

THE SUTTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY

SUTTON, MASSACHUSETTS



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STAFF

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SUTTON'S CRANBERRY INDUSTRY

By Phyllis B. MacLaren

Little do we think when we buzz off to the super-market for a week's supply of food, the drug store for medicinal concoctions, the hardware emporium for all manner of new-fangled objects to work with and the clothing store for the warming, cooling or beautification of our bodies, that, at one time, the job wasn't so easy. If we didn't pick it in our own back yard, chop it in our own woods, tramp the meadows for curative herbs, or "manufacture" it under our own roofs we would go naked, starve, freeze to death or expire from some horrible disease like "dropsy in the head" or "non-campus mentis."

And that was the way it was for Sutton's first white settlers during the early 1700's.

But don't think for a minute these hardy individuals had any intention of living thus forever. They were a determined breed - "grass was greener on the other side" and that was that. They would build a better life on something in this wilderness town, inhabited only by the Nipmuck Indian, but they knew not exactly how to steer the course.

Upon entering the area and by close observation the white man found his answer for a starter - Indian lore. Well worn Indian paths led to many refinements of nature: soapstone mining, watering holes where game abounded, fresh water springs, huge clearings for the native's "King of all crops - corn, red, blue and white and other odde fruits."

Yes, the established customs of the Indian became those of the white pioneer for the ensuing lean months. It was a tremendous inheritance. Wariness did exist between the two races but mutual friendship and understanding often prevailed.

However, the average white pioneeer was no dud. He was a canny entrepreneur. His intent was to spread by any means possible his own image into what here-to-fore had been termed as hostile and savage by his peers.

By man a-foot, ox-cart and horse-back, "civilization", via ancient Indian path-ways, crept ceaselessly into Sutton. Regardless of his hope for peaceful co-habitation the red skinned "savage" was inexorably pushed out. And that's a long bleak story in itself.

I have spoken of the white man's rich inheritance from the

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Indian, one segment on which I wish to dwell - the many cranberry bogs assiduously nurtured by the Red Man in the Westerly part of Sutton now called Eight Lots.

This ruby red fruit, harvested from these bogs, had long since been recognized by the Indian as a staple in his diet, both tasty when sweetened with honey and an excellent ingredient when chopped, dried and added to his indispensable pemmican, the small hard cake or biscuit which he carried with ease and used as nourishment while traveling long distances.

The early white settler recognized the virtue of these ready made bogs and continued to cultivate them. By the time the Civil War came along, great quantities of the fruit were shipped by rail to the soldiers in the Army camps as a preventative against scurvy.

But then came the hey-day of Sutton's cranberry culture. The Sutton Cranberry Company was organized. The site it chose for development of a cash producing crop was the many aced meadow immediately behind the Eight Lots School. This venture was conceived by three men all of Sutton: Rev. Fred N. Knapp, James W. Stockwell and Henry S. Stockwell.

Subsequently Rev. Thomas Hill, President of Harvard College, Fred Law Olmstead of New York City and B. F. Adams of Waltham, invested in the venture. The business was incorporated in November 1870.

The site chosen by the Cranberry Company for propagation of quality fruit was by way of many practical reasons - it had always grown a superior type of berry, seasonal flooding was available by controlling two ancient mill site dams and it was in close proximity to a gravel pit whence would come an abundance of gravel for improving the soil of the bog.

One of my father's pet stories involved the moving of that gravel to the meadow. His father, Benjamin F. Batcheller who owned the gravel pits was hired with oxen to aid in the gravel moving operation.

Miniature box type train cars running on miniature train tracks were used for hauling. From the pits to the bog was slightly down grade but high spots had to be removed by man with shovel. Traces of that digging still exist. Thus, gravity propelled the full cars to the bog at which time the oxen took over, hooves were padded wide with bunches of burlap to keep the beasts from sinking into the mire. More train tracks were layed and re-layed to various areas of the meadow while men with shovels spread the gravel. It took more than one yoke of oxen to heave the empty cars back to the pits.

