

# *The History of...* **Hopalong Cassidy**

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## **Did Hopalong Cassidy have his first ride in Coram?**

*Hopalong Cassidy, a 30's, 40's and 50's western star of short stories, comic books, movies, radio and that new-fangled thing called television, was the creation of Clarence E. Mulford ...who had once lived and wrote in Coram.*

(Story compiled and written by Paul Infranco).

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If you were a young man in the 1950s, you were probably glued to your 10-inch black and white TV watching the Hopalong Cassidy show. If you were lucky enough, you sat there wearing a Hoppy shirt and had your trusty six-shooter attached to your hip. What youngster doesn't remember the pearls of wisdom that Hoppy gave at the end of each show. "Always mind your daddy and mommy." "Have you washed your face and hands good lately?"

Behind the Hoppy craze was an author as different as the character he created. Clarence Edward Mulford was quiet, shy, introverted and uninterested in school.

Born in 1883, Clarence grew up possessing a fascination for the American west. He was a voracious reader of all things western and religiously cataloged information on the west in what grew to be a 17,000-index card collection.

Mulford settled in Brooklyn in 1900. After graduating high school having no interest in attending college, he began working for a technical magazine. Later he took a civil servant job at the Kings County Clerk's Office, which paid him a yearly salary of \$1,500.

In 1902, at the age of 19 he finished his first short story, which he submitted to a short story contest run by a magazine. One of six winners, it was published in the Metropolitan Magazine in 1906.

About this time his parents bought a home in Coram. Records from the Suffolk County Clerk's office show that the Mulford's bought a house and three parcels of land totaling 61 acres, sometime before 1906. The house was located where the 7-11 is on the east side of 112. The Mulford's were well received by their neighbors and played an active role in the community. As members of the Coram Methodist Church, they were known for their generosity and willingness to help at church events. The late Davis Erhardt recounted that his mother remembered that Mrs. Mulford had the nicest buggy she had ever seen and accompanied Mrs. Mulford on some of her rides.

The Mulford's had a greenhouse on the property, and sold Asparagus they grew on their land. It was in this greenhouse in 1906 that Clarence hammered away at his typewriter creating stories about the Bar 20 ranch and the cowboys who worked it. One of these cowboys that he created was Hopalong Cassidy.



William Boyd, the actor who played Hopalong Cassidy, with some of the children who adored the character... and his beloved horse Topper.

Mulford disliked writing in his Brooklyn apartment as he felt there were too many distractions. Retreating to his parent's farm, he found the concentration he craved. Rural Coram in the early 1900s was as close to the real west as Clarence would get for twenty years. He spent time at the Ben Still farm further south on Rte. 112 and a number of the Davis farms on Coram Mt. Sinai Road. We can only speculate what influence the local area had on his writing.

In 1910, Mrs. Mulford was engaged in a property line dispute with her Coram neighbor, Thomas Smith. When Smith put up a fence on where he claimed the line was, she promptly took it down. The case played out in court for years, with Mrs. Mulford eventually prevailing. In a case of life imitating art, one of the Hoppy stories centers on a property line dispute.

In 1907, Mulford wrote his first Bar 20 novel entitled Hopalong Cassidy, the first in a successful run, producing 28 books on the fictional cowboy.



The Mulford House on Rte. 112 in Coram, NY  
(North of Rte. 25—about where the 7-11 is now)



In 1935, Hopalong Cassidy made it to the silver screen and launched the first of 66 films. William Boyd portrayed Hoppy in stark contrast to the roguish character written by Mulford.

Mulford was unhappy with the changes made by William Boyd, as his books described Hopalong Cassidy as a hard drinking, foul mouthed, tobacco spitting, live off the land cowboy, not the knight that Boyd had turned him into on the screen.

William Boyd aware of Mulford's anger towards the characterization, arranged a meeting with Mulford and broke the ice by greeting Mulford with a, "How are ya doing, you son of a bitch?" Eventually a friendship developed between them.

In 1950, Mulford tired of continuing the series and Doubleday publishing hired a young writer named Louis L'Amour to continue the series. When actor William Boyd sold the 'Hoppies' to television, he touched off the first merchandising bonanza of the time. In spite of his distaste of what they had done to his beloved Hopalong, Mulford was soothed with the royalties he collected. In 1950, he established the Clarence E. Mulford foundation, which currently lists assets of \$12 million dollars.

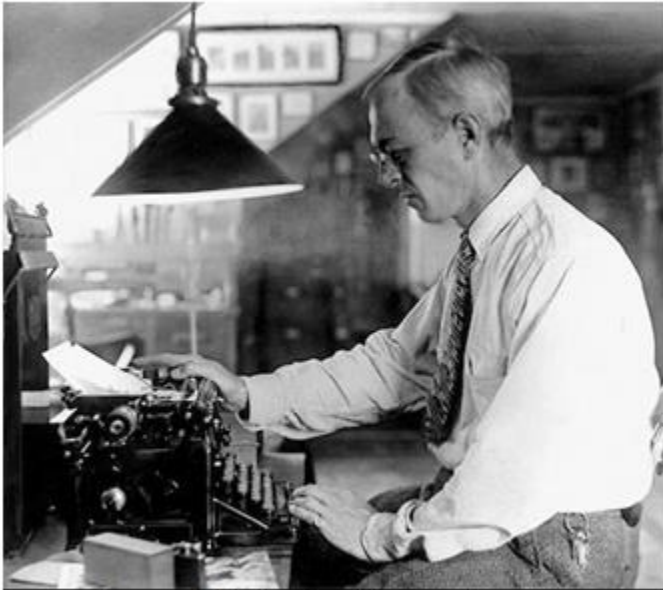
Clarence's father died in 1910 and his mother kept the Coram house until 1926, when she sold it to Sidney Ballance. Even after selling, the home newspapers reported Mrs. Mulford visiting and staying with friends in Coram. Young Clarence must have cultivated some relationships in the area as locals spoke fondly of him. Some even visiting his home in Maine.

The Patchogue Advance reported in October 1933 that Mr. and Mrs. D. Benjamin Still have returned from an

enjoyable trip through New England. While in Maine, they stopped at Fryburg to visit the writer, Clarence Mulford.

Preferring life in a small town to that of a big city Mulford settled in Fryburg Maine, where he wrote most of the Hopalong Cassidy books. His wife passed away in 1943. Clarence wrote a letter to the Ballances, who had bought the Coram house informing them of his wife's death.

In May of 1956, Mulford passed away at the age of 71 after unsuccessful surgery to repair a lung condition.



Clarence E. Mulford working on a story.

### FORMER CORAM MAN WRITER OF MOVIE PLOT

Quite a few Coram people went to see the moving picture, "Hopalong Rides Again," which was shown at the Granada theatre in Patchogue for four days, including yesterday, the picture being based on a story written by Clarence E. Mulford, who was a resident of Coram at one time. Both Mr. Mulford and his mother are well known in Coram, having resided in the home now occupied by Mr. and Mrs. Sidney Ballance. Mr. Mulford's mother, who lives in Maine, still corresponds with some of her Coram neighbors.

Patchogue Advance 1938

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