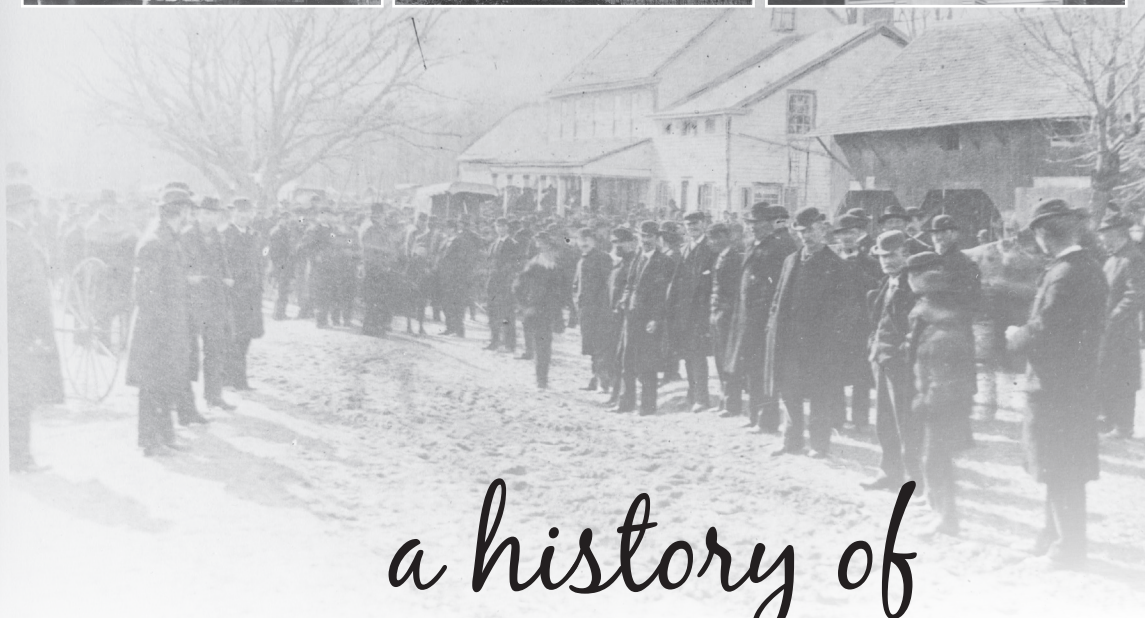


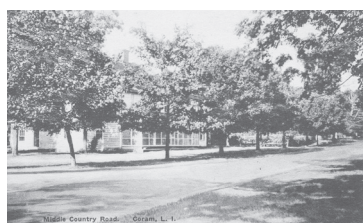
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a history of
CORAM



Rovagna's Pond, Coram, N.Y.



Middle Country Road, Coram, L.I.

By Eva Zheberlyeva and Summer Vitale, Longwood High School student interns,
edited by Melanie Cardone-Leathers



Schools

Back in the 19th and early 20th centuries, Coram's schoolhouses were built out of wood. Prior to the construction of the current Coram Elementary School, a one-room schoolhouse with two outhouses behind it had a fireplace that served as a cooking surface and additionally a heat source in the winter. Students worked at high, slanted wooden desks with benches by them. Older students typically taught the younger ones, while teachers focused on the higher grades. There was no mandatory educational requirement, so most students' educational careers terminated around 5th grade when they went on to help with farming and other family-related responsibilities. This was especially common in towns like Coram, where farming was the main economic focus.

Teachers were valued members of society, especially given that not many others were literate. In the early 1800s, Coram's school teacher was paid \$1.75 per student, with salaries increasing to \$8.75 per hour by 1953. In addition to their regular salaries, teachers received half a cord of firewood per child, which was to be used for the schoolhouse, and a week's stay at each of the pupil's homes.

Four separate schools have been built in Coram Town. The first was constructed in 1811 in a wooden triangular house that had previously served as a meeting house, located on Middle Country Road near the intersection of Route 112, in front of the current Methodist Church. It was soon taken apart to construct a home in 1813 when Brookhaven was divided into districts based on the

estimated location of what would be an acceptable distance for a school-aged boy to walk every day. Coram, also known as district #10, ranged from James Norton's in the west to Swezeytown Road in the east. A second schoolhouse built at the foot of Mt. Tabor was in use from 1813 to 1900. In 1900, a third school was built at a cost of approximately \$700 next to what is now the Coram Fire Department and currently serves as the commissioner's office. Similar to the previous buildings, it was a one-room schoolhouse (20ft. x 30ft.) with two outhouses in the back. However, in the 1950s, it became apparent that a bigger building was needed. The one-room could no longer fit all of the students, as the grades had reached 30 children each. Students for grades 1-2 attended the Coram School, while 120 more students ranging from grades 3-12 were brought by bus daily to the Port Jefferson School District. To avoid such inconvenience, the Board of Education approved a plan in 1951 for the construction of a fourth school.

