

BASS RIVER GAZETTE

A newsletter from the History Committee of the Bass River Community Library

Issue No. 3- January, 1999

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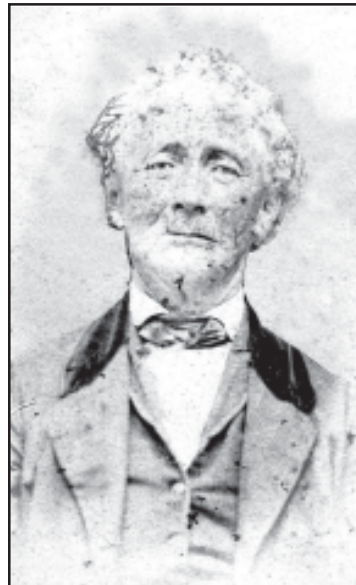
GREAT JOHN MATHIS AND MATHISTOWN

by Peter H. Stemmer

John Mathis is the most important and significant person in the history of Bass River Township. He was the first white settler in the Bass River area and politically, economically, and socially dominated the region for over fifty years. He was Bass River's Christopher Columbus and George Washington rolled into one, a status that was recognized by his peers who called him "Great" John Mathis.

Mathis family tradition tells us that John Mathews was born in Merthyr Tydfil, Wales around 1690. He, along with his brother Charles, emigrated to Oyster Bay, Long Island in the early 1700's. Little is known of their life in Oyster Bay except that John and two other Oyster Bay residents, William Birdsall and Moses Forman, purchased Biddle's Island (named after William Biddle one of the West Jersey Proprietors) in 1713 as part of a 250 acre tract. One year later John bought out his partner's interest in the island and moved to Little Egg Harbor. That John had the funds to make this purchase suggests that he had considerable money prior to coming to Little Egg Harbor. Whether this wealth was inherited or earned after his arrival in Oyster Bay is unknown.

John married Alice Andrews Higbee, the widow of John Higbee and the daughter of Mordecai and Mary Andrews, in 1716. [Note: Leah Blackman incorrectly states Alice was the daughter of Edward Andrews, Mordecai's younger brother.] They established a homestead on remote Biddle's Island (now called Oak Island) and began, as was the custom at the time, raising a large family. Micajah was born in 1717, followed by Job, Sarah, Daniel, Jeremiah, Nehemiah, and Eli, each born about two years apart with the exception of Sarah who was born about 3 years after her brother Job.



Daniel Mathis, Jr. (1801-1890) Great-great grandson of Great John Mathis lived on "Dan's" Island for many years. (Photo courtesy of Kathleen W. Gray)

with government leaders in Burlington City, the provincial capital of West Jersey, and was well thought of in Quaker society through his marriage into the influential Andrews family. In today's vernacular, Great John was one of the well connected "good old boys," an extremely big fish in the relatively small pond that was Little Egg Harbor.

There were no banks or financial institutions in the area, so those in need of money often went to Great John who used such opportunities to steadily increase his fortune. The wide scope of his influence can be seen by the number of loans



Oak or Biddle's Island can be seen southeast of New Gretna in the middle of an extensive salt marsh, a rather unlikely place for the first settlement in the Bass River area. (1887 N.J. Topographical Map)

Biddle's Island was surrounded, not by water as we think of an island, but rather by vast acres of salt marsh networked with creeks. John quickly went about the business of developing a farm from this coastal wilderness. He built causeways, dikes, and bridges which stabilized the high ground of the island and allowed overland transportation to the mainland. Some of these causeways can be seen on today's aerial photos and geodetic maps of the area.

The enterprise that evolved, although called a farm, was more like a self sustaining plantation with labor provided by slaves. This is not surprising as there were no nearby towns or cities. The area that was later to become Tuckerton was little more than a collection of farms, the Andrews' grist mill, and the Friends' Meeting House.

John purchased 813 acres in 1729 which were to the west of and adjacent to his Biddle's Island farm. He built a new house in the area of the present day Viking Yacht Company and proceeded to develop another farm with a ship building facility along the Bass River. The virgin forest of the surrounding area provided timber for the ships which supported successful fishing and trade ventures that became the foundations for Great John's ambitious land acquisition program. Mathis schooners, one of which was captained by his son Daniel, engaged in the West Indies trade, swapping South Jersey lumber for produce and other goods that enabled the Mathis farms to prosper.

His continuing land purchases would eventually encompass 4 large, contiguous farms containing almost 5,000 acres. It is said that at one time he owned and managed all the land in the present Bass River Township from the coast northward to Bridgeport. Deeds for much of this land list his name as Mathews; however, John changed the family name to Mathis as he felt it was easier to pronounce and spell. John Mathews from Oyster Bay, Long Island thus became Great John Mathis from Little Egg Harbor, New Jersey.

Great John's status and influence continued to grow as he served as the King's magistrate in the West Jersey provincial government. He became well acquainted



Dewitt Clinton Mathis, Jr. (1867-1947), grandson of Daniel, Jr., standing between Clarence (I) and Orval Mathis. Dewitt was the last resident of "Dan's" Island. (Photo courtesy of Leila Mathis Pitts)

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ANOTHER THING I REMEMBER

by Almira Cramer Steele

A Man Called Joe



Joe Cramer as a young boy. (Photo courtesy of Margaret Cramer McAnney)

Joseph Bradford Cramer was born to Caleb and Alma Cramer on February 14, 1906 and made his entry into this world on a cold, wintery day. Being 14 years younger than his youngest sibling, he was brought up more or less as an only child in a house just a stones throw from the Bass River on North Maple Avenue. His oldest brother, Stansbury, had left home to work in the Van Sant shipyard in Atlantic City and his brother Doughty, while still at home, married within a few years and took up residence just across the street from the family homestead.

