

# HISTORICAL GUIDE TO NASSAU COUNTY



**MAUREEN O'CONNELL**

**NASSAU COUNTY CLERK  
240 OLD COUNTRY ROAD  
MINEOLA, NEW YORK 11501  
516-571-2664**

Visit our website:



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## History of Nassau County's Seal



### Adopted: Coat of Arms, Seal & Flag

At the first meeting of the Nassau County Board of Supervisors on January 3, 1899, the Board passed their first resolution providing for a County Coat of Arms, Seal, and Flag. The county coat of arms was to include, "*Arms, azure, lion rampant or, between seven billets.*" The Flag was "*to be orange, charged with the arms of the County of Nassau.*" The Board's intent was to adopt the same general coat of arms design used by the House of Nassau.

### The House of Nassau

The House of Nassau was created in 1159 when Count Walram of Laurenburg changed his name to Walram of Nassau; his family living in the castle of the same name located in Western Germany until the 15th century. In the 1200's the family split into two branches: one remained as the House of Nassau, and the other became the Royal Family of the Netherlands.

### Why a Lion?

The lion is the most important figure in heraldry (recording of honors), symbolizing the fierceness, bravery and wisdom of the king of beasts. He's almost always rampant, meaning in an upright position. Designed to trace its historical background to "The House of Nassau", the rampant lion was commonly used on a coat of arms. To separate the seal from others, it was covered with shingles (billets); the colors, a golden lion on a blue field with golden shingles (billets). The lion on the current County Seal, although more natural than its predecessor is surrounded by 7 gold billets.



### Different uses of the Seal

There are more than a dozen different versions of the seal presently used in print, on flags, county vehicles, buildings, insignia, and on official documents. Its appropriate historic background and simple visual appeal of the dynamic lion on the original "House of Nassau" seal have made it an everyday symbol of the county government. County flags bearing the coat of arms can be seen flying at all County buildings and facilities. The use of the seal on these buildings is in the best heraldic tradition.

## History of Nassau County, New York

In 1670, Daniel Denton reported to England that the settlers of Long Island "are blessed with Peace and Plenty, blessed in their Country, blessed in their fields."

The Dutch controlled Manhattan, then known as New Amsterdam, in 1640, when a small group of New England British arrived hoping to relocate near Oyster Bay. Dutch authorities soon forced the Englishmen eastward where they eventually established the town of Southampton.

Three years later, on December 13, 1643, another band of adventurous New Englanders crossed the Long Island Sound from the Connecticut towns of Wethersfield and Stamford. The colonists landed at



Dutch Settlers, Long Island Sound, c.1600s

Manhasset Bay, passed through the thick North Shore woodlands, and established the town of Hempstead near clear streams and ponds.

The 50 original families planned carefully and purchased a large portion of land from the sachems (leaders) of the Massapequa, Merioke and Rockaway Indians who lived in the region running from the Long Island Sound south to the Atlantic Ocean. The small number of Indians in Nassau declined rapidly through disease brought by the settlers. Today many Native American place names are a reminder of Long Island's original residents.

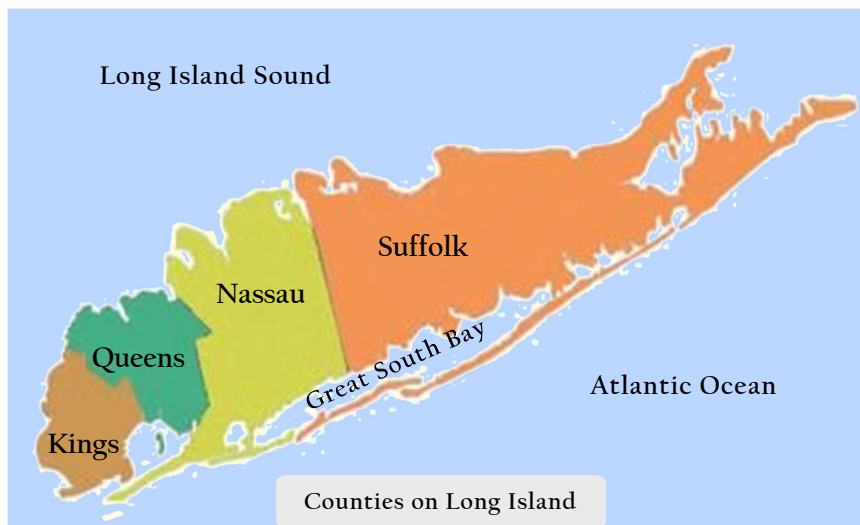
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The settlers also received a Dutch patent allowing the incorporation of a town government that still provides local services on Long Island today. In 1664, the British ousted the Dutch from New Amsterdam and established New York colony. The small hamlet of Hempstead hosted the first colonial convention of 1665. There, leaders adopted the "Duke's Laws" which established basic government for the new colony.

