



HOW GLEN COVE BECAME A CITY



*Courtesy Glen Cove Public Library
Robert R. Coles History Room*

Glen Cove's First Mayor, Dr. James E. Burns



*By Dave Nieri
for the GC350 History Committee*

How Glen Cove Became a City

Glen Cove was tied inextricably to the Town of Oyster Bay for the first 250 years of its existence. The settlement of Oyster Bay preceded that of Musquito Cove (the 17th century name of this community) by about 15 years, and four of the five original proprietors of the Musquito Cove Plantations had lived in Oyster Bay village and had acquaintances there. From 1668 however, the early Glen Cove community known as Musquito Cove operated as a rural hamlet under the oversight of the five proprietors. Over time and with the passing of the original settlers, local governmental administration would fall under the Town of Oyster Bay.

150 years passed before the hamlet of Musquito Cove was recognized by the Federal government, when the first Post Office opened here in 1818. With the establishment of its own Post Office, from all of the various spellings (Musquito, Muskeeto, Musketa, Muscheda, Moscheto, etc.), the official name of the community became Musquito Cove. The residents finally voted for an alternative name in 1834, changing it to **Glen Cove** in order to dispel the notion that the community was a haven for mosquitoes. There are two tales as to how this name was selected, but that's another story.

The community of Glen Cove would grow dramatically during the latter half of the 19th century, but it never incorporated. By early in the 20th century its population was approaching 10,000 souls, making it the largest community in both Nassau and Suffolk Counties according to an editorial in the *Glen Cove Echo*, the local newspaper. In 1915, when this editorial appeared, Glen Cove was accessible by the Long Island Railroad, and the steamships from New York City; it had an electric trolley line that connected the steamer wharf with the downtown and with both the Glen Street and Sea Cliff railroad stations; the Glen Theater was a major entertainment venue hosting vaudeville shows and moving pictures; the Ladew Leatherworks was the largest employer of local workers; and the Crystal Spring Ice Company had replaced the Upper Glen Lake as a year-round source of ice for village households. It was a thriving community, but Glen Cove was still administered by the Town of Oyster Bay, while the neighboring Village of Sea Cliff had incorporated in 1883. Many citizens felt that Glen Cove was not receiving the services commensurate with the tax dollars sent to the Town.

Some in the community thought that Glen Cove should become an incorporated village and form its own government, while another faction favored a complete break from the Town of Oyster Bay, and its incorporation as a city. As early as 1906, articles in the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* newspaper, which chronicled many of the happenings in Glen Cove, discussed forming a local committee of prominent citizens to study the incorporation issues. By 1915, the editor of the *Glen Cove Echo*, John Davis, had become a voice for the pro-city faction, printing editorials advancing this position. In a follow-up editorial in 1916 he sparked a debate on the topic, and the Village Improvement Association finally called a meeting to discuss the matter. At this meeting on April 21, 1916, a "Committee of Seven" was selected, whose members were many respected Glen Cove names of the period: Franklin A. Coles, John C.F. Davis (the *Echo* editor), Harry L. Hedger, William E. Luyster, William A. McCahill, Edward E. Craft, and Edward Donaldson. They were tasked with studying the question of incorporating Glen Cove as a city. However, the committee remained silent on the topic for a long period – World War I was then raging in Europe, and the debate as to whether America should enter the war overshadowed the debate on Glen Cove's future form of government.



The Village Improvement Association finally called a follow-up meeting in January of 1917 to hear the report of the "Committee of Seven". In support of this meeting the *Glen Cove Echo* published an editorial titled "Citifying Glen Cove" to lay out the arguments that supported becoming a city. At this meeting, the committee reported in favor of a city form of government, and a new committee of 25 members (including all of the "Committee of Seven" members) was chosen to draft a Charter. When word got out that Glen Cove was pursuing "citification", a request was made by some Sea Cliff residents that their village be included in the future City of Glen Cove, however this request was rejected, and it was decided that the boundaries should coincide with those of School District No. 5 of the Town of Oyster Bay. Today, the City of Glen Cove and the School District are unified within these boundaries.

A City Charter was soon drafted but prior to its being submitted to the State Legislature, it was decided that a vote be held to determine whether Glen Cove's citizens supported the action. On March 2, 1917, in

this "informal vote" as it was later termed, the voters overwhelmingly supported creating a city, yet there was still a vocal opposition that were determined to defeat this action. With some minor changes (recommended by the Legislature), the Charter was submitted to Albany and approved by the Legislature on May 9th of that year. But during this continuing debate in Glen Cove, another local newspaper was born to promote the point of view of those who opposed Glen Cove becoming a city. Ironically, this voice of the opposition was called the *City Record*, and after numerous mergers, acquisitions and name changes, the *City Record* is still published today as the *Glen Cove Record-Pilot*, celebrating its 100th anniversary in 2017. Its competitor, the *Glen Cove Echo* survived until 1960, when it was acquired by the *Record-Pilot*.

