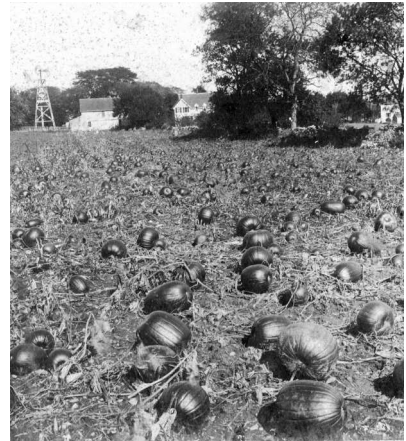


Portsmouth's Farm Heritage

by Gloria Schmidt



Portsmouth RI, 2019

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**By Gloria H.
Schmidt
2019**

Introduction

The history of the Town of Portsmouth is intertwined with the history of our farms. I began to study Portsmouth farms as a research project with my students at Elmhurst School. Our school was on Glen Farm land and Glen Farm was our first research focus. Through the years we interviewed farmers and made field trips to visit Portsmouth farms. My interest in Portsmouth farms continued when I retired and became a volunteer for the Portsmouth Historical Society. We have wonderful artifacts, but some of the most interesting are the tools and machines that have been in use on Portsmouth farms. This booklet began as blog articles for PortsmouthHistoryNotes.com. As a member of the Curator's Committee of the Portsmouth Historical Society, I was preparing for an exhibit on Portsmouth Farm Heritage. This booklet serves as an exhibit guide for visitors to the Old Town Hall on the grounds of the Society museum.

Gloria H. Schmidt
2019

This booklet is dedicated to the Portsmouth families that continue farming in Portsmouth today.

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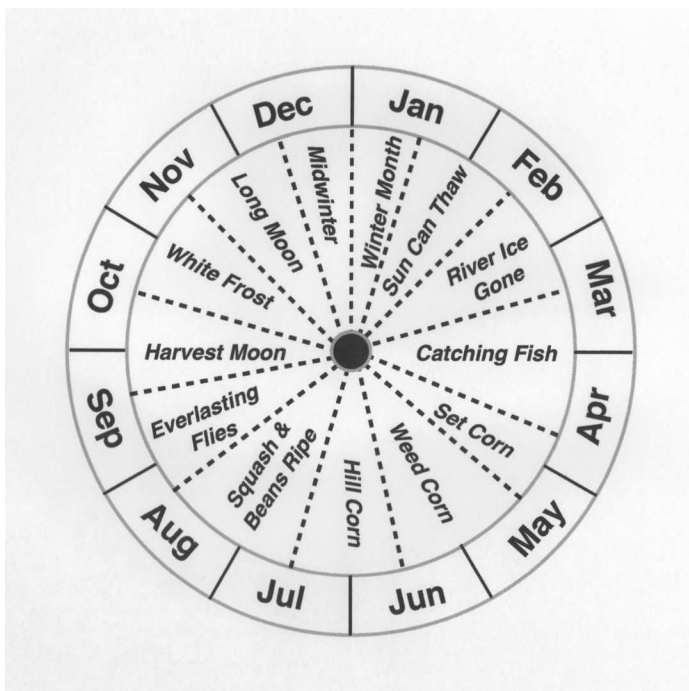
Wampanoag Farming

Portsmouth history is farm history and our farm history starts with the fact that Aquidneck Island was a summer campground and hunting field for both Wampanoag and Narragansett tribes. We know something about how the Island's first residents grew their crops through the heritage of Wampanoag "Three Sisters Gardening."

How did our native residents feed their families? They hand planted seeds in a mound pattern about 18 inches at the base and 10 inches at a flat top where the corn would be planted. The mounds are about 4 inches high with a shallow ring around it to hold water. When the corn reaches about 4 inches

high, beans are planted in four holes around the corn mound. Squash (summer, winter, pumpkin) is planted with the beans. The beans, corn and squash all help each other grow. The beans grow up the corn stalks and the squash spreads out and help prevent weeds.

We associate the Wampanoags with our Thanksgiving, but in their calendar they have five thanksgivings. Strawberry Thanksgiving greets summer when the first wild berries ripen. Green bean thanksgiving and green corn thanksgiving are held in mid summer. Cranberry Thanksgiving celebrates the ripening of that berry in the Fall. After all the work is done there is yet another thanksgiving.



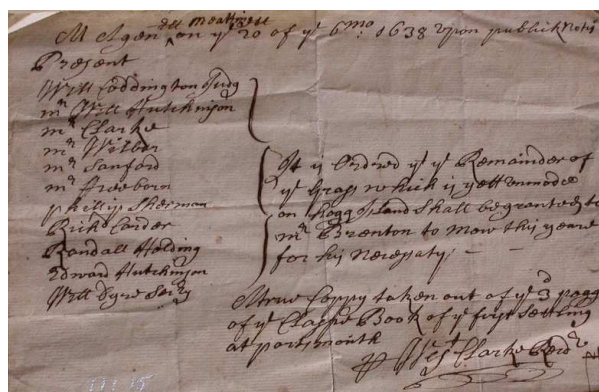
**Wampanoag Calendar
Showing Growing
Seasons**

Founding Farmers

As the spring of 1638 came, the little band of founding settlers began their journey to Aquidneck Island. Some came over the land by way of Providence. Others sailed around Cape Cod. They settled at the North end of the Island around Founder's Brook and another brook in the area. They had left the security of Boston for tent like homes or dug out caves lined with wood. Just like the Native Americans before them, they hunted and fished for food and they began to prepare the land for planting. There was a new community on Aquidneck Island beginning as the old native community had ended.

Portsmouth has always been known for its farming, but the original settlers had little experience in farming when they came here. They were craftsmen and tradesmen. William Coddington was a merchant, William and Edward Hutchinson had a textile business, John Coggeshall was a clothier, William Dyer was a milliner and fishmonger, William Baulston was an innkeeper, Nicholas Easton was a tanner. They had some experience with how land had been laid out in Boston, so they followed similar patterns here. The house lots were clustered together with open fields around them. Early town records show they were concerned about how land would be given out and that records of land ownership should be kept. They lived in the area between East and West Main roads from Sprague Street to the Mount Hope Bay. At first they were given two acre house lots near a spring and larger areas of grazing land further south from the settlement.

The first settlers brought cattle with them. There was a common pasture for cattle in the area that became known as Common Fence Point. All the settlers contributed to the cost of building and maintaining the fence. This pattern of houses together with town planting fields around them was a practical solution for the settlers. They didn't yet have enough tools or time to clear land for planting nor did they have the plows or other equipment for planting and harvesting crops. Later on the house lots were given up as families began to live on their farms instead of together in a community. Caring for their animals and property became a real need. Soon the pigs and other animals became a problem as they trampled over the fields that had been planted. The grass on Hog Island was given to Portsmouth settlers and pigs roamed freely on Hog, Patience and Prudence Islands. Massasoit had granted grazing rights in the Fogland area of what is now Tiverton in exchange for wampum.

