Our tour starts at Post Avenue and Jericho Turnpike where there once was a well and pump where travelers could get refreshment. It serves as a symbol of the Historical Society of the Westburys. As you start a walking tour of Westbury, you are at the location of one of the oldest continually occupied religious sites in this country. The first settlers here in the late 1600s chose home sites where the forest met the open prairie, the Hempstead Plains, so the area was known as Woodedge or Plainedge. They cleared fields and built homes just north of an old Indian trail, “ye yeacois path,” later Jericho Turnpike. One of these men, Henry Willis, had lived near Westbury in England and chose that name for the new community. He and Edmond Titus had known persecution for their adherence to the Quaker faith. Here they found freedom for the religious services they held in their homes, barns, or fields when joined by others of like belief. By 1701 they decided to build a meetinghouse. This very spot of ground, at our present Post Avenue and Jericho Turnpike, was selected as the site and 4 pounds paid for 3 ¼ acres of land. As the years passed two other buildings replaced it, the present one in 1902, all plain wooden structures. Additional land acquired over the years provides for the cemetery, which is famous for its beautiful trees and shrubs.

During the early part of the 19th century growing differences between liberals and conservatives in the Religious Society of Friends led to the withdrawal of a group who built the Orthodox Meeting House near Post Avenue in 1830. It thus becomes the oldest building for religious purposes still standing in Westbury. The two branches are now happily reunited and the building is used by the present day school. This was started in 1957 in the Friends Center, as a nursery school. Additional classrooms built later enlarged the school to the sixth grade. This is one of many private schools serving our community.

Just east of the Friends property are the grounds of the Episcopal Church of the Advent. The Church itself was organized in 1910 when Westbury's population was only about 1,200. The architect was John Russell Pope and the builder, a member and leader of the parish, John R. Hill. The day when Winthrop Hall was opened in 1912 was a great day for Westbury, for its facilities have always been generously available to the village. Now there was a place at this end of town for basketball games, gymnastics, theatricals, as well as the myriad activities related to the life of the church. The rectory built just previously, the additions and improvements to buildings and the establishment of the Nursery and Advent Tuller schools has all kept pace with the life of the community.

Proceeding south on Post Avenue with the Friends Cemetery on the left, we pass on the right, the section known as Wheatley Villas. This was farmland until about 1912.
Before the Northern State Parkway cut through our village in 1937, School Street extended to what is now Advent Street, which is also by a parkway exit. At this intersection there was formerly a blacksmiths shop, a very important place, where farmers brought their horses to be shod. The dark interior was lighted by the glowing embers of the forge when the smith shaped each horse shoe. The place operated to a late date because of the many polo ponies here. The blacksmith shop was one of many buildings moved when the Parkway came; it is now the Van Cleef Realty office further south. Several dwellings formerly here on both sides of the road stand today in various parts of the village.

Next we come to an office building where the brick school erected in 1909 for elementary classes was situated. Reference will be made to other school buildings after we turn the corner on Rockland Street. Pause here a moment to glance westward to the Methodist Church on Asbury Avenue. It is the third edifice for this congregation. Rev. Homer Rhinesmith served as pastor from the time this building was erected in 1950 until 1980.

Facing Post Avenue on the south side of Rockland Street is a building with a long and varied history. Ambrose Clark, heir to the Singer Sewing Machine fortune, built it at the time, about the turn of the century, when it was popular to move to the country for sports such as racing and polo. Later his extensive holdings in Old Westbury became the campus of SUNY. It was exciting when Mr. Clark could be seen driving "a coach and four" about country roads to return to the house here, it was the home of the White family for a long time, later a branch of Saks 5th Avenue and a funeral home before becoming the War Memorial Community Center. Local support, headed by the men of the Kiwanis Club led to the acquisition of the property in 1946. The building was remodeled to open as a library and soon became a recognized asset to the village. Increased use made it necessary to call for tax support in the school district area in 1956. A favorable vote resulted and trustees were elected. The original building, with additions, is now run by the Village of Westbury Recreation Department. Its principal use is by the Senior Citizens Group, a large and active organization. (You will see the present library later.)