In 1683, Long Island was divided into three counties: Kings, Suffolk, and Queens. Queens County included western Long Island, as well as the present day towns of Hempstead and Oyster Bay. The towns grew slowly as quiet farm lands through the early 1700's, although its plains provided ideal sites for colonial horse racing tracks.



On January 1st, 1898, all the western towns in Queens County became part of New York City. The eastern towns--Hempstead, North Hempstead, and Oyster Bay--were excluded from Greater New York but remained part of Queens County.

On January 22nd of that year, a citizens' meeting in Allen's Hotel in Mineola set the stage for the separation of the three towns by proposing the creation of a new Nassau County. The name was proposed since it reflects the region's earliest Dutch and English colonial heritage, and was used for Long Island as the "Isle of Nassau" honoring William III (1650-1702), who was King of England, Stadholder (governor) of the Netherlands, member of the House of Nassau, and great-grandson of the Prince of Orange. After a bitter battle in Albany, the law creating the new county was signed by Governor Frank S. Black on April 27th, to take effect on January 1st of 1899.



Map of Nassau County, Long Island

**Nassau County  
Is composed of:**

**3 Towns**

- Hempstead
- N. Hempstead
- Oyster Bay

**2 Cities**

- Glen Cove
- Long Beach

**64 Incorporated Villages**

County residents elected the officials of the new county and chose the location of the county seat within one mile of the railroad station Mineola. Today, it is still an easy walk from the Mineola railroad station to county buildings actually located in neighboring Garden City.



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**Mineola Government Offices (County Seat)**



Maureen O'Connell  
Nassau County  
Clerk  
2006-present



Office of the Nassau County Clerk  
240 Old Country Road, Mineola



Office of the County Executive  
1550 Franklin Ave, Mineola



County Court  
262 Old Country Rd, Mineola



Supreme Court  
100 Supreme Court Dr, Mineola

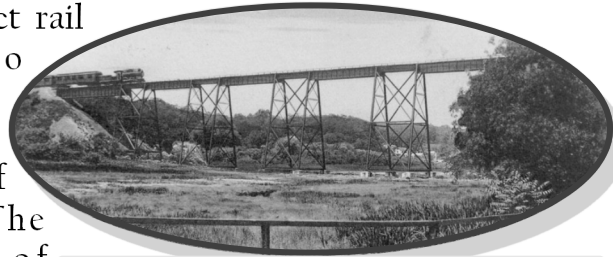
## Nassau County Grows

The courthouse referendum indicates the important role the railroad played in local growth. By the end of the Civil War in 1865, tracks ran along the center, and the north and south



Long Island Railroad Steam Engine

shores of the Island. By the turn of the century, the Long Island Rail Road had become the dominant means of transportation to New York City. In 1911, the railroad completed direct rail service to Pennsylvania Station in the heart of Manhattan. The population of Nassau's small villages along the railroad lines swelled with commuters, leaping from 55,448 in 1900 to 303,053 in 1930.



LIRR early years crossing Manhasset Bay



Central Ave Bethpage bridge construction, Vanderbilt Cup Races, 1908



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Towns located along the tracks--Port Washington, Rockville Centre, Freeport among them--experienced



Steamboat on long Island Sound, Sea Cliff, c.1906

rapid growth as the population expanded with commuters and local businesses to support them. Trains and steamboats also brought tourists to the beautiful seaside. Waterfront communities such as Sea Cliff, founded as a Methodist camp meeting ground, blossomed. The wooded North Shore attracted prominent New Yorkers to establish vacation homes.



Long Island Sound, Oyster Bay, c.1900s

In the early 1900's, up to the Depression of the early 1930's, North Shore farmlands became the site of expensive country estates for wealthy New Yorkers. The Long Island "Gold Coast" across the entire north shore of Nassau has left a legacy of elegance, open space, and spectacular architecture that can still be seen today.

