



# Dennis Historical Society

## Newsletter

### August 2019

#### Volume 42, No8

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The Next Board Meeting, Tuesday, August 13th, 2:00 pm, Dennis Memorial Library, 1020 Old Bass River Rd., Dennis  
Members Welcome!

Please send information & stories for the newsletter to Dave Talbott at the DHS Website email address: [info@dennishistoricalsociety.org](mailto:info@dennishistoricalsociety.org)

## DON'T LET THIS BE YOUR LAST NEWSLETTER!

You have all received your membership renewal letter and a renewal reminder. If you have not paid your dues by the middle of August, you will not receive the September Newsletter!

### *The Cultivated Cranberry, Part 2*

*A Cape Cod Story of Discovery and Success*

In the April, we all enjoyed and were educated by Part 1 of Bob Poskitt's informative presentation, *Creating the Cultivated Cranberry*, which kicked off our 2019 program season on March 16th. It is my pleasure to bring you Part 2! Editor's note: Overheard just before the start of Bob's talk, "Who is this Bob Poskitt, and what does he think he knows about cranberries?"

In 2014, as a new Cape resident and Board member of the Dennis Historical Society, I was asked to start work on a Bicentennial Exhibit of the founding of the cultivated cranberry industry 200 years earlier. The first thing my research uncovered was a book published in 1856 by a Reverend Benjamin Eastwood of Dennis. It was the first book ever published on the cultivated cranberry industry. I felt it was important to have a copy if one could be located. I am happy to say that within a couple weeks of searching, I was able to locate and purchase the book at *Parnassus Book Services* in Yarmouth Port. Here are a couple sentences I would like to share with you from that book. Remember, this is circa 1856: "As a traveler over Cape Cod, you should now, and then turn your eye toward the borders of the many kettle ponds which abound in that region, or occasionally examine the margin of swampy tracts. If you do, you will frequently perceive patches of a very strange looking, and at first sight, a seemingly low and quite stunted vegetation. It presents a very different appearance to the extensive fields of quite stately Indian corn, or tall stocks of rye and wheat, golden in the sunshine of summer."



(Images provided by Bob Poskitt)

It was not until well after the Civil War that cranberry scoops were developed. They were probably patterned after blueberry scoops. Prior to the scoop, hand picking on your hands and knees was the only way to harvest cranberries. In the 1880s with more acreage under cultivation, wooden scoops began to replace traditional hand picking. There was no 'one size fits all' as far as cranberry scoops were concerned, as they were often hand made from common materials found on the farm. Materials such as wood, canvas and tin plate were used; the tin plate type being fabricated from discarded metal signs. The Cape Cod farmers' philosophy "use it up, wear it out, make it do, or do without" was evident in the scoop designs. Design was all about utility. The better a scoop fit your hand and your physique, the more

your could harvest and the more money you could earn. One large scoop design was called a *rocker scoop*. It allowed a picker to sweep the vines a number of times before actually dumping the contents into barrels. As the industry moved into the 20<sup>th</sup> century, gas powered picking machines were developed allowing a worker to pick more than 10,000 lbs per day.

Returning to our local history, Dennis was not only the birthplace of the cultivated cranberry itself, but also a center for invention and standardization of packaging and shipping equipment for the cranberry industry.

Eli Howes discovered that different varieties in his swamps ripened earlier than others, and some would keep longer when stored. He carefully sorted these out and began to grow only certain varieties that could be of benefit to him. His son James developed the *Howes Berry* that can be picked either wet or dry. This fruit became so profitable to the local Dennis farmers that they coined the term "*Bog Rubies*" to describe these red berries. Today the *Howes Berry* is still very popular and widely grown.

Last fall, while riding the Bike Trail in Harwich, I stopped to talk with a gentleman working his bog. His name was Ray Thatcher, son of Link and Bev Thatcher, who I mentioned in the April Newsletter, as the couple responsible for the excellent cranberry exhibit in Harwich. Ray pointed out that more than half of that bog were *Howes Berries*. He had flooded his bog, and he was in waders walking behind a self powered machine that was churning up the water. Many of you have probably seen this often here, or in Ocean Spray commercials. The machine is called a beater, and it beats the water and vines to release the berries so they can float to the top for harvesting. The berries float because of air pockets inside them.

