

Middleboro Library Has Novel Cranberry Room

Contains Numerous Photos and Data With Original Background and Is Much in Demand

MIDDLEBORO, Oct. 18. — The Indians had a name for it. Easier to spell than to pronounce. They spelled it "Massassoomineuk," meaning "much cranberries," so that might be an up-to-the-minute way for the cranberry barons of to-day to evaluate crop prospects when they were on the sunny side.

This choice bit of information on the past of cranberries, as well as all sorts of data, with references to them even back in the days when "Bart" Gosnold put in at Martha's Vineyard on one of his cruises, there to become enraptured by the tart berry of the fall, is among the vast amount of cranberry historical information on file at the Middleboro Public Library.

In fact the library has a room set apart for the collection of all sorts of data with reference to the cranberry, now a prime money fruit in this part of the State. The room, nicely colored in a restful green, with a table and chair, and accumulating reference material, is an interesting place to glean cranberry information.

Responsible for its start, in a great measure, Mrs. Mertie Witbeck, the librarian says are Dr. Henry J. Franklin, veteran head of the State of Mass. experimental cranberry bog at East Wareham, and Russell Makepeace of Wareham, prominently identified with cranberry growing.

For a long time it had been felt there should be gathered at a central point, Mrs. Witbeck says, all sorts of information on growing cranberries, from the earlier days as well as modern printed materials on the finer points of to-day's growing. This is so researchers who are checking on cranberries will have a dependable library to look to, and so students may have a central point to look for thesis material.

Just to keep in step with the industry, the book cases and filing cabinets now are quarter barrel cranberry boxes, stacked atop of each other, to hold the valuable data. There are some metal filing cabinets, and when available it is planned to have metal stacks for the room, instead of the cranberry boxes, but they sure do seem in keeping with the business to have them so used.

One of the interesting photographic collections are fine enlarged photos made by E. G. Hudson of Brockton, a man described as "having a definite interest in the historical side of cranberries." He has photos of modern as well as primitive conditions affecting the industry, which are valuable. He also has compiled a notebook of historical data on the industry. When he was unable to get original pictures of long past conditions, he has made copies of old negatives or enlarged snaps, so his file is the most complete of any picture collection on cranberries.

There are records dating into the past of the Cape Cod Cranberry Growers Association, together with the magazines, now published by the New England Cranberry Sales Co., of Middleboro, and the National Cranberry Association of Hanson; also files of the C. J. Hall publications and files of records of other units, large and small.

One of the priceless specimens is a photographic enlargement of the call of the first meeting of cranberry growers to be held in the USA. It's a fine facsimile of a handwritten notice, signed by Zebina H. Small, Obed Brooks, Cyrus Cahoon and Nathaniel Robbins, calling the meeting for Feb. 15, 1866, at Exchange Hall in Harwich. From this meeting sprang the Cape Cod Cranberry Growers Association of to-day, a recognized authority on cranberry matters. It annually meets at the State bog at East Wareham, and the U. S. department of agriculture first makes public estimates

of the probable yield of berries for the year.

One of the first records of commercial growing of cranberries reveals Capt. Henry Hall of East Dennis in 1816, as a pioneer, though it is felt he may have been preceded by other commercial growers. Capt. Abiatha Doane, who wrote the history of the Doane family, was another early grower at Harwich.

To Capt. Hall, however, goes the credit of first observing the reaction of cranberries to sand. He had an extensive acreage of wild berries. Sand blew onto some of the vines from the nearby dunes, and he noted the berries which had the sand treatment seemed to prosper better than the others. In time there was more sanding by intent, and from it developed the present idea that sand and cranberries go together for successful growing.

Middleboro was selected as a central point, easy of access, as the best site for housing the records. When the Middleboro library trustees were approached on the matter, they eagerly provided space for this unique library of which Miss Edith Veazie is curator, and is excellently informed on what is available in the files.

Middleboro High school agricultural course students, who study bog culture in addition to other subjects, use the library freely and they are now seeking data from it for a cranberry exhibit which they plan to stage soon.

There are also some unusual entries in the history of how cranberries have figured in Massachusetts and some other places from the earlier times. Colonists aroused the ire of Charles II of England when they coined the Pine Tree shilling, and while this is not a pre-revolutionary historical essay, it is revealed that to make peace with "Charlie No. 2," a peace offering was sent him.

It included 10 barrels of cranberries, two hogsheads full of sump and 3000 codfish. This was in 1677. In 1680, Mahlon Stacy, it is recorded, bought 800 acres of cranberry meadow in the area which is now Trenton, N. J. He describes cranberries as being good to serve with venison, turkey and other fowl. That would seem to make Mahlon as the originator of the idea which hatched out in South Carver a while ago of the wedding of the little white hen and the cranberry. Mahlon also cited it as being better for tarts than was gooseberry or cherry.

In 1702, it is related that the town of Plymouth voted to supply land to Sam Sonnett and his wife Dorothy, both Indians, a tract of land on Sampson's pond, South Carver, which abounded in wild cranberries.

And speaking of prices which is always a matter of interest to a cranberry grower, it is related that in 1850 a Harwich grower loaded up 10 barrels of berries on an oxcart and laboriously pushed the oxen to Brewster where they were loaded on a packet, headed for Boston. His returns were 10 \$20 gold pieces, (now extinct) for the berries. Not a bad return in those days, when production costs were low.

Another entry as of 1855 shows that Capt. William Crowell and Howes Baker, lower Cape Cod men, opened the first cranberry brokerage office in New York city. The next year it is recorded that Benjamin Phinney of Carver built the first known dyke to hold water for cranberry flowage, of which there are now countless miles of dykes.

An early attempt at cranberry growing away from Cape Cod came in 1874 when A. D. Makepeace, a Cape Cod pioneer grower, started a bog in Newton. There is no further record of its status.

The famed McFarlin berry was developed in 1875 by Thomas H. McFarlin, from cuttings which he took from the bog of his brother Charles D. McFarlin, both of Carver.

Also of interest are quotations from early published books which shows that at Harvard commencement in 1703, and at the installation of Pres. Leverett in 1708, cranberries were on the menu for dinners then served. Also at the first observance of Old Colony or Forefathers' day at Plymouth, cranberry tarts were listed as No. nine on the menu of foods which were served.