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Even before the Civil War, noted editor William C. Bryant established his country estate, Cedarmere, in Roslyn. In 1899, telegraph company tycoon Clarence Mackay built his 650-acre Harborhill complex, also in



President Theodore Roosevelt, c.1900

Roslyn. In 1885, Theodore Roosevelt built Sagamore Hill at Oyster Bay. Roosevelt reveled in Nassau County life, writing, "There could be no healthier place to bring children up."

Cedarmere, Roslyn Harbor, Historic property of 19th century poet, William Cullen Bryant

Hundreds of thousands of other Nassau residents have agreed for over a century.



President Roosevelt's home Sagamore Hill, Oyster Bay, c.1902

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The economic impact of the estate construction and real estate development of south shore railroad villages began to create a unique suburban county, its growth weakening the old rural government system in the 1930's. County voters approved a new modernized charter, to take effect on January 1, 1938, the first of its type in New York, to establish a County Executive directing departments to oversee county government with a Board of Supervisors remaining as a purely legislative body.

As commuter villages grew, the sound of engines from above shattered the peace and quiet of the Hempstead Plains. Early airplane pilots soared overhead, testing their craft above this tremendous, flat, open prairie. Spectators gathered at two nationally significant airstrips: Roosevelt Field, a center of civilian aviation, and nearby Mitchel Field, a major army air base.



Aerial view of  
Roosevelt Field c.1931



Aerial view of Mitchel Field c.1930

## Nassau County's Rich Aviation History



Charles Lindbergh before taking off from Roosevelt Field for his record breaking "Transatlantic Flight", May 20, 1927

The aviation industry grew rapidly in Nassau County during



Early days of Aviation at Hempstead Plains

World War II. America's most famous warplanes, important for victory, were built at the Grumman and Republic factories. There, production

continued as a major part of the county's economic base during the post war years and peaked during the 1960's when the technicians at Grumman, working with NASA, built the Lunar Module that successfully landed on the moon in July 1969.



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Grumman  
Bethpage,  
F6F  
Hellcats  
1945



Landing of the first transatlantic  
airship (R 34) at  
Roosevelt field, July 1919



Grumman, Bethpage, Technicians  
at work on a Lunar Modular



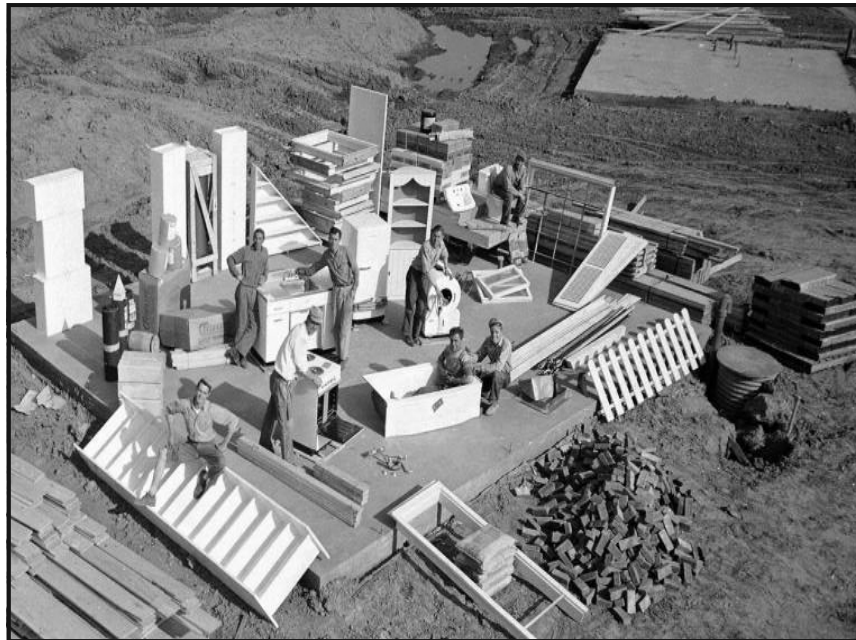
Fitzmaurice Flying Field  
Massapequa Park, 1929

## A Model Suburb

When the guns of World War II fell silent, the soldiers came home and another wave of settlers transformed Nassau County. An advertisement in *Newsday* on May 7th, 1947, offered 2,000 homes for \$60 a month in a new development built on the open Hempstead plains. By the end of the month, more than 6,500 veterans had filed applications for the new housing units of Levittown.



