THE VILLAGE OF GREAT NECK

People Remember The Way It Was
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the Incorporated Village of Great Neck
The Village of Great Neck is one of nine villages that (together with several unincorporated sections) make up Great Neck - part of the Town of North Hempstead and of Nassau County. Among Great Neck's earliest settlements - some say the first "of any real importance and presence" here - it is still called by many "the old Village." It occupies 1.3 square miles, more than any other village except for Kings Point and Lake Success.

As of 1990 the Village had 8745 people - down from a high of 10,731 in 1970, but still three thousand more than the next highest village.

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130 YEARS OF VILLAGE HISTORY

1867  First Post Office in Great Neck opened in Nehemiah Hayden's General Store near Beach Road
1868  Union Free Chapel built, first church in Great Neck since colonial times (later used by the Chapel Players, and now the Village School)
1870s-1880s Era of large estates in Great Neck begins
1876  First wooden building of St. Aloysius Church built (replaced by present buildings in 1913)
1886  All Saints Church built
1886  First voting station in Great Neck opened near Beach Road (before then, voters travelled to Manhasset)
1892  First telephone in Great Neck installed in Hicks General Store on Beach Road
1906  Bank of Great Neck is formed (first bank on the peninsula)
1913  Great Neck Health League (later the Great Neck Visiting Nurse Association) is formed to help workers on large estates
1916  Day nursery opens on Arrandale Avenue for children of working mothers (fee: ten cents per day per child, twenty-five cents for a family of three).
1922  Village of Great Neck (population 2290) incorporates
1926  Tuscan Court, one of first apartment houses in Village, goes up
1931 Baker Hill and Vista Hill areas added to Village, as result of new construction
1932 Weybridge area added to Village
1937 Strathmore area added to Village
1945 Start of postwar population growth (from 6200 in 1940 to 10,700 in 1970)
1953 Better Government Party replaces Old Village Party in office
1990 Federal Census puts Village population at 8745

AN OVERVIEW OF VILLAGE HISTORY

When oldtime residents said "the Village" or "the Upper Village", they meant not today's entire Village of Great Neck but a small section along Middle Neck Road, clustering mostly between Hicks Lane and Beach Road. Like the rest of Great Neck, the Village was almost exclusively farm and orchard from its settlement in the 1660s into the nineteenth century. In that century it became a small center of commerce for all of Great Neck, either selling to farmers or servicing farmers' needs.

As a business center, in time it naturally also became the social, civic and population center as well. Most of the Village's oldest stores and institutions were along a small section of Middle Neck Road near the present Village Green - Great Neck's first four schools, its oldest church, its oldest synagogue, its first bank, its first public library building, its first telephone switchboard, its first post office, its first voting hall, and its first fire house. When the Village incorporated, the first Village Halls, naturally enough, were in this area. Many of our prominent families have
been business families - Hayden, Hicks, Gregory, Gilliar, Bullen, Austin, Ninesling, Gutheil - and many business leaders served as our early mayors.

All through the nineteenth century village population was probably less than one thousand people. (All of Great Neck had only 2000 people or so at the end of the century.) A single one-room schoolhouse, located in the village, was adequate for all of Great Neck until after the Civil War. Until the same time people had to travel outside Great Neck to attend a church, mail a letter or vote. Buildings were low and few, so that people looking up could see the long curve of a roadbed, a rolling hill, or a distant horizon. Along Middle Neck Road itself were still large farms belonging to the Wooley, Baker, Allen, Ellard, Hicks, and Regan families.

Around the eighteen-seventies and eighties, when wealthy socialites discovered Great Neck as a summer resort and as a site for a grand estate, Village farmland started shrinking and village business expanding. Steamboat Road, with its closeness to the ferry and to the Kings Point estates, was a lively part of town then, with hotels, stores, taverns, rooming houses and residences for estate workers.

Along with other parts of Great Neck, the Village had several real estate booms, especially after direct railroad service to New York was provided in the early days of the century. To get the services it now needed, and to control the direction growth would take, the Village - then only one square mile, with a population
of 2290 - became incorporated in 1922. Only fifty-seven ballots were cast - fifty-five for and two against.

Between 1922 and 1960 - 38 years - the Village’s population more than quadrupled, from 2300 to 10,100. (In the same period Nassau County’s population increased ten-fold - from 130,000 to 1,300,000.) Much of this growth resulted from pent-up housing demands and from veterans seeking homes after the war. Even in the thirties, however, a decade of deep depression, we grew by over fifty per cent. In this thirty-eight year period Nirvana Gardens, Strathmore, Weybridge, and Baker Hill houses were all built, as well as most of our apartment houses.

