

## Potato Barns of Southold and the North Fork

By Joel Reitman

Farming, especially potato farming, is an exceptionally difficult way to eke out a living. Farmers are subject to the forces of nature that control the back-and-forth cost of doing business. Potato farming on Long Island began in the late 1800s as Europeans moved out of the cities and onto the land to continue what they had done in their homeland—farming. Farming reached its peak on Long Island around 1945. Today, all that remains of a once-bustling industry and many proud families are several potato barns, a potato chip farm, and a potato processing facility. Farming was hard, and when I asked Al Krupski about potato barns, he responded, “You’re talking to the right fellow.”



maintain their way of life. They stored potatoes not in one of the partially submerged barns but in the cellar of another above-ground type of barn.

Al reminisced about working with a friend in his grandfather’s barn, trying to move the potatoes into the open field to save them. The smell was so bad that Al said, “I can still smell it

today.” Al also told me that one of the reasons potato farming on Long Island ended was the climate-controlled barns of the Midwest. On Long Island, all that remained were the cellars of many barns and the iconic, partially submerged ‘potato barn.’ The climate-controlled barns of the Midwest could keep potatoes fresh for two years, allowing farmers to wait out bad seasons. Meanwhile, Long Island farmers had no produce to sell when the weather was unfavorable.

Potato barns were constructed in order to have a steady supply of fresh and sellable potatoes. The barns were partially submerged into the ground to take advantage of the cool earth and maintain an even temperature to protect the potatoes even in the hot summer months.

These barns were typically built from cinder blocks or concrete and reinforced with vertical brick buttresses. The roof was made of wood, and there were no more than two windows. The front of the potato barn had one or two large, garage-style doors to allow for the potato truck to enter and deliver its load. This type of construction allowed the farmer to keep his crop fresh and



maintain the potatoes' quality and taste. That kept the temperature at about 40 degrees and ensured a longer life so that the potatoes could be cured in about two weeks. Proper ventilation was also necessary, and the barns were constructed to allow air to flow out through the roof.



In Southold Township, there are only eight partially submerged-style potato barns

left. Two or three are at the western end of Oregon Avenue, one of which is in poor condition; another (painted red) has become a residence. The third is in use and has had one side exposed. On Route 48 (Peconic), there is a barn with an electrical panel outside. That one, along with one on Wickham Avenue and Tuthill Lane (Mattituck), is in use as a storage facility. The potato barn on Main Road just east of Southold's business district is also a residence, and the one on Gin Lane in Southold is also a residence. Another one on Route 48 in Mattituck is painted white with an updated roof and is in regular use at Manor Hill Farms. There are at least four such barns in



Riverhead: one at Windy Acres Farm on NY 25 and three on Northville Turnpike between Route 105 and Doctors Path.

A few facts about potato farming on the North Fork: 1) The Sidor Farm, home of North Fork Potato Chips on Oregon Road, spans approximately 70 acres and is the last potato farm in Southold. 2) In 1919, a Polish church (Our Lady of Ostrabrama) was built to accommodate the new farmers. 3) The Potato Association of America held its 50th anniversary in Riverhead in July 1963. 4) At its peak in the late 1940s, Long Island had approximately 70,000 acres devoted to potato farming. 5) There was even a Long Island Potato Festival.

Information for this was obtained through: [longislandrestaurants.com](http://longislandrestaurants.com) written by Lon Cohn

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