Levittown... in the beginning, c.1947



Levitt house—unassembled



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A giant population wave changed Nassau County, almost overnight from a rural farming community to the nation's largest suburb. So frenetic was the growth during the 1950's that the number of people moving into the county in a single year often surpassed the entire population of 55,448 in 1900. The population doubled in ten years from 1950 to 1960, increasing from 672,000 to 1,300,700, reaching a peak of 1,428,838 in 1970. Major redevelopment of the east/west parkway systems created just before World War II were supplemented by the creation of additional north/south parkways and the Long Island Expressway.

Robert Moses was the “Master Builder” of the 20th century. He shaped the modern suburban culture we live in today. He changed shorelines; built bridges, tunnels and roadways; and transformed neighborhoods. Some of Moses' projects in Nassau County include the Northern State, Southern State, Bethpage State, Meadowbrook State, Wantagh State, Loop and Ocean Parkways. Additionally he built the Long Island Expressway, Bethpage State Park, Jones Beach State Park, Hempstead Lake State Park, Valley Stream State Park and the famous New York World's Fair (Queens County).



While these dramatic economic changes occurred, other institutional development flourished. Local government responded to contemporary problems and the county Board of Supervisors was changed to a more widely representative County Legislature in 1996. The county's educational system of independent local school districts is acclaimed as among the best in the nation and is enhanced by strong local colleges and universities. An increasing ethnic diversity of its population in the 1990's has enriched the county's cultural and religious life.

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In the subsequent decades of the 1980's and '90's, population growth ceased but the county's economic base and business/educational/recreational infrastructure changed dramatically as every aspect matured within the changes affecting all of America. Manufacturing, particularly the aviation industry, declined while retail and service employment boomed. A dramatic increase in office construction with some buildings exceeding over 1,000,000 square feet, changed the Nassau horizon and established it as a major place of white collar employment. Nassau County family income is in the top ten percent of the nation with the number one retail sales per household.

Modern day places across Nassau



Long Island Children's Museum



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**Nassau County-Yesteryear**



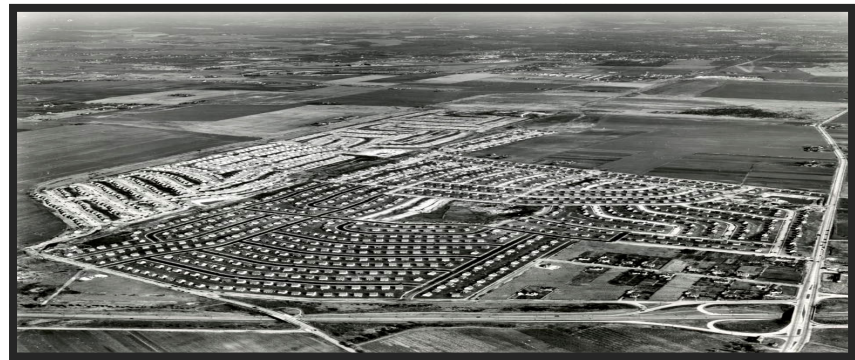
Jericho Tpke & Willis Ave,  
Mineola, 1920



West Hempstead Trolley,  
area of Hempstead Ave, 1920



Hempstead Tpke & Loring Rd,  
Levittown, c.1930s



Hempstead Plains, Levittown, 1947

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International Aviation Tournament  
at Belmont Park Racetrack,  
Wright Brothers attended, 1910



John Bevins Moisant "Captain  
Kitty", a pioneer United States  
aviator, was never without his  
beloved tabby cat, Mademoiselle Fifi.



Elinor Smith "Flyer Flapper of  
Freeport", voted the Best  
Woman Pilot in the USA, 1930



Roosevelt Field, 1928



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**Nassau County-Yesteryear**



Roads being cleared  
on the North Shore



Vanderbilt Cup Race  
Carman Ave, East Meadow  
Early 1900s



Curtiss Biplane taking off from Hempstead Plains, 1920



Mineola Train Station, 1940

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