In recent decades, the pattern has reversed; between 1970 and 1990 the overall population of the Village declined by almost 2000 (almost 20%).
PEOPLE REMEMBER THE OLD VILLAGE

No paved roads, no sidewalks, no lights, no gas, no bank, and just the one telephone. (Egbert LeCluse, describing Great Neck as it was in 1898)

There were more horses in the center of town than in a cowboy movie. Our local lamplighter, Jacob Schmidt, had his horse trained to zig-zag back and forth from one kerosene lamp to another along Middle Neck Road. Jacob would light them at dusk and douse them at dawn, polish chimneys, refill the tanks and trim the wicks - all for $150 a year. (I.G. Wolf)

At that time [1880s and 1890s] most baptisms were performed in the homes of the parishioners. Often the family would not let Father Smith leave until he had danced a special exhibition jig. (St. Aloysius Parish 1876-1976)

Before they had their own church, some fifty Catholic families of Great Neck walked or rode in carriages, wagons, on sleighs, or on horseback to their churches [in Manhasset and College Point], a distance of many miles, to attend Mass. When the weather made attendance at Mass impossible, the families would meet in each other's houses on Sundays. (St. Aloysius Parish 1876-1976)

I could tell so many things of the Union Sunday School. The strawberry festivals, the mid-summer picnics when the farmers would come with their market wagons all decorated with flags and bunting, and bells on the horses. The children would pile in the wagon and go to some grove for the day. (Robert Ellard)
After he left office, Willis Bryant, Mayor of the Village of Great Neck from 1937 to 1951, dictated to the Village historian what he thought significant about his life in Great Neck. He spoke, of course, of his accomplishments in office, but his reminiscences came alive when he talked about the kind of life that is no more - the dentist who came to town once a week; the open air movie that also came once a week, to Middle Neck and North Roads, charging fifteen cents admission, and canceling the show when it rained; the estates that closed for the winter every October, taking the domestic workers back to New York and laying off the gardeners. And he remembered an old department store, Ninesling's, and the house next door where the Ninesling family lived. Village Hall then was a store on the corner of Middle Neck and Baker Hill Roads.

Village oldtimers still recall an era in their lifetime, before even the earliest chain store, when housewives did not go to the store but either phoned in their orders or waited for the tradesmen to come around with their horses and wagons to take and deliver orders, when you bought everything on credit and settled the bill once a month (the storeowner knew who everyone was), and when you combined a trip to a shop with picking up your mail from the post office.

The Village not so long ago: a prevalence of boarding houses and saloons, ice skating on ponds no longer here, rowing across Manhasset Bay to visit friends, clambering on the family wagon to go on a picnic, soda fountains and penny candy, morning, afternoon and evening newspapers, empty lots where stores now do brisk business. In winter, merchants once sponsored
sleigh-trotting events between Hicks Lane and the Alert Fire House.

The fare on the Universal Open Air Bus was five cents then; on Sundays the bus arrived at St. Aloysius in time for each Mass and departed when Mass was over. Even though most of Great Neck’s theater people lived outside the Village, with so many nearby when a church or the Red Cross needed to raise funds it seemed second nature to turn to a theatrical extravaganza.

A letter written in 1880 (a copy is in the Great Neck Library) is addressed simply to "Katie Shea, Great Neck Post Office, Long Island"; no need for any street address or house number. You picked up your mail.

Egbert LeCluse’s general store had the second telephone in Great Neck, with an easily-remembered number: Great Neck 2. LeCluse claimed he’d send his delivery boy around with messages, that people would then come in to return the call, and that it was wonderful for business.

The Alert Fire Department, organized in 1901, owned no horses. When a fire started, nearby residents with teams of horses scrambled to get to the firehouse early to hire out their team to carry the volunteers and their equipment.

Traffic lights were still infrequent well into the century. According to a local merchant, after one was installed at the corner of Beach and Middle Neck Roads in the mid-twenties,
there were so many accidents it had to be removed. "No one knew which side to go on."

Even in 1946, the Village Sanitation Department's published schedule provided for days to collect ashes from homes, "dry and free from embers." There were Nash, Pontiac, Buick and Oldsmobile Dealers on Middle Neck Road, an Atwater Kent Radio Store, and many dressmakers and hand laundries.

What was it like to live in the Village before it assumed its present form? On the following pages are personal testimonies, some from decades ago and some given recently.

(All unattributed statements are from interviews conducted by the author)

Emily Robbins Child

The village [at the end of the nineteenth century] consisted of a post office, a small meat market, two to three general stores...the very necessary blacksmiths and a few houses, and the school, a tiny affair with three teachers.

It seems to me there was no one in Great Neck too poor to own a horse and buggy. And everyone simply had to have a sleigh.

In those days there were none of the modern improvements. The only water supply came from wells in the backyard. There was not a sidewalk, to say nothing of a paved street. Nor was there a single lighted street, if you excepted the illumination that came from the houses.
A drive in those first cars was an adventure. No one thought of trying to meet a train or keeping an appointment. You were fortunate indeed if you reached home without the aid of a horse. One Kings Pointer actually had a neighbor arrested for driving a car. The trial was a delight to the rest of Great Neck, who attended as a body.

The big places had beautiful parks kept up by the labor of a large number of workmen. How little they were paid! They worked ten hours and walked back and forth to their work - in some cases a two or three mile walk. We would meet them in the evening after their day of toil walking home in squads. They would tip their hats most deferentially.