In 1855, the Crowell and Baker families of West Dennis became the first agents for cranberry sales in the NY and NJ area, thus opening up many new domestic, and even international markets for the "*Bog Rubies*." They also developed a unique fruit box which is still used today. As with other farming products, the standard measures were pints, quarts, bushels and barrels. What was different, and patentable, was the box sizes they constructed. They were sized in relation to the standard 100 lb cranberry barrel, the standard in the industry. The new boxes were either a quarter barrel (25 lbs), or half barrel (50 lbs). They were designed with slots in the sides for just the right amount of air circulation. When stacked for shipment, many more boxes could be loaded in a certain space than barrels due basic geometry. This had an important impact on shipping costs especially in interstate commerce.

Here is some interesting folklore about the cranberry barrel. Supposedly, they started out as water barrels on ships voyaging between Europe and the colonies. When these ships arrived, their water barrels were empty. As mentioned in April, people had come to understand the value of the cranberry to reduce scurvy. With this valuable knowledge, barrels returned to Europe full of cranberries. Thus initially, until replaced by boxes, the barrel was the industry standard.

Into the 20th century, new bogs were being created, and new equipment was being developed to improve production and keep up with the fast-growing demand for cranberries. Men like Abel D. Makepeace of Wareham became the world's largest cranberry producer and earned him the title of *Cranberry King* in the early 1900s. The *Makepeace Company* designed and made equipment for the industry. The Makepeace bogs of southeastern MA are the largest in the state, and among the largest in the nation. Some of the scoops in the Society's collection, and on display in the Barn at the Jericho Historical Center, were made by and are labeled *A D Makepeace*. Hand sorting gave way to new equipment being patented, called "Separators." These machines, invented in the late 1800s and early 1900s, were manufactured in the Wareham area. They mechanically separated the berries from the leaves and twigs, and sorted them into different levels of quality.

Interestingly, a man named John *Peg Leg* Webb discovered that good cranberries actually bounce. He observed, quite by accident, when he dropped a large numbers of cranberries in his barn, that some bounced on the wooden floorboards; others did not. Examining the berries, he found that the ones that did not bounce were actually inferior, or spoiled. The new cranberry separators developed a 'bounce-ability' test for the berries. The berries in the separators were given 7 chances to bounce on wooden shelves over a 4 inch hurdle. If they failed, they were immediately discarded. High grade berries were those that bounced over the very first hurdles, making it much easier to classify berries so they could be priced accordingly for market. There is a well-known book for children of all ages, authored by long time DHS member and Cape Cod historian, Jim Coogan, "*Clarence the Cranberry who could not Bounce*." It is a fun read!

Here is some interesting cranberry history. 1912, was the year that changed everything for Thanksgiving dinners. That was the year in which a lawyer, Marcus Urann, bought a cranberry bog and came up with the revolutionary idea of

canning cranberries. Until the early 1900s, the only cranberries available were those fresh picked during 2 out of the 12 months a year. By developing canning methods for sauces and juices, he was able to extend the shelf life of the cranberry from days to many months. Urann went on to found the cranberry cooperative that today is known as *Ocean Spray*. He did this to better control variations in both price and supply. Ocean Spray is not a single company. It actually is a grower owned marketing cooperative made up of over 400 small and medium sized growers.

WW II was an interesting time for cranberries on Cape Cod. In 1941, the *Cranberry Army Pool* was formed by *Ocean Spray* to provide dehydrated cranberries for the Armed Forces, especially overseas. Ten pounds of fresh cranberries could be dehydrated into a 1 pound brick 3 inches by 4 inches by 4 inches. When reconstituted, this brick would make close to 25 pounds of cranberry sauce and serve 100 soldiers. The high vitamin value of cranberries, especially "C" was known to the US Surgeon General who insured funding for this program. In 1945 *Ocean Spray* received the *USDA's Highest Achievement Award* for this important war effort.

From the start of the cultivated cranberry industry in Dennis in 1816, there are now close to 170 total recorded varieties of cranberries. Today about 70 varieties are actively grown throughout North America. The cranberry is the number one food crop in MA. There are 400 growers covering 14,000 acres of producing bogs. An average acre produces about 100 barrels of cranberries. There are an additional 60,000 acres of open space to support those bogs. That acreage provides refuge for diverse wildlife species. The average farm is 15 to 20 acres, and most are multi-generational family owned enterprises. In MA, the industry employs several thousand workers, and grosses close to a one billion dollar per year. MA, however, is no longer the biggest cranberry grower in the US. That title has been taken over by Wisconsin which has been converting dairy lands into growing bogs. Canada has also increased its cranberry production to the point that exports from the US will no longer be needed.

