

The History of the... **TOWN POORHOUSE AT CORAM**

(As published by Longwood Journey with information compiled by Steven Torreblanca and Michael Loman)

Even during the colonial period in Brookhaven Town, attempts were made to help the less fortunate within the Town. Before the Revolution money in the Town was collected and the poor were placed with those who bid the least for care. An early record describes this process: *"At a meeting of the trustees upon the 13 day of March 1739...it was voted and agreed on that there shall be suffiesant sum of money raised of the freeholders and inhabitants of Brookhaven to defray the charge of a poor man who is fallen among us and is now at Nathaniel Roe's being frozen in his feet."*



Town Poorhouse, N.Y. Public Library Eugene Armbruster 1925

One source of money to pay for the poor came from money collected from fines such as *"ye 4th day of Aug. 1746, whereas we are credeably informed that the inhadetents of Brookhaven do frequently destroy the bayberys within the Township before they are grone to perfection... it was voted on and agreed on by us that whoever shall or may be found gathering any bayberys before the 20th day of September except on their own land shall forfeit 20 shillings. One half of of ye said penility to the complainent, the other half for the use of the poor."*

In 1769 the Town *"voted and agreed that there shall be a works house built... as there are many poor persons in this Town who are able to work and earn their living."* Nothing was done until 1817 when the Towns of Smithtown, Islip and Brookhaven purchased and built a poorhouse in Coram for \$900. The house was located north of Middle Country Road and east of Winfield Davis Drive. The Town Poor house was self-sufficient with food supplied by their farm it also had a cemetery for the inmates.

Lester Davis was the last of the superintendents at the farm earning \$3.00 a month and cartage, but not the labor of the poor. The 1870 census has Susan Hulse as the keeper of the poor house. It also listed 9 persons living in the house, four were blind, two listed as idiots and one insane.

In 1871 the County Alms house was built in Yaphank replacing the one in Coram. The inmates from Coram were transferred to Yaphank. Each Town paid for its own poor who lived there.

The Town Poorhouse was sold at auction and eventually torn down in 1949. The burying ground for the poor house remains in the wooded area east of the drainage sump.

The concept of a poor house was an example of humane social intervention.