(from a manuscript in the Great Neck Library)

Mills P. Baker

On a clear day, from our farm I could see the tower on the top of the Woolworth Building on lower Broadway. My father told me he was once delivering a load of hay to Long Island City, and on Northern Boulevard the wagon broke down. He sold the wagon and load of hay on the spot and rode one of the horses home.

In my last two years in High School we had sleigh rides, usually on Friday nights. The bottom of our box sleigh was covered with straw. There were usually five or six couples and a teacher as a chaperone. The ride lasted a couple of hours.
Of my fourth grade class of thirty-four pupils, only three graduated high school. The boys who dropped out of our class became carpenters, painters, mechanics, etc. I don’t know what the girls did but I imagine some of them ‘went into service’ at some of the big shorefront estates.

(from his book *Breezy Hill*)

Tanya Gutieri

Wood Road was just a cowpath then [1915] but the surroundings seemed so enormous. There was so much beauty and wildness to explore. Elderberry bushes grew wild. Lilacs were all about us. I can never forget the smell of the honeysuckle. We picked raspberries, apples and cherries. Mama made jellies and pies. This Great Neck was certainly a bit of heaven.

(from a letter to the Village Newsletter, March-April 1982)

Grace Eggers

Great Neck [long ago] consisted of estates and people working on the estates and the local store keepers. Mr. Marino of Marino’s Fish Market would wheel a fish cart to East Shore Road. Many peddlers came through.

People would harness up horses to the market wagon and all the families would go to the fair, where Roosevelt Field is now.

(from a statement to the Village historian, 1972)
I.G. Wolf

The biggest store in town was Ninesling’s, where you could get anything from a hammer to a haircut. More than once I waited with half a haircut while Old Man Ninesling took time out to sell a yard of calico.

I built Tuscan Court, one of Great Neck’s first three apartment houses, with "Sport" Ward. On a trip to Northern Italy he had taken 2500 feet of film showing picturesque old Tuscany. He persuaded me to reproduce a miniature of Tuscany which would look five hundred years old, complete with worm-eaten cypress, moss painted on the leaders, and patches of rotten cement and brick painted in the corners. In order to make it completely authentic, we had a grapevine climbing up the walls. It was leased for six days by a big film company for one of Tom Meighan’s pictures.

(from Great Neck Circle Magazine, October 1951)

Robert Ellard

The social life was simple but wholesome and pleasant and consisted of home parties with games and dancing and an occasional surprise party; straw rides; sailing parties; Indian clam bakes on the shore or in some grove. In the winter time when the bay was frozen enough they took to horse racing on Manhasset Bay. Sometimes when sleighing was good, horse racing with sleighs was also carried out on the Main Street. This
was....a test to see if the county fair could have an entry from Great Neck.

In order to call a doctor someone had to drive and get the doctor and bring him to their home, and as a matter of convenience the doctors had a slate in each store where one could leave their name for a call and the doctors, on their rounds, would check. We had three doctors then....who took care of all the ills of the people from surgery to teeth extraction.

In the supply time for fresh meat the butcher wagon came around two or three times a week....The cook would get her supply of meat, the dog a bone and the cat a piece of liver or something and goodbye until the next call.

The grocery man too would make his rounds every few days - usually twice a week. Then too we had the traveling dry goods store on wheels where mother bought yard goods for a new skirt, and for pop a new pair of pants or overalls. This [late nineteenth century] was the era of the Top Hat and frock coat for the gentlemen and beautifully dressed ladies, beautiful carriages, well groomed horses with their silver mounted harness. Carriages were either team drawn or single horse but all well turned-out....Then there was the stream of guests at the Nassau Hotel and their wives and families coming to meet them on their return. During the peak of the [resort] season there was a dance at the Hotel each Friday night, and the musicians came on the boat and returned to New York by boat the next morning.

(from a manuscript in the Great Neck Library, A Stroll in Memory Lane 1963)
Margaret Hoey

My mother, my grandmother, my father and my father’s father were born in Great Neck. Our dad was born in 1868, our mother in 1869. Our grandmother was born in 1848. Nana would walk to Manhasset. Before St. Aloysius was built she would walk to Flushing to St. Mary’s Church - and it was not uncommon for people to walk there.

I was born in a lovely old home on Potters Lane. I’ve lived here [on Maple Street] since 1966 in a house moved to that location from Middle Neck Road. There were six of those houses all alike on property across Middle Neck Road from where Food Emporium is located now. Our dad moved those houses in 1908, some to Hicks Lane and some to Maple Street. I’m living in one of those little houses now.

Folks passing Nana’s house on Potter’s Lane would stop in and sit on the porch with my grandmother. Grandmother had her little rocking chair on the porch and she wore her little white tea apron always, even when she was resting or reading on the porch, and folks would stop in and have conversations with her.

Our dad was born on the Farnum property in Kings Point. I remember the pond where we had the lovely swans, where we had the cygnets, the raccoons, the pheasants. They’re still there.

