

Bass River Related Portions of the "History of Little Egg Harbor" by Leah Blackman

[Transcribed by Peter H. Stemmer.]

BASS RIVER

[Pages 217-220]

Great John Mathis appears to have been the first white man who settled at Bass River. In the year 1713 he purchased Daniel Mathis' island, and soon after settled on it. John Mathis was the wealthiest man and greatest landholder that Little Egg Harbor produced for three or four generations after its settlement. He became possessed of thousands of acres of the best lands in or about Bass River and several of the most valuable farms in that section were formed into farms under his superintendence, and he presented his six sons with more than six thousand acres of land, beside what he sold to strangers and devised when he made his will. The stage road from Tuckerton to Bass River and on to Bridgeport for a space of five or more miles runs through lands that once belonged to John Mathis, and he owned large surveys in other sections.

In the fore part of this work I have not recognized Bass River as a township, for most of this history belongs to a period when Bass River was a part of Little Egg Harbor township. Bass River township was set off from Little Egg Harbor in the year 1864.

I think the first white neighbor John Mathis had after he settled at Bass river, was Robert Allen, who came from Shrewsbury, and in the year 1721 married Edith Andrews, sister to John Mathis' wife, and about the same date John Cranmer married Mary Andrews, and settled at Bass river. Robert Allen at what is now called Allentown, and I think John Cranmer settled somewhere between Bass river and Bridgeport.

In the year 1729 Stephen Cranmer settled at Bass river on the farm formerly known as the Caleb Cranmer, Esq., farm, which lies contiguous to the river. Stephen Cranmer was considered one of the wealthy men of Bass River, and a man of considerable influence in the place of his adoption, and for some generations his posterity were people of wealth and influence in their native place. Within forty years after the first location of emigrants to Bass River, John Leak, Charles Loveland, Francis French and Jeremiah Baker, were residents of the place.

At a later date Micajah, Job and Eli, sons of great John Mathis, and Caleb, son of Stephen Cranmer, were men of high standing. John Leak was a sea captain, and commanded a privateer during the Revolutionary war; he was also captain of militia, and a deputy surveyor, a profession which at that time made him a man of note. Charles Loveland was a sea captain, and followed bringing negro slaves from Guinea to the American colonies.

The first locators in Bass River were Quakers, and at an early date there was a Quaker meeting-house built in the place, and about the time of the Revolutionary war the Methodists obtained a foothold in that settlement, and the Presbyterian missionaries used to put up and hold meetings at Captain Charles Loveland's and Captain John Leaks. It seems that Rev. John Brainard visited this place, in coming from Manahawkin to Bass River he had to pass through Tuckerton, but he does not make any statement of the fact- No doubt he found Tuckerton such a thorough Quaker stronghold that he considered it useless to endeavor to try to make proselytes there, and in consequence shook of thousands of acres of the best lands in or about Bass River and several of the most valuable farms in that section were formed into farms under his superintendence, and he presented his six sons with more than six thousand acres of land, beside what he sold to strangers and devised when he made his will. The stage road from Tuckerton to Bass River and on to Bridgeport for a space of five or more miles runs through lands that once belonged to John Mathis, and he owned large surveys in other sections.

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After the last-named generation had passed away, among the men of their class may be counted Enoch Mathis, Barzilla Mathis, Benjamin Mathis, Job Mathis, Jeremiah Mathis, Josephus Sears, Joseph Allen, Esq., Caleb Cranmer, Esq., Isaac Cranmer, William Leak, Charles Adams, Charles Loveland, Thomas French, Sr., and a few others. Robert McKean and Samuel Taggart were merchants and traders in general. After this last-named generation, came into the list of the principal men of the place Captain William French, Francis French, William Allen, Esq., Isaiah Adams, Joseph Baker Cranmer, Caleb S. Cranmer, Caleb Cranmer, Ebenezer Sooy and others. Recompense Darby held the office of constable for more than twenty years.

There has been considerable ship building done in Bass River, and its inhabitants are of the seafaring class. Large quantities of wood, rails and charcoal were formerly exported from Bass River to New York and other cities. At the present time, the principal business and other influential men of Bass River, may be found among the Frenches, Adamases, Cranmers, Mathises, Sooyes, Lovelands, &c.

