

VILLAGE OF LAUREL HOLLOW

Syosset Post Office  
New York

Dear Fellow Residents:

Enclosed is a copy of a history of our Village prepared in 1951 by Mrs. George S. Hornblower, then Village Historian. I thought it would be of interest to you to read.

Very truly yours,

Dudley L. Miller, Mayor

H I S T O R Y  
of the  
INCORPORATED VILLAGE OF LAUREL HOLLOW  
Nassau County, New York

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The Village of Laurel Hollow lies on the western shore of Cold Spring Harbor in the Township of Oyster Bay, Nassau County, Long Island, and is located partly in the Suffolk County School District of Cold Spring Harbor and partly in that of Oyster Bay. Reaching an elevation of 180 to 200 feet above sea level, it commands from many angles the incomparable view of Cold Spring Harbor and Long Island Sound, framed by Cooper's Bluff and Lloyd's Neck. It is not far from the Long Island Railroad Station of Syosset, which, with thirty-eight commuting miles, offers the best service to New York, and Highway 25A, a main motor artery to metropolitan bridges and tunnels, passes just outside the boundary.

The nature of the terrain, a series of hills alternating with deep ravines resulting from glacier activity, renders the land unsuitable for farming or for real estate development, but the character of the vegetation makes the region worthy of consideration as a conservation project. Thick woods predominate, with a rich undergrowth of mountain laurel, whence the name, and flowering dogwood.

Laurel Hollow is entirely a residential community with no business or commercial facilities. Its inhabitants shop at Oyster Bay, Syosset, or Huntington, and their children attend largely the

West Side School, which moved in 1941 to its present location in the close vicinity, and which offers an up-to-date educational opportunity to pupils in the lower grades. The nearest religious centre is St. John's Church by the Lake, an Episcopal institution which, though outside the Village limits, gives many of our adults and children their spiritual inspiration.

For recreation the villagers turn naturally to water sports, although access to the beaches is limited. In earlier days the Gurdon Parkers offered to their neighbors an informal gathering place on their beach and float, and there began the characteristic spirit of informality and mutual loyalty which has ever since been felt. As the community grew in numbers, and as its interest in small-boat racing evolved, this unique spot was partially superseded as a gathering place by the Cold Spring Harbor Beach Club, which is outside the Village boundaries, but where many of our citizens have achieved wide recognition for their sailing prowess. Our public beach is always crowded with strangers, because, though small, it annually receives a high sanitary rating by the Board of Health, and, as our parking space is limited, we ourselves seldom find room for our cars.

The entire area was originally owned by two families named Jones, one that of Oliver, the forebear of Miss Rosalie Jones, who is still the proprietor of much territory not far from the Village, and the other that of one Major Charles. The memory of these early settlers is perpetuated in the designation of the great State Park, Jones Beach, on the south shore of Nassau County. The Jones property in Laurel Hollow was in large part purchased by the Tiffanys

and de Forests, but parts of those holdings soon passed to members of the Lusk, Parker, Gilder, Ames, Havemeyer, Hornblower, and other families, many of whom remain. Representatives of the Bleecker interests still live on the land acquired by their ancestors not long after the Joneses settled there.

A state road crosses the southwestern corner of Laurel Hollow, and Overton's History reminds us that George Washington passed along that thoroughfare, called, then as now, Moore's Hill, on his triumphal trip around Long Island. The Laurel Hollow Road, running north from the North Hempstead Turnpike, provides the only public access to the water. Its course originally ran through the property of the late Louis C. Tiffany, and the elms which bordered it still remain. But Mr. Tiffany, after much delay, effected an exchange of land, rerouting the norther most quarter mile. This road once led to a hotel and casino which were destroyed by fire at the end of the last century. To their boat landing came the last of the side-wheel excursion steamers, after the fleet of sailing sloops previously used for commerce on Long Island had given way to more modern forms of transportation. Hordes of picnickers from New York roamed along the Ridge Road as far as the Brightson Farm, now the estate of Mr. J. Barstow Smull, on the southern edge of our Village. At one time the hotel was so popular a resort that the Long Island Railroad contemplated building a spur directly to it, and for that purpose ties were cut from the trunks of the chest-nuts which were still to be found throughout the woods long after those noble trees had all been killed by blight.

In 1900, after the burning of the hotel, Louis C.

Tiffany built the famous Laurelton Hall on part of the old foundations. For many years this house was an important focal point, and the beautiful Westminster chimes in its clock tower, which is still marked on charts and used as a means of navigation, could be heard far out on the water and were greatly beloved. The fire siren on the estate, sounded every Saturday at noon, was also a well-known institution.

This property became a most controversial issue, as both town and state invoked riparian rights and claimed access to the beach which Mr. Tiffany had developed by the erection of concrete walls and breakwaters and the importation of countless tons of sand. At one time, a protesting group organized a torchlight procession, marched down the Laurel Hollow Road, and blew up with dynamite the structures designed to hold and accumulate sand. This, so far as is known, was the only act of violence in the history of our otherwise idyllic rural community, although the sand pit extending into Cold Spring Harbor from the shore of the Henry W. de Forest property constituted another similar point of contention between public and private interests. Public right of way to the water was, after many years of bitter litigation, accorded to the Township of Oyster Bay, and thereafter many thousands of people came daily throughout the summers to use the beach at the end of the Laurel Hollow Road.