Our dad would take us with the horse and buggy to Hoyt’s shore, and that’s where we’d swim, from Hoyt’s shore. We would enter
that area just before you come to the wooden bridge over the creek as you came to Mr. Brickman's estate.

At Steamboat Landing there was a steamboat which would bring the gentlemen here from Wall Street - and their coachmen would be awaiting the boat, between 4:30 and 5 o'clock. The coachman and the man who sat on the high seat with him; maybe two horses, maybe four. Thoroughbreds, to be sure. My aunt Kate would walk from her home on Potter's Lane to the Steamboat Landing between 4:30 and 5 in the afternoon just to see the gentlemen step off the boat - the beautiful livery - and maybe their wives and children to meet them.

(from an interview with Muriel Borin)

**Kathleen Wilson**

My father was an overseer for the Preston Pope Satterwhite estate on West Shore Road. When they were away we lived in "the big house"; otherwise we lived on Wood Road. The people who worked on the estates didn't live with the family; they were there when they were needed.

The Satterwhites kept horses, and the big limousines where the chauffeur rode up high. They had a home in New York and one in Palm Beach. Even when they were living in their New York house, they'd come out to Great Neck for Christmas. They gave a big party for their friends, but they invited the families who worked on the estates to come. They gave the girls dolls and the boys mechanical toys. They didn't exactly pat you on the head, but you felt they were going to.
There were just three houses on Wood Road then. Father had his own backyard, a vegetable garden. Starting from Arrandale Road there was a wooded space, then a pond. In winter it froze, and people skated.

My father and mother were born in Ireland, but he had a sister living on Hicks Lane; that wasn’t so built up then. It was a good-sized property, like a small farm. Her husband ran the Farnum farm.

Fairview used to be the end of the Village. We used to call the area around the station ‘the other Village’. The station itself used to be not much more than a shack.

Faigle’s Meat Market was very well known, but not everyone could go there, because it was expensive. The well-to-do people would buy from him. Mr. Faigle had a wooden building, somewhere between the bank and Hicks Lane. Hicks Lane was always a very busy corner.

The only hospital was in Mineola. If you had your tonsils out, you went there. It didn’t seem far; no one thought that much about traveling. People just accepted the fact. You could go to Mercy Hospital in Rockville Center.

It was an event when we went to the movies - not like today. In the winter we swam in the water, but not at a public beach, so there weren’t many people there. We didn’t care for it especially. We used to climb and sit on the big rocks.
My father came over from Germany in 1888 or 1889; my mother came a little later and worked as a kitchen maid. My father started a grocery in Hell's Kitchen and one in Jamaica - "the Jamaica Beef Trust" - but he lost both businesses playing pinochle. He came here and worked for Pat Sellers where Massaro now has his oil business, and then he and my uncle opened their grocery at Middle Neck and Beach Road [Kortlander & Rempe], at the corner where the Village Green is now.

Great Neck was really a summer place, and I delivered to all those people - Eldridge, Hearn, Aldrich (later Sloan), Cord Meyer, Satterwhite, the theatrical people - I delivered groceries to them. We had an old model T Ford; before then we had a two horse carriage; Mr. Ellard took an old carriage and attached it to the front of a car, and that became our delivery wagon. The butler would telephone the order in; the boss would tell him what to buy, and the butler called. Or I'd go around to collect orders from people who were too poor to have phones. We sold things on credit, till the A&P came along.

I delivered to the kitchen; the butler and cook were very nice, but there were no tips in those days. Once in a while there'd be a Christmas present, but the boss gave it to the butler to give to us, and you couldn't be sure he didn't just keep it. Butlers did all right; $150 a month plus board - good living!
Before there was rail my father used to get his freight by boat; there used to be parking lots at the end of Steamboat Road. I always wondered why they let the Academy close off Steamboat Road; before then you could take the road right down to the water.

The first beach for Great Neck people was at the end of Beach Road, alongside the Grist Mill. Eldridge didn’t like us coming, but it was public land. Then they moved us next to Hayden’s coalyard; when they unloaded the coal into his yard we used to get all the dust. They said we got bath houses out of the move, but they only did it for their own advantage.

The Mitchell who owned the Mitchell estate was mayor of New York. When kids went there to collect berries his superintendent Ferguson tried to chase us away, but Mitchell told him, "Leave the kids alone. We can’t eat all those berries ourselves." From then on we went down with pails. The berries there were bigger than the ones you get in the stores.

The school athletic field was Grace’s property; it was a cow lot and an orchard. The Grace estate also had a polo field. I used to walk there from Main Street when I was a boy; I used to get ten cents to walk the horses before the polo match. (All the kids called Middle Neck Road "Main Street", even though that wasn’t its name. We called Elm Point Road "New Road").

My house was on the Brokaw estate. My brother tells people that he was born in the Food Emporium parking lot. Brokaw
Lane was just a service road; later they had to move the street one hundred feet south to allow room for the houses they were building there. I used that service road when I was delivering.

