

The Hamptonization of Glover Street

The Sag Harbor strip is a market microcosm



Glover Street, as it looks at this moment.

By Mary Cummings

Glover Street, one of Sag Harbor's oldest, runs west from Main Street, following the shoreline of Upper Sag Harbor Cove. From the village's earliest days, when it hummed with entrepreneurial activity, it has always been an important street. In the 18th century, the Hommedieu family had a ropewalk—a long, narrow building where rope is made—at the Main Street end of Glover. There was also a spider-legged windmill for grinding grain on the cove side at Peter's Green. And, in the early 1800s, ships were built on the Green and launched in the cove.

When whaling wealth enriched Sag Harbor's 19th century captains and shipowners and filtered down to its shipwrights and sailmakers, the new prosperity was reflected in Glover Street's two handsome Federal style homes facing Main Street: the 1820 house of Captain George S. Tooker on the southwest corner, and, opposite it, the home built around 1810 by master carpenter Benjamin Glover for his family and later elegantly expanded by Captain David Vail.

Now Glover Street is in the midst of another transition, one that reflects what has been

noticeable for some time elsewhere on the East End, as village homes, increasingly viewed as prime real estate, have been snapped up, renovated and reborn as luxury second homes.

If the trend has taken longer to reach Sag Harbor, it is probably because, from its earliest days, the village has had a distinct spirit, combining the urbanity and openness of a small city with the beauty and sense of community of a small town. With its busy waterfront and entrepreneurial energy, Sag Harbor never moved to the agricultural rhythms that once governed life in the East End's farming

communities, nor did the village experience the stark high-season/off-season contrast so characteristic of the resort towns those farming communities became. Sag Harbor has always been mainly a year-round community, and it has been the rare Sag Harborite who aspired to the fashionable life, Hamptons-style.

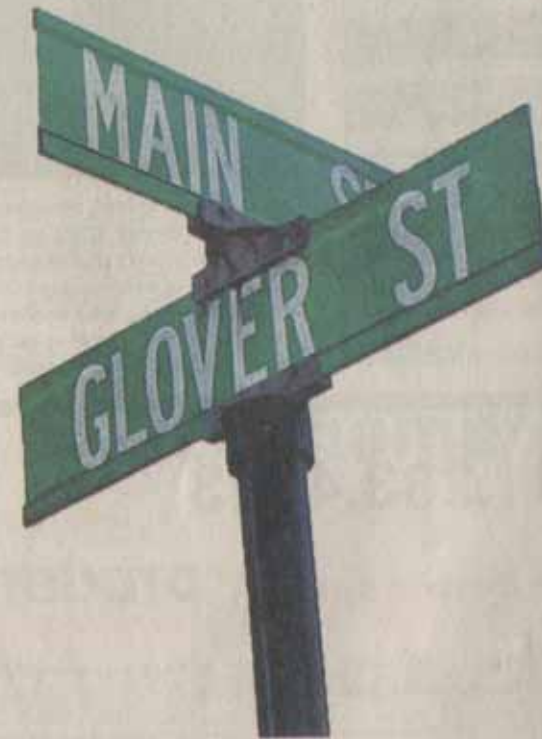
Which is why what is happening on Glover Street is significant, for there is no denying it: Glover Street has become Hamptons fashionable.

Old-timer Andrew Neidrig, whose family has owned the house he lives in at 52 Glover Street since 1921, recalls a time, not so long ago, when "everybody knew everybody," and he laments that now he and members of the Mortensen family, who live at number 37, are just about the only ones left. Captain Tooker's house on the Main Street corner has been meticulously restored and is on the market for \$3,100,000, while the Gloverhouse, on the opposite corner, which has also undergone extensive renovations, is being offered for \$2,850,000.

