

Previously published in *East Islip Historical Society Newsletter*.

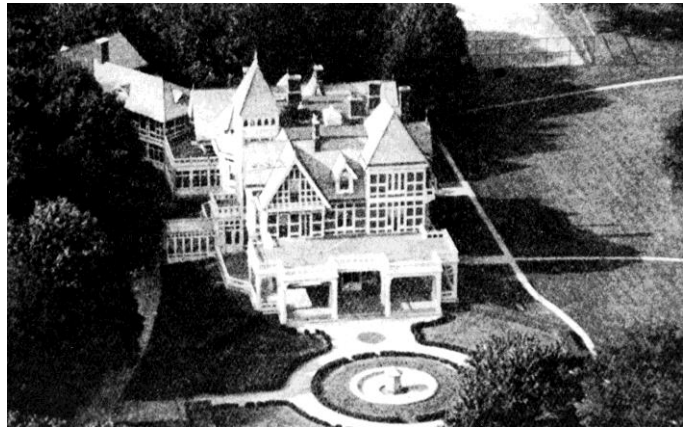
Modified in July 2010 for website publication at [www.spinzialongislandstates.com](http://www.spinzialongislandstates.com)

Please cite as: Spinzia, Raymond E. "Socialite Spies: The Grandchildren of Henry Baldwin Hyde, Sr." *East Islip Historical Society Newsletter* March 2008. revised 2022

## *Socialite Spies: The Grandchildren of Henry Baldwin Hyde, Sr.*

by Raymond E. Spinzia

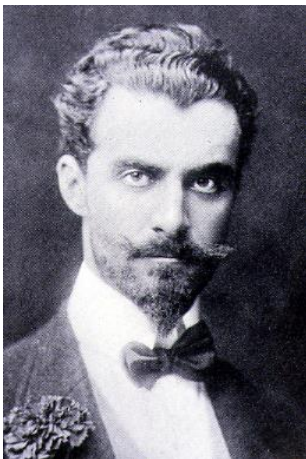
When one mentions the Hyde family of West Bay Shore, Long Island, Henry Baldwin Hyde, Sr.'s massive stick-style mansion *The Oaks* or perhaps the magnificent Hyde Memorial stained-glass window by Tiffany in the north transept of St. Mark's Episcopal Church in Islip, Long Island, may come quickly to mind.<sup>1</sup> Some will remember his connection with the Equitable Assurance



*The Oaks*

Society of the United States, the insurance firm whose motto was "The Protector of Widows and Orphans," and still others will think of Henry's flamboyant son James Hazen Hyde and his extravagant costume ball in 1905 which nearly caused the downfall of the insurance company.

A lesser known fact about the Hydes is that Henry's grandchildren were spies.



James' son Henry Baldwin Hyde II (1915-1997) was raised in France and educated at Chesterhouse School and Trinity College in Cambridge, England, and at the University of Bonn in Germany prior to receiving his law degree from Harvard University. In 1942, while practicing law in Manhattan, he was chosen by William F. Donovan to become the chief of the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) operations in France and, later, to replace Allen

*James Hazen Hyde*

Dulles as OSS chief in Switzerland. The flamboyant Henry, who was known to his operatives as Monsieur Henri, was charged with recruiting, briefing, and equipping agents, selecting drop points, and coordinating secret radio links with OSS operatives in France.<sup>2</sup>

The astounding accuracy of the information provided by Hyde's network on German troop movements in France was invaluable for the planning of the Normandy and Southern France landings. For his work as chief of OSS operations in France, Hyde was awarded the Legion of Honor and the *Croix de Guerre* by France, two Bronze Stars by the United States government, and a special citation by President Franklin Delano Roosevelt.

After the war Hyde returned to Manhattan, became a partner in the law firm of Wormser, Kiely, Galef, and Jacobs, and summered on Fire Island.



*Monsieur Henri*

Henry Baldwin and Annie Fitch Hyde, Sr.'s daughter Mary married Equitable's treasurer Sidney Dillon Ripley, Sr. and resided with him at their forty-eight-room mansion *The Crossways* on Fulton Avenue in Uniondale, directly opposite what is now Hofstra University. The Ripleys' daughter Annah married Count Pierre de Viel Castel and resided with him in Normandy, France. During World War II the de Viel Castels' residence was occupied by the German army, forcing Annah and her husband to move into the servants' quarters. Because of her impeccable German and French, the Germans never suspected that Annah was an American. She was able to eavesdrop on the German conversations and pass the information on to the French resistance in baskets of eggs that she took to the local village for sale in the market.

Annah's cousin Sidney Dillon Ripley II, the son of Louis Arthur Dillon and Constance Baille Rose Ripley, was in charge of OSS operations in Southeast Asia during the war. A noted ornithologist, he later served as Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution, helping to found the *Smithsonian Magazine* and the Smithsonian Folklife Festival.

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## ENDNOTES

1. The remnants of Hyde's West Bay Shore, Long Island, residence *The Oaks* is currently the clubhouse of the Southward Ho Country Club.

According to the vestry minutes of St. Mark's Church, the Henry Baldwin Hyde, Sr. Memorial window, *Recording Angel* was given in 1899. It was fabricated by Tiffany Glass & Decorating Company, before the incorporation of Tiffany Studios. The bell tower, which obscures the window, was added in 1919. An improved, but still artificial, illumination system was installed during the church restoration after the December 5, 1989 fire. The Hyde window, which suffered only smoke damage, was, however, disarticulated and cleaned after the fire.



*Hyde Memorial window, Recording Angel, 1899,  
fabricated by Tiffany Glass and Decorating Company,  
St. Mark's Episcopal Church, Islip, Long Island*

2. Henry's flamboyance tended at time to be dangerous and somewhat foolhardy. While stationed in Algiers, Hyde became notorious for walking through mine fields to swim in the Mediterranean.

For further information on the Hyde and Ripley families see:

Beard, Patricia. *After the Ball: Gilded Age Secrets, Boardroom Betrayals, and the Party that Ignited the Great Wall Street Scandal of 1905*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2003.

Spinzia, Raymond E. "Society Chameleons: Long Island's Gentlemen Spies." *The Nassau County Historical Society Journal* 55 (2000):27-38.

Spinzia, Raymond E. and Judith A. Spinzia. *Long Island's Prominent Families in the Town of Hempstead: Their Estates and Their Country Homes*. College Station, TX: VirtualBookworm, 2010 – Ripley entry.

Spinzia, Raymond E. and Judith A. Spinzia. *Long Island's Prominent North Shore Families: Their Estates and Their Country Homes*. vols. I, II. College Station, TX: VirtualBookworm, 2006 – Ripley entry.

Spinzia, Raymond E. and Judith A. Spinzia. *Long Island's Prominent South Shore Families: Their Estates and Their Country Homes in the Towns of Babylon and Islip*. College Station, TX: VirtualBookworm, 2007 – Hyde entries.

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*The Last Hero: Wild Bill Donovan*, 2  
Raymond E. Spinzia, 3  
*Town and Country*, 1 top

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