

Historic Southold Property A Special Christmas Gift

SOUTHOLD — 'Twas three days before Christmas when the Town of Southold received the welcome news that a very special gift was on the way: The deed to a parcel of land in the heart of Southold's commercial area that will be preserved as a public park.

The property, at the northeast corner of Main Road and Youngs Avenue, is the site where the old Hartranft house once stood. Considered by preservationists and history buffs as a village landmark, the house fell to the bulldozers two months ago, touching off a storm of protest throughout the community.

But now the site, at least, will be safe from development. At a closing at high noon Monday in the offices of lawyer Michael Hill, title to the land was transferred by owner-developer Herbert Mandel to the Peconic Land Trust, a Southampton-based, not-for-profit land preservation organization. The Trust in turn will convey title to the town, once it has drafted the covenants and restrictions necessary to protect the site forever, according to John Halsey, Trust president.

Among the many residents

who were saddened by the loss of the Hartranft house was George Wells of Glen Head, whose family has a summer cottage on South Harbor Road. Mr. Wells had inherited the Howell Farm from his aunt, Lillian Howell, upon her death in 1972. "Aunt Lil," as she was known to all in Southold, had indicated to her nephew that she wanted him to use his inheritance to benefit the town in some way, Mr. Halsey said.

After the Hartranft house was gone, Mr. Wells got the idea of using part of his aunt's estate to create a village green or park on the corner parcel in the hamlet's center. Last month he discussed his idea with Town Councilman Paul Stoutenburgh, who directed him to Mr. Halsey and the Peconic Land Trust to explore the possibility of having the Trust acquire the land and then convey it to the town.

As Mr. Halsey tells it, events moved swiftly from there on; he got in touch with Joseph Townsend Jr., a member of the town's Landmarks Preservation Commission, who helped in the negotiations to purchase the property from Mr. Mandel at bargain sale, which is the sale of



All smiles at Monday's closing which will ensure the preservation of Main Road lot as a town park are, from the left, Joseph Townsend Jr. of the Southold Landmarks Preservation Commission; Town Councilman Paul Stoutenburgh; Raymond Terry, president of the Southold Savings Bank which is providing the landscaping; John Halsey, president of the Peconic Land Trust; and Herbert Mandel, who agreed to sell the parcel to the Trust. George Wells of Southold and Glen Head has donated the funds to purchase the lot, which will be conveyed to the town.

Southampton Aeroservice Photo

land to a qualified conservation organization at less than market value.

The price, Mr. Halsey said, was \$200,000 for the approx-

imately one-acre parcel, which is zoned for business use. Mr. Mandel acquired it in 1985 from Joseph B. Hartranft Jr. of Eastport, Maryland. The pro-

perty was appraised recently at "in excess of \$300,000," he added.

(Continued on Page 9)

Christmas

(Continued From Page 1)

According to Mr. Mandel, the property's popular name, "Silversmiths' Corner," dates from the 17th century when a silversmith's shop was located nearby. The owner of the first house on the property was Robert Hempstead who came to Southold from London in mid-18th century, and served as Southold Town Clerk and Justice.

The house was enlarged in 1835 and again in 1855; since then several wings were removed and located elsewhere, Mr. Mandel said. Successive owners included Col. John Wickham, John Gardiner, John C. Appleby, Joseph Albertson and Dr. Joseph Hartranft, who bought the house for use as a residence and medical office toward the end of the 19th century.

Attempts in recent years to preserve the house for historic reasons failed, said Mr. Mandel, adding that after he bought the property in 1985 he found that "excessive cost and physical obstacles made moving it" to another site "impossible." It was razed on October 29 of this year.

Mr. Wells, a designer in his late 80s, is in the process of selling the Howell homestead to fund the \$200,000 cost of the corner site. He is also selling the farm's development rights to the town's Farmland Preservation Program, with the proceeds from the transaction earmarked for the Hallockville Restoration project.

Mr. Halsey added that the Southold Savings Bank has agreed to donate \$20,000 to landscaping

the corner site.

The Peconic Land Trust was incorporated in 1983 to facilitate the preservation of the East End's rural lands on both North and South Forks. To do this, the Trust offers a mix of conservation tools, among them the bargain sale, which can result in substantial tax benefits for those involved.

The Trust already has been able to effect the preservation of numbers of environmentally valuable tracts on the South Fork; the Hartranft parcel is its first success on the North Fork, although others are "in the works," Mr. Halsey said.

Mr. Wells, Mr. Halsey said Monday, "feels he's fulfilling Aunt Lillian's wishes, and what he has done creates something very special for Southold."

—Portia Flanagan