I used to get milk from Mr. Thomas, who was superintendent of the Brokaw estate. Selling it was part of his pay, I guess. Every night I walked there with a two-quart pail; I put down an empty pail and picked up a full one. The milk wasn’t pasteurized, but my mother would boil it; she took the cream off first and used to whip it for cake.

I was an altar boy in the old church [St. Aloysius]; I remember we had a shed in back of the church where the farmers left their horses. I hunted rabbits on Baker Hill Road.

Do you remember Murphy the Mover? He was hired by Olga Petrova to move a piano up to her second floor, and she was abusing him all the way about his not scratching the piano, until when he had hoisted the piano half way up and she wouldn’t stop he told his helper just to leave it there in the air and they walked off. She called him back and agreed to leave the house until he finished the job.

Timothy Reed

Where my house is now [Hayden Avenue] used to be a potato field. We used to go ice skating on the pond at the bottom of Baker Hill. I’d go crabbing at the Mill Pond which was at the Grist Mill; that’s the same water that’s behind the Library.
Everyone had his own chickens, and some had hogs. The boys went to the shore to gather driftwood for the fire to boil the hogs - and the boys were given the pig's bladder to use for football. When I was twelve or fourteen, I earned money killing and plucking chickens - five cents per family, no matter how many chickens there were. I did this Fridays, for the family to have for the Sunday meal. You ate chicken on Sunday; during the week you ate pork and soup and so on that you bought from the butcher. You never had steak.

My father was a butcher who worked for Faigle's. The old school room had been on the floor above the store; when I went there to get a bag of sawdust I'd see the old school records kept there.

There were no hospitals nearby then, so people used to go to New York City to give birth.

During the depression there were community gardens where Park Circle is now. You were free to plant vegetables to feed your family. You were given a bag of beans, lard, a bag of flour, and sugar - and you made or grew your own food.

There were morning papers, afternoon papers, and evening papers at 4 P.M. so men could look up how their stock had done that day. The barber shop had a shelf lined with shaving mugs, because everyone had his own. The owner of the ice cream store made his own ice cream, and came down the street in a horse and wagon - three cents for an ice cream cone.
There was a bike shop on Middle Neck Road. Thurston gave you the tools, and you fixed the bike yourself. When you found rubber bands you saved them and made rubber band balls, because you’d use them to patch the rubber tires.

Dr. Alexander Allen
My father was a gardener on the Booth estate; he came to Great Neck in 1900. He thought his life here was a good one; he was paid $30 a month, big pay for those days. He didn’t live on the estate; he rented a house.

He knew how to read and write, so he became a secretary for people here; he wrote for people who needed letters to Lithuania, and then when the answers came - mail from there came only two or three times a year - he read the answers aloud. My father was the center of the Lithuanian circle here; he was interested in bringing people over. When the people came, naturally they boarded with us until they located or got married. Eventually they all bought the houses they used to rent.

Everyone in Lithuania could farm and could do everything with his hands. My father built his own office and the furniture in it, and his tool chest. He made his own sauerkraut; he used a whole barrelful of cabbages, and he’d make enough to last the winter.

My mother was a midwife; she delivered the babies, and for $25 she took care of the family for ten days, including cooking
dinner. She lived till she was eighty-five; she would have lived longer, but she didn’t like to miss a funeral, and she caught cold at one and died.

I graduated from Arrandale High School in 1915. Fourteen of us graduated - we were the biggest graduating class in their history until then. The year before they had six.

There weren’t very many people here. Dr. Wellwood on Beach Road was the only doctor we had for miles around, and afterward Dr. Dowsey was the only one. There were only two or three cars in Great Neck; Croley had one, and Doc Parsons another. The cars could make it up almost any hill, if the kids helped push it; going down hill, kids could stop a car if they held onto it. The first garage was in an empty space near the bicycle shop, across from the park. There were no gas stations, not till much later. You carried gas in a can with a spout on it.

The movies didn’t come until 1910 or so. The movies were outdoor; they put up a canopy. A piano player played songs of the time, with slides, for us to sing along. The movies were in various places. There was a farm with an open field where Bullen is now; we kids would climb into the locust trees there and watch.

Opposite the fire station was a road called Tin Can Alley. It was really named Hutton Avenue, but when people there got married they’d rattle tin cans, so it got its nickname. The Post Office was one little room opposite Arrandale School. An apple orchard operated on both sides of Fairview Avenue.
There was no firehouse then; they used barns for the engines. They used a train rail for a bell; when you wanted to call the firemen, someone hit the rail with a sledgehammer.

There were saloons every three blocks; the people who worked on the estates used to go there to have beer. They were the coachmen and the people who took care of the horses, and they worked hard. Casey’s Saloon was on Middle Neck Road and Steamboat Road, Killiger’s Saloon on Ellard Avenue; opposite St. Aloysius was O’Connell’s; down Steamboat Road was Jack Butler’s Saloon and Ninesling’s Saloon - they had a hog-guessing contest there -and Jones’ Saloon on Wood Road.

