



Summer 2013

The Marston's Grist

The newsletter of the Marstons Mills Historical Society
P.O. Box 1375 Marstons Mills, MA 02648 marstonsmillshistorical.org

Dear Readers,

Welcome to *The Marston's Grist*, the official newsletter of the Marstons Mills Historical Society. On these pages we celebrate the unique history of our village, Marstons Mills, located in the Town of Barnstable, MA on Cape Cod.

This is an exciting season for MMHS as it celebrates its 30th Anniversary with special events and the release of the new book, *Marstons Mills*, by authors and members James Gould and Vivian Cushing. It features over 200 images from our Collection. Signed copies may be purchased on our website, through the mail or in person at the Marstons Mills Public Library.

I hope you will join us at an upcoming event, or at one of our monthly meetings on the 3rd Tuesday of the month, which resume in September. We would welcome your participation, company and membership! MMHS is a 501 (c) 3 charitable organization, and your contributions are tax deductible. Don't forget to visit our website, marstonsmillshistorical.org!

My best wishes for a fine summer,
Bob Frazee, President



On 20 March 2013 the Cape Cod Cultural Center hosted an Awards Recipient Reception honoring grantees. Marstons Mills Public Library was one of 16 grant recipients out of a total of 46 applicants. During the reception, six recipient groups participated in a five-to-ten minute presentation of what they did to develop a program of value to the community. Renee Voorhees and Sandra Bolton performed a reading from the original radio play written by Bolton in honor of the 30th anniversary of the Marstons Mills Historical Society, entitled *On the Shelf: the Birth of the Marstons Mills Library*. The complete radio play, which is educational and entertaining, will be performed by the Library's youth group drama club on Saturday, 3 August, 2013 at 3:00 p.m. and 7:00 p.m. at Liberty Hall, Marstons Mills. (Photo courtesy of Sandra Bolton)

See the new Arcadia publication, "Marstons Mills," by Jim Gould and Vivian Cushing:

www.marstonsmillshistorical.org/publications

Coming Events...

- **Saturday, 3 August, 1:00 - 2:30 p.m.** Walking Tour of Marstons Mills, led by Jim Gould (Meet at the Library), followed by a performance of an original radio play by Sandra Bolton, *On the Shelf*, at **3:00 p.m.** at Liberty Hall.
- **Sunday, 8 September, 12:00 - 4:00 p.m.** MMHS at Marstons Mills Village Day--come for the Scavenger Hunt!
- **Tuesday, 17 September**
- **@2:00 p.m.** Monthly meeting of the Marstons Mills Historical Society, Liberty Hall (2150 Main Street), Marstons Mills.

MARSTONS MILLS HISTORICAL SOCIETY OFFICERS

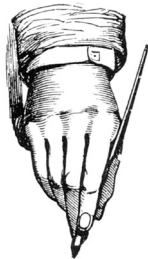
President: Bob Frazee

Vice-President: Claire Melix

Secretary: David Martin

Treasurer: Nancy Wong

The MMHS meets on the third Tuesday of every month at 2:00 p.m.



Comments and articles for submission should be sent to the editor at sturgisreference@comcast.net

Cut out and return to the address on the bottom of the form.



MEMBERSHIP FORM

I / we wish to join the Society and enclose payment for my / our Individual Membership(s) at \$10 each.

I / we wish to make a charitable contribution to the Society to support the development of its Village Archives and the Preservation of its Collection.

\$250 \$150 \$75 \$25 \$10 Other _____

Name: _____

Street / POB: _____

City: _____ State: _____

Zip: _____ E-mail: _____

I / we wish to be notified about MMHS Meetings.