With the City Charter having been approved on May 9th, it still required the signature of New York's Governor Whitman, who finally signed the bill on June 8th, just before the 30-day period for approval expired. In celebration, the *Glen Cove Echo* published a special edition on June 9th announcing the bill signing, and the Carpenter Memorial Band marched throughout the new "City", while a cannon was fired at 30-second intervals in the evening. A larger, formal celebration was held on June 13, 1917 with music, parades and fireworks.

But the story was not over, and the anti-city opposition attempted to have the Charter declared invalid because of a clause in the document that called for a referendum to be conducted under the auspices of the Town of Oyster Bay Supervisor, William H. Seaman, and the Town Clerk, Charles R. Weeks. This referendum was subsequently held on June 30, 1917. Interestingly, the local newspaper reported that 150 of the referendum voters were Glen Cove women, who were taxpaying residents, and yet women did not have the right to vote for elective office in New York State (though this would change by year's end). The results: the proponents of the City prevailed by only 7 votes, while 13 votes were declared "void". Not to be deterred by the slim margin and questionable referendum results, the anti-city faction then tried to have the Charter declared unconstitutional, but without success.

The next step was the election of a Mayor and City Council in late 1917. The candidates formed two slates – pro-city and anti-city candidates, with the pro-city group running on the Republican ticket and the anti-city group on the Democratic ticket. But the sentiments of the public did not coincide with the major party lines, and from the outcome of the election one can only wonder whether anyone knew what they were voting for. Although two prior votes on becoming a city were both in favor, all but three of the anti-city candidates were elected, and men who had been opposed to Glen Cove's incorporation as a city became the first Mayor and three of the four City Councilmen.

Election of 1917 Results

Mayor	Dr. James E. Burns	Anti-City
Commissioner of Finance	Charles P. Valentine	Pro-City
Commissioner of Public Works	Robert C. Meserole	Anti-City
Commissioner of Public Safety	Bryan Murray, Jr.	Anti-City
Commissioner of Accounts	Herbert W. Morrison	Anti-City
Assessor (2 years)	Martin F. Murray	Pro-City
Assessor (2 years)	George M. Rehill	Anti-City
Assessor (4 years)	Frank B. Edmonds	Pro-City
City Judge	William Cocks, Jr.	Anti-City
Supervisor	Ward Dickson	Anti-City

The election strained many friendships, but it was surely one of the strangest elections in the city's 100-year history. Unfortunately, women of Glen Cove had no say in the choices for Mayor and Council because women could not yet vote, however this was about to change, at least in New York State. In the same year as Glen Cove's first election for a local government, a referendum on the November ballot passed, changing the New York State Constitution to give women the right to vote. This was three years before the 19th amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which granted women the vote nationwide.

New Year's Day 1918, in the 250th year since Glen Cove's founding, saw a large crowd present in the Justices Court building on Glen Street to witness the inauguration of the first Mayor and City Council. The Justices Court building had been constructed just 10 years prior (1907-1908), as a courthouse for the Town of Oyster Bay, and subsequently served as Glen Cove's first City Hall.

The first order of business of Glen Cove's new government was to appoint a City Clerk and Chief of Police. Mayor Burns and the City Council had a number of issues to deal with as Glen Cove's first government, among them, negotiating with the Town of Oyster Bay for Glen Cove's share of the taxes collected in that first year. The city's last historian, Dan Russell, wrote that the Justices Court building was 'taken' by the City of Glen Cove as compensation in a disagreement with the Town of Oyster Bay, which continued to assess taxes on the city's residents after Glen Cove broke away from the Town. As a result, the Justices Court building became Glen Cove's first City Hall and Police Headquarters. This building continued to serve as the Glen Cove Police Department Headquarters and City Court into the 1990s, when the City acquired the old bank buildings on Glen Street near the center of the downtown, and moved the City Hall, Police Department and City Court to new locations. Today, the Justices Court building has been restored to its configuration as it was when completed in 1908, and now serves as the home of the North Shore Historical Museum.

The City of Glen Cove was incorporated 100 years ago this year, and in January of 2018 the Mayor and newly-elected City Council re-enacted the photo of the first City Council's inauguration in the same courtroom in which it took place on New Year's Day 1918.



Glen Cove City Councils – Separated by 100 Years

This story is based on a chapter of the book, "A History of Glen Cove" co-authored by former City Historians Robert R. Coles and Peter Luyster Van Santvoord, with additional information from the writings of City Historian Daniel E. Russell

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