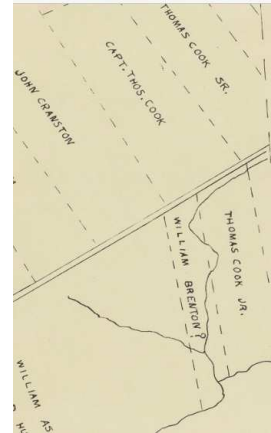


Hog Island Hay Document

Thomas Cooke: Settler/Farmer

When Thomas Cooke died in 1677, he left us a valuable insight into farming in Portsmouth in colonial days. Recorded in the Portsmouth Scrap Book on page 72 is an inventory of the Cooke's estate done by John Albro and Joshua Coggeshall. What livestock did he have? What kinds of tools did he work with? After living in Portsmouth for thirty years, what possessions did he have? At the top of the inventory is "housing, lands, orchards." We know that the Cooke lands include what we think of as the "Glen" area. Cooke's home was located just about where the Glen Manor House is today. In the early days, before his land was cleared, Cooke would ferry his livestock over to Fogland across the river in Tiverton to graze during the day.

What livestock did he have? He had fifteen sheep, five lambs, two horses, six cows, three yearling cattle, and ten swine. What farm tools did he use? He had sheep shears, three hoes, a whip saw, carpenter tools, and two scythes. He had branding irons (marking livestock was an important duty then), steelyards (a type of scale), perhaps axes, a crow bar, iron chains, sieves, and lumber. He had a bridle for his horse. What household goods did he have? For cooking he had brass kettles, iron pots, colanders, spits to cook meat over a fire, jugs, a bottle, pewter items and what may be a churn. He had household items made of fabric and tools to make cloth. He had flax, wool, linen yarn, four pairs of cards (to pull wool apart) and two spinning wheels. He had bedding, a coverlet, sheets and even a "pillow bear". He had his "wearing clothes". For furniture he had a table, and two cupboards, a chair, one bed, two chests, bags, boxes and a basket. Cooke had been a military man (he was sometimes called "Captain") so he had weapons – two guns and two swords. And yes, he owned "one Indian



Cook Land on West Map

Boy". Who was Thomas Cooke? In 1637 Thomas, his wife and three sons left their home in Dorset in England to board the repaired Speedwell at the port of Weymouth in England. Like many of Portsmouth's early residents, the Cooke's journey to Portsmouth passed through the Massachusetts Bay Colony and Taunton. Thomas and his family came to Portsmouth in 1643 and he was welcomed as a freeman who could vote and he was granted land. He had a house lot nearby Common Fence Point, the site of the first Portsmouth settlement. We know Thomas couldn't read or write (his mark was a capital T), but he served the town in many ways as timber warden (protecting the trees), he made agreements with the Wampanoags and he took his turn as part of a jury. The Cookes prospered with hard work. Between Thomas, his sons and grandsons they owned property from what we call East Main Road on the west all the way to the Sakonnet River and from Glen Road to the north to Sandy Point Avenue. Thomas Cooke was not a wealthy man, but he left an inheritance of land and goods to pass down to his son and grandchildren.

Portsmouth Farms During the British Occupation

During the occupation, many of Portsmouth's farms were damaged. The occupation was harsh and civilians were killed and injured. Not even children were safe. In 1776 a fourteen-year-old boy, Darius Chase, was killed when the British destroyed his family farm. He made the mistake of trying to save his shotgun. British soldiers were quartered in farmhouses throughout the island. Families were allowed to leave the island with some of their possessions, but many who had property to defend stayed and endured the hardships. Portsmouth lost only about ten percent of its population during this time. The cattle and sheep had been ordered off the island so they couldn't be taken by the enemy for food. The Portsmouth landscape was beautiful before the occupation. British officer Frederick Mackenzie was quartered there, and his December 16th journal entry described the beauty of the local area, even in winter. "There is a hill about 7 miles from Newport, and on the Eastern side of this Island called Quaker Hill, from there being a Quaker meeting-house on it, from whence there is a very fine view of all the N. part of the Island, and the beautiful bays and inlets, with the distant view of towns, farms, and cultivated lands intermixed with woods, together with the many views of the adjacent waters, contribute to make this, even at this bleak season of the year, the finest, most diversified, and extensive prospect I have seen in America."

This beauty did not last. Wood was the major source of fuel at the time, and it became difficult to provide enough wood from the mainland to supply both the local residents and the occupying troops. The British and Hessians chopped down most of the trees on Aquidneck Island and burned many houses. The fuel shortage was so severe that they regularly sent men in transports to Long Island to cut wood for Rhode Island. Mackenzie records that the citizens were given an opportunity to help feed themselves. They could keep one gun to hunt birds and they could keep a boat for fishing. During most of the occupation the British were particularly careful not to damage the mills on the island that ground corn. The British ordered all Portsmouth men to work three days a week on the defensive works for the village.



Revolutionary Era Map

Portsmouth Farm Heritage: After the Occupation

What happened to Portsmouth farms and farmers after the British occupation? A line from town hall meeting records states the post Revolutionary War situation succinctly: "On Sunday ye 8th Day of December A.D. 1776 about Eight Thousand of British Troops took possession of this island and Remained on until Monday the 25 Day of October A.D. 1779, for which time the inhabitants were greatly oppressed." Farmers were left without their livestock, without their hunting guns, without their farm tools, without their carts and wagons, without their fencing, and in many cases without their homes. Firewood was scarce since the British had chopped down just about every tree on the island, so the farmers felt the cold winter without fuel for heating or cooking. Farmers may have had their land, but many had not been able work their land. During the occupation they had been impressed by the British to labor on fortifications, etc. The occupation had taken its toll and right after the Revolution, Portsmouth farmers needed to focus on their own interests. To make good their losses, Portsmouth families petitioned the state for compensation for the damages suffered during the War. Among the documents in the collection of the Portsmouth Historical Society is such an inventory of losses dated around 1780. Robert Binney (Benney) and Elizabeth Heffernan were "in laws" who shared a home and a 26-acre farm just north of the Quaker Meeting House. The household inventory that they prepared can give an idea of what Portsmouth residents lost in the War. Among the items destroyed were five acres of orchards, a mare and 5 hogs. They lost their corn crib, four acres of corn, 12 loads of hay, twelve goats, two cows and one calf, a jackass and a ox cart among other household items.

