

Musketa Cove Becomes Glen Cove: How Glen Cove Was Renamed

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More than 175 years ago, on Feb. 29, 1834 a public meeting of some of the community's most prominent residents was held to discuss changing the village's name from Musketa Cove, which it had been known as since its founding in 1668, to Glen Cove.

The major reason for the proposed change was simple: people from outside the community confused the name "Musketa" with mosquito, the pesky insect which annoys people in summer. This, in the minds of many residents, was detrimental to the village's reputation... especially in light of the fact that the community was attempting to establish itself as a summer resort for wealthy New York City residents.

Musketa Cove derived its name from a word in the Matinecock Indian language which meant "place of rushes" or "meadows", undoubtedly referring to the large meadows which existed north of modern-day Glen Cove Creek. On May 24, 1668, Joseph Carpenter (formerly of Rhode Island but then residing at Oyster Bay) purchased the land surrounding Musketa Cove from the Matinecocks.

Recognizing that the creek that flowed down the glen (parallel to the present-day path of Glen Street) would provide an excellent source of water power for a mill, Carpenter had proposed to dam the stream and construct both a saw and grist mill. He took in as co-partners in this venture three brothers who were also former Rhode Islanders, Robert, Nathaniel and Daniel Coles, and Nicholas Simkins. Together, they became known as "The Five Proprietors of Musketa Cove Patent." Within a short time after settling at Musketa Cove, the proposed saw mill was in operation and lumber was being exported to New York City and neighboring settlements.

Since few inhabitants of the community in colonial times could boast of a formal education, and those who could write spelled phonetically, a great diversity arose in the spelling of the settlement's name in the colonial records, including Muskeeta, Muskeri, Muskiti, Musketo, Masketi, Moschetto, Moskete, Musceda, Muschida, Mosquito, Musheta, and Musscote Cove. When the village's first Post Office was established in 1818, the name was standardized to "Musquito Cove."

The late 1820s and early 1830s were a period of great change for the community. In 1829, the first regularly scheduled steamboat service began operating between Glen Cove

and New York City. This permitted local residents to communicate more rapidly with New York City; soon — following New York's cultural lead — debating, legal, literary, and musical societies were created in Musketa Cove. The steamboats also allowed New York City residents easier access to Musketa Cove. Within three decades, our town had become one of the foremost summer resorts on the North Shore, which eventually led to the "Gold Coast" era of grand estates.

But not before the name of the village was changed from Musketa Cove to Glen Cove. People from outside the community continued to confuse "Musketa" with "mosquito" even after 166 years.

Therefore, since many of the community's residents considered this confusion "a disadvantage to the property and reputation of the village," a public meeting was called to discuss the possibility of changing the name of the town. On Feb. 29, 1834, a public meeting was convened in the newly rebuilt public schoolhouse, which was then located on the corner of Highland Road and School Street, to weigh the pros and cons of the proposed change and consider what name, if any, would be selected.

There are several legends which explain how the new name of Glen Cove was selected.

One of the most widely circulated stories is that a local resident of Scottish ancestry had proposed "Glen Coe" after a particularly scenic area in Scotland, and that someone in the back of the room who was a little hard of hearing had misunderstood him to say "Glen Cove." Since the townspeople could still say they were "going to the Cove" with this new name, it was popularly accepted. This version of events was put to paper by Jacob T Bowne in 1868, on the occasion of the 200th anniversary of the settling of Glen Cove:

We are here to celebrate a birthday. Our good old mother Glen Cove has reached her 200th anniversary ; and though she bears the marks of two centuries upon her features, we greet her to-day beautiful and improving still. As mothers will sometimes do, she has changed her name now and then.

She retained her original name of "Musketo

Cove” until 1834, when, by a vote of her sons, she consented to be called by her present name, “Glen Cove.” As early as 1830, the subject of a change of name was agitated and several names proposed—among them the names of Regina, Circassia, Pembroke, and Glencoe—the latter from a place in Scotland.