Notice now a house at the corner of Linden Place, typical of turn-of-the-century constructions. It houses the Village Recreation Department offices.

North of Rockland Street are some of Westbury's present day school buildings. But let us try to imagine a Westbury of 1845. It was only then that the idea of a local public school developed. At a meeting at the house of David Layton, at one time a tavern on Jericho Turnpike, east of Cambridge Ave., Union Free School District I was formed and $180 raised by taxation to build and furnish the first school house on land rented from Thomas Powell, at some spot in this vicinity. (It was a tiny building and
is thought to be what could be seen as late as 1914 used as a dog kennel near the previously mentioned blacksmith shop where it had been moved.) The school district soon purchased land on the west side of the former extension of School Street and in 1857 a larger one room school was constructed. Within thirty years there had been two additions, making a three-room school. This became the three dwellings you see opposite the Children's Library. In 1895 a two-story brown shingle building was built at about the location of the new wing of the Middle School. Many large shade trees grew on the school grounds at that time; a double row of maple trees lined the road leading directly to the front entrance, a porch shaded by a wisteria vine. Shrubbery on each side made good hiding places for hide-and-seek. There were no organized athletics in those days, but seasonal games are remembered—jumping rope for the girls in the spring and marbles and baseball for the boys. There was space for some of the classes to plant flowers and vegetable gardens.

The 1895 building, supplemented by a lower elementary school erected about 1920, comprised the educational facilities of School District I. Some High School subjects were offered, but those seeking to graduate went to nearby villages. This could be done by train or trolley. In 1924 the town could be proud of its own four year High School built with many departments for a student population of about one hundred.

A few years later the old wooden building gave way to a brick building for the upper grades which was absorbed by the Middle School after the neighborhood K-6 schools were built. It was enlarged by a connecting addition to the High School after the latter moved to a new campus in 1958. The entire complex here now houses the Middle School with recent additions.

Now we cross the street to the Children's Library. This delightful place was a gift to the children of Westbury by Mrs. Robert Bacon as a memorial to her husband, Col. Bacon, who had been Ambassador to France. One of the reasons it is unique is that at the time of its opening, there were only two other libraries especially for children, one in London and one in San Francisco. Mrs. Bacon not only created a beautiful interior but also provided a garden at the side, then a quiet spot to be viewed from the windows. Generations of children have here enjoyed an introduction to the best of children's literature. The story hours have been famous. Noted people have signed the Library's guest book, starting with Mrs. Theodore Roosevelt. It was here that Miss Jacqueline Overton, librarian for twenty-five years, wrote "Long Island's Story," its history for young people.
Do find time to return here for an extended visit. You can then see the wall maps showing Long Island wildlife, native plants and historic events and many special collections. Here it should be noted that the small brick building at the rear of the Children's Library that at one time was the librarian's house became the headquarters of the Historical Society of the Westburys in 1977, by special arrangement of the Library Trustees. Directly east of the Children's Library is Westbury's Adult Library. Publicly supported since 1956 it has served the community in this location since 1967. The book collection has shown consistent growth and expanded services now include concerts and bus trips. The auditorium is used for classes and for meetings of many organizations.

Across from the Library parking lot on Jefferson St. is one of the buildings moved from Post Ave. when the Parkway was constructed in 1937. It is typical of the 1890 period.

Proceeding south on School Street, the building at the corner of Walton Place was once a barn when the Muller family operated a dairy farm. At that time they lived in the old yellow house behind the picket fence. The house was actually built much earlier, in 1780, in fact, by Oliver Losee. It is said that a cobbler (shoemaker) once worked in the basement.

At the juncture of Cross Street on the east side of School Street stood the nice old home of the Seaman family whose farm comprised much of this area. Parts of the house became two small ones moved to Grand Boulevard.

Turn here and note on the right, the spot where stood a large building once Hesse's Hotel. At one time, the dining area was rented for additional school space. After school it had to be made ready to serve food.