In 1779, when the town meetings began again, Portsmouth citizens sent a message to the Rhode

Island General Assembly asking that their taxes should be lowered because the town was in a "Distressed Situation." Unfortunately the state still wanted its taxes and in May of 1781 threatened to confiscate the property of those who did not pay even though they had supported the war and suffered from the hardships of occupation. Portsmouth people were so concerned about their local issues, that it was hard for them to sacrifice anything more for the state or national government. The citizens preferred the more decentralized Articles of Confederation to the new Constitution that was proposed. Portsmouth Freemen voted twelve to sixty to not adopt the Constitution in a vote held May 24th, 1788. Portsmouth military leaders Cook Wilcox, David Gifford and Burrington Anthony were among those who voted against adoption of the Constitution. As an agricultural community, Portsmouth people were concerned about war debt repayment and "paper money" issues as well as waiting for the adoption of the Bill Of Rights. Portsmouth townspeople began to favor the new constitution when it seemed that the national government would start putting heavy fines on Rhode Island trade with other states. That would not be in the best interest of the Portsmouth farmers. Portsmouth voted for the Constitution and Rhode Island finally became the thirteenth state in 1790.

The 1790 census showed a thousand, five hundred and sixty residents – 243 families and 19 slaves. By the early 1800s dairy and grain farms were more important. Sheep raising became less important than it had been in early years. The occupation and post war concerns had changed the lot of the Portsmouth farmer. Resources: Localism in Portsmouth and Foster during the Revolutionary and Founding Periods by WILLIAM M. FERRARO. Rhode Island Historical Society, August 1996.

Wind Grist Mills

Wind grist mills were important to Portsmouth farmers during the 19th century. In 1942 the Fall River Herald ran an essay by Benjamin Boyd whose family ran the Boyd's Mill. Boyd wrote about "Wind Grist Mills of Rhode Island." He provides a first hand account of the history of his family's mill, the Sherman Mill and the vital role the mills played for local agriculture. "For some reason," Boyd wrote, "Rhode Island seems to have been the only place where these wind mills were used to any extent." When Boyd was a boy he remembered 10 mills in Portsmouth. In 1942 there were three mills left in Portsmouth. Almy's Mill (later called Thurston's Mill) was on East Main Road. The Sherman Mill was built in Warren to grind grain for whiskey production. It was moved to Fall River and then to LeHigh Hill on West Main Road. Boyd's Mill was the third. The first mill the Boyd family ran stood by Bristol Ferry. The Great Gale of 1815 destroyed that one. The family bought the Peterson Mill. It was located by Mill Lane near West Main Road. This mill was built in 1810 to grind grain to feed livestock. Boyd said that in 1901 he converted the Boyd Mill into a eight vaned windmill. Boyd wrote that cheap grain and meal from the western US made these old methods of farming unprofitable for Rhode Island farmers so they went more into truck farming. "But there were many people who appreciated the fact that Rhode Island corn, which is of a different shape and color from any other, possessed merits for making meal for family use superior to any other cornmeal." Boyd was referring to the famous Rhode Island Johnny Cake meal. Boyd commented that all meal up to 1895 was unsifted so that the cook had to sift it. Boyd invented a "power sifter" run by the mill. By the end of the 19th century there were 6,000 sheep kept on the island and many hogs. November was slaughter

time for the hogs that had been grown and fattened by the wind mill ground grain. As the miller, the Boyd's received a portion of the ground grain as payment and they fed their hogs with it. Benjamin Boyd said his father took up to 6,000 pounds of pork to sell in New Bedford. The gristmill grain and hay fed cows, oxen, sheep, pigs and poultry. Most Portsmouth farmers had at least a pair of oxen that could be put to work. Boyd said that local farmers looked to "pay off" their taxes. "Money was scarce, so the town was divided into seven road districts with a supervisor for each district, and on a certain day after planting, when there was a slack time before cultivating and hoeing, the supervisor warned each taxpayer that he could come out and work out his tax if he so desired, bring oxen and carts, crowbars, shovels, forks, hoes, chains, plows, and as many of his hired help as he desired." Boyd states that the seven "road districts" corresponded to the "school districts." Boyd remembers "cattle drivers" and "horse traders" who drove their livestock down the main roads to sell their animals to the farmers. One such driver stopped to talk to a potential buyer but his animals continued down the road and found a poor farmer's cabbage patch. For Boyd, windmills were part of his heritage. He was a descendant of Nicholas Easton who built the first wind grist mill. "I have farmed all my life and have turned the black dirt of Old Mother Earth into wheat, rye, oats and barley to be ground into feed for livestock, and I have baked many Johnny Cakes. I have literally turned the black dirt of Old Mother Earth into one of the finest food products known to man, the Famous Rhode Island Johnny Cake; ground by the power of the free air, which is the only thing that is free today."

Among the prize possessions of the Portsmouth Historical Society are the diaries of David Durfee Shearman. Shearman (or Sherman) was a jack of all trades and he recorded everyday life in Portsmouth. We only have the records of a few years, but the 1858 volume provides a wonderful description of how the "Sherman Mill" was moved from Fall River to a spot on Quaker Hill in Portsmouth. The mill had a history of moving from place to place. It was constructed in Warren around 1812 and then moved to Fall River. Shermans moved it to Quaker Hill and then to LeHigh Hill. It was finally moved to Prescott Farm by the Newport Restoration Foundation (NRF). NRF says that Robert Sherman moved the mill to Portsmouth, but Sherman's diary names his Uncle John Sherman as the owner who moved it.

From Sherman's 1858 diary:

May 5: ..Uncle John has bought a windmill in Fall River and I and Jonathan Sherman have contracted to take it down and move it here on his land west of the main road – and put it up again. It was moved from Warren to where it now stands.

May 15: Helped Jonathan Sherman unload the top of the Mill about 9 o'clock. He brought it in 6 parts, sawed through from top to the plates. At one load with 4 horses.

May 31: Built wall for Father, he went to Fall River with John and Jonathan Sherman to help take down the Mill. They got three sides down and brought them home...

June 1: Built wall for Father. Uncle John's hired man has been there two days helping us. Uncle having Father's Oxen to get after the Mill...Jonathan did not get home until 3 o'clock in the morning with the loads of mill.

June 8: Helped knock the shingles off the sides of the Mill AM. They are going to take them all off and nail the boards on firm then lay the same shingles again.

June 11..went up where the men was at work with the Mill. helped them some about raising the poles to make a derrick to put the mill up with. They are near 50 feet long. The bottom of the Mill is laid and some of the sides ready to put up. Four men at work on her.

June 14..Jonathan raised two sides of the mill today.

June 17. Went up to the mill awhile and helped some. They have got up all the sides but one.



Sherman Mill



Boyd's Mill

June 25. I worked for Jonathan on the Mill – shingling some and putting together the driving wheel on the main shaft.

June 26: I worked for Jonathan today, putting on the top of the Mill. Got it all on. Uncle is going to have it new shingled.

July 14...I went up to Uncle's Mill afternoon – put up the arms. I helped some. They have got the machinery all put up and will finish it in a short time.

July 22.. Jonathan Sherman finished Uncle's Mill today. He had \$500 for moving and putting it up in running order.

August 13: I sawed some wood that Uncle exchanged with me for white oak, to make pins for his Mill.