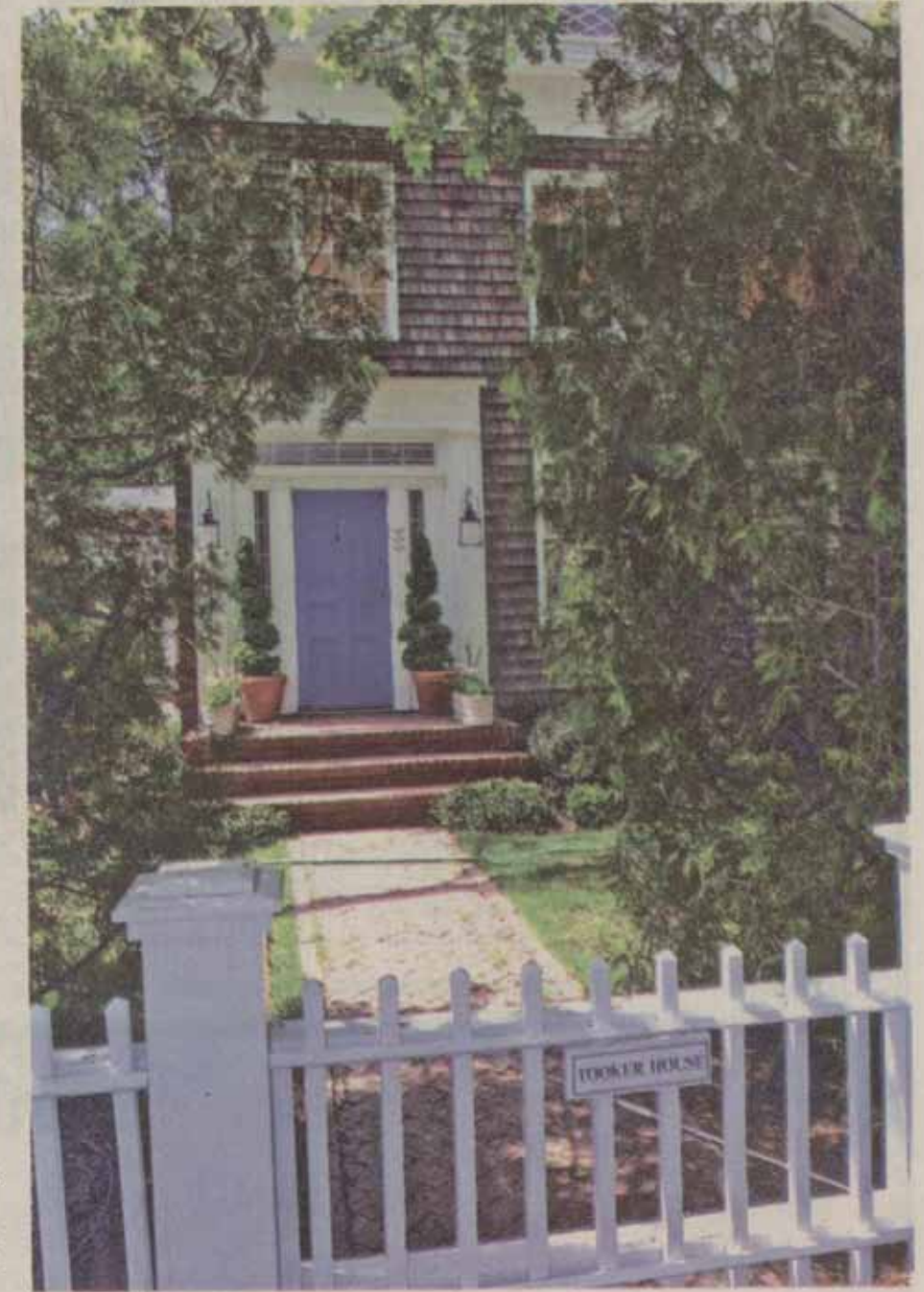
Glover Street properties priced at less than \$1 million, meanwhile, have pretty much gone the way of the rope walk and the windmill.

Enter the Renovator

During a recent quick tour of the block led by Robert Tortora, who lives near the end of Glover Street and is in the business of renovating houses, Mr. Tortora pointed out houses that had recently changed hands and gave an account of his own role in the street's rebirth as a pricey, mostly second-home haven. He said that the sellers, in many cases, were from families with long histories on Glover Street, and he described a pattern: "They sold to renovators,



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The 1820 Tucker House, now on the market for \$3.1 million.

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and I sold them to New Yorkers."

Mr. Tortora counted seven houses on the block that he has either renovated himself or been involved with as a consultant. He speculated that many of the New Yorkers who are now turning to Sag Harbor as a weekend and summer retreat are doing so because they want an alternative to the mega-mansion with all the amenities. "They are starting to appreciate living in a village," he said. Granted, he added, "for the same money they can get two acres, a house and a pool, whereas here lots are measured in square footage." But leafy streets, community

band concerts and easy access to Sag Harbor's quaint but lively downtown are evidently also worth something to the urban-weary weekender.