The new school was constructed on Mt. Sinai Coram Road on a 10-acre parcel donated by the estate of Winfield Davis. Unlike the previous buildings, this school was made from brick and had four classrooms and even an auditorium. It was completed at a cost of \$115,000 in 1953 and served students in grades K-6. Due to lack of space, students in grades 7-12 were still transported to Port Jefferson daily by bus. The school still stands and now serves as the Coram Elementary School, which has undergone major reconstruction and renovation prior to the 2000-2001 school year to add several hallways to the Intermediate building. During the following school year, all but one hallway was demolished in the Primary building to complete large-scale additions. The one remaining hallway was gutted the following summer and restored in time for the 2002 school year.

In 1959, Coram, Middle Island, Yaphank, and Ridge joined together to form a single, unified school district called the Middle Island School District. With the completion of the new high school in 1963, students from the area who previously attended Port Jefferson's secondary schools were able to attend school in the newly constructed buildings. In 1980, the name Longwood Central School District was adopted. Originally, the Longwood School District was broken up with K-5 students attending

the elementary school in Coram, 6-7 in the middle school, with one “house” dedicated to each, 8-9 in the junior high, and the remainder attending the High School. However, in 2000-2001, there were additional wings added to the junior high and high school, as well as an extra house to the middle school. This allowed students to be redistributed as follows: elementary school K-4, middle school 5-6, junior high 7-8, and high school 9-12. This distribution is still in effect. As a result, all of the schools experienced different start dates between the years 2000 to 2005.

Bayberry Tax

During the mid-1700s, Coram faced a dilemma involving a specific fruit: bayberries. Bayberries are a blue fruit not typically eaten, but perfect for making candles. These candles had a sweet scent and a greenish color, and Coram residents competed to be the first to pick the berries during harvest season. Some residents were so overly zealous that Brookhaven Town became involved. On August 4, 1746, a law that prohibited gathering bayberries from public property prior to September 20 was implemented. All violators would receive a 20 shilling fine. This was done to allow the berries to fully ripen and give everyone an equal opportunity at gathering them. The law stated that citizens were not allowed to harvest the berries until they were fully ripe, and would tax anyone who did so unless the berries were on their own land. Bayberry candles are still bought today, and are used around Christmas and New Year’s as a way to bring good luck in the new year!

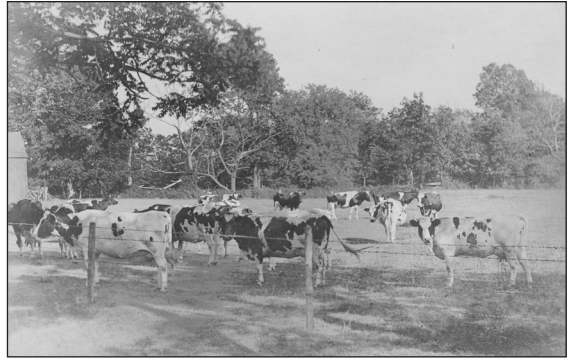


Coram and the American Revolution

Coram was a surprisingly significant town throughout American history. Before America was even established, the town received its name from the Native American word for “a passage between hills or a valley.” Although the town is rich in history, many local residents are unaware of Coram’s immense significance in the American Revolutionary War. Benjamin Tallmadge was a director of military intelligence and led important events and battles on Long Island, specifically in Coram. In November 1780, Major Benjamin Tallmadge led 80 men from Fairfield, Connecticut to Mount Sinai Harbor, then to Mastic in less than a day. Tallmadge’s company was able to capture the British-held Fort St. George without firing their guns, while two other companies mounted the fort as well. British soldiers emerged from hiding and began to shoot, quickly resulting in a fierce gun battle. This led to what George Washington stated as the most important American Revolution event in Coram: the Burning of the Hay. Twelve men rode on horseback to Coram, where British troops stored 300 tons of hay. Tallmadge’s men set fire to the hay which the British had intended on using for their horses over the course of the winter. Tallmadge received a congratulatory letter from George Washington personally, and another important figure in this battle, Elijah Churchill, won the first-ever Purple Heart award. In modern times, people can still travel across the same route Tallmadge and his men traveled from Cedar Beach to Mastic. Boy Scout troops on Long Island have even traveled this path in the span of two days, spending the night at Cathedral Pines County Park, in order to earn a Benjamin Tallmadge Historic Trail badge.