August 15: Worked on Uncle John's Mill sails patching and sewing up the rents.

August 17: ... Finished mending the sails. Jonathan Sherman came out from Newport and Mr. Borden came in the stage from Fall-River to get the mill in running order to grind corn. Mr. Borden was the owner of the Mill when Uncle bought her. We went up and took up the Big stone (Runner) found that we should have to have the bed-stone to make the wheels gearing to each other.

Note: The "bed-stone" was set into a bed of concrete to keep it from moving. The "runner" is the top rotating stone. Both stones have a pattern of grooves that direct the grain to the outside edge. The stones don't touch each other and the grain is cut in a scissor like motion over and over again as they go from the center to the edge.

August 18: Cut away the floor and moved the bed stone just on the Runner. Rigged the sails the afternoon and started her up for the first time in 4 years. A damp, strong south -west wind – she went off start with sails reafed; ground about 5 bushels of southern corn for feed – some was mixed with oats. Levi Cory bought two grists. The first that was bought.

August 19: We took up the Millstone and picked it with the small picks, shaving 25 or 30 of them together, making the surface of the stone much finer than the old way of picking with a single pick and not taking a quarter of the time to do it. We started up and ground a little at night, but wind light from northwest.

Note: Stone dressers would come at least once a year to "re-face" the stones to keep the grooves sharp. Picks were used to sharpen the grooves.

August 20: Had to move the small bed-stone about an inch. wedged around it again: Worked a good while to make the break clear the driving wheel, and doing other small jobs. Started up the Mill and ground 6 bushels flat corn, making fine meal for John Eldred of Newport: got 6 cents a bushel for grinding it; wind south west, whole sail breeze.

August 21: Isaac Grinnell came and set up the curb around the small stone (it is made of staves and hooked), and done one thing or another about the Mill. A fine clear day, wind west, light

August 23: Worked on the Mill – wedging the arms of the driving wheel to keep it firm and strong. Asa Tibbets was there and assisted us. Jonathan left many things undone which was needed to be done.

Started up and ground 13 bushels of corn for feed, one bushel of round corn for Father, and one bushel of eyes in less than two hours, wind blowing strong from west nor west..

David Durfee Shearman



A Year (1858) on Portsmouth Farms

David Durfee Shearman did not have a farm of his own, but he helped on his father's farm (Benjamin C. Sherman) and did odd-jobs for a number of farmers in Portsmouth. His 1858 diary gives an idea of what the farmer's year was like.

Onions:

Portsmouth farmers did not rest over the winter. Shearman worked on making farm tools, but he noted on January 28th that farmer Dennis Hall was taking advantage of the mild January to plow his onion patch.

Manure/Fertilizer:

The better part of February, March, April and May were spent carting and spreading manure. Most of the manure came from his father's stable. February 6th he comments: "Went to father's about 10 o'clock and helped cart manure until night. Carted 11 loads. Father has got a great lot of manure this year. He has got 9 pigs and a sow fattening and a part of oxen and steer for beef besides 12 head of cattle and 5 horses." May was a good time to spread fish on the plowed ground.

Potatoes:

March and April seemed to be busy months for the potato crop. Durfee comments on March 27 that some potatoes were being planted in Newtown. The Shearmans themselves were plowing to plant potatoes April 4th. On April 22nd Shearman wrote: "Been planting in my garden today; planted half a bushel of potatoes with two or three peas betwixt each two pieces of potatoes."

Oats:

March 29: "Uncle John brought us a two horse team and a two ox team to help Father. We finished plowing and sowed all of the oats – 43 bushels – on about 7 acres and harrowed them in the ground in most excellent order to work upon being dryer than any spring I remember for many years, and so early, too." By October 12th, Shearman comments of threshing oats: "Went over to Father's to eat breakfast and began to thresh before sunrise. Finished threshing at three o'clock having thrashed 394 bushels. The stacks

were in first rate condition at the top and bottom and shelled out oats beyond our expectations.”

Corn:

Corn occupied the farmers for many months of work. In April they began to prepare the fields by removing the stubble and rocks from last year. Planting began in May. May 15th: “Planted corn all day. We manure it in the hill where it is wet.” Corn was hoed in June and July. By August they were picking the corn. August 14th: “I arose at 4 o’clock and went to Newport with Robert carrying sweet corn, getting 12 or 14 cents a dozen...” They continued husking through to November. November 11th: “Benj. C. Jr. finished husking last evening – being about 3 bushels. I helped get the corn into the cribs forenoon. The side bins are full and fifty bushels of ears in the middle part estimated to be 350 bushes of corn, a large crop for the land planted.”

Grass/Hay:

Grass and hay were planted in April and harvest began in June and through July. Hay was raked in August. April 2nd: “Father and William went to Newport and got the grass seed forenoon, sowed it afternoon.” June 30th: Mowed south part of the 2nd meadow below the house very good grass in quality and quantity; Mostly barley grass. Stacked hay in the corner meadow.” Sherman has a delightful entry about an Uncle Ned (a good mower) who

used to mow dressed in a pink striped calico dress!!

Apples:

Shearman is busy building stonewalls and other things during September, so we don’t hear as much about agricultural work. In October Shearman reported picking Sweeting, Greenings, Roxbury Russets, and Leathercoat Russets. October 22nd: “We picked Roxbury Russetts today. They are large and handsome. The trees were loaded with them. Picked 57 bushels, which is as many as they have had in any one year, since Uncle has owned the farm which is about 18 years.”

Hogs:

Hogs seemed to be a common livestock for Portsmouth farmers and New Bedford seemed to be the place to sell the pork. April 21st: “Helped Uncle John kill 7 fall pigs. They averaged 175 lbs a piece. Dressed them all at one scalding. “

Vegetables:

Shearman has his own garden and plants. May 19th: “Been hoeing and planting my garden all day. Planting sweet and pop corn, squashes, cucumbers and melons.... Potatoes just coming up, the peas about two inches high.” Other vegetables mentioned in the diary include cabbages, carrots and turnips.

What was farming like in Portsmouth before the Civil War?