What makes Glover Street especially alluring is its waterfront on Upper Sag Harbor Cove, an unusual advantage in a location that is also so close to the heart of the village. Oddly enough, the waterfront advantage was missing for many years when the Long Island Rail Road ran alongside the cove on its way from Bridgehampton to Sag Harbor, effectively cutting the Glover Street houses off from the water. Though train service was discontinued in 1939, the tracks were not removed until sometime in the 1950s.

"No one had waterfront," said Mr. Tortora. "Glover was on the railroad tracks, and then it went from junky, next to the tracks, to waterfront."

True, but the transformation from junky to pricey was not instantaneous. Even after the tracks were taken away, Glover Street remained remarkably resistant to gentrification, with even its two corner mansions showing the effects of time and neglect. Waterfront did not carry the same cachet, translatable to cash, that it does today, as a story Mr. Tortora tells illustrates.

One Glover Street property actually remained landlocked after the tracks were removed, he said, because the owner's wife did not

jump at the chance when representatives of the railroad offered each resident an opportunity to buy the waterfront strip of railroad right-of-way behind his or her house for \$50.

"She said she couldn't decide without talking to her husband," recounted Mr. Tortora. "But the men were anxious to go home and went next door." The neighbor snapped up his strip and hers too, for the royal sum of \$100.

Old-Timer Tales

Mr. Neidnig, who said he once spent two days in Riverhead examining real estate records, found that the earliest reference to his own property was a transaction in 1844, when George Fordham bought the house and land for \$450. The house changed hands fairly frequently after that, he said, but stayed in the \$500 range "up until about 1861." In 1867, the Kelly family moved in and stayed put until Mr. Neidnig's uncle bought the house in 1921, by which time Mr. Neidnig reckoned it had perhaps doubled in price. "If he paid \$1,000, he was doing good," he said.

When he began coming out after World War II to visit his parents, who had inherited the house from his uncle, it seemed to Mr. Neidnig that the neighborhood had barely changed since his uncle's arrival. The Spodicks, a large Orthodox Jewish family whose patriarch had arrived in Sag Harbor in 1884, were next door. The McDonoughs, another old family, were across the street, and various members of the King family accounted for a significant portion of the Glover Street population.

Neighbors traipsed over the lawns of neighbors to make unannounced visits or to gain access to the cove. "We got so friendly," recalled Mr. Neidnig, "that they just walked into your house. They didn't ring any bells, and you had to be sure you were dressed."

One former Glover Street resident, who had recently visited Eastport, Maine, an old village where many quaint houses are unoccupied and deteriorating, said he was struck by the resemblance to Sag Harbor in the 1950s. "That was when people were buying houses in Sag Harbor for \$5,500," he said. "They were boarded up, and nobody wanted them."

Another former resident, Jon Snow, who now lives in Bridgehampton, said he spent about a year in the early 1960s on Glover Street, when his parents moved into the former Spodick house at the corner of Long Island Avenue. The house, which has lately been seen in the pages of Elle Decor, was hardly luxurious at the time, according to Mr. Snow. "When we lived there," he said, "there wasn't even any heat."

There are many versions of the house's origins. Mr. Tortora's is that it came to Sag Harbor from Connecticut, served as the village's first Catholic

What a Difference Two Decades Make

Numbers taken from real estate transfer records on four Glover Street houses that have changed hands between 1984 and 2004—numbers 40, 41, 45 and 48 Glover Street—are instructive. (odd numbers are on the cove side of the street)



40 Glover Street (.2 acres)
Single-family, 2-story residence

Year of Sale	Price
1998	\$375,000
2003	\$880,500
2004	\$1,500,000



41 Glover Street (.3 acres)
Single-family, 2-story residence

Year of Sale	Price
1998	\$322,000
2002	\$901,000



45 Glover Street (.1 acre)
Single-family, 2-story residence

Year of Sale	Price
1986	\$145,000
2002	\$460,000
2004	\$915,000



48 Glover Street (.2 acres)
Single family, 1-1/2 story residence

Year of Sale	Price
1984	\$76,000
2002	\$640,000