On the east side of Grand Boulevard stands the A.M.E. Zion church. founded in 1834, it was the home of the second congregation to be organized in Westbury. Its members were the black people who were the descendants of slaves freed by the Quaker farmers as early as 1776. One hundred fifty four of their manumission papers were found some time ago and they are now in the Friends Records Room in New York City. Gradually they established homes in this area. A dairy farm was operated by the Levi family across the road from here and a few had businesses on lower Post Ave. even though the town was very small. The area bounded by Union Avenue, the west side of Grand Boulevard, the L.I.R.R. and School Street. came to be known as Grantville.

We may note that New Cassel was named by Hessian soldiers. They were British mercenaries who remained here after the Revolutionary War and named the area in remembrance of Hesse Cassel in their homeland.

Walking west along Union Avenue we come to Maple Avenue. If you look south you will see a large apartment building for senior citizen housing. The Garnet Fresh Air Home,
which was established by African-American families for women and children, used to be on this site. Traveling along Maple Avenue we come to the corner of School Street and Maple Avenue. The Bethel AME Church on the northwest corner is another old church, built in 1887. It was started by a small group who left the A.M.E. Zion church. If we walk one block south on School Street, we are at Union Avenue again. Heading west toward Post Avenue, we will come to the current railroad station.

This area along Union Avenue was the scene of a couple of disasters. In 1904 there was a great fire which started in the Christ Blacksmith Shop and spread to a number of other businesses. In 1919 or 1920 there was a flood throughout this area, turning it into a lake, as seen in photos from that time.

The Long Island Rail Road reached Westbury around 1837. The first “station” was Kelsey’s Store where tickets were sold and passengers could wait for their trains. In 1883 the LIRR actually built a station in Westbury, a wood frame structure located just east of Post Avenue. In 1885 the LIRR changed the schedule for the milk train causing hardship for the farmers. They went on strike to protest the change. At that time Westbury was the largest shipper of milk on Long Island.

In 1901, a “first” occurred in Westbury - the first recorded train-automobile collision in the United States. This and other collisions resulted in the elimination of the street level grade crossing in 1914. The track was raised and the current railroad bridge was installed. A new station was built in 1916 in the location of the current station. The LIRR was electrified through Westbury in 1957 and high level platforms installed in 1981. The station was replaced with an improved version in 2002.

As we walk toward Post Avenue, we come to the Horizon Apartments which were built in 2005. This has been the site of several restaurants/ hotels over the past century or more. In 1891 on New Year’s Eve, a restaurant called the Old Homestead was burned to the ground. It was replaced in 1900 by Luessen’s Westbury Hotel. Later on, it became Nino’s Restaurant, then the Piping Rock. The Piping Rock was extensively damaged by fire on December 8, 1999, and never
reopened. Photos of Luessen’s may be viewed in the lobby of the Horizon.

Across Post Avenue by the railroad tracks Kelsey’s store stood in the 1870s. As mentioned earlier, this store was the location of the first railroad station. The post office was also in the store. One of the early postmasters was a woman, Mrs. Sarah Kelsey, who held that position from December 14, 1897 to July 1, 1904. Kelsey’s store later became Schweiker’s store. Lou Trope’s dry goods store was north of Schweiker’s. The Westbury Feed Store was also here where the entrance to the Post Avenue Apartments is located.

If we go south of the railroad tracks, we see the Bristol assisted living facility on the west side of Post Avenue. This is where the Westbury Coal Yard, owned by the Hicks family and managed by Charles Levi, was located. The Westbury Coal Yard was started by Edwin Hicks to keep the nursery employees busy when farm work was slow. It later became Hicks-Westbury Oil Company. Fred Levi’s sporting goods and bicycle store was on the northwest corner of Post Ave. and Madison Ave.

Looking south on the east side of Post Avenue we can see St. Brigid’s Church surrounded by the cemetery. The church we see is the third one, built in 1916. The second church was moved across Post Avenue and became the original parochial school. Now the building is St. Anthony’s Hall.