The Dennis cranberry exhibit I mentioned at the outset celebrating the bicentennial of the founding of this industry is located at the Jericho Historical Center on Main Street in West Dennis. The museum is open weekly from late June until September. We were fortunate last year to have a visit from the *Cape Cod Cranberry Growers Association* which was interested in seeing the exhibit. In addition, the visitors enjoyed delicious cranberry baked goods prepared by the very talented volunteers at Jericho.

In the two Newsletters, I have shared with you a little early history of *Sassamanash* (cranberry) and the native peoples known as Wampanoags who discovered so many good uses for them. That story carried through to Henry Hall's discovery of the cultivated cranberry industry in 1816, and into WW II where dehydrated cranberries provided important nutrients to our soldiers.

I would like to end this article by sharing with you that Henry Hall's bogs in Dennis are still producing cranberries today. The proud owner today is Annie Walker of *Annie's Crannies*. In the 1990's Annie left a successful career in wardrobe design in NYC, and returned home to the Cape to find a new career. She ended up buying her grandfather's cranberry bog off Scarsdale Road in Dennis. It was Annie's grandfather, Ben Walker, who is documented in 1912, as being the fastest picker ever using the hand rocker scoop. He picked 19 barrels of berries in a 6 hour day and earned \$14.28. That was more than most men earned in a whole week in other professions. Henry Hall's bog, that he called "Molly's Pasture," is *Annie's Crannies* cranberry bog today. Annie was very helpful to me in creating the cranberry exhibit at the Jericho Center, as I knew absolutely nothing about the industry, or its history when I got started. Annie has become a good friend and supporter of the Dennis Historical Society, often providing tours of the cranberry exhibit at the Jericho Center and exhibiting at the Josiah Dennis Manse Museum on Colonial Day.

Our thanks to Bob for providing this fascination history of, "*Sassamanash*," a *Cape Cod Story of Discovery and Success*.



### ***"This Unknown House"***

This image is from the Digital Archives is from a glass plate photo from **Album 03\36-2001-07-17, Richard Howes\ Warren Whigginton\ Photo 5**. Nothing is know about this picture except that the house is/was probably in Dennis. If anyone can identify the house, or provide any other information about this picture, please email me at: **info@dennishistoricalsociety.**

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**Non-profit Org.**  
**US POSTAGE PAID**  
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**02664**

Saturday, August 3, 1-4pm

**WEAVING  
ON THE LOOM**

Join Dennis Historical Society's Susan Kelley for a one-day-only special event at the

1736 JOSIAH DENNIS MANSE

61 Whig Street in Dennis Village

**FREE ADMISSION**  
*(Donations gratefully accepted)*



**COLONIAL DAY AUGUST 17  
AT JOSIAH DENNIS MANSE**



**FREE ADMISSION TO THIS SPECTACULAR SUMMER EVENT**  
**SATURDAY, AUGUST 17, 10am-4pm**  
Step back into the 18th century as costumed interpreters demonstrate crafts and trades from the 1700s at the home of the town's remarkable minister. (and try something special at the Pie, Bake and Bread Sale). Donations gratefully accepted.

**HISTORY COMES ALIVE  
AUGUST 23 AT 10AM**



**DENNIS VILLAGE  
CEMETERY WALK**

**FREE TOUR WILL HIGHLIGHT  
EARLY DENNIS HISTORY**  
**Friday, August 23, at 10am**

Meet guide Terri Fox at the Receiving Tomb  
**RAIN DATE: Sunday, August 25, at 2pm**

**Parts & Pieces  
Yard Sale**

Donate items to sell; sell your own extras, or come to browse and buy.



**SATURDAY, AUGUST 24th, 1-4 pm**

1801 Captain Baker House & Barn  
30 Old Main Street, West Dennis

**THE SAGA OF  
THE CROSS RIP**



*Learn about this Maritime Tragedy when crew members did their duty and it cost them their lives.*

**SATURDAY, AUGUST 31ST, 1-4 PM**  
**JOSIAH DENNIS MANSE MUSEUM**  
**61 WHIG STREET, DENNIS VILLAGE**