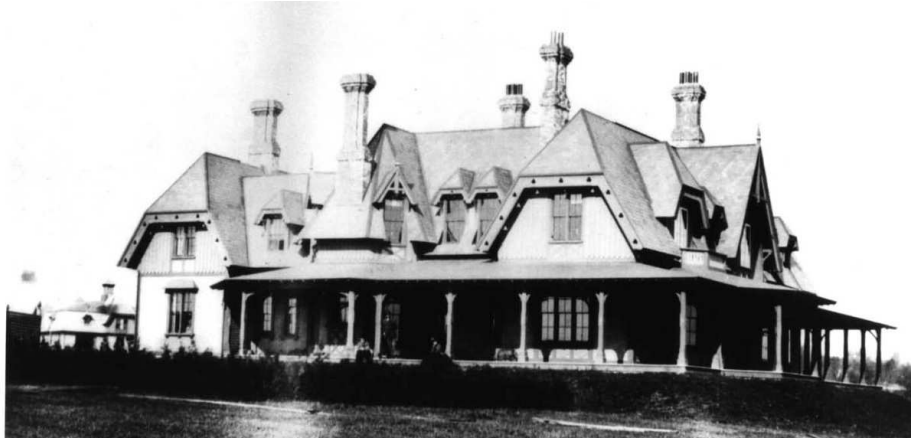
Back in 1840 a Portsmouth farmer named Judge Joseph Childs responded to some questions about his farm. Three different writers used information on Childs' farm in different books. Edward Peterson thought of him as a representative Portsmouth farmer. "Farms generally are small, having been cut up and divided time to time. This, however is preferable, as a few acres, well cultivated, will yield far more than a larger quantity, partially cultivated....As illustration of this truth, it may be found in the proceeds of the model farm of the late Judge Child of Portsmouth, which contains about forty acres of land." It was stated to one author that Childs had realized \$1000 per annum, independent of his living." The judge clearly held public office and like most farmers in Portsmouth, he probably had other occupations beyond farming. One report tells us that "the farm of Judge Childs is situated in Portsmouth, on the eastern side of the island, near the sea shore." Looking at an 1850's map of the island there is land owned by John Childs in the Newtown area near Child's Wharf that would probably fit that description. Jackson, the author, visited the farm itself and collected soil samples. Childs reported that his farm was about 46 acres. Twenty-one of the acres was plowed land, 6 acres were in pasture, over 16 acres were hay and two and a half acres were orchard. Most of his land (over nine acres) was in growing Indian corn. Four acres were devoted to potatoes, and another two and half to rye. Child also grew peas, onions, turnips, wurzel (beetroot), apples, pumpkins, cabbages, and grapes. Childs lists onions as his most profitable crop. He sold them as far as New York. Potatoes were the next most profitable. He had livestock as well and produced 2000 lbs of beef, 2000 lbs of pork and 300 lbs of butter. His stock included two horses, two oxen, 5 cows, 12 hogs and 40 chickens. The judge was seventy-one years of age and he and his wife worked what they could on the farm. The census lists four people on the land working agriculture. He hired labor for about \$500 a year. Childs reported that he used 350 large ox-loads of manure per year. That manure was made of fish, sand, sea weed, green weeds and remains from hog-pens and barn yard manure. He experiments with composting with spent ashes and lime. When asked "what agricultural experiments have you made?" Childs replied that "I change my seeds often, and practice a careful rotation of crops with every thing except onions." Rev. Edward Peterson's history comments in his section on Childs that "Farming is a most honorable employment, and the most independent which can possibly be followed." Joseph Childs and his farming success are clearly examples of this "honorable" employment.

Portsmouth Farmer: Leonard Brown

If you are familiar with the Glen, you may know that the newly restored Leonard Brown House sits at the end of a drive lined by majestic linden trees. Who was Leonard Brown and what does he represent in Portsmouth history, especially its agricultural history? Leonard Brown was born in Middletown in 1815. A newspaper clipping shows that he is an orphan in 1835. By 1838 Brown marries his wife Sarah. She was the daughter of Revolutionary War militia leader Cook Wilcox. Leonard Brown came by his farm land through his wife's inheritance from her widowed mother. What would become the Brown farm had been part of Wilcox's land and that land was originally part of settler John Cooke's original land grant. Brown's descendants believe that the property would not officially become Leonard Brown's until 1870 after the death of Sarah Wilcox Brown's mother – "Polly" Wilcox. The Wilcox home is found close to East Main Road in the Walling map of 1850. By 1870 the Dripps map shows Leonard Brown holding the property in 1870 and that his house was placed much further into the land where it is today. There is no doubt that Leonard Brown was farming the property even when his mother-in-law officially owned the land. Dating the Brown House has been difficult. The diary of George Manchester shows that Brown was on the land in 1851 because a barn was built for him by Albert Coggeshall. 1852 clippings of the winners of the Aquidneck Agricultural award show him as the winner of "best lot of native cows." Award postings for 1875 give us an idea of what animals he raised. He won Agricultural Fair ribbons for best Durham cow, Beef cows, lambs, working oxen, Aldernsey heifers, Southdown Backs sheep, and best pen of

sheep. By the 1880s Brown was considered one of the best farmers in Portsmouth. He raised poultry and pigs and brought them to market in New Bedford. Along with farming, Brown served as a wheelwright and a blacksmith. Leonard Brown represents the Yankee farmers, the descendants of the original English settlers. Brown and the farmers like him were the backbone of Portsmouth. They served in political offices, farmed and were the skilled craftsmen of the town. When Leonard Brown died in 1896, the Brown farm was sold to H.A.C. Taylor and became part of the Glen Farm.L





Greenvale: A Gentleman's Farm

“Gentleman’s Farms” have long been a part of Portsmouth farm history. Greenvale Farm has been in the same family since the 1860s. John S. Barstow, a China-trade merchant from Boston, created a “gentleman’s farm” on fifty-three acres of land on the shore of the Sakonnet River. Greenvale was Barstow’s country retreat and he constructed a large main house and stable designed by Boston architect John Sturgis. Barstow followed a pattern for a gentleman’s farm from the agricultural literature of the day (*Country Life* by Robert Morris Copeland – published 1859). This volume is among the “Greenvale Library” collection that was given to Redwood Library by an heir to Barstow. In his introduction, Copeland wrote: “I shall confine myself to the wants of men with small fortunes, as our country must always be principally inhabited by this class.” Copeland sees these as men who have retired from active business so they need to have an occupation so to avoid the “evil of mental inactivity.” Copeland goes on to describe a pattern for such a farm. He sees the ideal farm as 60 acres of which 20

are farm. three acres are kitchen garden, 11 acres are for orchards of pears, peaches, cherries, plums, quinces, apricots, nectarines, apples and nuts. Six acres are occupied by barns, stables, greenhouses, a grape house, hotbeds and nurseries as well as a dwelling house. Land is set aside for a flower garden as well. The rest is lawn, woods, ponds and roads. The author organizes the book around an agricultural calendar that somehow starts with September when planning begins for the next growing year. Gentleman Farms existed in Portsmouth during colonial days when Newport merchants (Metcalf Bowler, Aaron Lopes, etc.) had their country estate. After Barstow’s day the tradition continued with the Taylor’s Glen Farm and Sandy Point and Oakland Farm with the Vanderbilts. You can visit Greenvale today. It is located off Wapping Road and descendants of Barstow operate it as a vineyard.

