, 18, a senior from Middle Island. "But it was interesting to see other sides of him that we wouldn't have known without doing the project."

The seven-page article was the cover story of the January-February issue of Decoy magazine, a Delaware-based bimonthly, print-only publication with 2,000 subscribers.

The students' names are listed at the end of the article, which also is posted on the Yaphank Historical Society website.

The society's president, Robert Kessler, who worked with the students, said Weeks, who was 76 when he died in 1897, was "a very innovative guy," adding, "If you read his life story, it's really very interesting."

The students, supervised by teachers Dan Tapia and Lauren Goepfert, said they learned the value of researching primary documents as they pored over Weeks' ornate handwriting.



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Longwood High School students helped trace the life of 19th-century naturalist William Jones Weeks.

"It's directly from the person himself, so you know it's exactly how it was," said Summer Vitale, 15, a sophomore from Coram. "It wasn't miscommunicated or anything."

The article's author, Gene Kangas, 77, a retired Cleveland State University art professor, said he contacted Longwood of-

officials when he realized much of the material he needed was in museums and libraries hundreds of miles from his Concord, Ohio, home.

He said the students' work helped him confirm his own research — and saved him a long trip to Long Island.

"I was just thrilled that it

gave them an experience and at the same time it took a big burden off of me," Kangas told Newsday. "When they looked through the diaries that are in the local library, you find quotations of things that the guy wrote. . . . All of a sudden, the pieces of the puzzle start to come together."