At the southeastern corner of our Village, at a much earlier date, the de Forest family had built a homestead named Nethermuir near the site of an Indian encampment called by the aborigines Wawapex, a word apparently meaning "West Shore". This spot was later graced by a famous garden designed by F. L. Olmsted, the

creator of Central Park in New York City, and well known to garden lovers, garden clubs, and schools of landscape architecture. A colonial dwelling, Airlslie, also standing on this property, was given by Mrs. Henry W. de Forest to the Long Island Biological Association as a memorial to her husband, after she had decided to raze the main house, Nethermuir, and to dispose of the surrounding acreage. Airlslie is reached from the North Hempstead Turnpike by the Bungtown Road, so called in allusion to the stoppers of the kegs and barrels which were manufactured in several factories there during the days when Cold Spring Harbor was an active whaling port.

The razing of Nethermuir was the first manifestation in Laurel Hollow of the trend toward the breaking up of large real estate holdings which has been in progress ever since the great business depression of the early 1930's, and not long afterwards the Briars, the house occupied by Mr. Tiffany prior to the development of Laurelton Hall and then owned by his daughter, Mrs. Graham Lusk, was also torn down. Of that house and its many outbuildings, only a tower with a windmill and clock and, not far away, the Peacock Tower, around which the residence of the present Mayor of the Village is designed, remain. An ancient and famous apple tree forms part of the landscaping around the house of Mr. George C. Johnson adjoining the site of the Briars.

Distinguished scientific projects are carried on in the vicinity by our neighbors the Carnegie Foundation and the Long Island Biological Association. For many years the Louis Comfort Tiffany Foundation, established by the owner of Laurelton Hall, functioned as a training centre for promising young artists and craftsmen.

Qualified students lived in the extensive stable buildings attached to the main house, with access to its art treasurers, its museum, and the chapel hidden away in the beautifully landscaped gardens. This chapel, originally shown at the Chicago World's Fair of 1893, was later installed in the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York City, but when the architectural style of the Cathedral was changed from Byzantine to Gothic, its mosaic decoration was found inappropriate, and it was relegated to an inconspicuous position in the crypt. Mr. Tiffany therefore solicited and obtained permission to remove and reconstruct the chapel on the grounds of the Foundation.

At that time it was thought that the Foundation would continue indefinitely to operate the training centre, but after the death of the founder, when its income proved inadequate to carry on its work in the spirit in which it was conceived, the operation was discontinued. Its collections were sold and scattered, and its income, instead of providing direct applied training, has become the source of many scholarships at other schools of art. The land and buildings of the Foundation, once the property of a single owner, have been sold and divided into a score of smaller holdings.

Following the opening of the beaches of Laurel Hollow to the public, it became increasingly difficult to control the crowds which came throughout the summer. The beaches were small, and the roads narrow, so that the daily influx of thousands of visitors constituted a serious menace to health and property, but no legal authority existed for the imposing of restrictions. It was felt that incorporation would remedy many difficulties by permitting the

establishment of a zoning ordinance, supported by a local police force.

Therefore in 1926 the area was incorporated as the Village of Laurelton, so named in deference to its principal landmark, Laurelton Hall. Early recollections, according to an authority long resident in the vicinity, seem to prove that this name came into being in 1850, when Oliver Newlett Jones built a house on the later site of the Tiffany Foundation. The hotel, which bore the same title, was erected by his son Oliver Livingston Jones. In 1935 the designation of our Village was changed to Laurel Hollow, following endless confusion in mail and express deliveries and on maps, resulting from the establishment in Queens County on the south shore of the Island of a town which had duplicated our name. At the same time it was realized that the new designation was more appropriate, for it was found to appear in early deeds dating as far back as 1700 in the possession of the Bleecker family. Mr. Charles Moore Bleecker recorded in a letter dated June 11, 1935, having read that "on April 6, 1700, land was laid out by the Town to Thomas Youngs on the east side of Lawrell Hollow."

The actual date of incorporation was July 31, 1926, and at the first meeting of the Village, held on August 11 of the same year, Mr. Beverly Duer was sworn in as President; Messrs. Henry W. de Forest and Gurdon S. Parker as Trustees; and Messrs. John G. Melrose, John Chase, John E. Terwilliger, and J. Barstow Smull as Clerk, Treasurer, Road Commissioner, and Police Justice respectively. The Village Trustees were simultaneously appointed Acting Assessors. The title of President was changed in 1927 to Mayor, and that office



has been held, since Mr. Duer's term, successively by Charles E. Ames, Collier Platt, Allen T. Klots, and again by Collier Platt, the present incumbent. W. Shelby Coates has served as Attorney for the Village continuously since his appointment in 1926.