Motorcycle Track

The Suffolk County Motorcycle Club began competing in Coram in the 1940s. They originally held their races at the Riverhead County Fair but began racing at the newly built track on Granny Road shortly after World War II. Motorcycle contestants traveled from Pennsylvania, Connecticut, Rhode Island, New Jersey, and upstate New York to compete and tour at the new track, and it quickly became a popular attraction. Considered the toughest in the five-track circuit of these states, races at the track were so competitive and dangerous that it is said there was a waiting ambulance at the bottom of a hill due to how perilous the jump down the hill could be. The contestants of these races challenged each other for prizes such as money or a trophy, drawing around 500 local spectators from Coram to these events. Eventually, the owner of the track realized the potential liability issues if an individual became seriously injured there, and the competitions ended in 1953. But for the short span of time the Motorcycle Club operated in the Coram area, individuals within the community enjoyed competing and watching the thrilling events that occurred at the motorcycle track on Granny Road.



Davis House

Driving through Coram today, the large Davis House on Middle Country Road near the fire department is the most prominent feature in town. Events such as craft fairs and yard sales are held here, and the tree in front is decorated for Christmas. The building is an official town landmark and Coram's most historic structure. The Davis house may go unnoticed by some today, but in the past, this house was an important meeting spot and farm that was owned and loved by seven generations of family, dating back over 250 years.

The Davis House was an important location for numerous events throughout history. It was originally owned by Elijah Davis (1727-1802), but the house didn't become popular until 1790 when the town's government site was moved to this building. Every April, annual town meetings and voting events took place here. After 1800, official town board meetings were held, and in the mid-1800s, the house became a temperance house, a non-alcoholic bar. Also, around this time following Lincoln's election, the house served as the City Hall for the Town of Brookhaven. On April 10, 1880, the house held a large voting day where hundreds of voters gathered there before 7 a.m. to decide how the town should be governed. The vote had little dissent between Democrats and Republicans and was overall a successful event, and even included tents with food and drinks. From 1812 to 1840, the house served as a base for the state militia's horse artillery and was also used by militia officers as a meeting place due to its central location. Without the Davis House, so many important local elections and town meetings would not have been possible.



Also significant in the history of the Davis House is the land surrounding the building. During town meetings held at the Davis House, horses were traded and dinner was served for 50 cents. These meetings were not only a way for information to be spread but an opportunity for relatives to socialize and connect with one another as they ate and traded. Justices of the Peace would also attend these business meetings to ensure everything ran smoothly. The town meetings shut down in 1882 when the meetings became too large.

The farm produced tremendous amounts of grains such as barley, wheat, buckwheat, and rye, as well as flax which they used to make their own cloth and linen. Wood was chopped here for use by the Davis family and also sold. Large numbers of animals were kept at the farm, including hogs, sheep, cows, and chickens. The last owner of the house kept about 140 cows and would have them cross the street every day to get to the fields. As Coram became more populous and the streets became busier, police officers needed to hold traffic for the cows in order to keep the animals safe while crossing. The chaos of lives being

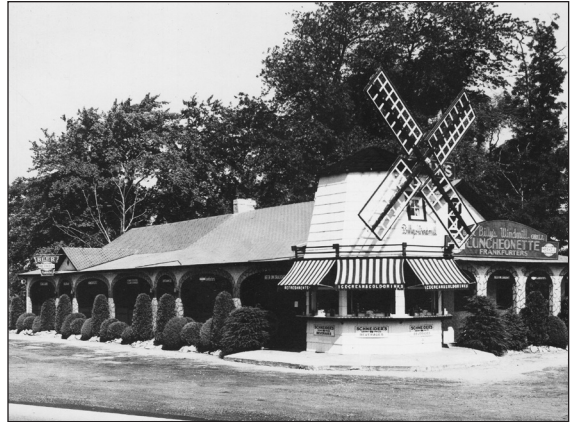
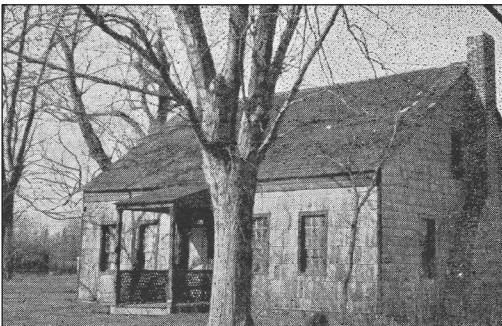
risked by these cows crossing the street, along with high taxes, ended the Davis dairy business during the 1960s. Shortly after the farmland was sold, houses and a shopping center were built on top of the old farmland. The shopping centers and Davis House are there to this day, located on Middle Country Road.

