By Jack Sheedy

Part three of a three part series

Cranberries were picked by hand up until the late-1800s when wooden scoops were first introduced. Picking time prior to the advent of wooden scoops was as much a social event as a job. In some areas, whole communities would gather at the local bogs in September to harvest the annual crop. In family owned bogs, the children would miss school during the harvest season. Some communities actually began school in October after the harvest.

Pickers would gather at the bog with their measures in hand. A measure was a six-quart pail made of tin into which the picker would place his or her cranberries. The bog would be segregated into a series of four-foot wide rows cordoned off with fishing line or rope. Two pickers would work side by side in each row. Behind them would walk a person who checked their progress and made sure that the vines in their wake were truly picked clean.

―Coming ashore,‖ as it was called, referred to the point when the picker’s measure became full and was then brought forth from the bog to the screen and barrels where the good berries would be separated by hand from the bad. The small, unusable berries would fall through the screen; good berries would be packed in barrels and then placed in wagons for transport to the buyer. At the end of the harvest, the bog owner would tally up the number of quarts harvested by each picker. For the longest time the going rate was one and a half cents per quart.

Toward the turn of the century the tools of the trade became more “sophisticated” in order to cater to the growers’ needs. Actual growers who knew best what was needed to do the job developed these tools. For instance, a curved-bottom rocker scoop replaced the original flat-bottom tip up scoop. The curved bottom allowed the picker to make a number of consecutive passes through the vines without emptying the scoop after each pass. Other scoops were made for tender, young vines while long handled picking rakes were used for snagging berries at the edges of the bog.

During the days of handpicking a good picker could harvest fifteen barrels a day - some 1,500 pounds worth. As mechanized methods were developed that figure jumped to seventy-five barrels. Wooden hand scoops were used into the 1950s; for

(Continued on page 2)
TWO HUNDRED BILLION CRANBERRIES

(Continued from page 1)

one hundred years the industry had changed very little as one still had to get down on hands and knees to harvest the berries.

With the invention of self-propelled machines one person could do the work of many, harvesting about 10,000 pounds of cranberries daily. Yield grew substantially. A half million barrel annual crop in the 1930s tripled to one and a half million barrels by the 1960s. As yield grew, researchers developed new uses for the berry such as the cranberry juice cocktail. As new uses were developed and markets grew, more cranberries were needed to keep up with demand. Today’s harvest is nearly five million barrels annually; about 200 billion berries. Half of those cranberries are harvested from Massachusetts’ bogs.

Wet harvesting was developed in Wisconsin in the 1950s and began to be regularly employed in Massachusetts during the 1960s. The bogs would be flooded to a few inches above the vines. Vehicles with balloon tires so not to crush the plants and with a waterwheel churning the waters into turbulence would move over the bog. The waterwheel, called an eggbeater, would not make contact with the vines, but the turbulence in the water would cause the buoyant berries to separate from their vines and rise to the surface. Wet harvesting is faster and more economical than dry harvesting, and also inflicts less damage on the vines.

Today, bogs provide a natural habitat for wildlife. They also provide us with an ever-changing vista as the bogs show a different face for each of the four seasons. Winter’s coat of dull reddish-brown gives way to a blanket of small pink flower blossoms by late spring. Light green berries begin to appear in the summer and grow until fall when the berries mature, becoming bright red and ready for harvest.

And then the cycle begins anew, nature picking up where she left off, on and on, year after year. One hundred years from now cranberries will continue to grow on Cape Cod ... and Cape Codders will continue to harvest them.

From the book Cape Cod Companion by Dennis residents (and DHS members) Jack Sheedy and Jim Coogan, now in bookstores.

CRANBERRY BREAD

From Cape Cod Cooking, favorite recipes of the East Dennis Ladies, 1958

2 cups flour 1/2 tsp. soda
1 1/2 tsp. salt 1 cup sugar
1 1/2 tsps. baking powder 1 egg
2 tbsps. shortening melted, and enough orange juice to make 3/4 cup
1 cup cranberries, cut in half.

Beat egg, add sugar, add shortening and juice, combine dry ingredients add to egg mixture, add cranberries plus 3/4 cup of nut meats.

EMILIE’S CRANBERRY MOULD

A recipe shared by Emilie Sears Goodspeed, from the cookbook of Blanche L. Crowell

2 c. raw cranberries
1 orange without seeds
Put through finest knife of chopper. Stir into this 1 c. sugar.

1 pkg. lemon or raspberry Jello
1c. boiling water
1/2 cold water
Let this set until almost thick, then stir in the cranberries.
A letter received from Michael Dubin of East Dennis.

In the October 1999 Newsletter is an article by Peggy Eastman entitled “The Way We Were” about the Beaches in Summer: which reminded me of the days the beaches changed to “pay” from “free.”

