

The History of the...
THE OLD TOWN PUMP

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THE OLD TOWN PUMP WHICH STOOD AT CORAM CROSS ROADS IS NO MORE

Mid-Island Mail

August 7, 1935

Motoring through other states particularly New Jersey and Pennsylvania, one is attracted by the tiny signs calling attention to sites of historical interests, or old landmarks. Long Island has a few, but not many of such memorials, though there are many places that would merit them.

For example, there was the old town pump at the intersection of the Patchogue-Port Jefferson state road [and a road] called the Middle Country Road in Coram. This served as a landmark for many years, after its active career ended and prior to the erection of the pump there was a well which was used both by people traveling across the island and those going along the Middle Country Road.



The Town Pump, located at intersection of Route 112 and Middle Country Road, Photo Courtesy of Davis Erhardt Collection



Town Pump, and Coram's first Catholic Church (in background, building with porch), Photo Courtesy of Davis Erhardt Collection

Permission to dig this well was given in 1833 to Richard W. Smith, grandfather of W. W. Smith of Patchogue, in whose possession the original permit now is. Richard W. Smith petitioned the commissioners of highways, Samuel Hammond, David Worth and John S. Mount, "to build a well at or near his signposts, standing a little to the west of the southwest corner of his barroom and the said well to be used with a pump only and a small trough or half-hogshead tub for the purpose of a watering place for his convenience." The commissioners examined said place and considered it of no inconvenience to the public and granted the privilege to make the well.

As may be guessed from the description, Mr. Smith kept a tavern, and it dated back to early in the eighteenth century. The stage coaches stopped there with the mail, and during the Revolution it was occupied by the British. In 1865 the tavern burned down and at present there is a stucco house on the site where the tavern stood. In 1867 a new house was built by Horace Overton which was later owned by Mrs. O'Doherty.

In 1883 the following entry is found in the town records: "Trustee Meeting at Port Jefferson, Tuesday, July 3, 1883. Trustee Charles E. Rose offered the following resolution which was adopted: Resolved that Trustee French be appointed a committee to purchase and have placed in the well at Coram opposite the residence of Mrs. O'Doherty a pump, the expense not to exceed \$12.00 for the use of the public, and the bill of same be paid by the treasurer of this board from the town funds." The trustees who were present at this meeting were Austin Culver, president of the board, Charles E. Rose, Charles S. Rose, Henry T. Osborn, John R. Davis, Joseph T. French and Albert H. Hutchinson.

At a later meeting of the town board held at Coram on November 3 of that year, it is recorded "a bill of \$9.25 was presented by Trustee French for the new pump placed in the town well at Coram by George E. Randall of Yaphank. Said bill was ordered paid."

The device was the old type of chain pump and was for many years a convenience. When the state highway department rebuilt the Middle Country Road a few years ago, the pump was right in the path of the new route. It was therefore removed and lay at the side of the road for several years. The D.A.R. made a large hole next to the road was filled in, the old pump was dumped into the hole and covered up. So although it was not glorified as a memorial to times past, it was given "decent burial," so to speak. The place where it was buried happens to be at the foot of a large maple tree next to "Billy's Windmill," a roadhouse and refreshment stand at the junction of the old road and the new. There is a triangle of ground on which there is a boulder bearing a tablet commemorating the burning of the British forage at Coram during the Revolution. It seems as though this plot would also be an ideal spot for the old town pump to recall other days and other customs.



Town Pump, Looking north to Port Jefferson, Greene Photograph, Photo Courtesy of Davis Erhardt Collection

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Patchogue Advance

September 8, 1899

Your correspondent was greatly surprised a few days since on discovering the condition of the town pump at Coram. In that arid region the necessity of a pump to supply water for the weary and thirsty travelers and their horses on the road from Patchogue to Port Jefferson needs no argument to prove. And the town trustees have for many years maintained a pump there at the intersection of that road and the country road. But its present condition is a scandal to the town. It is a chain pump and the chain has by long use worn away the inside of the tubing so that the water runs back almost as fast as it can be raised. It requires vigorous and patient turning of the crank to bring any water at all and the bearings are partly gone so that the wheel shaft slips out of place unless care is taken to hold it there. We wonder why the trustees do not have this pump repaired or replaced with a new one. Speaking of this difficulty of getting water in the dry places suggests another great annoyance to the public in this vicinity arising from too much water in some places.

Update Notes:

In 1993, **The Middle Country Road Renaissance Project** published an article from which the following was excerpted: *“Also at this intersection is a marker commemorating the famous town pump, which was dug in 1833 in front of the Richard Smith Tavern. The pump served its purpose well (no pun intended) at this main crossroads until the 1920's when the road was straightened.”*

If this marker exists somewhere, I cannot locate it. Anyone?