Covering at the outset an area of one square mile, the minimum then permitted, Laurel Hollow was enlarged in 1947 to include the five-acre property of John W. Gillies, lying just outside the southwest corner. Very roughly triangular in shape, with a northeast hypotenuse and sides facing south and west, the boundaries take a number of irregular turns necessary to encompass the acreage of various owners who desired to be included. In 1926 the assessed valuation of properties was \$215,600 for unimproved, and \$604,500 for improved, land, taxed at the rate of \$ .90 per hundred and divided among 19 taxpayers. At the present time the total valuation is \$693,708 for unimproved land, and \$1,738,437 for real property with improvements, divided among 71 taxpayers. In contrast to the increase shown by the foregoing figures, the census of 1930 indicated a total population of 161, while that of 1940 recorded only 110. The findings for 1950 have not as yet been published.

A police force was immediately assembled, and it has been judged by many in the general police pool to be one of the most efficient village forces on Long Island. The original officers were Captain White and Patrolmen Smith and Sullivan. Captain White remained in charge until 1934, when he was succeeded by Patrolman Smith, who was promoted to the grade of Sergeant and in turn replaced in 1949 by Sergeant Meehan. The present force consists of the Sergeant in charge, assisted by two regular patrolmen and an

alternate. Originally mounted on horseback, Captain White cut a dashing figure as he patrolled our sylvan roads. Our two official horses were elegantly equipped and housed in Mr. de Forest's stables, but, from 1927 on, our patrols have been made entirely by automobile, as horses and bicycles proved impractical.

The first police court was held in the barn on the property of Mr. Smull, the Justice; later courts have sat in the Village police booth. Succeeding Mr. Smull as Police Justice have been Messrs. Ames, Klots, Platt, Kenneth S. Van Strum, Bernard J. Ridder, the last-mentioned of whom holds office today. For many years the headquarters of the Village Clerk and Treasurer was located in various buildings on the de Forest place, but in 1949 it was transferred to the residence of Mrs. Charles E. Ames, who now holds both positions.

On February 5, 1927, our original police ordinances were approved, and on January 18, 1931, a zoning ordinance was adopted. A complete Building Code was introduced on October 14, 1948, and William B. Hornblower was appointed Building Inspector. These three groups of regulations are still in effect. It was originally arranged that fire protection would be in the hands of the Fire Department of Cold Spring Harbor, but the Oyster Bay Fire Department and the Atlantic Steamer Company, also of Oyster Bay, are now under contract to come to our assistance when necessary.

Privately-owned artesian wells constitute our main source of water. For many years Laurel Hollow was technically included in the Jericho Water District, but it was separated therefrom by the act of incorporation. In 1930 the Ames-Platt syndicate,

which now has thirteen members, arranged for the routing of municipal water to certain properties along the southern side of the Village.

Official announcements are published in the Enterprise-Pilot of Oyster Bay, and Village notices have always been posted on a huge oak at the intersection of Moore's Hill and Ridge Road, but that tree was destroyed by the severe wind storm of November 1950, one of many which have caused damage in the Village. In 1934 the senior Mrs. Chase, one of the oldest inhabitants both from the point of view of age and of length of residence, died during a blizzard, when transportation was so hampered that it was impossible to reach her house. The hurricanes of 1938 and 1944 temporarily crippled the facilities of the Village and uprooted or broke many fine trees. In the past it was not uncommon for winter residents, whose houses occupied hilly sites, to be cut off from outside communication for as long as a week, but milder winters and improved methods of snow removal have largely eliminated this inconvenience.

Laurel Hollow has always had an excellent record of public spirit and citizenship. In World War II, in addition to those engaged as civilians in various kinds of war work, not less than six individuals were enrolled in the Army and a dozen in the Navy. The only casualty was Edward V. Tucker, news of whose death in the invasion of Normandy was received in August 1944. Edward was born and raised in Laurel Hollow and was greatly beloved. Recently graduated from the Oyster Bay Parochial School, he had been drafted into the Army, and sent overseas after a short period

of training. He is buried in the United States Military Cemetery at St. James, France. The whole Village mourned this gallant and much respected hero.

During the War we cooperated with the air-raid and civilian defense organizations of the Town of Oyster Bay, and the Tiffany Foundation loaned its buildings to the United States Navy for secret camouflage operations. In the present emergency we are alerted, and a combined civil defense organization has been formed by the Mayors of Cove Neck, Oyster Bay Cove, and Laurel Hollow, with Chauncey B. Garver as chairman and Collier Platt and Alfred L. Loomis, Jr., as co-chairmen.

In 1950 an important addition to the efficiency of Village management was secured when rural free delivery was inaugurated by the Syosset Post Office.

As a result of incorporation the Village of Laurel Hollow, in addition to preserving the unique and beautiful scenery, has been able to establish laws to protect its roads and beaches and to control traffic which would otherwise constitute a source of danger to the public at large, not to mention the grateful inhabitants.

Respectfully submitted,

Dorothy M. Hornblower,  
Historian.

2/1/51