



Item of the Week *from the* Long Island Collection

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Nellie Gay McGuirk and her sons on the Porch of her Boarding House

With Mother's Day approaching, this image of Ellen "Nellie" Gay McGuirk (1861-1929), seen standing on the porch of her boarding house behind her three children speaks to the spirit of the holiday.

Nellie was born on November 6, 1861 to James E. and Mary Corrigan Gay in the original "Rowdy Hall." In 1889, Nellie married Thomas McGuirk (1861-1906) of Bridgehampton and they had three children-James Thomas (1891-1954), John Leo (1893-1958), and Mary Elizabeth (1898-1975). After residing on Egypt Lane with Nellie's father and brother, the McGuirks hired Frank and James Grimshaw in 1905 to build a "cottage" on Newtown Lane, which is where the above photograph was taken.

Unfortunately, Thomas died in 1906 after suffering from an "abscess on the brain," which may have resulted from a horse's kick to the head. The week before

he died, however, he transferred twelve acres of land on Newtown Lane, located next to Charles H. Mott, to Nellie. An [obituary for Thomas McGuirk](#) appeared a week later, which reflected on his outstanding work ethic and his skill as a property manager, foreman, and farmhand.

Now a widow, Nellie turned her home into a boarding house to support her family. She benefited from the house's proximity to the train station and school and by late 1908 had several female schoolteachers boarding with her. As such, the boarding house was successful enough to hire a cook.

As young men, Nellie's boys found work in the building trades. Her eldest son, James Thomas, worked for Nellie's relatives at E.M. Gay as a carpenter, while John Leo worked for S.C. Grimshaw as a plumber, before serving in World War I. The McGuirk boys raised their own families in East Hampton. Their sister, Mary Elizabeth McGuirk worked as a teacher and later a guidance counselor in both Orange and East Orange, New Jersey; returning to East Hampton for summer vacations and holidays.

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[The East Hampton Star Archive](#) is a fully searchable, online digital archive of our local weekly newspaper, that features each complete issue of the paper from 1918-1968, exactly as it appeared in print. Visit the archive online, for a tour of our Town's history that will fascinate both the amateur and professional historian!

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Welcome to the Long Island Collection's "Item of the Week."

We are an archive dedicated to the history and people of Long Island, with a special interest in all things East Hampton and East End. Unlike some small local history rooms in other public libraries, we have over 100,000 items including, but not limited to, rare books, maps, photographs, deeds, postcards, letters, newspapers, and whaling logs. We also have a dedicated and hardworking staff ready to help you with any questions you may have. Unable to make it to the library? No problem! We upload images from the collection to Digital Long Island on a weekly basis, so there's always something new and interesting to behold.

Please visit us at the Library, make use of our extensive online digital resources, or contact us for assistance. Public hours are: Mon. - Tues. and Thurs. - Sat., 1:00-4:30 p.m.

Researched and written by Andrea Meyer, Librarian/Archivist, Long Island Collection.

Andrea Meyer began working in the Long Island Collection in January 2015. Her responsibilities include updating Digital Long Island, scanning, processing new collections, and assisting patrons with research. She earned her M.L.I.S. through Long Island University, and completed her M.A. in Archives and Public History at New York University through the dual-degree program. Andrea started working in archives in 2005. Prior to working for the East Hampton Library, Andrea worked at the New Jersey State Archives, at NYU Libraries, and as a private research consultant. Her clients included the New-York Historical Society. She is also involved with the Sag Harbor Historical Society.

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