The Marstons Mills Historical Society is
a 501 (c) 3 Charitable Organization

P.O. Box 1375 Marstons Mills, MA 02648
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“MARSTONS MILLS” Book signing event, April 2013



Authors Jim Gould and Vivian Cushing sign first edition copies of the Arcadia publication, *Marstons Mills*, a pictorial factual history, at the Marstons Mills Public Library for Library Director Renee Voorhees. (Photo courtesy of Sandra Bolton)

Marstons Mills Historical Society Committee Members Claire Melix and David Martin peruse first edition copies of *Marstons Mills*. (Photo courtesy of Sandra Bolton)



A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE LANDS AT “CAPE COD AIRFIELD”

(Originally inspired by a Walk conducted at the Airfield June 18, 2005 for Barnstable Land Trust led by Jim Gould and Robert Frazee)

Less than 400 feet south of Race Lane and the entrance to Cape Cod Airfield is the biggest and northernmost of the three Indian Ponds, called Mystic Lake. This is the second largest fresh water pond in the town, 149 acres, which gives it the rating of a lake. The surface is 44 feet above sea level, eventually draining into the sea at Marstons Mills. As we look north from the airfield buildings we see a flat-appearing plain that actually rises gradually toward a low ridge covered with forest. This is the Sandwich Moraine, left behind when the Laurentide

Glacier retreated a short 18,000 years ago. This rugged barrier of rocks, kames and kettles is about a mile wide and here over 200 feet above sea level. The moraine is part of the 1,114 acre West Barnstable Conservation area, the largest town-owned park on the Cape, acquired by the town in 1967. In the north corner of the airport property is “Bald Hill,” a 150-foot-high elevation, no longer bald since it is covered with tall pines and oaks. The upper third of the land is in West Barnstable (37 acres), and the lower two-thirds is in Marstons Mills (84 acres), divided by the east-west line that separated the VIth (north) from the VIIth (south) school districts in 1818.

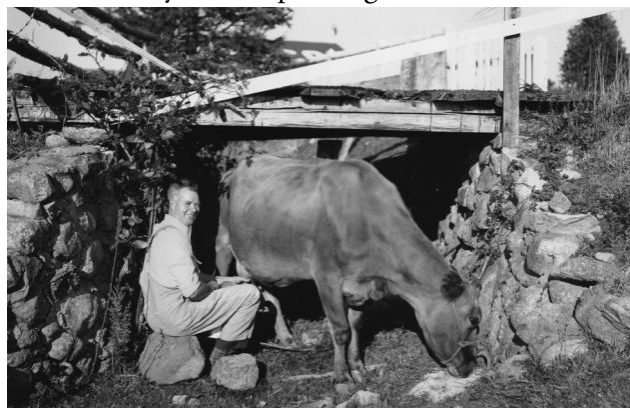
Although none of the primeval forest is left today, the ridge has probably always been wooded. The moraine was divided into woodlots in 1706 and cut for timber, especially oak for ships, chestnut for heavy house beams and white pine for flooring and siding. A striking feature of this area is “Tar Pit Valley,” a 500-foot-long depression in the plain along the Farmersville Road. Here the pitch pines were burned to produce pitch to caulk ships. When Thoreau visited in the 1850s there was still a long stretch of forest extending from Yarmouth to Sandwich. The voracious demands for fuel for the Sandwich glassworks and the Old Colony Railroad and for cordwood for treeless Nantucket must have reduced the woodland greatly, however. Today it is perhaps more heavily wooded than ever, since the Indians regularly set fires to make hunting easier, producing a more open woodland than we now see. Although we fear fires today, the Indians had the ecological advantage of getting rid of the unwanted tinder of underbrush, rodents and other pests, as well as fertilizing the soil.

The relatively flat land that extends to the foot of the moraine is called an outwash plain, comprised of sand washed down from the melting ice mixed with fine alluvial soil. The plain was ideal for native Indian agriculture: growing corn in mounds lined with beans, squash, pumpkins and perhaps tobacco. The crops may have supported a winter population of Native Americans of the Scouton (Scorton in English) tribe who came to shelter from the cold northeast winds off Cape Cod Bay on the sunnier north shores of lakes like these.