Where the little train and its tracks went to I'll never know, but this I do know - one of those heavy iron train wheels sits atop our well by our side door.

I do have a record that says that the Sutton Cranberry Company did go into insolvency but none saying when. However, Alice Riley, today a resident of Eight Lots, does remember sorting cranberries as a young girl eight years old perhaps, at the home of Henry S. Stockwell who lived at and owned the farm which David Love now owns. Fred Clark, now deceased, a brother of Alice, was a former owner.

Alice remembers the many boys brought from Millbury to do the cranberry picking at harvest time and the manner in which the berries were graded for size - the very largest being used to "top off" the containers which were being readied for shipping.

A wagon drawn by Mr. Stockwell's beloved "greys" Lady and Fanny, moved the sturdy containers full of cranberries over the road to Worcester. There they rendezvoused with two train stations, Boston and Albany and the Worcester and Hartford - thence to distant points for delivery.

THE MANCHAUG COMPANY STORE, SUTTON, MASSACHUSETTS

By William B. Brierly & Donald A. King

The Manchaug Store Building on Manchaug Road on the west side of the Mumford River Bridge is probably the most conspicuous and most interesting building of the old Manchaug Mills Complex. In its simple solid structure, it stands as a rough jewel among the beautiful rough ashlar stone buildings remaining from the three mill Manchaug Complex.

The store has served as the center of news of the Village and the outside world, a center of local social activities, a meeting place, as a church when St. Anne's church burned down on 16 April 1924 (until rebuilt in 1952), as a library, a theatre, a post office and always as the primary store and butcher shop of the company village.

In the early years it was here that the farmers bartered their excess, butter, eggs, milk, beef, pork and vegetables for groceries in exchange for supplies that could not be produced on the farm. It was here also where the mill families were enslaved by a system established by many of the early mills in the country of advancing credit for work to be done in the mills and where large families seldom could extricate themselves from indebtedness. The store represented the pulse of the community. It was a visual manifestation of a way of life; it was reminiscent of an archaic system soon to pass into history and leave its scars behind in the memory of the indebted.

The Manchaug Store established in 1830 by Mr. S.J.C. Bartlett was originally located in a wooden building on the northwest corner of Putnam Hill Road and Manchaug Road. He ran the business until 1855, a period of twenty-five years then selling out his interest and moving to Connecticut. Mr. Bartlett's successors were Ezra Jones and William Metcalf. After a period of time the Manchaug Company who owned the building took over the business under the management of Mr. Scott Mowry. After a short time the company sold the business to Mr. Metcalf and Mr. Smith who operated for about five years until 1869 when Mr. Metcalf bought out Mr. Smith's interest. Mr. Metcalf sold one half of his interest to Mr. William Abbott of Douglas April 1, 1864. On April 1, 1867 Mr. Abbott became sole owner of the business. During Mr. Abbott's term of ownership business increased from \$20,000 to \$100,000 per annum. On April 1, 1874 Mr. Abbott sold out his interest to the Manchaug Company. They selected Mr. J. S. Page to manage the store. At this time, the store business moved to the stone building which exists at present. The old wooden building was moved about a quarter of a mile north where it stands today, made into a multi-family dwelling, now owned by Mr. and Mrs. Ode Roberts.

Very little is known about the original store activities but Mr. J. S. Page proved to be such a good manager that the Knights promoted him to be manager of all their stores at their mills. In May 1876 he was succeeded by his brother T. C. Page who had served as his book-keeper. The stone store continued to operate after the mills passed from the Knight family in 1920 and until the B.B. & R. Knight Company went into bankruptcy in 1926.

