



Coates Island History

EST. 1872

Originally published July 1997
Revised with Addendum July 2017, revised with Addendum July 2022

COATES ISLAND COLCHESTER, VERMONT

ISAAC COATES	1800-1877
LYDIA H. COATES	1806-1875
WILLIAM I. COATES	1832-1893
ADALINE T. COATES	1825-1901
WILLIAM I. COATES	1866-1960
MARIE L. COATES	1879-1957
WILLIAM I. COATES, JR.	1904-1982
MINNA A. COATES	1908-1976
WILLIAM COATES, III	1929-2017
HELEN C. COATES CADWELL	1913-1983
FRANK A. CADWELL, JR	1913-1991
MARILYN CADWELL	1938-2010
FRANK A. CADWELL, III	1942-2012

JAMES P. COATES
DAVID R. COATES
GLADYS M. COATES HART
HELEN C. COATES BAILEY

Coates Island History

In 1833, Isaac and Lydia Howard Coates accompanied by their two children, William (age 2) and Emma (age 6), left their home near Ipswich, England and set sail for America. Isaac, who was 33 at the time, was a farmer in England and the son of John and Mary Coates, also farmers.

The Coates family arrived in Boston and over the next few years made their way to Colchester, Vermont.

The first official record of their arrival in Colchester is noted in the town's tax records. In 1848, Isaac paid a personal property tax on 4 cows, 3 horses and 4 sheep. Horses were considerably more valuable in those days than cows. Each horse was valued at a total of \$1.00. In 1849, in addition to their cows, horses and sheep, they had one hog valued at \$5.00.

Isaac and Lydia either rented or stayed with friends for their first few years in Colchester, as the first land transaction on record was in 1856 when they acquired a 100-acre parcel of land (lot #60) from Samuel and Betsey Smith for \$3,000. This parcel is where several local businesses are currently located – Mazza's General Store, Broad Acres, Lakeshore Hardware, Harbor View and is bordered by Lakeshore Drive and Prim Road. Anticipating the purchase of this land is probably the reason he declared \$1,000 of cash on his personal property tax return in 1851.

Cash was taxable as personal property by towns in those early days, but very few residents ever reported any significant sums.

The old town records contain many notations about the activities of Isaac and his son William. At a March 1, 1864 town meeting, Isaac was elected a Highway Surveyor for District #4. In the 1893 town report, William was paid \$15.98 for “work on highway”. William was also elected a “Sexton” in 1877 and continued in that role until 1893. A “Sexton” in those days was in charge of the cemetery. This made sense as the 100-acre lot Isaac owned, completely surrounded the Malletts Bay Cemetery which is also the family’s burial plot.

In 1877, the Selectmen paid William Coates for damage done by someone else’s dogs. In 1882, William Coates paid the Town Treasurer for damages done by his dogs, proving even then “what goes around, comes around”.

Isaac and William were frugal Englishmen evidenced by their vote at a December 21, 1863 town meeting. A special ballot item calling for paying volunteers an additional \$150 was soundly approved by a 2 to 1 margin. Isaac and William were duly recorded with the “nays”.

In 1858, at the age of 23, Emma Coates, daughter of Isaac and Lydia married James Thayer, a 30-year-old farmer. This is the same Thayer family that “Thayer’s Bay” and “Thayer’s Beach” are named after. The old brick farmhouse currently owned by Gary Booska was the Thayer homestead.

In 1860, William Coates, son of Isaac and Lydia, married Adeline Thayer, sister of James Thayer who, as noted earlier, married William’s older sister Emma in 1858.

William and Adeline Coates had two children, Ida born in 1864 and William born in 1866.

Along with his father Isaac, William Coates was a farmer and maintained a small farm in Colchester in the area where the State Access and Champlain Marina are located. This parcel consisted of a house, barn and several acres that bordered on route 127 and the lake. This original homestead still stands today but is no longer owned by the family. Across from the homestead was a 20-acre parcel used as a garden that still remains owned by the family.

On January 3, 1872, William and Adeline Coates acquired an eighty-acre Island farm from William Munson at a cost of \$1617. This would hereafter be known as Coates

Island. The earliest recorded transaction for the Island goes back to 1816 when E.M. Farrington sold it to Thomas Brownell. It was called Mathers Head at the time.

The Island was initially used for farming purposes to graze the family's cows and horses. However, it soon would become the "summer" home to several out of state campers.

We have reason to believe that at least one camp was built on the Island prior to 1900 and probably prior to when William Coates took title from his mother Adeline in 1896. Adeline's husband William died in 1893.