From Slaves to Portsmouth Farmers: The Aylers

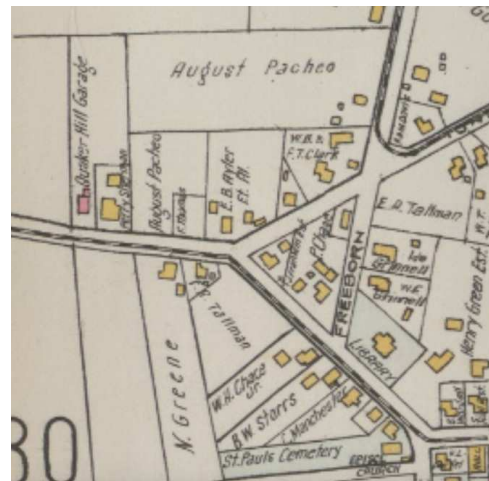
Our farmers have come from a variety of experiences. They were settler farmers who were originally tradesmen and merchants in England. “Gentleman farmers” with big estates came from business backgrounds in New York and cities. Our Yankee farmers were the descendants of the settlers and they were pillars of the community. Portuguese farmers came across the Atlantic to Portsmouth to continue their farming trade. The road to Portsmouth was quite different for the Ayler family. Edward Ayler’s obituary (published in the Newport Mercury in June of 1935) provides some clues to understanding their lives. “Edward Ayler, one of the oldest and best known citizens of Portsmouth, died last Friday at his home on Freeborn Street.” This first line tells us where Edward (and his father before him) lived – in the area of Portsmouth known as Cozy Corner. Edward was well known. “He was the son of the late Morgan and Matilda Ayler, former slaves, who came from the South to Portsmouth after the Civil War.” The last line of Edward’s obituary tells us that he lived a long life as a Portsmouth farmer. “He was more than 80 years old and had been engaged in farming practically all his life.” How did the Aylers settle in Portsmouth? The obituary of Matilda Ayler’s sister gives us another clue. The Newport Mercury 1926 article about the death of Mrs. Robert Scott said “She came to this town over 60 years ago from the South, when the late Joseph Macomber went there and returned with 16 slaves.” I am still working on researching the others who came here with the Aylers and I will write more about these Portsmouth community members in a later article. Morgan Robert Ayler was born in Virginia in 1825. Genealogical resources show him residing in Ohio and West Virginia on his way back

to his native Virginia. The records of the U.S., Freedman’s Bank show his residence as Washington, D.C. in 1870. Also in 1870, Morgan, his wife Matilda and three of his children are listed as residing on the farm of Joseph Macomber off East Main Road in Portsmouth. Morgan is listed by his middle name of “Robert” and son Edward is listed as “Edmund,” but their ages correspond to the birth dates of Morgan and Edward. The men are listed as being farm laborers.

An interesting Daily News article in 1879 tells us that Mr. Morgan Ayler is in charge of Friend Macomber’s farm. It seems that Morgan Ayler found thirty six small bottles of liquor – all in a row – in one of the fields. Since Macomber was a “well known temperance man,” it was suggested that the bottles were left behind by “thirsty Providence folk” who came for the “great celebration” of the Battle of Rhode Island the year before.

By the 1880 U.S. census both Morgan and Edward are listed as farmers with land of their own. Both men won awards for their produce at the local Agricultural Fair. At age seventy-seven, farmer Morgan’s tomatoes were given awards in 1902. In 1914 and 1918 Edward was winning awards for his potatoes, parsley, beans and lima beans. The Aylers must have been well known as farmers because an 1890 newspaper ad uses a testimonial from Edward Ayler and his brother Robert – “In trial with other Fertilizers, E. Frank Coes’s Red Brand Excelsior Guano gave the best results.” The Ayler family was very involved

in Portsmouth activities. Edward Ayler's wife (Louise Jackson Ayler) was active in the Woman's Christian Temperance Union. She often hosted meetings at her home. She was active in the Friends Missionary Society. The early generations of the Aylers were strong Quakers, but there seems to be a split among the third generation. Edward's sons Raymond and Emerson and daughter Alice Ayler Morris were known for their singing in the Friends Church before World War I. During the war, however, Raymond H. Ayler was commissioned as Second Lieutenant after having been drafted "with the colored boys" (Mercury, 9/13/18) while brother Osceola received a deferment because of his Quaker faith. In the 1920s Raymond would be on the executive board of the American Legion along with William Vanderbilt and Bradford Norman. Later generations of the Aylers would move on from Portsmouth. Despite their difficult beginnings they became a vital part of the Portsmouth community. The Ayler family is part of Portsmouth's farm heritage.

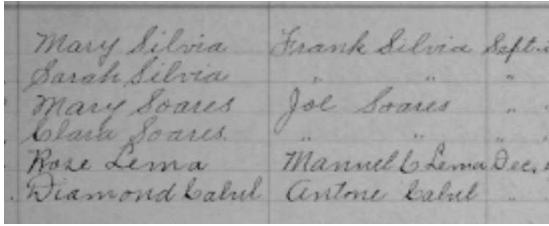


Cozy Corner Area

**EDWARD AYLER DIES
IN PORTSMOUTH**

**Was More Than 80 Years Old
and Engaged in Farming
All His Life**

Edward Ayler, one of the oldest and best known citizens of Portsmouth, died last Friday at his home on Freeborn street. He was a son of the late Morgan and Matilda Ayler, former slaves, who came from the South to Portsmouth after the Civil war. He leaves a daughter, Mrs. Alice Morris, and two sons, Osceola, and Raymond Ayler of Portchester, N. Y., and nine grandchildren. Another son died recently in Portsmouth. His wife, who was Miss Louise Jackson of Newport, died several years ago. He was more than 80 years old and had been engaged in farming practically all his life.



1915 School Newtown School
Register Shows Portuguese
Names on the Roll

Portuguese Farmers Come to Portsmouth

Portsmouth has a strong heritage of farmers of Portuguese descent. When did they begin to come to Portsmouth? How did they come to own their own farms? What were their farms like? How were they accepted in the community? Fortunately, back in 1910 twenty Portsmouth farmers of Portuguese heritage were interviewed by a federal government agency for a report on immigrants in various American industries. The information in this report gives us valuable insight into the roots of the Portuguese farming community here in Portsmouth. **When did the Portuguese come to Portsmouth?** According to the report, the Portuguese began to come in numbers to the United States as early as the 1830s. They shipped out from the Azores as sailors on whaling vessels bound for the port of New Bedford. There were communities of Portuguese in New