Bass River township contains one Methodist and one Presbyterian church, and has five district schools. New Gretna is the principal village, and the post office is kept here. The population of the township is 1003.

The cultivation of cranberries is carried on to some extent in this township. There is a great amount of valuable cranberry soil within its boundaries.

Bass river is noted for its valuable winter fisheries.

Among the sea captains of former days were Barzilla Mathis, John Cranmer, Josiah Cale, William Leak, Sr., Uriah Cranmer, John Carlisle, William French, Caleb Cranmer, Ebenezer Sooy, and perhaps others of whom I have not been informed. With the exception of Captain William French, all of those old-time captains have sailed away to the spirit land.

The saw-mill at the head of the west branch of Bass river was erected at an early date. In the year 1767, it was sold by high Sheriff Imley, and was then called Baker's mill, probably after its founder. Eli Mathis, Sr., was the purchaser of the mill at the sheriff's sale; and in the same year Eli sold the mill tract, containing twenty-one acres, and also one-half of the mill to his brother, Micajah Mathis, Sr., and it is probable that these two men sold the mill and the twenty-one-acre survey to Ebenezer Tucker, who owned the mill a long time. In the year 1778, this mill was burnt by the British.

It is said that Francis French. Sr., was the founder of the Cranmer saw-mill.

Harrisville, situated on a branch of Wading river, about seven miles from its mouth, is the seat of a flourishing paper-mill, owned by the Messrs. Harris', formerly of Philadelphia. In this mill an excellent quality of brown paper is manufactured, largely from the salt grasses which grow in great abundance in

the townships of Bass River and Little Egg Harbor. This mill was erected some forty or fifty years ago, and was owned by an incorporated company, and was operated under the management of a gentleman named McCarty. He or the company spent a great deal of money in improving and beautifying the place. The water-power is excellent. Henry C. Carey, Esq., the distinguished writer on political economy, was a frequent visitor at this place when it was under the management of Mr. McCarty.

Bass River township was cut off from, Little Egg Harbor, and a part of Washington, in 1864. It is bounded on the north by Randolph and Woodland townships, on the east by Little Egg Harbor, on the south by Mullica river, on the west by Wading river, which separates it from Randolph township.

MATHISTOWN

[Pages 230-231]

The lower part of the Samuel B. Headley farm was located by son one of the ancient Belangee's, after which it came into Gentlemen John Ridgway's hands, and during his ownership, John Berry, Sr. lived on it for the space of 19 years. The Berrys carried on weaving and paid the rent of the place in weaving, each year they wove one piece of linen and one piece of linsey woolsey cloth for John Ridgway and this paid the year's rent. The usual length of a piece of cloth was thirty yards, and the rent for 19 years would be 38 pieces of cloth which at 30 yards apiece would be 1140 yards.

Thomas Willits, Sr., must have bought of John Ridgway, and Willits also bought the balance of the S. B. Headley farm of Carpenter John Mathis. Thomas Willits, sold the farm to Samuel and Nathan Andrews, and they sold it to Jesse Mathis, and he sold it to Samuel B. Headley, who has added to the buildings and improved it in various other ways.

The northern section of the Samuel B. Headley farm, the Joseph T. Headley farm, the Falkinburg place, (now owned by Pharo's) the Aden Mathis farm, and the Isaac Gifford farm, were all owned by John Mathis, Sr. He deeded the whole of the above property to his grandson's children of his deceased son, Jeremiah Mathis. John Mathis had the upper section of the S. B. Headley place, the J. T. Headley place and the Falkinburg place. John Mathis sold this property and went to the State of Ohio, since which time it has passed through various hands. Hezekiah Mathis had the Aden Mathis farm, which he deeded to his son Aden, since whose death it has been divided, into lots and sold to various persons.

Eli Mathis had the Isaac Gifford farm, which he sold to Thomas Gifford, Sr., who willed it to his son Isaac Gifford, the present occupant and proprietor.