William, or Gompy as he was commonly known, built a farmhouse in 1896 with the help of his neighbors; and in 1897, built a barn also with the help of his neighbors. He farmed the Island as well as the 20-acre lot on the mainland across from the homestead. In addition, he became quite famous as a fishing and hunting guide. He knew the Malletts Bay water like no one else. In the summers, he knew where the small mouth bass could be found and, in the fall, where the best duck hunting for Whistlers (Golden Eye) was in the Bay. He was also an avid ice fisherman, trapper of muskrats and speared fish in the swamps bordering the Island in the spring.

In the early 1900's, several camps were built on the Island. Many of the campers were from out of state, as Vermont and particularly Malletts Bay, was fast becoming known to many tourists.

One of the first camps built on the Island was the Churchill camp built in 1907 by Gompy Coates. He built several other camps on the Island as well. The Churchill camp is significant in that it is presently the home of the only daughter, Evelyn Nolan, and has remained in the family since it was built. Mr. Churchill owned a "Kerosene Vapor launch" named the "Margaritte", built in 1896, and was a familiar sight in the Bay in the early 1900's.

Another camp of significance is the Mason camp, or Camp Ingleside, which was built around 1908. This camp is also still in their family today. Marie Hanson, a Swedish immigrant, was a nanny for the Mason family and it was here on Coates Island that she met her husband to be, William (Gompy) Coates. Gompy and Marie (Gram) were married on August 29, 1903 in the farmhouse that he had built in 1896.

Another generational camp belongs to the Millers. Dr. and Mrs. Miller were from Philadelphia and came to Vermont each summer with their family to vacation. The Miller

family still has the original architectural plans drawn up by a Burlington firm. Before the Millers acquired the camp, it served as the first home of the Brown Ledge camp. Its Indian name was Camp Winnake – or Camp of the Birch Groves. Around 1930, Brown Ledge moved from Coates Island to its present location near Marble Island.

Another interesting camp called Cedar Ledge belongs to the Heininger family. Although they were not the original owners, they acquired the camp in 1946, and perhaps one of its unique distinctions was Alfred Heininger's knack of catching large catfish from his dock. Alfred, a slight man often dressed in coat and tie (he was a prominent attorney), caught catfish so large they nearly pulled him and the dock across the Bay.

Gompy and Gram became the caretakers of Coates Island, living off the land, supplementing this with the small boat place, building and maintaining the camps and, of course, leasing campsites. Gradually the number of camps grew to 36. In addition, there are four-year round homes on the Island, now all owned and occupied by their descendants.

Gompy and Gram had three children, William, Jr., Helen and Mary. Mary died less than a month after her birth in 1912. William and Helen were born and brought up on the Island and shared the same love for it as their parents. William, as a young lad, labored with his father in the fields and in the gardens. William married Minna Aust and together they raised five children, three sons and two daughters (William, III, James, David, Gladys and Helen) ...the fifth generation. William, an electrician by trade, maintained the Island after his parents passed away and also ran the boat place.

Minna was a very active and respected member of the Colchester community serving on many boards and involved in many of the Town's activities. She was one of the original organizers of the Colchester Fourth of July Fair Day Celebration and was instrumental in getting a bandstand for the town that was subsequently dedicated to her in 1985. Minna died in 1976.

William, who died in 1982, remarried Louise who still lives in the farmhouse.

Helen attended Burlington High School and was a star member of the BHS ladies' basketball team. She married Frank Cadwell, Jr., who she met when he was an engineering student at the University of Vermont. After their marriage, Helen and Frank moved to Farmington, CT where he ran his family's oil business. They had two children, Marilyn, and Frank III (Bunky). Helen and the children came to Vermont every summer.

She took care of her parents and Marilyn and Bunky enjoyed the summer with their cousins. They were joined frequently by Frank who spent most of his time in Vermont with his father-in-law (Gompy) fishing for their beloved black bass. Helen died in 1983 and Frank in 1991. Bunky is still running the family business and Marilyn, a retired school teacher, is a co-trustee of the CoatesCadwell Trust.

A fire in 1982 nearly destroyed the farmhouse. A quick response by the Colchester Fire Department contained the blaze and the family was able to restore it to its original exterior design. The barn, built in 1897, was completely restored in 1988. Many of the tools and other artifacts have been saved and are being maintained by the family to benefit future generations. In 1965, William and Helen set up a Trust to keep the Island in the family as long as possible. The CoatesCadwell Trust is still in existence today and their children (the fifth generation) have established an additional Trust that will ensure family control long into the future.

Many of us can still see Gompy with his horse and wagon patching holes in the road, picking berries in his garden, rowing his boat to his favorite bass reef, or just chopping firewood for the kitchen stove. And, we can see Gram feeding the horses and chickens; bringing pies, berries, vegetables, and cookies to the campers as they drove by the farmhouse, whether they wanted them or not. Those were the days and the memories.