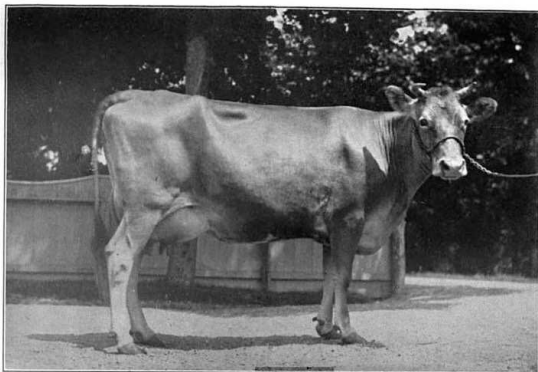
Bedford and later Fall River. In the 1880s Portuguese began to come to Portsmouth as farm workers. They lived in Fall River and worked in Portsmouth. Within the Portuguese community, Portsmouth became known as a place where men could find agricultural work. By 1890 the Portuguese began to come directly to Portsmouth. Of the twenty farmers interviewed for the report, 14 had been farmers or sons of farmers in their native islands. They were used to working in agriculture and they wanted to continue in that tradition. They came from the islands of Sao Miguel, Sao Jorge and Fayal in the Azores. **How did they come to own their own farms?** In 1909 there were 59 Portuguese farmers on the Portsmouth tax rolls. Thirty-one of them were tenants and twenty-eight were owners of their own farms. These owners were able to find a path from farmer worker to tenant farmer and then buy their own land. When they came as

farm workers they were not afraid of hard work and long hours. They saved their money in order to rent land. Land in Portsmouth was expensive. Portsmouth agricultural land was considered some of the best farm land in the state. As tenants they paid for their house and \$8 to \$10 an acre to farm the land. They saved money to buy a horse and wagon, a few pigs and a few implements. Their wives routinely worked the land with their husbands. The writer made a comment that the women did not neglect their homemaking even though they helped their husbands. Many of the men worked for neighbors in order to augment their income. Most tenants (and owners, too) had to take out loans and could not pay their debts until the crops were sold. Not every farmer succeeded, but most were able to make a good living. In order to become an owner, they had to take on a mortgage. **What were their farms like?** Most farms were small. The largest of the Portuguese farms was 95 acres and the smallest was one acre. More than half the farms were under 15 acres. Potatoes were the money crop. Most farmers had half their ground planted with potatoes. Their potato crop was marketed through Bristol Ferry to Providence. Nearly every farm had a few acres in corn, but their corn was used to

feed animals. Five of the twenty farms grew hay. Some of their farms had dairy herds and poultry products were sold by most of the farms. They were somewhat self sufficient in providing their own meat, milk, eggs and vegetables. The writer reports that “on the whole, the farms are well kept and appear like the surrounding farms.” **How were the Portuguese farmers accepted in the community?** The report writer claims that “there is really no race prejudice and the Portuguese are not looked down on.” (page 454) He writes that “Americans regard them as indispensable.” (page 458) Their credit is good and the fields “improve under Portuguese tillage.” One of the few negative comments is that the Portuguese are not as interested in becoming naturalized citizens as other immigrant groups. Clearly the Portuguese farmers as a whole were able to take the path from farm worker to tenant farmer to proud farm owner. Their hard work and willingness to put in long hours paid off. They became an integral part of the Portsmouth community.

Portsmouth's Own Glen Farm:

In 1989 the people of Portsmouth voted to purchase the Glen Farm barns complex and what is now the Gardner Seveney Sports Fields. Together with the 1973 purchase of previous Glen Farm land around the Glen Manor House and Glen Park area, this gave the town a remarkable piece of open space for recreation. It also gave the town a special piece of Portsmouth history to enjoy and to preserve - Glen Farm. What were the beginnings of Henry Augustus Colt - "H.A.C." Taylor's famous Glen Farm? Taylor was one of the wealthy bankers and railroad owners who came to summer in Newport. Taylor was sincerely interested in breeding the best animals. On September 28, 1882 Halsey P. Coon sold his "Glen Farm" to H.A.C. Taylor. The area of land was about 111 acres. The "Glen" is a traditional name for the area and Taylor continued to call it "Glen Farm." In the hands of the Taylor family, the farm grew in



MISSY OF THE GLEN.
Record Guernsey cow of the world. Milk, 14,591.70 lbs.; butter, 1100 lbs. in one year.
By courtesy of H. A. C. Taylor, Newport, R.I.

Missy of the Glen

value, prestige and land area. Around 1889 H.A.C. Taylor began breeding Guernseys at Glen Farm. Taylor wanted to create an ideal farm, and he also wanted to establish a herd of award winning Guernsey cows. Taylor's manager very carefully selected twenty cows and a bull in the Island of Guernsey. The wooden cow barn was probably the first barn put up by Taylor on Glen Farm. It seemed to set the style for the other barns in the complex with the iconic Glen Farm cupolas on the roof. H.A.C. Taylor moved to breeding Percheron horses instead of Clydesdales in July of 1922. An article on Glen Farm from the 1920's describes their foals as "thrifty" and "growing rapidly". Glen Farm was famous enough in its day to warrant some articles in agricultural journals. An article in "The Field Illustrated: A Journal of Advanced Agriculture" in 1915 provided an account of how Glen Farm was breeding Clydesdales horses. The writer touted Glen farm as "an illuminating example of what may be accomplished by skillful use of rare opportunity, by careful breeding and by wise use of money in buying good foundation stock." The Glen Farm herd won many awards at national dairy shows and state expositions for butter fat content of milk and as breeders. Taylor's horses, cows and sheep competed with animals from the farms of other wealthy "gentleman farmers" such as Alfred Vanderbilt and his Oakland Farm across East Main Road. Winning championships was a matter of pride. When "Missy of the Glen" set a record as a butterfat producer, another "gentleman farmer" from the Boston area protested and claimed there had been

irregularities in the testing. The records books were going to list “Dolly Dimple” as the champion butterfat producer. Now H.A.C. Taylor had two good reasons for defending the record of his Guernsey. He was protecting the honor of his workers (who had been accused of cheating) and his cattle would claim their “true value” as champions when he sold Missy’s calves. Taylor sued the President of the American Guernsey Cattle Club, the publisher of the official register. The suit made its way from one court to another higher court until it finally ended up with the U.S. Supreme Court! Missy was under the observation of the Rhode Island Experiment Station (URI today) for an entire year. This independent monitor found that she was indeed the world champion Guernsey cow! H.A.C.’s grandson commented that although Taylor received a verdict of \$10,000 in damages, the suit cost him \$25,000 to win the case. It was worth it to Taylor. He upheld the honesty of his workers and ensured a good price for Missy’s calves. When H.A.C. Taylor died in 1921, his son Moses Taylor and his family made Glen Farm a summer home and moved into the newly built home we now call the Glen Manor House. In 1928 Moses Taylor died, but his widow continued the farm and even added to the land. In the 1940s Mrs. Taylor (then Mrs. Nicholson) began to sell the championship stock. After her death in 1959, the Glen Farm land was shed piece by piece - just as H.A.C. Taylor had accumulated it piece by piece in the 1880s.



Henry Clay
Anthony

Some Portsmouth Farmers

Henry Clay Anthony grew up on his father’s farm and understood farming, but he also had training at Scofield Commercial College in Providence and that prepared him for business. Early on Anthony became interested in raising seeds to supply to the local farmers and he perfected his techniques through the years. By 1920 he was the largest seed grower in all of New England. His seed was sold through many areas of the United States and Canada. He had more than 800 acres of land in Rhode Island and rented land in Massachusetts to grow his seed. Besides working at his business for sixteen hours a day, Anthony devoted time to community service as a State Representative, Portsmouth Town Councilman and active member of countless religious and social groups.