Shortly after the first white settlers came, the native population was nearly wiped out by the European plagues to which they were not immune, such as smallpox and measles. Although this was not intentional genocide, the effect was disastrous. The first settlers of the 1630s found in “The Plains” a rich farmland, almost empty. One historian in 1939 called it “the best farmland east of the Connecticut valley.” Today the US Department of Agriculture calls it “prime farmland” on the Enfield and Merrimac Sandy Loam soils (EnA on airport, MeA to the west). Barnstable pioneer James Hamblen was given a “Great Lot” of 50 acres to the northwest of the ponds, which his son James settled on by 1702 and where his brother John built a house. Henceforth, it has been known as “Hamblens Plains” (or alternate spellings Hamlin, Hamblin, etc.). To the west of the Hamblens, Barnstable pioneer William Crocker had also received 50 acres by 1655, which he doubled in size by 1692. This remained in the Crocker name for the next 300 years, until the sale of the farm in 1931 on the death of Stephen Fremont Crocker.

As late as 1900, rows of corn were still grown on the Plains. Though two hundred years of cultivation had reduced the fertility of the soil, in 1924 Fremont Crocker was cited by the county farm agent as a successful farmer of “good red kidney beans, cranberries, mangel beets (yellow cattle feed), alfalfa, apples, corn, turnips, asparagus, fresh pork and cream.” While bringing ice cream to a Grange clambake in East Sandwich, his horse broke a leg and had to be shot. The Grange chipped in and bought him a new horse, so he joined the organization as a lifelong supporter. Crocker had a steam engine that pumped water from Mystic Lake to his cranberry bog. He also had a steam sawmill that produced planks, firewood and his own cranberry boxes, and he made dolls’ cradles for children and framed maps of Cape Cod from pieces of Sandwich glass. He also played in the West Barnstable Cornet band. Crocker Road still runs north from Mystic Lake over a gap in the moraine to the Great Marshes east of Scorton Hill. When the woodlots on the moraine were given out in 1706, both Crockers and Hamblens got shares. The “head” of these woodlots lay at the bottom of the moraine, approximately on the line of Popple Bottom Road. People have supposed that this curious name came from the local name for aspen trees, but the historian/cartographer Eben Johnson found the term in seventeenth century botanical books referring to red maple swamps. The road is one of the longest of the ancient ways, extending four miles from Route 149 in West Barnstable to Mill Road in East Sandwich.

Rumor has it that colonial troops drilled here during the Revolution, but the evidence is lacking. At the town tercentenary in 1939, the town put a marker on the corner of Popple Bottom Road and Route 149 stating that 123 yards northwest (along Popple Bottom?) was the door stone of the birthplace of Major Micah Hamblin (1741-97), who led a company to the defense of Boston in 1776 in the Revolutionary War—spending a month on an island



Hilding Hord milks a Jersey cow at the old cow passage under Race Lane. (MMHS collections)

in Boston harbor—but devoting most of his efforts locally recruiting soldiers. Local historian Martin Wirtanen has shown that Micah did not become a major until the War of 1812 and lived until 1814.

There is little record of the area in the nineteenth century except Cape Cod historian Freeman's description of "villas" along the road in the Plains, evidently prosperous farmsteads, perhaps in the Greek Revival style then popular. By far the most famous inhabitants of the neighborhood were Seth Weeks (1803-87) and William Wright (b. 1801), survivors of the Moby Dick legend of the Essex, who had grown up at opposite ends of Race Lane. Race Lane, which is the Airfield's southern boundary, was named for the horse races that took place on the exact mile of open road across the Plains. The farmhouse that is on the northeast corner of the property, just below Popple Bottom Road, was built about 1793 by Micah Hamblin's daughter Hanna and her husband Asa Jenkins. Their son Charles inherited the farmhouse on 47 acres with a quarter of an old orchard in 1843. In 1875 the homestead and 50 acres were sold to Alonzo H. Weeks (1845-1929), to which he added several other Hamblen lots; the last Hamblen owner sold out in 1900. Directly across Route 149 was the birthplace of Elizabeth Crocker Jenkins (1875-1956), the woman who saved the 1717 Rooster Church in West Barnstable.

