

Historical Geography:

Long Island in the 20th Century

Copyright 2011 AFG

1

Long Island in the 20th Century

- Areas of Long Island take on unique looks.
- In the early 1900s parts of Brooklyn and Queens (now a part of NYC) quickly urbanize and industrialize; rest retains a rural atmosphere.
- Nassau and Suffolk develop differently in the years before World War II (1900 - 1940) and the years after World War II (1945 -1980s).
 - Pre-war was "living the good life."
 - Post-war was "making a better life."

Copyright 2011 AFG

2

L.I. in the 20th Century, 2

- In the 1960/70s civil unrest and an economic turndown begin to blight neighborhoods of Brooklyn and Queens and spill into Nassau and Suffolk towns.
- In Nassau and Suffolk, even the *better life* gets old and aging takes its toll (1980s - present).
- The first decade of the 21st century brings a reassessment to the entire Long Island landscape.

Copyright 2011 AFG

3

Question of the Day

Providing Long Island with Power

**Local generation?
Non-traditional generation?**

Copyright 2011 AFG

4

Catalysts for Development

- Leisure-time activities
- Transportation improvements
- Automobile
- American dream
- Suburbanization
- Industrialization
- Changes in local agriculture
- Reassessment

Copyright 2011 AFG

5

Catalysts for Development: Leisure-time Activities

- Coney Island and the Rockaways draw NYC common folk to the beaches and amusement parks.
- Nassau and Suffolk became the weekend and summertime destinations of the rich and famous.
 - Gold Coast mansions and yacht clubs.
 - Sailing on LIS and the Atlantic Ocean
 - Hunting and riding on the estates.
 - Auto and horse racing on specially-built tracks.
 - Ocean beach resorts of the Hamptons and Montauk Point.

Copyright 2011 AFG

6

Catalysts for Development: The Automobile

- Although invented in 1885 and available in the 1890s, it did not become popular to the masses until 1914.
- **Driving was considered a leisure-time activity. Parkways were built.**
- NYC residents went to the open spaces of Long Island to drive on the parkways and to race their vehicles.

Copyright 2011 AFG

7

Catalysts for Development: The Automobile

- **Long Island Motor Parkway was the world's first high-speed, limited access paved roadway.**
- Ran 50 miles from central Queens to Lake Ronkonkoma.
- It was the site of the Vanderbilt Cup Race (started in 1908).
- It became a toll road (1920) because it was the safest automobile road on L.I.

Copyright 2011 AFG

8

Catalysts for Development: Transportation

- While the City of Brooklyn and the Town of Bushwick became urban-industrial areas in the late 1800s, most of Brooklyn and Queens remained rural farmland.
 >>>Add Transportation to the Mix<<<.
 >>>Needed if areas outside of a city are to grow<<<
- Horse-drawn cars linked towns on LI to East River ferries.
- **In 1883 the opening of the Brooklyn Bridge increased the volume and speed of traffic between NYC and the City of Brooklyn.**

Copyright 2011 AFG

9

Transportation

- In 1885 Manhattan's elevated rail line or "El" reached the Brooklyn Bridge.
- It allowed people to move to less the crowded living conditions in Brooklyn and still be linked to Manhattan.
- Soon the El was extended across the BB into Brooklyn and trolley lines linked it to the villages of Brooklyn and Queens.
- Rail lines spread across Bklyn and Queens

Copyright 2011 AFG

10

Transportation Links

- Williamsburg Bridge (1903) was opened for road and rail traffic.
- The first subway tunnel under the East River was opened in 1907.
- Blackwell's Island Br (now Koch-Queensboro) and Manhattan Br are opened in 1909.
- LIRR completes a tunnel that links LI with Penn Station (1910). Passengers have a direct ride into Manhattan.

Copyright 2011 AFG

11

Transportation Links

- Long Island roads are narrow, congested and dangerous.
- In the 1920s to accommodate automobile traffic, parkways are built under Robert Moses' vision of Long Island's future: **parks linked by roads.**
- Triborough Bridge (1936), Whitestone Br. (1939) and Queens-Midtown Tunnel (1940) are opened.
- **The suburbanization of Long Island began in earnest.**

Copyright 2011 AFG

12

Catalysts for Development: Industrialization

- Brooklyn/Queens East River waterfronts first experienced the growth of industry after the opening of the Erie Canal (1825).
- After the Civil War (late 1860s/70s) Brooklyn benefited from Manhattan's industrial and commercial growth.
- Cargo ships docked at its piers; factories were built along the East River.

Copyright 2011 AFG

13

Catalysts for Development: Industrialization

- Western LI grew in population and became more urban in character while eastern LI's population remained stable and rural.
- There were local pockets of manufacturing: shipbuilding, pottery (from clay), starch (from corn), crushed stone.

Copyright 2011 AFG

14

Catalysts for Development: Industrialization

- The Great Depression (1929) hurt eastern LI less than western LI.
- Suffolk County fared the best with its emphasis on farming and fishing.
- Resort industry suffered in the 1930s and early 1940s; mansions were closed.