Long before, back as far as 1773, it had been called Pembroke by many of the inhabitants, but the name was never legally adopted. At the meeting held to decide upon the change, after discussing the propriety of several others, Glencoe was mentioned, and some person present, misunderstanding the name, and thinking the speaker had said Glen Cove, exclaimed, “That’s it! That’s the name—we can still say ‘going up to the cove.’” So by unanimous consent the present romantic name was adopted.

A footnote to a work of fiction entitled “The Kushow Property: A Tale of Crow Hill” written by Frederick William Shelton, published in the Knickerbocker Magazine in 1838, claimed that “Skeety Cove’s” new name was proposed by Grant Thorburn. Born in Scotland in 1773, he emigrated to the US in 1794. He operated a highly profitable seed business in New York City, and penned a number of short stories and articles for early 19th Century magazines.

For although Mosquitoe Cove is a ‘Rose of Sharon’ among villages, with such a name it could never ‘smell sweet’ in the nostrils of the age. That literary seedsman, Lawrie Todd, who lived for many years in his museum in Liberty-street, surrounded by tulipbeds and singing birds, and every thing else that looked, or smelled, or sounded sweetly, removed at last Mosquitoe Cove, to spend a contented old age. There, amid to “Charms which Nature to her votary yields” he found ample scope for a correct taste, and was acknowledged by the inhabitants as a legislature and reformer. He changed the name of Mosquitoe Cove into Glen Cove, which was the beginning of a revolution in names all over the island.

Recently, however, a manuscript was uncovered which was written by one of the individuals who claims to have had originally proposed the name-change, and who was actually present at the meeting at which the matter was decided. The manuscript’s author was Edward Coles, a resident of the Dosoris area of Glen Cove who resided in the venerable mansion originally constructed by Rev. Benjamin Woolsey in the 1830s. Born about 1808, Coles had served as a trustee of the local public school, had spearheaded the drive to establish an Episcopal Church (St. Paul’s) in Glen Cove, and who had, at the age of only 19, been elected colonel commanding the 117th Regiment of Infantry (one of the regiments of the Queens County militia). It is interesting to note that, upon taking up a captaincy a year earlier, Coles’ entire military training was limited to some

instruction in drill and tactics given to him by his brother who had attended “Captain Partridge’s Military Academy” in Norwich, Vermont.

According to Coles, several names were proposed at the public meeting. A local Quaker suggested “Pembrokeville.” A local physician of repute proposed “Queenville” after Queens County, of which Glen Cove was then part (Nassau County was not established until 1899). Someone else thought “Regina” had a nice ring to it. Coles claims that he himself had proposed “Glen Cove” as a fitting name, since “....it was descriptive of the village, it being situated in a glen, and it would also be retaining the name Cove, which was also descriptive of the village location.”

However, the general idea of changing the village’s name did not meet with universal approval. At the meeting, according to Coles, one of the oldest residents of the community, who was also owner of the village’s principal general store, stood up and made the following comments:

I am opposed to giving up the old name of the village. My great-grandfather, grandfather, and father lived and died under the name ‘Skitty Cove.’ The name is sacred to my memory; there is too much disposition on the part of the rising generation to make changes. I am opposed to them. I was born in ‘Skitty Cove’; I was married in ‘Skitty Cove’; I have brought up my children in ‘Skitty Cove’; I have made what money I have in ‘Skitty Cove’; and when my time arrives to die, I hope and trust in heaven’s name that I may take my departure from this world in our village under the name of ‘Skitty Cove’ and no other.

The chairman of the meeting then formally set before the assembly the proposal to change the village’s name from “Musketa Cove” to Glen Cove. The chairman of the meeting then formally set before the assembly the proposal to change the village’s name from “Musketa Cove” to Glen Cove. According to Coles, the proposal was “carried by an almost unanimous vote.”

Yet, the name “Musquito Cove” is not dead. It continues to be used as the name of the embayment at the mouth of Glen Cove Creek.