At the auction of the B.B. & R. Knight interests in Manchaug in April 1927, the store was sold to the Roman Catholic Diocese of Springfield for twenty-eight hundred and fifty dollars (\$2850.00) The store continued to run under Mr. George Plante who was also post-master until after World War II. The Post Office was moved to the Company office building on the east side of the Munford River bridge and after 1952 when the new St. Anne's Church was built, the building became unused.

It was later rented and sold to a Mr. St. Germain of Oxford, Mass. It is now owned by Mrs. Yvonne M. St. Germain

From a 1906 account book used by Mr. James Cranska some of the entries: oil 19¢, tea 15¢, oats 13¢, shoes \$1.25, 3 lbs. butter 18¢, onions .08¢, 1½ lbs. beans 14¢, cheese 14¢ and sugar 10¢.

There were two buildings at the site, the stone store building and the coal shed. The stone building is constructed of local granite stone which has been dressed in rough-ashlar form, that is a square hewn stone. The building is 75 x 53 feet in size [Sutton History Vol.1 indicates 80 x 50] and is two stories with a basement. Entrance to the basement is from the river side, entrance to the store sales area was from one door in the front. A walled up door on the west end of the front led to the village library[later moved to the school house]their area was used as a dry goods sales area with clothing, shoes, etc. displayed. A large metal door to accomodate large bulky supplies was added to the front some time after February 1913, access to the second story is by a door and narrow stairs from the west side of the building which proved problems to pall-bearers when the top floor was used for church funerals.[I helped twice.at Military Funerals DAR]

Originally there was a coal shed on the southeast side of the building on the edge of the pond south of the bridge, this building was 58x30 feet and one story in height. The coal stored here was for the homes of the department heads and other private sales [the agent's house was heated by steam from Number 1 mill via pipes under the road]. Each mill building had its own coal storage area.

From records left and interviews with living personnel who worked at the mills and patronized the store in its later days, it would be classed as a general store covering most of the needs of the workers, as well as, farm families in the area. In its earlier days not only were farms operated by the company to supply the basic food needs of the mill families but local farmers blessed with a surplus of various farm products would barter with the store manager for manufactured products needed by the farm families and for the operation of the farm.

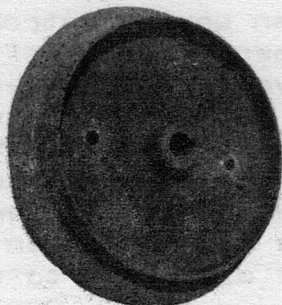
The Manchaug Store may have lost the warmth of fraternization, the frustration and struggles of its patrons, the focus of its social activities but it stands sadly in mute silence as a worthy monument to the activities of a by-gone era.

References: History of Sutton, Vol I & II, Town of Sutton, Town Reports, and Tax Records, and interviews with elderly citizens of Manchaug Village.

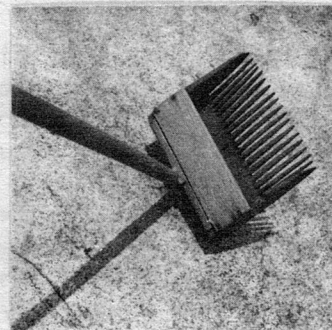


As a money crop cranberry production slowly diminished in Sutton - Ocean Spray dominated the market. But as late as 1933, Whittier Bros. harvested 100 bushels from a small bog on their own farm high on Town Farm Hill.

Little patches of cranberry plants, known only to local residents, do exist to this day but don't ever try to wrest the secret of their where-a-abouts from the owners. These hidey-holes are guarded with a passion. Yes, even now, a few Thanksgiving "groaning boards" are graced with the delectable added attraction of that succulent fruit" picked from our very own land.



BOG R R
CAR WHEEL



CRANBERRY
RAKE

1979 - March, April, May - WELCOME TO NEW MEMBERS

Mrs. Christine W. Cataldo
Ernest and Edith Cramer
Jean F. Flynn
Inez Gornall

Garry and Karen Melia
Dudley and Marie Perry
C. Perry Schenk.
Barbara E. Weaver

William and Janet Whittier

MONTHLY MEETING PROGRAM REVIEWS - (A Short Synopsis)

April - William Stein, reported on windmill generators and Hugh Tomb talked about solar heating apparatus. Their joint discussions were illustrated by slides. The information was interesting and instructive.