Copyright 2011 AFG

15

Catalysts for Development: Suburbanization

- Suburbanization of LI outside of Brooklyn and Queens grows as transportation is improved.
- The LIRR encourages movement east, opens a rail tunnel to Manhattan, and electrifies its lines.
- The aviation industry is LI's chief employer.
- In the 1930s: more than 30,000 people commute via the LIRR.
- The Great Depression (1929) stops Nassau's real estate and housing construction boom.

Copyright 2011 AFG

16

Catalysts for Development: The American Dream

- After the end of WWII and the return of military men, the American Dream of a better life outside of the crowded city began to come true.
- The wish for a house in the country, with a yard for the kids and dog, a garage for the car, and separate bedrooms for family members sparked a move to the areas surrounding cities: the suburbs.
- For NYC, this was Nassau County.

Copyright 2011 AFG

17

Catalysts for Development: The American Dream

- Levitt & Sons decide to build 2000 rentals for returning veterans in Island Trees (1947).
- Using a model of mass production construction, they quickly and cheaply build houses at a rate of 30/day. Levittown was born.
- In the mid-1950s Suffolk experienced suburban growth as educational and research institutions, aerospace industries and other technology-based industries were established there or grew in size.

Copyright 2011 AFG

18

Catalysts for Development: The American Dream takes a Hit

- By the 1970s people were moving out of Nassau Co. into less crowded Suffolk Co., which in turn was becoming crowded.
- Farmland and open space began to disappear as landowners subdivided their property and sold to developers.
- With end of the Cold War military and aerospace industries begin to down size and jobs are lost.
- Nassau/Suffolk were slow to transition from a military to a service economy.

Copyright 2011 AFG

19

Suburbia

Levittown planned
community



Copyright 2011 AFG

Roosevelt Field
Shopping Mall



20

Question of the Day

Viewing Levittown
60 years Later

Copyright 2011 AFG

21

LI is the Cradle of US Aviation

- LI's aircraft industry began in 1909.
- Mineola and Westbury were testing areas.
- Extensive, flat treeless land (for landing strips), labor force, local financial backers favored its development. (Belmont sponsored an international aerial tournament in 1910 at his race track.)
- 1914 a military flight training school was set up in Hempstead (present-day Roosevelt Field).

Copyright 2011 AFG

22

LI is the Cradle of US Aviation

- The aircraft industry grew to national importance (1929-1980s):
 - Grumman Aircraft in Bethpage
 - Republic Aviation in Farmingdale.
 - Sperry Gyroscope in Lake Success & Garden City
 - Fairchild Camera, Liberty Aircraft Products in Farmingdale
- During WWII defensive installations had to be built to protect the aircraft industry which specialized in military aircraft.
- By the end of WWII, over 83,000 workers were employed: 60% were women during the 1940s.

Copyright 2011 AFG

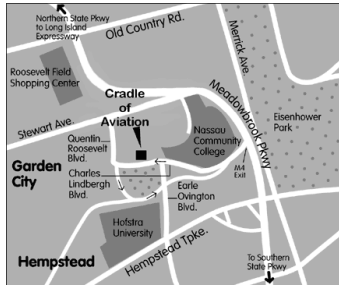
LI is the Cradle of US Aviation

- <http://www.cradleofaviation.org/timeline/index.html>
 - 1902 First powered airships take off from Coney Island
 - 1909 First aircraft built in Mineola
 - 1911 First aircraft manufacturing company opens in Hempstead
 - 1915 Hempstead Plains Aerodrome >> Hazelhurst Field >> Roosevelt Field (originally a military training field)
 - 1916 Naval air stations established around LI
 - 1917 Curtiss Field and manufacturing plant in Valley Stream
 - 1918 Aerial torpedoes tested in Great South Bay
 - 1931 Floyd Bennett Field, Brooklyn, NYC's first municipal airport
 - 1939 NY Municipal Airport, Queens >> LaGuardia
 - 1942 Islip Airport (defense landing field) >> MacArthur Airport
 - 1948 Idlewild Airport, Queens >> Kennedy International

Copyright 2011 AFG

24

Cradle of Aviation Museum



Copyright 2011 AFG

25

Catalysts for Development: Changes in Agriculture

- **Early 1900s:** agriculture is a major industry on LI
- It supplies NYC with fresh **vegetables, fruits and dairy**. Farms are small, family run businesses.
- **1940s:** worm destroys Nassau's potatoes.
- **After WWII:** the farms of Nassau, then western Suffolk, begin to disappear (suburbanization spreads).
- **1970s:** potato beetle infestation affects eastern Suffolk.
- **1975:** Suffolk enacts farm preservation program.

Copyright 2011 AFG

26

Catalysts for Development: Changes in Agriculture

- **Horticulture and floriculture** which caters to suburban homeowners thrives. Suffolk leads NYS in production; it is important in Nassau, too.
- **1980s:** **Vineyards** are planted on the North Fork.
- **1990s:** **Pumpkins, strawberries** and other U-Pick crops become popular.
- **2010:** Suffolk Co. ranks first in NYS in total receipts from agriculture.

Copyright 2011 AFG

27

Catalysts for Development: Reassessment

- Since the 1980s Long Island residents, including those in NYC, have begun to look at their areas from different points of view.
- Quality of life issues
- Aging and changing population
- Aging infrastructure
- Maintenance of open space
- Urbanization and everything that goes with it.

Copyright 2011 AFG

28