If we go back under the railroad bridge and head north past Union Avenue, the first street we come to on the east side of Post is Scally Place. The second post office used to be on the south side of Scally Place where Maria’s Pastry Shop is now. The district court and first and second school grades were upstairs. Crossing Scally Place we come to a large brick building which is the Republican Club. The building originally was the Wheatley Hills Bank built in 1920, and the village offices were upstairs.

Crossing the street here to the west side of Post Avenue, we are in front of the former McKenna building. The building, which is now brick-faced, at one time housed McKenna Brothers Plumbing and a barbershop. Apartments were on the second floor. The north end of the building originally had no second story when Barley’s Pharmacy was located there. Barley’s Pharmacy later moved south to 167 Post Avenue at the corner of Post and Butler Streets and Hickey’s Garage moved into the vacated space.
Going north on Post Avenue to the corner of Maple Avenue, we find another popular location for hotels and restaurants in Westbury’s history. In the early 1900s it was the United States Hotel, owned by William O’Connor. It later became the Greentree Inn, then Eugene’s, before it was Benny’s. People from Manhattan, Brooklyn and Queens would come to Westbury to spend a week or two in the summer at the United States Hotel and Luessens.

Standing on the corner and looking west along Maple Avenue we can see a large apartment building which is the Maple Towers Condominiums. On this site there was a restaurant known under various names as ownership changed hands. At one time it was the Maple House Restaurant, another time Apple Annie’s. Between roughly 1907 and 1920 a trolley ran along Maple Avenue on a route between Hicksville and Mineola.

On the north side of Maple Avenue and west side of Post Avenue, we come to the Chase Bank, formerly the Bank of New York. This building, originally the Bank of Westbury, was built on this corner in 1924, with the addition added in 1948. The original Bank of Westbury, founded in 1910, was located in the brick-faced building next door. Next to this building the “new” post office was located in 1909. Across from the bank, on the east side of Post Avenue, Harris’s Bicycle Shop was located. Arthur Harris bought a bicycle shop from Michael Knipfing in 1911. A few years later Harris moved to this site north of Maple Avenue which was formerly occupied by a shoe store. In 1929 using horses, Mr. Harris moved his house from the site of his bicycle shop to its current location on the corner of Wilson Avenue and Fulton Street. He expanded his business by building a garage to repair cars on the former site of his home. He had a parts department for cars, sold veterinarian products for horses and dogs and had an insurance business. Later Mr. Harris moved back the building housing the bicycle and insurance business to install gasoline pumps. All of this was on the current site of Rite Aid and the village park. The second A & P store immediately preceded Rite Aid and a gasoline station occupied the corner where the park was recently established.

The first firehouse built in 1898 was north of Harris’s property. There was a movie hall upstairs. The original fire alarm was a bell on a pole with a
rope. The fire siren was acquired around 1915, about the time Westbury got its first fire truck, a Kelley Springfield, with a top speed of 15 miles an hour. The original horse drawn apparatus, which looked like a wagon but held a ladder, hand pump, hoses and two dozen buckets, was purchased used from the Gravesend Hook and Ladder Company in June of 1897.

Crossing to the west side of Post Avenue, between Schenck Avenue and Winthrop Avenue was Lascelle's hardware store and electric shop. Mr. Lascelle was first to install electricity in many Westbury homes and estates to the north. On the northwest corner of Post and Winthrop Avenues stands the Deferrari building, built before 1900. Deferrari’s store on the first floor sold different items at various times. These included fruits; newspapers, stationery and school supplies, records and radios. The northern half of the store was also the first A & P store in Westbury.

We continue north on the west side of Post Avenue to Belmont Avenue where Mike Knipfing’s garage was located. Knipfing’s Ford dealership was established in 1907, the first one in the area. Mr. Knipfing came to Westbury to operate a bicycle shop and sporting goods store. As noted earlier, he sold the bicycle shop to Arthur Harris. Knipfing also used his garage to house the automobiles used in the annual Vanderbilt Cup Races, which began in 1904.