May - Raymond Barlow presented a most interesting discussion on Sandwich Glass and displayed exquisite examples of beautiful pieces made at this famous site. As usual, his unique lecture was highlighted with many anecdotes relating to both amusing and climatic experiences in collecting glass.

June - Held at the Blacksmith Shop as a work session in preparation for Fleamarket Day, June 16. An incomplete financial report indicates sales of \$650.00 with additional revenue to come.

THE DEMISE OF MR. ISAAC STILES, MARCH 25, 1808

Excerpt from a sermon delivered at Sutton, second parish, at the interment of Mr. Isaac Stiles, March 27, 1808, by Joseph Goffe, A. M. Sermon printed at Sutton, (Mass.) by Sewell Goodridge, April 9th, 1808.

Mr. Isaac Stiles was a young man of reputable character and agreeable manners: and was descended from respectable parents now living in the town of Sutton, [Mass.]. He had been for several years, employed at the Blacksmith-works belonging to Elijah and Asa Waters, where his principal business was to grind scythes, which he performed with neatness and dispatch. He had lately hung a new and large grindstone, which was found, but not the strongest kind used for grinding. Upon this stone which was of sharp and good quality, he had ground for several days, without the least appearance of any danger which is not common in such business.

On the morning of the 25th of March he had ground about a dozen of scythes before breakfast; and then returned to his work about 9 o'clock in good health and spirits and intent upon performing a profitable day's work. It is thought he drew the gate a little higher than usual, and the pond being somewhat raised by a rain which had lately fallen, the rotary motion of the stone must have been increased to a degree which it had never reached before. He then, it appears, took a scythe in his hand, and either as he was placing, or had placed himself in a position to grind, but before he began the stone burst and he was instantly killed.

There were several men in the works at the time, but as no human eye was upon him at the fatal moment, the progress of the sad catastrophe is not certainly known; and as there might have been several strokes sufficient to extinguish life, it is not certainly known by which effect it was produced; probably they all concurred in the event--Mr. Stiles was quickly seen lying on the floor a few feet distant from where he sat to grind with about one fourth part of the stone which weighed four hundred and thirty-nine pounds, leaning on his head. This part of the stone seems to have been thrown, in a quite elevated direction about ten feet high against the timbers of the shop where it broke a large oaken brace, indented the beam and thence returned in an oblique direction to the place where the body lay.

All the bones on one side of his head were broken in, either from the stone as it burst or the timbers behind him, against which he must have been thrown with great violence as the blood was to be seen sprinkled on the side of the shop.

His body was much bruised in several places but the stroke which he received on the head was what proved immediately fatal. He was seen to gasp but once or twice after the stone was removed from his head.

This accident [if it may be called] appears to have been purely providential. Not the least shadow of blame, or even carelessness can be justly attached to any individual living. From what can be learned, the immediate cause of the stone's breaking must have been its being too tightly wedged with seasonal timber on the spindle in the center. The increasing strain here, arising from the swelling of the wedges, and the swifter motion of the stone which has been mentioned, apparently was sufficient to account for its bursting at that time. It is hoped that those who may hang large stones in the future for the purpose of grinding by water will be cautious on these two points.

Thus died, in an instant, in the 25th year of his age, a young man of industrious habits, promising abilities, and agreeable prospects, leaving a wife and one child, parents, bretheren and friends, to lament his sudden and untimely exit. May they be comforted and otherwise warned. His funeral was attended the next Lord's Day at the house of Deacon Elijah Waters where the afternoon service was performed to an auditory unusually numerous, collected on the solemn occasion.

Reported by Rae Johnson

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Manchaug, Massachusetts 01526

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