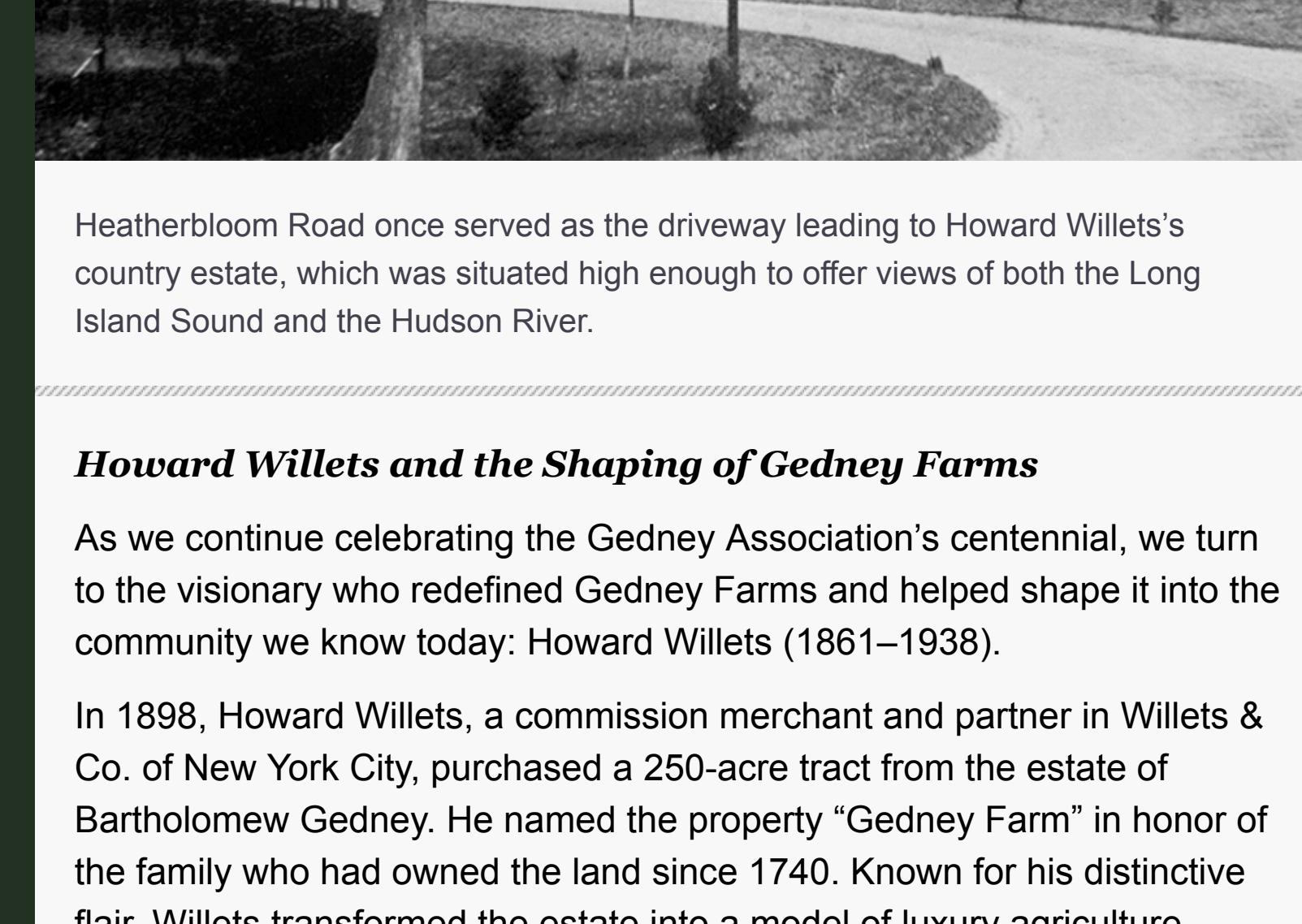




## The Gedney Association

Celebrating 100 Years: Shaping Gedney Farms with Howard Willets

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Heatherbloom Road once served as the driveway leading to Howard Willets's country estate, which was situated high enough to offer views of both the Long Island Sound and the Hudson River.