I bought this house [on Steamboat Road] in 1923 from Dan Reed, who had all the property from here to Arrandale Avenue. There were no sidewalks on Steamboat Road then. When I was a boy there were cherry trees here, but Old Man Reed would never let you touch them. I thought now I would eat all the cherries I wanted, but they put in sidewalks where the cherry trees grew, and I still couldn’t get any.

Alexander Wesey

Lithuanians began coming to this country in large numbers about 1880; many settled in Pennsylvania to work in coal mines, and around 1900 many came to Great Neck to work on the large estates, such as Chrysler, Ballentine, Bloomingdale, Meyers, Eldridge, Eden, Brokaw, and Booth.
In many instances married couples were hired as a gardener and housekeeper, living on the estate either in a cottage or above a garage. Unmarried women were hired as maids and had a room in the main house; single men were required to find a room in town, usually living with a Lithuanian family and paying for their board.

Since both parents had to work, because times were hard and salaries meager, many parents either pooled their children and paid a neighbor to take care of them or brought the children to a day care center at a nursery on Arrandale Avenue. Each day there were ten to twenty children to take care of. The care involved a snack around 10 A.M., lunch at noon time, and a nap immediately following lunch. The center also provided medical nursing care. Miss Tomlinson was head nurse, with an assistant; they did not receive a large fee for their services but were very dedicated nurses.

Because of the bad economy, the men organized benevolent societies to help one another in sickness or death. Dues were fifty cents a month; sick benefits amounted to one to two dollars a day, whereas a death benefit was $200. Upon death, members volunteered to have a night vigil and acted as pallbearers at the funeral.

At one time there were about eighteen stores on Steamboat Road owned by Lithuanians.

(from a document prepared for the Ellis Island Museum)
George H. Bullen

My great-great-grandfather was an Ellard - Captain John Ellard, a ship captain whose house is still standing, near Steppingstone Park. Another great-great-grandfather, Ambrose Bullen, who came here in 1876, often traveled back and forth to New York City on the steamboat that left from the landing at the end of Steamboat Road.

My grandfather George Bullen was originally involved in building houses, and our insurance business evolved out of that. It was very common to move houses once; he moved two houses from the site of Memorial Field so the athletic field there could be built. Another house he moved got stuck in the middle of Middle Neck Road when they were moving it, and it took two days to get it out of the way.

The big era of development in this century was from the teens to the thirties; Great Neck was still relatively rural then. This part of the Village [around the Village Green] is the oldest; later development radiated out from here. My grandfather built many of the houses on Arrandale Avenue; there were deep lots so you could erect larger houses, and they have a similar 1920s look. That was the street for the prosperous shopkeepers, the local banker and the car dealer. Prosperous people had houses on Middle Neck Road too, especially as you go up toward Red Brook Road and just before [All Saints] Church.
Dolly Gutterman

My husband and I moved here more than fifty-five years ago; we were looking for the highest spot in Great Neck to live, and we found it on Oxford Boulevard. When I woke up in the morning, from my bedroom I could see New York City. The whole block between Hampshire and Cambridge was vacant then - a lot of it was woods - and we bought the block. We built our house on half the property, and the other half we sold much later. There were still remnants of farm life then.

We opened a store on Middle Neck Road in what had been a cobbler’s shop. There was no heating - we had to put in a stove - and when we took up the floor covering we realized there was only a dirt floor. Below the floor there were piles of very old boots that were old-fashioned even then, with high laces, and some old coins.

Even though most celebrities lived outside the Village, they’d come here for church services - and to Temple Beth El too - so sometimes people here would watch the famous names passing on their way to church. It was like a celebrity parade.

Marian Dannenfelser

I came to Great Neck as a bride sixty years ago. I’ve lived in several homes since then; now I’m here [in Autumn Houses], on the same site as the old Arrandale School, where my daughter was a student.
Middle Neck Road was just a two lane highway then; they didn’t widen it until after the war. It was the only road that led to Steamboat Road and the Landing. We used to take it to the public bathing beach there, before they traded places; there were fewer people here then, so the beach could accommodate us. They say the water is too polluted for people to swim in now, but it may be that they just don’t like so many people coming down there to swim.

There used to be a summer theater where the Village School is now; I remember Betty Furness would come there, and other well known actresses. Betty Furness would use local kids to play children’s roles in the plays, and the kids and their parents all enjoyed it. Later when the building became a youth center the kids used to love to come there for the sports and the dances Saturday night, or just to have a place to go.

I remember when the war ended that all the fire trucks went down the street with their bells ringing, and all the kids running after them. Everyone was out in the street, because we were so happy that the war had stopped.

Helene Herzig

[In the nineteen thirties] sports was an important part of life. Every Saturday and Sunday afternoon the town turned out to see one of Great Neck’s semi-professional teams play in Memorial Field.
All the pharmacies in Great Neck had soda fountains where high school students went for an ice cream cone or cherry cola after classes. Gilliar’s Drug Store was so crowded in the middle of the afternoon that the regular customers could hardly get in or get out.