You can see some of the drawers that stored Anthony Seeds at Denise Wilkey’s Pottery Studio on East Main Road.

Frank Chase and Mary Chase Hanks

Many of the farm tools in the Old Town Hall exhibit were used on Frank Chase's farm at the bottom of Quaker Hill. Frank was a farmer for 80 years. He was a local pioneer in raising turkeys, eggplant and late growing cauliflower. Frank's daughter, Mary Chase Hanks, donated the farm equipment in her father's name.

A number of years ago my students at Elmhurst School were studying Portsmouth's farm heritage. I was able to bring the third grade students to various farms in Portsmouth to interview farmers about their work. I brought one class to the Chase Farm at the bottom of Quaker Hill. The students were delighted to talk to two women farmers. One was an organic farmer who was renting the Chase land. The other was Mary Chase Hanks whose family had been farming the land for generations. In many ways their farming techniques were similar.

It is difficult to find information about many of our Portsmouth farmers, but a 1994 Newport Daily News article by R.E. Reimer on Mary Chase Hanks give us more information on both farmers. At the time Mary was growing peaches, pears, tomatoes, peppers, berries, flowers and corn and selling them at her "Stonewall Stand" on East Main Road. Mary was using organic techniques and was quoted as saying, "I like natural things, the natural way of preserving life and doing things that's going to help the other fellow." She didn't use herbicides or insecticides. That was the Chase farm way since before the Civil War.

Mary stated that the farm was once part of her great-great-grandfather Samuel Chases much larger farm. Frank Chase inherited part of that farm – around 18 acres of it from Quaker Hill to Bloody Run Brook.

Mary said her father Frank worked long, hard hours and expected the same of everyone who worked with him. "Remember he started out when you delivered milk in the horse and buggy at 4 o'clock in the morning."

Mary related that her father liked to plant cauliflower because he loved to watch it grow. He teased that he had the sweetest melons because he put sugar on the land.

Mary Chase Hanks was dedicated to farming on her father's side, but she was also artistic like her mother. She earned a degree in commercial art, but didn't use her training for a while. She married and went on to raising four children in California. She became a portrait painter with children as her subjects.

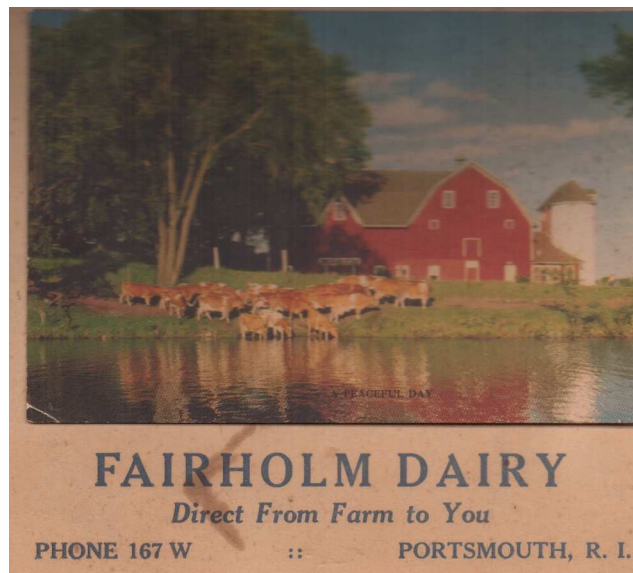
Mary returned to the Chase Farm in 1954 in order to help her father and she brought her children with her. As her father aged she would farm in Portsmouth from April to October and then return to her California life over the winter. Farming was an essential part of Mary's life. She died at age 88.

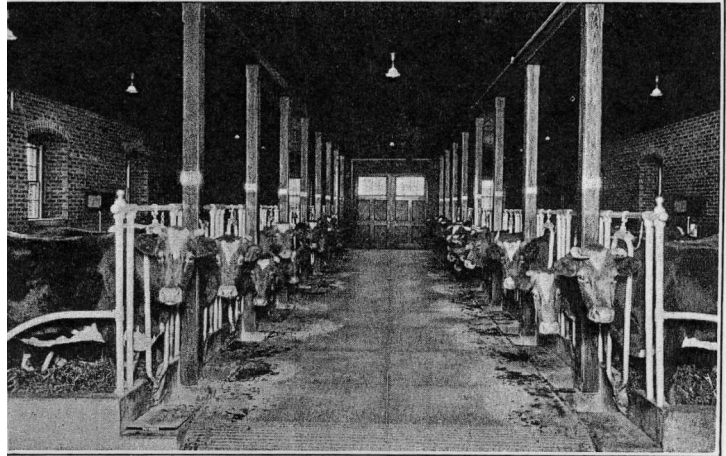
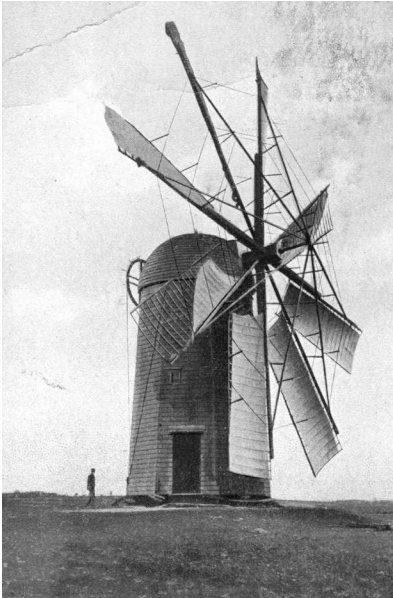
Frank Chase



Mervin Briggs and Fairholm Dairy

Are you old enough to remember the days when milk was delivered to your home in glass bottles? In the collection of the Portsmouth Historical Society is a calendar advertising the Fairholm Dairy. Located on West Main Road by Hedly Street, it was started by Mervin Briggs and later was run by family members. The dairy developed into a wholesale and retail establishment. As a family business, Mervin's sons Barclay, Frederick II and Ernest Briggs all had roles to play. By 1970 it was operated by Mrs. Frederick Briggs and sons Frederick, David and Richard. Newspaper accounts in 1953 show that the Briggs family had a championship Guernsey cow named Fairholm Senator's Coronet – that produced 10,423 pounds of milk and 483 pounds of butterfat. In 1949 when the Glen Guernseys were sold at auction, Mervin Briggs bought one of the Glen Farm prize cows. Mervin was a dedicated member of the Friends Church in Portsmouth and he played an active role in agricultural interests in the town. One account lists him as a "Extension Minuteman" who would help to survey Portsmouth farms for food supply in 1943.





Interior of the cow barn which affords the most comfortable and sanitary surroundings for the cattle. All the environmental factors are most favorable.

