

# A Brief History of Old Town Hall

*Written by Thomas B. Smith, Babylon Town Historian*



Founded in 1872, the Town of Babylon conducted its business through Town Board meetings held at various hotels and on occasion in Board Members' homes. The Town Clerk received mail and maintained records in a rented office establish in the community of his residence.

At that time, most of the Town population was located within the communities of Amityville, Babylon and Breslau (now Lindenhurst). The remainder of the Town was sparsely populated and consisted mainly of farms. Town Government consisted of many function such as Supervisor, Councilman, Town Clerk, Tax Assessor, Highway Superintendent, Constables and Judges. Most Town officials used their homes for office space.

Just as the railroad brought an influx of people to Babylon Town in 1842 when it reached Deer Park, and again in 1867 when it came directly into Babylon Village, the arrival of the automobile after the turn of the 20th Century caused a major impact on Town Government. The need for a centralized place for government operations became obvious.

Some suggested that at building intended to conduct Town business should be located as near to the geographic center of Town as possible. Others thought that in as much as Babylon was the Town's name, it would be appropriate to place it in the Village of Babylon. This concept prevailed and on a plot of land located on the northwest corner of Main Street and Cottage Place, donated by the family of David S.S. Sammis, the taxpayers in 1917 voted 667 to 462 on Proposition 18 to erect a Town House or as it would later come to be called, a "Town Hall."

On March 13, 1918, Supervisor John Clinton Robbins served as master of ceremonies for the laying of the building's cornerstone; exactly 46 years after the Town's inception. After a brief but impressive speech, he placed a copper box within the stone that held copies of the four newspapers published in the Town, a Liberty Quarter, the gift of the Supervisor, specifications for the building, photographs and other items. On November 1, 1918, the headline of the *Babylon Leader* read, "Town in New Headquarters—First Meeting Held Wednesday."

Built in the Classical Revival style, the main floor of the Town Hall had offices for the Town Supervisor, Town Clerk, Tax Assessor and the clerical staff. The Town Constables, Charities Bureau and Highway Superintendent occupied the second floor, along with the Town Boardroom, which was also used as a Courtroom. In the basement a prisoner cellblock area was installed.

Official Town business was conducted in the first Town Hall for 40 years, until functions and staff increased to the point where a new and larger building was required. In 1958, a new Town Hall was built and this time placed in a more centralized location within Babylon Town.

During 1964, the Old Town Hall was renovated and dedicated as a District Court. In 1979, the building was sold into private ownership and served as a photography studio until the Town of Babylon regained ownership through Resolution #299, on April 13, 2004.

Recognizing the full historic value of Old Town Hall, Town Supervisor Steven Bellone directed that research be undertaken to determine if the structure would qualify for national landmark status. After exhaustive research and an in-depth year-long application process, Old Town Hall was approved for placement on the National Register of Historic Places, on October 5, 2005.

The historic building was faithfully restored, inside and out, and an extension was made to the northeast corner of the building allowing the construction of an elevator, providing access to all floors. On June 11, 2010, the Old Town Hall was rededicated as the Town of Babylon History Museum.

## Photographic History of Old Town Hall



*Sketch of the proposed Babylon Town Hall by Amityville architect Lewis Inglee, 1917.*



*On the face of the building is a plaque honoring David S.S. Sammis, in whose memory the property for the Old Town Hall was donated to the Town of Babylon.*



*Dedication of the building's cornerstone on March 13, 1918, the 46<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Town of Babylon, led by Town Supervisor John Clinton Robbins (second row, right).*



*Reacquired by the Town of Babylon in 2004, the building was designated as Old Town Hall, and placed on the National Register of Historic Places the following year.*



*On June 11, 2010, the Old Town Hall was rededicated, once again, as the Town of Babylon History Museum.*