The saw-mill at Mathistown occupies the site of a fulling mill, built in very early times by some one of the ancient Belangees. There was not enough business in the place to pay for the running of a fulling mill, and it was abandoned for that purpose and then turned into a saw-mill. Eli Mathis bought it and bequeathed it to his daughter Mary, and she sold it to Francis French, and now it belongs to Thomas E. French.

Mathistown received its name from Jeremiah Mathis, or some of his family, and has always been inhabited principally by his descendants. After the lower road was opened from Tuckerton to Bass river, Jacob Willits set up a tavern where Samuel B. Headley now lives, but it soon ceased to exist as a public house.

THE DAVID MATHIS AND THE POINT FARMS

These lands were owned by John Mathis, Sr.; he deeded them to his son, Nehemiah Mathis, Sr.; he made his home on the Point farm, where he brought up his thirteen children, most of whom lived to be very old people. Finally the Point property was purchased by Eli Mathis. Nehemiah Mathis, Jr., made his home where David Mathis now lives. This and the Point property together contains about a thousand acres, all of which Eli Mathis purchased and bequeathed to his sons Jesse and David, and at this time David Mathis has the whole of the property.

THE ELLIS MATHIS FARMS

These lands were once owned by John Mathis, Sr. He deeded them to his son, Micajah Mathis, Sr., and

he left them to his son, Job Mathis, who cleared the farm and gave it to his son Ellis. The buildings now on both places were built by Ellis Mathis, and the property belongs among his sons.

FARMS IN BASS RIVER

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THE FRANCIS FRENCH FARM

This farm was cleared up by John Mathis, Sr., who, in the year 1729, purchased of John Budd and others 813 acres of land. This farm, the Isaiah Adams farm, and several other small places, are included in the 813 acre survey. After John Mathis had got this farm in a habitable condition, he left his home on Daniel Mathis' Island, and took up his abode on this, his new farm, where he ended his days. He deeded this farm to his son, Micajah Mathis, who resided here until he was eighty-eight years of age, when he died and left the farm to his son Benjamin, who spent his life here, and dying without a will, the farm was sold at commissioner's sale, and Francis French became the purchaser, and now it belongs to his son, Thomas E. French. This farm has never been out of the ownership of John Mathis' descendants. There is a shipyard on this place, and the first large vessel (the brig Argo) built at Bass River, was built in this shipyard.

DANIEL MATHIS' ISLAND FARM

In the year 1713, John Mathis, William Birdsall and Moses Forman, all of whom then resided on Long Island, purchased of Daniel Leeds, of Springfield, 250 acres of land, in which was included this island, which at that time was called Biddle's Island. Soon after this joint purchase, Birdsall and Forman sold their shares to John Mathis, thus constituting him the sole proprietor of the island. In the year 1716 John Mathis married and settled on this island, which he soon made into a farm. He made extensive banks around the island in order to defend it against the encroachments of the tide, and also built causeways, bridges and other conveniences. This island is noted for it's valuable fisheries and its extensive salt marshes. After Job Mathis married, his father, John Mathis, deeded him this island farm; and after Job Mathis' death, the farm came into the possession of his Son Daniel, who spent a long life there, and bequeathed the farm to his sons, Micajah Smith Mathis and Daniel Mathis. Daniel bought his brother's share of the farm, thus constituting himself the sole proprietor. John Mathis built a bridge across the creek, between the island and the Francis French farm, and thus had a convenient communication between his two farms. The ownership of this island has been in the Mathis name ever since John Mathis purchased it — one hundred and fifty-five years ago.

THE ENOCH MATHIS FARM

I cannot ascertain who first located this farm. It is probable that belonged to some one of the ancient land speculators, who, at an early date, sold it to John Mathis, as it appears he owned it in early times. John Mathis must have deeded it to his son, Job Mathis, at whose death it descended to his son Enoch. There is a valuable fishery belonging to this farm, which used to rent for an hundred and twenty dollars a year. Enoch Mathis was an enterprising and economical man, and while he lived on the farm he kept a store, the only one about Bass River; and by this and various other means he accumulated a considerable sum of money. He bequeathed the farm and a valuable scope of woodland to his two sons, Marshal and Enoch Jackson Mathis. They sold the farm to Micajah S. Mathis and Thomas French, Jr., and now it belongs to some of Francis French's family, and also to others, as there is a number of houses on the land which once belonged :to this farm.