Even though the Lester Davis house is more commonly referred to as the Davis house today, other members of the Davis family, Minnie and Grace, lived in the Minnie and Grace Davis house next door. This house was similarly significant to the Lester Davis house due to a member of the home, Squire Davis, being the Justice of Peace and therefore holding important meetings in the home's dining room. In contrast, the house was a beautiful example of typical 1900's architecture. Minnie and Gracie took great pride in this and loved to show off their home to their guests and visitors. Unfortunately, the house burned down in a fire in 1991, but the history behind the house still lives on today.



Fun Facts

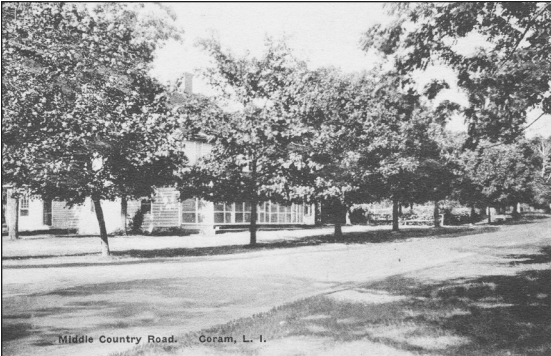
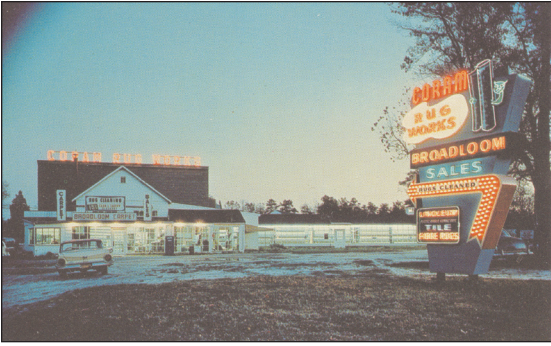
- In less than a decade, Coram's population of residents between ages 0-17 more than doubled from 81 to 182 between the years 1943-52.
- Coram had an airport that was used from 1959 to 1984, which now serves as an emergency landing area.
- Eleanor Roosevelt visited a Coram restaurant called the Old Orchard Tea Room when she was in the area but was not able to be served because the restaurant was closed that day. She came back on later trips and was able to enjoy the restaurant. The Old Orchard Tea Room was open from 1920 to 1989.
- Every hamlet of Longwood had a baseball team, and all but two members of Coram's baseball team served in WWII.
- Hopalong Cassidy, a comic, short story, radio, and TV show which was read/aired in the early 1900s was created by Clarence E. Mulford, who lived in Coram.
- Biz Markie, a professional rapper, DJ, and producer, lived in Coram and wrote the famous song, "Just a Friend." He was born in 1964 and died in 2021.



Hospitality Industry

- Casa Bordone
- Davis House Tavern
- The Old Orchard Tea Room
- Smith Hotel
- The Hunter's Inn
- Baczensky Service Station
- Janus Tavern
- The Red Rooster
- The Coram Roadside Rest
- The Coram Twins' Seafood
- White House Inn restaurant
- Billy's Windmill Luncheonette
- Fingar's Store
- Covati Stand / Tavern
- Home of Dominick Plate
- Manzoni Dairy Business





Middle Country Road. Coram, L. I.



Rovagna's Pond, Coram, N.Y.

7-E

The Bayles Room houses the following collections:

- Bayles photographs and family files
- Biographies
- Cemetery transcriptions
- Correspondence
- Deeds
- Local population censuses
- Genealogical reference books
- House histories
- Long Island Forum
- Manuscripts, clippings and scrapbooks
- Maps and atlases
- Minutes of library and some school boards meetings
- Periodicals
- Post cards
- Town records
- War histories
- Wills

Bayles Room



The Thomas R. Bayles Local History Room, located in the Adult Department, is a room full of local history. Most of the books, pamphlets, postcards, and photographs were donated by Mr. Bayles in 1976. The collection was dedicated in his honor on October 4, 1980. The portrait of him by Audrey Swanson Marlow that hangs in the room was donated by his wife, Gertrude Bayles and

his son, Donald M. Bayles. Mr. Bayles lived in Middle Island all his life. He was born February 4, 1895, and died June 29, 1977. He spent most of his life working for the Long Island Rail Road. He got his start in the freight office at Camp Upton during World War I. His father, Richard M. Bayles, had been a Suffolk County historian who wrote several books on the history of Suffolk County. When Thomas retired in 1958, he wrote a local history column for years entitled "Footnotes to Long Island History" for the Long Island Advance. He also published over 50 pamphlets on the history of Long Island. Several were published by the Town of Brookhaven during the Bicentennial.



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