### Howard Willets and the Shaping of Gedney Farms

As we continue celebrating the Gedney Association's centennial, we turn to the visionary who redefined Gedney Farms and helped shape it into the community we know today: Howard Willets (1861–1938).

In 1898, Howard Willets, a commission merchant and partner in Willets & Co. of New York City, purchased a 250-acre tract from the estate of Bartholomew Gedney. He named the property "Gedney Farm" in honor of the family who had owned the land since 1740. Known for his distinctive flair, Willets transformed the estate into a model of luxury agriculture, featuring prize-winning Jersey cattle, manicured pigs, and one of the country's first concrete dairy barns equipped with electric lights and steam heat. His innovative approach earned national attention.

Despite the acclaim, the dairy experiment ultimately proved financially unsustainable. In 1907, Willets shut down operations after losing nearly \$1 million, concluding one of the boldest agricultural ventures in history.

Willets was equally passionate about show horses and dogs. He served as president of the American Kennel Club and was Master of Foxhounds for the Westchester Hounds. Among his most famous horses was Heatherbloom, a bay gelding who unofficially cleared an astonishing 8 feet 3 inches at Gedney Farm, a feat unmatched in its day. Although not an official record, it became legendary in equestrian circles. Tragically, Heatherbloom was later injured in a jump and had to be euthanized in 1909.

In that same year, a catastrophic fire destroyed Willets's mansion, which was situated on the highest point of Gedney Farms near what is now Heatherbloom Road. The fire caused an estimated \$300,000 in losses. As fate would have it, Willets learned the very same day that a jury had ruled in his favor in a civil suit, awarding him \$277,999 in damages for a misrepresented investment.

After the fire, Willets rebuilt nearby. His new home, completed later in 1909 at what was then 10 Oxford Road (now 25 Hathaway Lane), became the new heart of the estate. Willets envisioned subdividing his property, with a luxury hotel serving as the centerpiece of the residential development. In 1912, he sold a significant portion of the land to developer Robert E. Farley, who went on to build the Gedney Farm Hotel, a luxury country resort with golf, tennis, swimming pools, and even a kennel for guests' pets. Farley likely also initiated the first phase of residential development on the former estate.

By the mid-1920s, Willets began subdividing the portions of Gedney Farm still under his ownership. In 1925, he appointed L. Ward Prince as sales agent and helped launch the Gedney Farm Building Company to continue shaping the neighborhood. **That same year, he founded The Gedney Association to preserve the character of the growing community and became its first president.**

Willets passed away in 1938 at the age of 77, at his Gedney Farms home at 10 Oxford Road. He left behind a legacy that extended far beyond White Plains. His vision lives on in the graceful layout of our neighborhood, the horse-themed street names like Heatherbloom Road and Hathaway Lane, and the enduring sense of community he helped foster. We remember him not only as a founder, but as a creative and ambitious pioneer who turned farmland into a timeless neighborhood.

### Did You Know?

- Willets was a descendant of the Willets family for whom Willets Point in Queens is named.
- Heatherbloom, Willets's champion jumper, was once valued at \$20,000 - but Willets turned down a circus offer before the horse met a tragic end.
- In 1905, a fire destroyed Willets's new \$5,000 kennels, but 40 dogs and 8 horses - including Heatherbloom - were saved by quick-thinking servants.
- After retiring from the dairy and dog worlds, Willets turned his attention to a silver mine in Colorado.
- He served in World War I as a first lieutenant in the U.S. Army remount service, managing military horses in Florida.

### Help Us Preserve History!

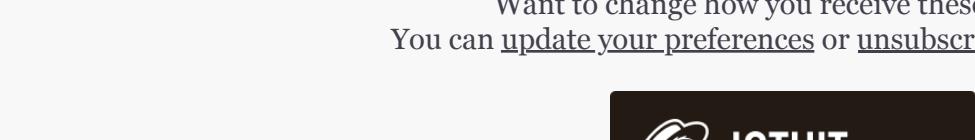
If you have historical insights, photos, or family stories related to Gedney Farms, please reach out to us at [info@gedneyfarms.net](mailto:info@gedneyfarms.net).



Circa 1910 map of White Plains featuring Howard Willets' Gedney Farms

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