

Henry L. Stimson (1867-1950)

Secretary of War During World War II



Henry L. Stimson served his country in a variety of roles from 1911 to 1945 under five Presidents, both Republican and Democratic. Born in 1867 in New York City, he attended Yale and Harvard.

By 1903, he was a 36 year old lawyer in Manhattan looking for a permanent country home. He chose 100 acres in West Hills with what he described as “one of the most perfect views on Long Island, reaching at the time we brought it from the Sound and shores of Connecticut on the north to the distant rim of the ocean much further away on the south.” The house he built, which was known as Highhold, had no running water and no telephone.

Shortly after building his new country home, Stimson ran for governor. Although he lost that race in 1910, the next year President Taft appointed him Secretary of War. He served as a colonel in the army during World War I. In 1927, he resumed his service to the country as President Coolidge’s special envoy to Nicaragua to negotiate an end to civil unrest there. After his success in that mission, he was appointed governor-general of the Philippines. President Hoover appointed him Secretary of State. While in that office, he issued what became known as the Stimson Doctrine in response to the Japanese invasion of Manchuria in 1932. Under that doctrine, the United States would not recognize any situation or treaty that was brought about by means of aggression.

With election of democrat Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1932, Stimson returned to his legal practice. However, in 1940, he returned to government service when Roosevelt appointed him Secretary of War, which office he held until 1945. According to local legend, the decision to drop the Atomic Bomb may have been made at Highhold. Due to the secrecy surrounding this decision, the story has never been confirmed.

In his book, *My Vacations*, he wrote that except for his time in Washington or while at war, he spent his time in West Hills. Horseback riding over the farmers’ cart paths and through the neighboring woods became his greatest pastime. In order to show his appreciation to his neighbors for allowing him to ride over their land, he organized the annual Highhold Games at first held every Thanksgiving Day and later held on Columbus Day. Stimson would issue a blanket invitation to all his neighbors through a notice in *The Long-Islander*. The games, which varied from year to year, consisted of field sports created by Stimson for those on foot as well as on horseback. Cups were given out as prizes under a big tent where coffee, cider and doughnuts were served.

Stimson died on October 20, 1950 in Huntington. Stimson’s estate later became West Hills County Park. His house no longer stands. The junior high/middle school in the South Huntington School District is named for this local resident.

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