After 125 years, Coates Island has changed very little. Once you cross the causeway things are pretty much the same – the farmhouse, the barn, the fields, the roads, the campers, the boaters... the family. We believe it's a perfect example of what is possible if a family remains devoted and committed to something they love and respect.

July 1997

Addendum to Coates Island History

As with any history, it must be updated periodically. Our original history was published in 1997 in conjunction with our 125th anniversary. This update twenty years later commemorates our 145th anniversary.

Many events have changed our state, country, and the world during this span. Fortunately, little has changed on Coates Island...at least physically. Emotionally...we have lost many beloved members of our family and Island community. As one would expect in any living legacy, new members have joined our family and the Coates Island community. Our family is now up to the eighth generation and going strong.

We lost two of our fifth generation representing the entire Cadwell portion of the Coates-Cadwell Trust. The Coates-Cadwell Trust ran the Island from 1960 to 2000. In 2000 a new entity, Coates Island, LLC was set up to manage the Island. With the passing of Marilyn Cadwell (2009) and Frank Cadwell (2011), Coates Island LLC is now owned by two family trusts whose beneficiaries are members of the fifth, sixth, and seventh generations, ensuring continued family stewardship for many, many years to come. All in accordance with the wishes of our grandparents.

When Frank (Bunky) Cadwell died he was the last Cadwell living in Farmington, CT. His only heirs were the 5th generation Coates family. Fortunately, the family had planned for the succession of Coates Island and his interest representing 50% was transferred to a trust owned by members of the 5th generation.

In the process of disposing of the Cadwell property in Farmington, several family artifacts were returned to Vermont and are now part of the Coates Island Collection housed in the family barn built by Gompny and his neighbors in 1897.

Two items are of special note. One...the skiff that Gompny had used for many years as a local hunting and fishing guide had been taken to Farmington in 1960 after Gompny passed away...to be repaired. Fortunately, the repairs were never made. The skiff has been in the family for over 100 years. It was built by Josiah Farnham of Colchester, a noted boat builder and clock cleaner. The skiff, nearly 14' long with two sets of oarlocks, bears Josiah Farnham's signature. The skiff is now back home.

The second is a 12g Parker shotgun made in 1892. Parker guns were built in Meriden, CT for seventy years before being purchased by Remington Arms Co. in 1934.

Production finally ceased in 1942. It was called “American’s Finest Shotgun” by most serious shotgun experts. The Parker was an heirloom of the Cadwell Family and, now fully restored, is in the Coates Island Collection.

Marilyn Cadwell was also an accomplished artist. Country scenes and wildlife were her specialties. Several of her paintings are on display at Miss Porter’s School in Farmington, CT in the Cadwell House. The Cadwell House was the original Cadwell Homestead built in the early 1800’s. Miss Porter’s School acquired the homestead in 2012. Marilyn’s paintings are also on display locally at the Converse Home and the Arbors. Family members and campers have many of her paintings as well. Several are in the Coates Island Collection.

In 2012, Coates Island hosted a barn party to celebrate the 250th anniversary of Colchester...part of a town-wide celebration to commemorate this historic event. The barn party was to thank those donors who had provided the funding required to sponsor the many town related activities. The following day, the Island was open to the community and included tours of the Island and the family barn and farmhouse.

Finally, as we prepare to celebrate our 145th anniversary and as we (the fifth generation) move into our senior years, we wanted to share our appreciation of our grandparents William (Gompy) and Marie Coates. Their 1903 wedding picture is included in this history.

They made all of this possible for us and all generations past, present, and future. They had a profound impact on our lives. Our grandfather instilled in us the importance of hard work and to always keep your word. Our grandmother provided us with the gift of faith. And, they both, by example, instilled in us the importance of the stewardship of Coates Island. We are confident our children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren and those to come will follow their sage advice and leadership just as we have.

July 2017



William and Marie were married at the Farmhouse on August 29, 1903

Second Addendum to Coates Island History

We last updated our original history (1997) in 2017 at the time we celebrated our 145th year of family ownership. As we enter our 150th year celebration, here are additional updates.

We lost the oldest member of the 5th generation, William Coates III. Bill had a great life in so many ways enjoying Coates Island from the beginning (1929) to the end (2017). He attended the one room schoolhouse across from the island with his two younger brothers. He spent his youth hunting and fishing with his grandfather and then teaching his younger brothers what he had learned. Bill was a patriot who loved his country as he did the island. He served, like his brothers, in the US Army. Bill was a long-time resident of Shelburne where he operated the Coates Insurance Agency until his retirement in 2000.