Looking down Belmont to the northeast corner of Belmont and Fulton Street, you will see a parking lot, which was the location of the Methodist Church, built in 1900. The church was there until 1950 when its new (and current) building was constructed on Asbury Avenue just off Post Avenue. The old church on Belmont became the Country Art Gallery until it was eventually torn down in the 1960s.

Coming back to Post Avenue and looking across to the east side of Post, we see, south of Newton Street, the old movie theatre building. The Westbury Theatre was once a gem of the village. Prior to 1927 movies in Westbury were shown on the second floor of the firehouse as noted earlier. John R. Hill, a local builder who felt that Westbury should have its own theatre, approached Salvatore Calderone, owner of a chain of theatres on Long Island. Calderone agreed to build the theatre and asked
Douglas Pairman Hall, a well-known New York theatrical architect, to draw up plans. Hall designed a medieval style building similar to a British baronial hall with the half-timber, arches, beamed ceiling and heraldry. The building was completed for opening in November 1927. The theatre was closed in 2001 and the property sold in 2004.

As we continue north to Liberty Avenue and look to the west on Liberty, we can see an apartment building on the north side beyond the gas station on the corner of Post. The Windhorst house, a former farmhouse, used to be on the site of the apartment house. The farm extended from the parkway south to Lewis Avenue and from Post Avenue to Hicks Nurseries. The previous owner of the farm was Wilbur Lewis. The Lewis farm was much larger, extending from Maple Avenue to the parkway.

Across Post Avenue on the east side opposite Liberty Avenue, Mrs. McCarthy’s store occupied the building which is today the Kraemer and Mulligan Law Office. The store sold a small line of groceries, pencils, paper, candies and ice cream. In the late 1800s this was also the site of the home of Townsend Levi, a member of one of the African-American families who were significant participants in the history of Westbury. According to Henry Hicks, Townsend Levi owned a wagon repair shop where the Northern State Parkway crossed Post Avenue. This is around the area of the former blacksmith’s shop, mentioned earlier in our tour.

South of McCarthy’s store was the residence of Danny Kivlighn, who owned cows. From Kivlighn’s south to Maple Avenue there were mostly residences in 1914. During the early 1900s stores and homes mingled along Post Avenue. Among the homes were those owned by the Barley, Tatem, Strada and Harris families.

We are now back to the Senior Center which was formerly the White family residence, having made a circular tour of the main streets of the village. There are other places which are of interest to Westbury’s history, but they can best be reached by car.

**Driving Tour**

We start the driving tour from the corner of Post Avenue and Jericho Turnpike. Jericho Turnpike is the site of a famous historical event, the Vanderbilt Cup Race. This was actually a yearly race which was started in 1904 by William K. Vanderbilt to promote the automobile. The early races started and finished at Westbury, running on local roads such as Jericho and Hempstead Turnpikes. Several years later Vanderbilt had the Long Island Motor Parkway built for the race because of the danger to pedestrians and non-motorized vehicles on the local roads.

If we drive west on Jericho Turnpike from Post Avenue we pass the Wheatley Villas section of Westbury on the south side of Jericho Turnpike. Hicks’ Nurseries is beyond this section. This is the oldest business in Westbury. It was started in 1853
by Isaac Hicks, who grew and sold fruit trees to other farmers in the area. In the late 1800s the nursery was known for the workers’ skill in moving large old trees and shrubs to serve the developing estates on Long Island. In the late 1960s the nursery became a garden shop in response to the changing needs of its customers and it is still a thriving business. In the past, the nursery owned a much larger area of land, extending north of Jericho Turnpike, south to Maple Avenue and around Powell’s Lane. As the focus of the business changed, the land was sold off.