ALLENTOWN

This place was located by Robert Allen, who settled here about the year 1716. After Robert Allen's death, his farm was divided between his sons, Peter and Edward Allen. Joseph Allen, Esq., became the owner of most of his grandfather's farm, and since his time it has been formed into a little rural village, denominated Allentown, and inhabited mostly by the descendants of Robert Allen.

BRIDGEPORT

Tradition says that John Mathis, Sr., once owned Bridgeport, and also that he sold it to Captain John

Leake, who settled there at a rather early date. It is probable that Leake left the property to one of his sons, who probably sold it to Robert McKean, and now it belongs to some of McKean's children.

THE LOVELAND FARMS

At quite an early date, Captain Charles Loveland, Sr., settled on those lands, and since his time the property has been divided, redivided, and re-re-divided among his posterity.

THE ELI MATHIS, SR. FARM

This farm was located by John Mathis, Sr. He had it cleared and farmed under his superintendence until 1765, when his son Eli took the farm in the capacity of a tenant, and finally his father deeded him the farm, together with several hundred acres of outlands. In Eli Mathis' time, this farm and the adjoining farm, now called the Ebenezer Sooy farm, were included in one farm. These two farms, the Enoch Adams' farm, the Sears' farm, the Jeremiah Mathis' farm, and other property in that section, all belonged to the above-named Eli Mathis. Eli Mathis' farm buildings were on that portion of his farm now known as the Arthur Cranmer farm, and this farm possesses considerable historic interest. It was here that in the year 1778, the British burnt the farm house and all of the outbuildings, destroyed the hay and the grain, and the live stock of the farm. And here, after this ruinous affair, he put up a small house on the ruins of the old house, but he had scarcely got it finished and furnished with needful articles, when a band of refugees came and carried away every movable article to which they took a fancy, and in this house Eli Mathis stood, with a refugee holding a loaded gun at his breast, and threatening him with instant death if he did not give up his money. In the farm house which the British burnt, it is said was held the first Methodist meeting in Egg Harbor, and the owner of the house was the first proselyte to Methodism in the Quaker colony. Eli Mathis became a class leader and a local preacher, and his house was a temporary Methodist Church, until it was destroyed by the British.

Eli Mathis gave the Arthur Cranmer farm to his son, Amasa Mathis he sold it to Caleb Cranmer, Esq.; he gave it to his son, Joseph B. Cranmer, and he bequeathed it to his son, Arthur Cranmer.

Eli Mathis gave the Ebenezer Sooy farm to his son, Asa Mathis. Ebenezer Sooy bought it and now it belongs to his son, Daniel Sooy.

Eli Mathis gave the Enoch Adams farm to his son, Maja Mathis, Esq., and now Enoch Adams is the proprietor.

Eli Mathis gave his son, Jeremiah, the Jeremiah Mathis' farm, and now Jeremiah Mathis, Jr., is the occupant and proprietor.

The Sears farm and other portions of Eli Mathis possessions, have been sold from the farms which he gave his four sons.

THE CRANMER FARMS

The Joseph and the Joseph B. Cranmer farms were formerly included in one farm, located by Stephen Cranmer who came to Bass River it the year 1729. This farm was Stephen Cranmer's homestead, and on a hill near the centre of this farm, the ancient members of the Cranmer family were buried, and now it is the principal burial place in Bass River.

After Stephen Cranmer's death, his son Caleb Cranmer, Sr., became the proprietor. He left it to his son Caleb Cranmer, Esq., and he bequeathed it to his two sons Joseph B. Cranmer and Caleb S Cranmer, and now the farms belong to some of the heirs of these two men. Joseph Cranmer is the proprietor of his father's (Caleb S. Cranmer's) farm.

There are a few more ancient farms in Bass River, of which I cannot obtain a connected account. Such as the Hezekiah Adams farm, the Isaac Cranmer farm, the Chalkley Cranmer farm, etc.