Sadly, in 2021, we lost another dedicated and important member of the 6th generation, Ed Losier (1968-2021), sister Helen's son. Ed, like his Uncle Bill, enjoyed the island to the fullest growing up here and working with his grandfather and Uncle David managing the island's operations. Ed was an active member of the Colchester community where he operated Management Accounting Services. He was a volunteer in many local organizations and a long-time member of the Colchester Fire District No 2 Prudential Committee, serving as Treasurer the same position his grandmother Minna Coates previously held. He was also the 4th generation owner-operator of the Coates Island Marina following in the footsteps of his great grandfather (Gompy), grandfather (William) and father (Arnie Losier). Fortunately, and as would be expected, Ed was able to seamlessly transition the marina to his two daughters Shelby and Taylor.

Another memorable event in the family's history heretofore not mentioned, occurred in 1913 when the barn burned. Until we saw the article in the Burlington Free Press, not one of the 5th generation had been aware of this. Attached is the article from the Burlington Free Press reporting the fire and the interview with our grandmother that tells it all. Amazing how the neighbors arrived to help save the farmhouse and the bucket brigade they formed. The only thing in the article that is inaccurate is our grandfather's middle initial. It is I not G.

July 2022

FROM THE BURLINGTON FREE PRESS.....26 March 1913
FIRE AT MALLETT'S BAY

In some unknown manner the barn of William G Coates on Coates Island, Malletts Bay caught fire yesterday morning and burned to the ground along with a hen house, a shed and other outbuildings. The loss was estimated in the vicinity of \$1000 and only a small part was covered by insurance.

Mrs. Coates was in her house which is only a short distance from the barn. When her attention was attracted by the barking of the dogs and kicking of the horses in the barn. She looked out of the kitchen window and saw smoke curling out from a small window in the hayloft. No time was lost in notifying her husband, who had been in the barn only a few minutes before. He succeeded in getting three horses and four cows out of the barn unassisted. Although the last horse to be rescued was saved with difficulty. Two calves and about 30 hens were burned with the building.

In an incredibly short time, the barn was in flames and dense columns of smoke were pouring out. The residents in the neighborhood on seeing this gathered and in a short time a bucket brigade was at work. The house caught fire in one or two places, but the bucket brigade extinguished the flames and saved the building.

The wind made the work of fighting the flames more difficult, but the rain helped to offset this. The hen house was situated a short distance of two rods from the barn, but burned as soon as the larger building. Most of the poultry was liberated and got away from the barn, but Mrs. Coates thinks about 30 of the birds perished.

In addition to the livestock and the buildings, a large stock of tools and wagons, sleighs and other articles were burned.

Information About Coates Island

- First Coates to arrive in Colchester: Isaac and Lydia – approximately 1840. They came from England.
- Eight generations
- Acquired Coates Island 1872 for \$1617
- Approximately 70 acres
- 36 Seasonal camps
- 4 Year round homes
- First lease dated 1896
- Five year leases
- Farmhouse build by William (Gompy) Coates in 1896 (was partially destroyed by a fire in 1982 but was restored).
- Barn built by William (Gompy) Coates in 1897 -destroyed by fire in 1913, rebuilt in 1914
- Brown Ledge camp for girls – started on Coates Island (is now the Miller camp). Indian name was Camp Win Nah Kee (the boys stayed at Camp Champlain which is now Brown Ledge).
- Marina (boat place) was started in 1910 by William (Gompy) Coates.
- Coates Island Camper's Association takes care of roads and helps with rules and regulations.
- The Mallett's Bay Boat Club actually started on Coates Island in 1936 (The Roberts camp) and moved to its current home in 1938.
- Island is owned by a Limited Liability Company – the two members are family trusts.
- The family has a collection of arrowheads found on the Island over the years.
- Gompy also had a big garden on the mainland, i.e., 20 acres on corners of Prim Road and Lakeshore Drive. (Sold produce in Burlington and at Fort Ethan Allen).
- The original family homestead (1856) sits on small hill on the west side of Rozzi's.
- Captain Mallett is rumored to have buried his treasure on Coates Island. William Coates found some brass buttons he believed to be his (don't have them now).

FROM THE INGLESIDE CAMP LOG
1936

EVENING ON MALLETT'S BAY

*THE STARS ARE APPEARING, ONE BY ONE:
THE SUN HAS SUNKEN TO REST:
THE CRESCENT OF THE MOON APPEARS
ABOVE THE LAKE'S CLEAR BREAST.*

*OLD WHITE FACE LOOMS ABOVE THE WEST,
MT. MANSFIELD CROWNS THE EAST;
AND SLOWLY, SLOWLY DROWSINESS
COMES OVER MAN AND BEAST.*

*TIS NIGHT, THE MESSENGER OF SLEEP
HAS SPREAD HIS MANTLE O'ER THE WORLD;
AND AS OUR EYELIDS DOWNWARD CREEP,
LOVE'S BANNER IS UNFURLED.*

**BLANCHE TOUSLEY RANDALL
COATES ISLAND, WINOOSKI**