Further along Jericho Turnpike on the south side just before Hillside Avenue forks off of Jericho Turnpike, we come to Westbury Manor. The 22-room house on six acres of land was the home of the John Hill family until 1945 when it was sold to Auguste deSandigiliano. Mr. Sandi (he simplified his name after coming to the United States) opened the Manor as a restaurant in July 1946. Delegates to the United Nations were frequent visitors to the restaurant as well as many celebrities such as Bing Crosby, Gene Tierney and Gordon McCrae. Business was so good that the restaurant went through a couple of expansions. At the time of Mr. Sandi’s death in 1961, Westbury Manor was sold and became Carl Hoppele’s Westbury Manor. It is still a well-known restaurant today where weddings and other celebrations are held.

Driving to Glen Cove Road, we will go north until we come to where Glen Cove Road crosses the Long Island Expressway. This section of the road is called Guinea Woods Road which is near where the freed slaves settled, naming their settlement Guinea Town after their country of origin in Africa. This is where the New Light Baptist Church was started by Eliakim Levi, and a school was established to educate the children. Eventually many of the people moved to the area called Grantville and the church, later known as the Westbury AME Zion Church, moved to its current location.

We will drive east on the service road until we come to Old Westbury Road where we will turn to go south. About midway to Jericho Turnpike, we come to the entrance to Old Westbury Gardens. This estate was the home of the John Phipps family. John (“Jay”) had the house built in the style of an English manor house for his English bride Margarita Grace. Margarita loved flowers and planned the gardens on the estate. Westbury House was the scene of an active family life when the Phipps’ three sons and one daughter were growing up. Jay and
Margarita died within a year’s time in the late 1950s. It was then that the children, led by daughter Peggie, decided to create Old Westbury Gardens and open the estate to the public so that others could enjoy the beauty with which they had lived for many years. Several movies were filmed at the estate including *North by Northwest* starring Cary Grant.

There are a couple other points of interest to Westbury’s history to the south of the village. If we continue driving south on Old Westbury Road, and cross Jericho Turnpike we will be on Ellison Avenue which will take us south to Old Country Road.

This area south of Old Country Road is part of the Hempstead Plains. The farmers of the area used to let their sheep and cattle graze on the plains. A small portion of the Hempstead Plains is still preserved today in the northern section of Eisenhower Park bordering Old Country Road and Merrick Avenue (to the east of Ellison Avenue).

The area south of Old Country Road and west of Ellison Avenue is where the aviation industry was born on Long Island. In the early 1900s anyone with an interest in flying would build an airplane and try it out. The result was a lot of plane crashes, some ending in death. There were two crashes in Westbury: one at the intersection of Post and Maple Avenues, the other on the grounds of Hicks Nursery. Spectators came to watch these early amateur aviators and an industry grew up around this new entertainment. Those who were brave enough would pay to be given a short ride in an airplane.

Milestones in aviation were achieved here also. In July of 1919 the British dirigible R-34, the first airship to cross the Atlantic, landed at Roosevelt Field. Then on May 20, 1927, Charles Lindbergh took off on his transatlantic flight to Paris, France. That flight is commemorated by a marker behind the parking garage of the Fortunoff Source mall.

During the Golden Age of flight after World War I, Roosevelt Field encompassed a much larger area than where the shopping mall is now located. Most of the historic flights took place on the eastern field behind the Fortunoff Source Mall. The western half of the field was sold in 1919 and became known as Curtiss Field. In 1935 the eastern field was sold to become an automobile-racing, and later, horseracing track.

In 1936 and 1937 George Vanderbilt, a nephew of William K. Vanderbilt attempted to revive the Vanderbilt Cup Automobile Races. He had the Roosevelt Raceway constructed for this purpose. At the beginning of World War II George Morton Levy started harness racing at the Raceway. After the war, harness racing increased in popularity. The sport reached its peak in the 1950s and 1960s. Attendance started to decline after the institution of off-track betting in 1971. New owners purchased the track, and then closed it in 1988 amid much controversy.
The Historical Society of the Westburys

The walking tour through School and Cross Streets was written by Ester Emory in 1979 and updated and completed by History Society Board members in 2007.

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Historical Society of the Westburys
445 Jefferson street
Westbury, NY 11590-2300