



Our Gold Coast - A deeper look into the 16-mile stretch of land immortalized by F. Scott Fitzgerald

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If you're a Long Islander, chances are you've heard of "the Gold Coast." But how much do you actually know about our Gold Coast besides the name alone? Here, we take a deeper look into this famous strip of land immortalized by F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*.

The Gold Coast, so-called due to the huge concentration of wealth and fortune, is the 16-mile stretch along Long Island's North Shore region from Great Neck (Nassau County) to Huntington (Suffolk County) that was once home to some of the wealthiest families in America during the Gilded Era and the Roaring Twenties. By 1920, there were 600 estates, most of them over 50 acres in size, and over 150 of them exceeding 100 acres. A typical main house would have over 100 rooms and 30 baths. The estates usually had their own power source and waste disposal systems as well as plenty of outbuildings that served as greenhouses and housing for servants. These estates also included many facilities for entertainment of the families and their guests. For example, it was not uncommon for the estates to include elaborate equestrian facilities, 18-hole golf courses, and race tracks for horses and sometimes for automobiles as well. Formal gardens, swimming pools, children's playhouses, tennis courts, and reflecting pools were also typically found on these lavish properties.

At the turn of the 20th century in America, it was considered perfectly acceptable for the rich to display their wealth for others to admire. This action was called "success made manifest," part of the rewards of the American way. At this time the ultra-wealthy were showcasing their wealth by building mansions in New York City where they lived and worked, but this wasn't enough, they then began to build country homes of the same size along a lush and magnificent setting, this is how the Gold Coast came to be. Many of these homes belonged to wealthy industrialists of the Gilded Age who pioneered great industries such as steel, transportation, and banking. Some of these ultra-wealthy families you may even recognize: Vanderbilts, Astors, Whitneys, Morgans, Pratts, Hearsts, and Guggenheims.

The homes built along the Gold Coast were commonly castles, villas, or chateaus, designed in Georgian, Gothic, Mediterranean or Spanish architecture. To paint an image of just how grand these homes truly were, here are a few examples to help draw to scale: Frank W. Woolworth's "Winfield Hall" had a marble staircase that alone cost \$2 million; Louis Comfort Tiffany's "Laurelton Hall" was 84-rooms and sat on 600 acres; Roland Conklin's "Rosemary Farm" had its own plein aire amphitheater with a stage surrounded by a moat; and Otto Hermann Kahn's "Oheka Castle" which was the second largest private residence in the world included never ending amenities. But perhaps of all the homes on the Gold Coast, it was "Land's End" in Sands Point owned by Herbert Bayard Swope that has become the most well known. This home was famous for throwing lavish Roaring Twenties parties attended by everybody you-ought-to-know.

There is no doubt that this estate became the inspiration for Tom and Daisy Buchanan's home in the great F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*.

Since the Roaring Twenties, many of the homes along the Gold Coast have been destroyed, however, about 200 still stand today, and over a half-dozen estates have since been converted into public-use, with many open for public touring. Some of these great estates that still stand today are Old Westbury Gardens, built in 1906 is a 70-room English manor house with traditional English gardens sprawling over 100 acres; Suffolk County Vanderbilt Museum aka "Eagle's Nest" is a 24-room Spanish Revival Mansion designed by architects who designed and created the original Grand Central Station; Hempstead House at Sand's Point Preserve, built in 1909 on 300 acres on Sand's Point is castle-like with stone gargoyles overlooking the Long Island Sound; Oheka Castle, built in 1919 is a 126 room mansion modeled after Napoleon's Chateau Fontainbleu, included a golf course, stables, greenhouses, private airstrip and many more amenities; Glen Cove Mansion, built in 1910, is a breathtaking 55-acre estate with lush English gardens and is often seen on the big screen; Chelsea Mansion/Muttontown Preserve, is comprised of 550 acres of nature preserve land. Ron Koenigsberg is the president of American Investment Properties, Inc., Garden City, N.Y.

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