By the twentieth century, this area became favored land for dairy farms, including Crocker Farm, and John Aalto's dairy in the former Jenkins farm on the east side of Route 149. Swedish immigrant Hilding S. Hord (1885-1964) and his wife Hilda (née Dahlberg, 1899-1924) opened the Mystic Lake Dairy after World War I and ran it until 1962. The dairy contained 150 Jerseys, Guernseys and Holsteins that produced 5,000 quarts of milk a day, which was distributed from Woods Hole to Eastham. "Dry Bridge," a cow-tunnel still in existence under Race Lane, linked the farm to the pasture on the lake. It was built when Race Lane was realigned in 1928, replacing an old wooden bridge on the former road north of the Hord house. This 5 ½ foot passage has recently been re-made as a pedestrian path between the lake's waterfront and hiking trails west and north of the Airfield. An old road, now part of that expanded trail system, descends from Race Lane to the site of a swimming bathhouse with a small wharf that provided access to Mystic Lake to service the seaplane operations. The bathhouse and wharf are long gone, but access remains for recreational users. Just west along the lake shore was an apple orchard. The last farming on the field was the 160 acre "Bill & Daniel" potato farm, begun just after World War I by Osterville residents Frederick Bill (1873-1927) and his brother-in-law Jack Daniel (1887-1958), who

was an agricultural college graduate of University of Massachusetts in Amherst. The old Hamblin farmhouse, a full Cape Cod cottage much remodeled, stands outside the northeast corner of the property facing the golf course. The farm raised corn as well as potatoes, eggs, pigs and vegetable produce for home consumption and hay for the family's cows and horses.

Cape Cod Airport, today known as Cape Cod Airfield, opened on the Fourth of July, 1929, with a flying circus, including stunt flights, parachute drops, Army planes and a seaplane on Mystic Lake. The opening was organized by Zenas V. Crocker (1887-1960) of Oyster Harbors, under the name of the Cape Cod Airport Corporation. Zenas had been a pilot in the U.S. Army Air Force in World War I who had gone over to England to train British pilots, but did not get into combat in France due to injury of an ear by a propeller. After the war, he continued his enthusiasm for flying and taught his wife to fly. His first planes were DeHaviland Gypsy Moth biplane trainers; MMHS has photos of these planes gassing up at the Cash Market two miles south of the airport. *To be continued in the next issue of Marston's Grist...*

By James Gould, with updates by Robert Frazee



Crocker Snow (1906-2000) fuels a DH-60 Moth at Loring Jones' Cash Market. (MMHS collections)

Sources: Mark Robinson, Lindsey Counsell, Zenas VI Crocker, Zelma Crocker Griffin, Martin Wirtanen, Norman Hord, Barbara Hill, Rob Gatewood, Eben Johnson, Frank Gibson, Zilpha Wright, Darcy Karle, Mary Sicchio, Soil Conservation officer, Gay Black, Chris Siderwicz, Robert Frazee, Bunny Zenowich, David Chase.

Primary sources: Barnstable deeds 331/137, 462/415, 515/342, and supporting deeds; National Register forms WBB 72, 911; Martin Wirtanen, "The Marston Mills Airport" (ms. June 2003); Barnstable Vital Records; Walling map 1858.

Printed sources: Donald Trayser, Barnstable, 133-4, 74-5, 419-20; John VanArsdale in 3 Centuries. Barnstable, 205; Vivian Cushing, 7 Villages, 227-8; Franklin Andrews, History of the Hamblin Family (1894, 126); Mass. Soldiers of the Revolution (VII:138); Amos Otis, Genealogical Notes 204; Andrea Leonard, A Crocker Genealogy; Robert Oldale, Cape Cod: The Geologic Story; Beth Schwartzman, The Nature of Cape Cod; James McLaughlin, Records of the Proprietors, 43, 45, 27; Nathaniel Philbrick, In the Heart of the Sea; Hattie Fritze, Horse & Buggy Days, 125-6; Frederic Freeman, History of Cape Cod, 1:443, II:252; John Nye Cullity, "Cedarville Journal", Sandwich Enterprise, 11 April 2003; Discoverflying.org; Barnstable Patriot; Register; Cape Cod Times; Indian Ponds Assn., IPA Newsletter.