

Agriculture in Queens County

(1842)

By Albert G. Carll, Jericho.

It is easy to forget that Glen Cove was once an agrarian community, blanketed with sprawling farms growing wheat and corn and raising pigs, sheep, and dairy cows.

Glen Cove was part of Queens County until the formation of Nassau County in 1898, and part of the Town of Oyster Bay until 1918. As such, much of the information on agriculture in Glen Cove is intertwined with accounts of agriculture in Queens County.

In the early 1840's the New York State Agricultural Society had requested each county-level agricultural society to prepare a description of the "state of agriculture" in their respective county. At the time, the United States was experiencing a severe depression in the economy (described by Henry Randall, Secretary of the State Agricultural Society, as an "unexampled pecuniary disaster and agricultural depression"). In his capacity as Secretary of the Queens County Agricultural Society, Albert G Carll responded with the following description of the state of affairs here in 1842. Carll was one of the founders of the Queens County Agricultural Society in 1841 and served as the organization's secretary from 1841 to 1849. A resident of Jericho in the Town of Oyster Bay, he was also Town Clerk for Oyster Bay in the 1840's and Postmaster of Jericho in the 1850's. The report was published in the Transactions of the New York State Agricultural Society, Volume 2, in 1843.

- Daniel E Russell

Queens County was first settled about the year 1640, and its inhabitants are chiefly engaged in agricultural pursuits.

Great improvements have been made within a few years by the introduction of new and valuable seeds, and by the experience and experiments of those who are willing to improve, and whose results are now so generally diffused by agricultural publications. Most were in the habit of drawing from the earth all they could, without giving any thing in return, until the soil became exhausted, and the crop was hardly worth the labor bestowed. But all now understand that as they put on, so will they take off; and great attention is paid to manuring and renovating the soil, and it is looked upon by intelligent farmers as one of the most important questions that effects them.

The "well enough" spirit has existed among our farmers, and prevented improvements being made here as fast as in many other parts, but it is fast giving way to a more liberal and enlightened spirit.

The present condition of our agriculture may be considered favorable, and while it reflects credit upon our farmers, gives an earnest that the errors which are only sanctioned by time, will soon be corrected by the intelligent spirit of inquiry and experiment.

The aspect of the county is generally even; while upon the north, bordering upon Long Island Sound, there are gentle

hills and dales, giving agreeable variety to the scenery, and making beautiful and pleasant locations, there is but very little that is so rough as to be difficult of cultivation.

There is a ridge of hills passing east and west through the county, and south of that the country is perfectly level, entirely clear of even small stones, and some 20,000 acres of it without a tree upon it. The opinion is that it was once covered by the sea.

Upon the north and south sides of the county are numerous streams, flowing into the bays and harbors; and except that part south of the line of hills, and a little north of the extreme south side, it is well supplied with natural springs. Upon this plain water is only obtained by wells, at a depth of 60 feet or more, being about level with the tide water.

The highest land in the county is the "Harbor Hill," at Hempstead Harbor, 319 feet above tide water.

The soil is generally fertile, and on the north and middle is loamy, and on the south more sandy.

The principal products are wheat, Indian corn, oats, potatoes and hay; and there is a considerable surplus of beef, pork, poultry, &c. to send to market.

The products are marketed at Brooklyn and New-York city.

The common mode of cultivation is to plow the sward in spring for corn, manuring well; the next spring sow oats with-

out manure, and in the fall prepared to be lain down, well manured, sown with wheat or rye, and grass seed. The grass is then cut for a few years; then pastured a year or two, and again goes through the same cultivation. Of course it depends much upon the character of the man, and the size of his farm.

The horses are generally good ones, of the English race breed; and as the very stout, heavy kind are not as necessary as in a more rough and hilly country, they are found to be the most handy and profitable on the farm, (at least where but a few are kept) and as roadsters, are ready to carry the products to the market. A ready sale is always found for such horses in the New-York market.

But few cattle are raised in this county, as the demand in the New-York market is such as to make a good calf a month or six weeks old, worth as much as it would be at two years of age.

Our cattle are generally from Suffolk county, and the interior of the State. The large part of our cattle are natives, while the favorite breeds are Durhams, and Durhams crossed with natives.

Considerable attention has of late been paid to the rearing of sheep, and many of our farmers have fine flocks of the most improved breeds. The Merinos and Saxonys were long the favorites, and perhaps are yet the most numerous; but as sheep are raised by our farmers for the mutton rather than the wool, it is found that the heavy breeds are the most profitable.

Of swine there are all varieties — from the stately Berkshire, who by general consent is placed at the head of that honored and honorable family, and the delicate Chinese whose unrivaled flavor has brought them in high favor with the palates of epicures — to those who require, when full grown, a yoke to prevent them from passing between the pickets of the garden fence. The favorite breed appears to be a cross of the Berkshire and the best native breeds.

Large numbers of swine are fatted for the New-York market, and the plan most generally adopted is to let them run in pasture through the summer, and feed them the slops of the kitchen and dairy, and about the first of September to put them

in pens and feed with apples, potatoes, pumpkins, unsound corn, &c. Some who have the conveniences, boil the apples, &c. which is most generally approved. They are slaughtered in November and December.

The cattle and sheep are generally fattened upon grass, although during the winter many are fed in stalls. But little attention has as yet been paid to the cultivation of roots as food for stock. Those who have used them deem them more profitable than grain.

There are many plows in use, among which may be named Freeborn's, Freeborn & Hitchcock's, and Wood's, the latter two forming perhaps the majority. Shroud's, made at Skaneateles, is used by a few, and much liked; and recently the "Wiskonsan plow" has been introduced, and by some approved of.

The square harrow, a few cultivators, and a few rollers are in use. The revolving horse rake is used but a little as yet. Threshing machines have been used by a few for many years, and within the last three years many have been introduced. The owner threshes the grain at so much a thousand sheaves, removing about from farm to farm as required. They are considered handy, as they enable advantage to be taken of any rise in the market.

Straw cutters are but little used.

Scythes are mostly the English, forty-eight inches in length.

The farms generally do not consist of more than one hundred cultivated acres, and the average value is not far from \$80 per acre.

There are large quantities of timber of the three oaks, chestnut, and hickory. In the east part of the county bordering on Suffolk, there is considerable pine, but it does not grow large. The locust grows generally on the north side and in the middle of the county, and large amounts are annually shipped to New-York. Our farmers have within a few years paid much attention to its cultivation, and now have large tracts well covered with thrifty young locusts.