

The Glen Cove Liberty Pole

by Daniel E Russell
City Historian
City of Glen Cove, New York

In April, 1861, only days after the outbreak of the Civil War, the people of Glen Cove erected a 90-foot tall Liberty Pole in a small public square located at the intersection of School Street with Cottage Row.

The tradition of erecting a liberty pole to show solidarity in a patriotic cause dates back to the earliest days of the American Revolution, when colonists erected tall flag poles to show their unity in protest against British taxation. The poles were often surmounted with a Phrygian cap, worn by ancient natives of Anatolia; this headwear, also known as a “liberty cap,” had become symbolic of freedom from oppression.

On April 12th, 1861, artillery batteries manned by South Carolina militia opened fire upon Fort Sumter, a federal fortification located on a small island in Charleston Harbor. The first salvo marked the start of the Civil War, a conflict which had been brewing many years.

Patriotic residents of Glen Cove decided to erect a community liberty pole at “Union Square,” located on the corner of Cottage Row and School Street (then considered to be merely part of Glen Street – it wasn’t named School Street until a generation or two later). The approximate site is today better known to locals as “Vinnie’s Island” It is hoped that further research will determine how and when “Union Square” was named; the name clearly predates the erection of the Liberty Pole. The pole raising was scheduled for the evening of Tuesday, April 23rd. The Glen Cove Gazette wrote:

UP! UP! WITH THE FLAG

A Liberty Pole will be raised at Union Square, Cottage Row, on Tuesday afternoon next, at 7 o’clock, and from which the Star Spangled Banner will be thrown to the breeze. The Cornet Band have volunteered their services, and there will be Speaking and Singing. A Salute will be fired on

the accession. We hope that every man, woman and child within ten miles of this village will attend the meeting. (GC Gazette, 1861)

The residents selected Judge Elias J Beach as their keynote speaker on the occasion. Beach was one of the leading Democrats of the community. While many northern Democratic politicians were denounced as “copperheads” (southern sympathizers) during the early months of the war by any of their sundry detractors, Judge Beach was a staunch supporter of the Union cause and was respected throughout the community.

In addition to the newly formed Glen Cove Cornet Band, Company E of the 15th New York State Militia – better known as the “Hamilton Rifles,” promised to participate in the flag raising.

On Tuesday evening there was another outpouring of the people, the occasion being the raising of a lofty liberty pole at Union Square, on the corner of Cottage Row and Glen Street. At an early hour our citizens began to gather, and before the meeting was organized it was pronounced one of the largest assemblages ever known in Glen Cove. Amid the roar of cannon and a burst of irrepressible applause – the flag was hoisted to its position 90 feet above the ground...

The Hon. Elias J. Beach was next introduced, who spoke at length, making an eloquent and patriotic speech, waking up the fires of patriotism in every heart. While Judge B. was speaking the Hamilton Rifles and the Glen Cove Cornet Band made their appearance on the grounds and were received with deafening cheers...

The Star Spangled Banner and Red White and Blue were sung by Jacob B Weeks and the chorus taken

up by the vast crowd, made the welkin ring. At a late hour the meeting adjourned. It was by all odds the most enthusiastic demonstrations ever held in our midst. (Coles and Van Santvoord, 1967)

The Liberty Pole of the Civil War was not forgotten in later years. In 1876, as the nation prepared to celebrate the 100th Anniversary of its birth, local residents decided to center the local celebration around the Union Square flag pole. The Glen Cove Gazette announced that on July 4th,

the “Stars and Stripes” will be raised on the liberty pole at Cottage Row. All are invited to be present and bring their firearms, that a salute may be fired in honor of the day. The band will probably be in attendance and play the national airs. (GC Gazette, 1876)

There are a few references to the Liberty Pole being used as a geographic marker in Glen Cove as late as 1916. The New York State Excise board – which was responsible for issuing liquor licenses to bars, taverns and hotels – noted in the license to Mary A George that the hotel was located on Cottage Row “west of the liberty pole.” (Anon, 1915)

As Glen Cove prepared to celebrate its 300th anniversary (May 24th, 1968) the Glen Cove Tri-centennial Commission selected a small number of sites within the community that were

representative of key aspects of local history. Historic markers were erected on these sites, which included the site of the Duryea Starch Works, the street where the founders of Glen Cove built their homes, and the site of the original saw and grist mills. As symbolic of Glen Cove’s participation in the Civil War, the Commission selected the site of the Liberty Pole. It was also decided to replace the Liberty Pole. (GC Record Pilot 1967a) In a ceremony held on July 4th, 1967 the Commission unveiled the historic marker which still stands on the site. (GC Record Pilot, 1967b)



Bibliography:

Anon.

1915 Twentieth Annual Report of the State
Commissioner of Excise
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Coles, Robert Reed and Peter Luyster Van Santvoord
1967 A History of Glen Cove
Glen Cove NY 1967

GC Gazette

1861 Up! Up With the Flag!
Glen Cove Gazette, 4 April 1861

GC Gazette

1876 Fourth of July
Glen Cove Gazette, 1 July 1876

GC Record Pilot

1967a Tri-Centennial Ceremony Scheduled July 4
Glen Cove Record Pilot, 22 June 1967

GC Record Pilot

1967b Dedication of Liberty Pole
Glen Cove Record Pilot, 13 July 1967

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