I believe it was in the late 1950’s Dennis instituted a “beach sticker” program, and along with it the “policemen on the beach.” Charlie Crowell and I applied for the jobs on the North Side and we were selected to patrol the Sea Street Beach, and the Cold Storage Beach and Harbor. It being a rather slow job, we switched each day, one day on Sea Street, and the next at Cold Storage.

But there were always funny things that happened and stories to tell. Wearing our uniform of policeman’s hat and a bright silver badge pinned to our blue shirts (the rest of outfit optional) we felt quite official, and so, one day in early July, when a visitor showed up and asked me if it was OK to launch his new Sears & Roebuck aluminum boat from the boat ramp, I gave him my full approval.

Little did he know that neither of us knew just how to launch it. He carefully backed down, and after rolling off each side a few times, he had the boat lined up. He got out of the car, and reached in to put his fishing gear into the boat, along with his sandwiches and refreshments. The tide was coming in, and as he gave a hefty push, the boat, still tied to the trailer, and the trailer still hitched to the car, and the car, still idling and in neutral all proceeded backwards, and started to float into what was then Sesuit harbor. The man yelled for help, and as I was the only official, and maybe even the only person around, I felt duty bound to perform the rescue. (No radios, cell phones, or even emergency phones in those days, you’d run or drive to a neighbor’s house for help.) Anyway, a few gulps of Sesuit Water and we had the car back on the ramp, our friend inside driving everything up to dry land to re-think the process.

He got into the boat to dry off, offered me a seat, and then proffered a sandwich. It consisted of two slices of white bread and a big slice of Bermuda Onion! I looked carefully around to see if something more nourishing had dropped out, when he assured me he had made the sandwiches himself, that very morning. I drove over to Sea Street to tell Charlie of my adventure and his only remark was, “Did you save me any of the sandwich?”

In August we got a report from a visitor on the beach that a plane had crashed off Sea Street Beach; he pointed out to me that there was smoke to be seen a few miles out. I went to a neighbor’s house and he saw it too, so we called the police. (But aren’t you the police? You have a hat and badge.) In a short while the town police car showed up and agreed. A call was made and in a while an Amphibious “DUCK” showed up with soldiers on board. They paddled a few hundred feet offshore and while they were waiting for a bigger boat, they dropped fishing lines overboard and picked up a few flounder.

The next day it was foggy and as the fog lifted a barge and crane could be seen offshore. Charlie and I were called to go to the police station and met with a few official looking folks from Camp Edwards. We were told to forget what we had seen, and not to give interviews. We felt this was right out of the movies, but some 30 years later there was an article in our local paper about a fisherman snagging a piece of an unknown plane and mentioning our saga of years ago!

Many adventures as the Dennis Beaches went from “free” to “pay” but don’t we all feel lucky for those days when we walk down to the water and just breathe in the salt air and remember all of those good days?

And it IS nice to be a part of the Dennis Historical Society!

The Dubin Falmily moved to East Dennis in 1948 where father Philip and mother Abbie along with the children’s grandmother, “Nana” started Players Pharmacy, and raised four children. Since 1961 the Players Pharmacy has been run by son, Michael, and his wife, Judith, and is part of Players Shopping Plaza in East Dennis. And the reason for the name Players is a story from another time...

If you have remembrances to share, send them to Beth Deck at P.O. Box 93, East Dennis, MA 02641
THE WINTER SEASON IS APPROACHING

In 1927, the well-known American poet Alfred Kreymborg spent the summer at the home of Dr. and Mrs. George B. Wilbur in South Dennis. That home still stands, directly across from the South Dennis Meeting House. It was built in 1730, and harbors a great deal of the history of the south side of Dennis within its walls. Mr. Kreymborg published a volume of sonnets in 1928, which he entitled *The Lost Sail – A Cape Cod Diary*. Most of the poems are romantic sonnets. A few, however, do have some local flavor. As we wind down from the summer of 1999, you might be interested in this verse reflecting Kreymborg’s interpretation of the reaction of a Cape Cod native in that year to the doin’s on the Old King’s Highway.

**Stranger and Stranger**

I’ve seen ‘em pass in limousines an’ Fords,
Strangers an’ strangers, drivin’ like lunatics.
I’ve felt ‘em smash the summers an old man hoards—
The fewer they are the more the memory ticks.
Before the Old King’s Highway turned macadam—
While this was just a lane that needed weedin’—
A man could take a walk like he was Adam
The girl beside him Eve, an’ these trees Eden.

None of us had machines inside the heart.
None of us cared which one of us won a race.
We loved an’ lived an’ died an’ had to part.
It’s hard for a man like me to change his pace.
The old all need the summer as they grow older.
I long for the lonely winter, though it’s colder.

*Answer to our Back-to-School Trivia Question…*

We were told, on good authority, that Dennis Port was the only village that did not have a church with a clock. Therefore, the clock was put on the school!