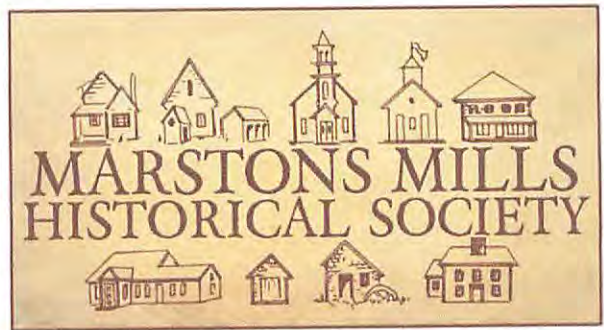


Marstons Mills Historical Society
Interview with Charles Crocker
(Jim Gould & Dave Martin)
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Charles Crocker of 256 Bog Road lives in a home that is presumed built in 1814 by Jedidiah Jones Jr., the year he married. It is constructed of cedar shingles and has a barn also. He acquired the house in the 1960's. When they bought the house, there were many empty S. S. Pierce whiskey bottles as well as a barrel of smoked herring in the barn. Flies had gotten into them so none ever got eaten.

Charles grew up in Centerville and attended Barnstable High School. When his parents got married his mother would not move to Newtown because there were so few people there.

Charles' grandfather owned 500 acres of land originally, that extended west from Mystic Lake to the Sandwich line. At the end, there were about 90 acres west of the house, and 70 by the lake. The woodlot across the road once had a primitive road for access. Right at the beginning of this road the Newtown sawmill was located, started in 1911, presumably the origin for the name Old Mill Road. However, some in the town claim the road should just be considered an extension of Crooked Cartway. In the 1930's, Charles found only a base of a large hit or miss engine on the site of the mill and salvaged the metal from the bearings.

Bog Road is a relatively recent road and is actually owned by the town. The title to Old Mill Road is not clear. Why the road name should change from Old Mill to School when there wasn't an intersection isn't clear. Wilbur Cushing maintained that the road into the woodlot used to be a main road. This could be the reason for the name change. Interestingly, the program Street Atlas has an imaginary road drawn near the Newtown school, perhaps as a copyright protection scheme.

Here's a list of the family bogs in back of the house: first there was Uncle Fred's three or four acres of bog; Down river Grampa's bog was on the curve of the river; and across the access road from there was an isolated section of 2 ½ acres called The Cove. John Hamblin has the record books of these for a few years around 1930. In these there was mention of a "Wild Acre". Why it was called that he doesn't know and never heard the term used. "Uncle Ned's" bog—probably named for Edmund, the brother of his great-grandmother, was farther up the river, near the Hamblin bogs. Bogs on the opposite side of the river were owned by Makepeace. The Marstons Mills River starts just above the Hamblin bogs from an underground drain from Long Pond. Warren Hallett owned a bog west of Bog Road. The "Pond Field" at the South end of Mystic Lake was built by his uncles Chester and Harvey. Up until the 30's they had a steam engine to pump the water from Mystic Lake onto the bog. About 1939 they replaced the steam boiler with the engine from a Pierce-Arrow they got from the Whitcomb farm. The tires of that car were sold off for the original purchase price of the whole car; the doors, made of cast aluminum were given to the war effort. The bogs were bought by the Syrjala brothers who lived in one of the bog houses for a few years.

His Uncle Fred Jones owned the house originally; he paid off the mortgage and went to California in the Gold Rush. Then the Bass River Bank foreclosed on the mortgage. Charles' grandfather then bought the property, and added it to his other property. He gave all of the land and houses to his children some time before he died in 1928. The title to the property was never divided. Through some complicated events he and a cousin ended up with something less than 15 acres of the original 500 and the rest is thoroughly "polluted" with houses. He now has to buy back his house every year in taxes by the town.

The Crockers' 8 to 10 acres of cranberry bogs (including the piece on the lake) produced as much as 800 barrels, or 100 barrels per acre. When picking with the handscoop method, really good picking was referred to as "barrel to the rod", or 160 to the acre. Today the bogs may produce 200 barrels per acre, using the water-picking method. The Crockers never got into picking by machine. John Hamblin used a Darlington machine for mechanized scooping, and his brother Seth Hamblin used Western machines. Ocean Spray Company shipped berries to Oregon to enhance the milder flavor of berries grown on the West coast. Cranberries are now grown also in Wisconsin and even in Chile. Charles' family did not hire "outsiders" to work their bogs. However, Makepeace had a shed out behind the tin shed which housed migrant workers; it is now a house, having been rebuilt by John's son Eric.

His Uncle Chet, had a barber shop and a pool hall in the Davis block of Osterville. He went to England to Barnstaple (sister town of Barnstable, Mass.) in 1951. Mayor Dart of Barnstaple had been here for the Barnstable Tercentenary in 1939. He brought back a pot made there which eventually ended up at the Sandwich Auction Gallery, but four relatives bought back to give to the Trayser Museum. A water color painting of an English cottage by Barnstaple's Mayor Dart by a different roundabout route also ended at the Trayser Museum. It would be interesting to know what has happened to these when the museum closed. Chet never went beyond high school, if that. He was a jack-of-all-trades, and was a Selectman for 13 years. He had a peach orchard up on the hill on School St., a grape arbor too at the top of the hill and an apple orchard. There was a big asparagus field where Hazel Path is now off Turtleback Drive and another peach orchard on the opposite side of Turtleback. The last thing he grew there was turnips. The year's crop was put in the basement of the house just before he died. On occasion he traded vegetables from the garden near the house, about 1/4 acre, for whiskey at the Cotuit Grocery. He also sold Colt shoes.

His father worked at the Bridgeport Arms factory during World War I and at the Morse Twist Drill Company in New Bedford during World War II. His grandfather had an ice cream shop in Osterville where Hanson's used to be (now Kinlin & Grover). He died in 1928. His grandfather also grew and sold potatoes. One day, a man purchased a bushel but then complained about the number of small-sized potatoes. So his grandfather sorted them and took out all the little ones, leaving only large potatoes—but there was still a bushel left!

When he acquired the house in the 60's, three cars per day was normal traffic. You would go outside to see who was passing by. One day a car stopped in the intersection, and the driver eventually came in. He was a friend of Uncle Chet, and sometime in the discussion the carboy of unknown liquid in the basement came up. The man told Charles' wife that it was elderflower wine and he had provided the original flowers. The five-gallon container was 3/4 full, with six inches of raisins in the bottom. Charles later bottled the wine—he still has several bottles of it, waiting for a special occasion to open one.

The family sold their cranberries through commission agents like Hall & Cole of Boston and Deyo Brothers of New York. In the attic there was a pile of labels for half-barrel boxes (50 lb.) of cranberries.

Apparently the labels were bought just about the time that half-barrels went out of style. Quarterbarrel boxes were the standard way to ship to market for many years. The labels have "King's Highway" and "Clipper" on them, and were printed for Hall & Cole. Over the years they have been sold for prices ranging from 5 cents each to eight dollars. Only a few are now left.