(from an interview in the Great Neck Newsmagazine, 1978)

Walter Blum
Relatively few people lived in Great Neck when I was a boy, and because Broadway celebrities were here (before Hollywood attracted them), you would routinely see them in the street. My father knew Eddie Cantor, Ed Wynn, Fanny Brice, Frances Alda. Eddie Cantor was on the stage of the Playhouse in the early thirties, to publicize the showing of his first movie. He was influential in getting people to contribute to the building of Temple Beth El.

My father used to visit Ed Wynn in his home, so it was a thrill for me when years later I came back to remodel it for its present owner. I played with Gene and George Buck, whose father was head of ASCAP.

At that time, Middle Neck Road was paved up to Arrandale Avenue, and beyond that was a dirt road. Beyond Arrandale - and off Forest Row, Maple Street, Crampton Avenue - service people used to live: postmen, school custodians, and so on. Workers on the estates - gardeners, cooks, helpers - lived on Steamboat Road.
People had to live near their jobs because there was little public transportation; they were still going to work by horse and carriage when I was a boy, or by livery. Horse and carriages were used for transportation even in the thirties when autos were popular. There was still a blacksmith shop on Steamboat Road that serviced horses on the estates or horses bringing people to the estates.

Memorial Field used to be Great Neck’s gathering place. We had semi-professional baseball and football teams - the Great Neck Athletic Association - which used Memorial Field; the players were Great Neck people. There were six or seven teams which played each other; when the Great Neck team played at home, it was a very big event - cars would park for a long distance around the field. When they played away from home, people would drive to Manhasset and elsewhere. The charge for admission was ten cents; the proceeds went to pay the players, who got about $5 a game.

All of Great Neck came out Saturday for the high school football team at the high school field, and on Sunday for the semi-pro team. The whole community turned out.

A lot of the merchants played for the team. Angelo, who ran the barber shop, was the umpire for the Sunday baseball games, so everyone patronized his place; we paid fifty cents for a haircut. The baseball team was very successful, until the war.
I remember when I was young and lived nearby that an airplane landed on Memorial Field; the Fire Department asked everyone to turn on their car lights to guide the pilot, and they took down the goal posts so he could land.

Many families had a locker at Steppingstone - the whole family went down to bathe in the water. There was a small area to picnic, and tables on the dock. There was also a party fishing boat. Sunday used to be a day for people to visit each other, and as a kid you'd go with your parents and play there with whatever other kids were in the house. There were wonderful people and wonderful families in Great Neck.

Lou Manzino

When the Bloomer Girls came to Great Neck to play baseball, they used a couple of male players, and I played three positions for them, so I can say I played for the Bloomer Girls.

I was what they call a tramp athlete. I was born in Binghamton, and I played basketball there for the National Guard - Company E. We played Alfred University one time and beat them, so Alfred recruited me for its team. I went to Manhasset High too, and we had a championship team that season. I even played football for the YMHA; I used the name Minsky.

I played for the Great Neck Athletic Club from 1928 on, until the war. The Great Neck Athletic Club used to field a team for football, baseball, and basketball. On the football team I was
quarterback and halfback; on the baseball team, shortstop; on the basketball team running guard. They don’t play that way any more; they don’t have that position. A little guy like me wouldn’t stand a chance now.

I also worked for the Post Office here from 1929 on. The main post office was next to Bullen, and later where French Way Cleaners is now; there were regular deliveries twice a day at that time. For a long time I delivered special delivery mail; I was paid by the piece - nine cents for a letter, ten, fifteen or twenty cents per package, depending on the weight. Some weeks I’d work seven days, but sometimes I didn’t earn a dollar all day.

The post office went twenty-four hours a day then; people worked all night sorting the mail, and Ed Maher used to take the out-of-town mail to the Long Island Railroad station in the morning. I worked for a long time, and wound up Assistant Postmaster.

All this time I used to play ball Saturdays and Sundays - baseball in the summer and spring, football in the fall, basketball in the winter. Clifford Sears, who coached at the high school, was our football coach. Frank Gerson and Frank and Felix Binkiewicz were some of the others on the team. We played Roslyn, Port Washington, Manhasset, Valley Stream and teams from other places; they’d come here, or we’d travel to them, using our own cars. There was no league as such. There was a softball league; the fire companies, the Knights of Columbus and other teams would play at night.
Reda Lee

I came here in 1940 from Bluefield, West Virginia, to be a blues singer; I was the first Black to sing on radio in my home town. I sang on the Major Bowes Amateur Hour and at the Apollo - I even had a scholarship to the Apollo School of Music - but I was never able to break into the theater, and to support myself I finally turned to domestic work in Great Neck, on Old Pond Road. A family friend was living here on Steamboat Road; long afterwards I moved into that very same house.

In the forties there used to be employment agencies that brought Blacks from the south to work here. People used to arrive here with string tied around their suitcase.

Steamboat Road was a very lively street; when I first came here it was like a little Old New York. Gene’s Bar was up the block, and Curry’s and Queen’s; all of them were owned by Blacks. There were grocery stores and beauty parlors. They opened up a club for working people, the United Golf and Tennis Club, I think at 82 Steamboat. Blacks then couldn’t get into other tennis clubs. You had a membership card, and you could have dinner there.

You always had somewhere to go. Now Steamboat Road is like a ghost town. The forties through the sixties were probably the best times for Steamboat Road. After that rents started rising, Black-owned stores started going out of business, and Blacks started moving out of Great Neck, because there was no place
they could afford to live. Now you have to go to the village to shop.

Seymour Antor

My grandfather [Abram Wolf] was a custom tailor in New York; he came from Germany some time after the Civil War. He did work for W.R. Grace, but he knew him on another level too; they played pinochle together. One day, Grace said: "Listen, all my friends in Great Neck own large estates; you’ll have enough work there to keep you busy the rest of your life."

After he came here he gave up tailoring and started a real estate insurance business; he became the largest Aetna representative on Long Island. People weren’t just clients, they were his friends. Even when he was eighty-eight he was still paying the mortgages for three families on Steamboat Road so they wouldn’t lose their homes.

Our family had a three story boarding house on Hicks Lane where the Wolf family lived. In 1921 Grandpa built a home next door. The boarding house became a small apartment building, until laws were passed to put up fire escapes; then the building was torn down.

Grandpa was very active civically. He was a charter member of the Fire Department. He was a founder of Temple Beth El too; before then he would walk to Flushing to attend synagogue on Saturdays. There used to be a row of doctors’ houses on Middle
Neck Road across from Tuscan Court; they left their lights on until he passed by, and then they turned the lights off.

My father [Albert Antor] was born in Vilna; he taught foreign languages there. He had a store in Roslyn in 1914, but he came here to court my mother [Fannie Wolf]. Years ago, a jeweler dealt in everything. Our store was where the Great Neck Hand Laundry is now on Middle Neck Road; one whole side was appliances. There were no appliance stores then. People paid a dollar a month for their refrigerators. We were the largest Zenith radio dealer on Long Island. When I sold the store I left behind some old large standing Atwater Kent radios and some organs.

Morris Lefkowitz [who later owned Belgrave Motors] married into the Wolf family too. He was one of the biggest cigar dealers here. He was a big cigar smoker himself. He had a store in the Village which sold Willys-Knight, Auburn, and Cord cars. People turned to many things to make a living then; they were hustlers.

I remember the policeman stationed outside the Arrandale school - Butch Blomberg. There was no real crime then; a kid might see if he could pick up something from the counter of the five and ten and not pay. I still have six of my kindergarten classmates from the school as friends.
I REMEMBER BROKAW

W. Gould Brokaw was the foremost citizen of Great Neck in those early days [around the turn of the century]. The measure of his popularity was not his wealth and his property holdings but his love for horses and his generosity in sharing this with others. Every year he held a race meet on his estate where he had a half mile track. He always arranged a fine card of flat races and steeplechases, and exhibitions in between. There were even selected bookmakers. Everyone was invited as Mr. Brokaw’s guest, and he not only gave them a fine race meet but all they could eat or drink. (Richard Kehoe)

Brokaw had a horse race every year, June or July, that he invited all the townspeople to. I used to watch the tally-hos, the four horses. He had a theater in his house, the main house where the high school now is. Once someone drank too much and got a little rambunctious, so Brokaw stopped inviting people to the show. As my old school principal used to say, "There’s always one rotten apple in a bunch." (Joseph Kortlander)

William Gould Brokaw owned the largest estate in the village, running along Middle Neck Road from Old Mill Road to Breuer Avenue, and along Bayview Avenue from Old Mill Road to Beach Road. His sister was married to John Pope Satterwhite, who owned a large estate in Kings Point.

"Well known as the owner of automobiles and yachts", Brokaw had inherited a large fortune from his father, a founder of the men’s clothing firm of Brokaw Brothers, "long one of the leading
New York houses in its field." His estate was large enough to contain not only the mansion he called Nirvana but an enormous garden, polo field and race course, to which the public was invited free once a year. The main entrance to the estate is the current entrance to Strathmore on Old Mill Road.
Middle Neck Road
Historic business and civic sites
in the heart of the Old Village

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All Saints Church (1886)</td>
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<td>Regan Farm</td>
<td>Apple Tree Lane</td>
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<td>to Homeward Hotel</td>
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<td>Road to Steamboat Landing</td>
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<td>Steamboat Road</td>
<td>Gutheil Road</td>
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<td>Bank of Great Neck 1906</td>
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<td>Arrandale Avenue</td>
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<td>Arrandale School</td>
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<td>to Library 2nd site 1907</td>
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<td>Nehemiah Hayden’s General Store (19th century)</td>
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<td>Early Post Office</td>
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<td>Breuer’s Grocery</td>
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<td>to Allen House 1750</td>
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<td>Lecluse’s General Store</td>
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<td>Geo Bullen Real Estate 1897</td>
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<td>Higgins the Blacksmith</td>
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<td>Fowler’s Feed &amp; Grain Store</td>
<td>Alert Fire House 1904</td>
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