Joe, a descendant of the Van Sant family who were known for their expertise in ship building, learned boat building skills at an early age. As a young boy he visited the shipyards of his relatives and later worked under their tutelage for a few years. He became quite good at his trade.

Joe lived in the family home after the death of his parents until his nephew Preston came home after serving his country in Europe during World War II. Since Joe was single and didn't think he needed the big house, he let his nephew and family move in, and he went across the street down to the river's edge. There was a small cottage, almost new, that Joe could have been very comfortable in, but that was not in his plan. Instead he chose a tiny old shack that was barely big enough for him and his dog, and moved in.

Thus began the saga of a talented and friendly fellow who decided early on to live, not as the world lived, but as he wanted to live, and he did just that.

One might have thought him a recluse. Far from it, Joe had lots of company. He would squat down and talk outside his shack for hours about everything and anything. Someone was always at his door wanting him to work on their boat or give them advise on what to do. Sometimes he would advise them and sometimes work for them. Then again, if he wasn't in the mood, he wouldn't be bothered.

Joe was a great storyteller and an avid reader. He could tell some of the tallest tales you ever heard. If you believed them he was happy. If you didn't, well that was okay, because he'd tell you another one tomorrow.

All of his interests were centered around the Jersey Shore. Besides boat building and repairing, using his navigational skills, and story telling, Joe spent a lot of time carving ducks, sand snipes, and various shore birds. They were given freely to anyone who admired his work. Today I am told some of his pieces are now collector's items.

Joe wanted no responsibilities and took on none. His shack had no electricity or phone. A small pot belly stove which burned wood cut daily by Joe served two purposes- cooking and heating. The shack was so small and the heat would become so intense that he cut two portholes in the wall to let the heat OUT. Taxes never concerned him because his brother Doughty owned the property and took care of them.

Joe never owned a car. If he went anywhere he went by boat or someone drove him. His desire for clothing was almost nil. A winter jacket, long underwear, and boots were neces-



Joe Cramer sold many a "Marsh Rabbit" to Henry Updike over the years to earn a little spending money. (Photo courtesy of Caleb Stansbury Cramer III)



Joe in his familiar squatting position talking with his older brother Caleb Stansbury, Jr. (Photo courtesy of Caleb Stansbury Cramer III)

sary, but things like socks, shirts, and pants were in short supply. Belts and accessories were out of the question. Many times I have seen him wearing a piece of rope to hold his pants up. On occasion you might see some clothes that he had just washed, probably at high tide, hanging on a line strung from his shack to a nearby post. Once or twice I did see him in a suit and tie when he had to attend the funeral of a dear relative. Where the suit came from I don't know, but he wasn't bad looking clean-shaven and all dressed up.

I don't ever remember Joe going to the doctor except the time he got a fish hook caught in his arm and had to have it cut out. He used a lot of home remedies, and they seemed to work for him. However, when he didn't feel quite up to par, he might sleep for two or three days then waking up wondering what day it was. On these occasions nobody disturbed Joe.

Joe had no desire for money. He was happy just so long as he had enough to feed himself and his dog. Sometimes I believe "Blackie" ate better than Joe did. He liked a good swig of brandy now and then and never refused if someone wanted to treat him. He smoked cigarettes but never bought a pack. He rolled his own.

(Continued on page 5)

Hen Updike and the “Marsh Rabbit”

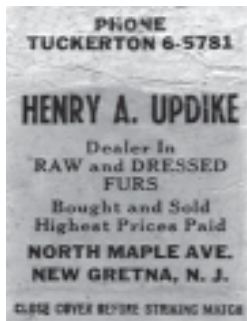
by the Herrintown Poet

Up on “The Hill” there is laid a familiar friend whose remembrance yet I prize. Independent, self reliant, frugal, honest - all these names serve to describe Henry Updike. He left behind lasting impressions that are hidden deep in my mind.

In “Herrintown”, as natives affectionately called it, you will find few remains of the simple life, few mementos of the old fashioned ways of doing things, of skills handed down and the independence that the native took for granted.

Fur trapping was just one of many handed down skills that formed the basis for fortune and independence in this town that was ruled by the bay and rivers.

The fur of the “marsh rabbit” is perfect, the ideal design and utility. A look instantly suggests its purpose. It’s meant to be a warm shiny coat of great price.



Henry was the only New Gretna resident fur trader for many years. (Courtesy of Harry DeVerter)

Henry Updike had, over the years, honed the skills of fur buying to a razor’s edge. He used wit and humor freely on all occasions. His keen eye would look through the trapper’s lot, feel the fur, turn it over in his hand searching out cuts, old scars or discoloration in the pelt, while always describing the animal as less than perfect.

“Jist a kitten,” he’d remark, followed by “Looks like you stretched this one.” He was referring to a technique employed by some trappers which was to break the backbone of the animal allowing it to be stretched out as far as possible without tearing the skin, thus making it appear larger than it’s actual size and, of course, more valuable. Henry couldn’t be taken in by that old trick. He was up on all the subtleties of the trade.

This good natured banter was carried out in an atmosphere of good will, the trapper and buyer jostling with wit and cunning, each one pressing his advantage until the bargain was struck. The men then part company with a faint smile on each face, a hint of doing something that satisfies.

There are things that can never be the same. The downhome, uncomplicated ways of doing things have vanished forever, and Henry Updike has found other scenes.



Hen Updike in his Cranberry Point duck blind awaiting the morning flight. (Photo courtesy of Ann Ware Walling)

The Chasing of the Marsh Rabbit

Today the folks all call him “rat.”
How did this creature come to that?

Why has the Marsh Rabbit sunk so low?
Is it because the modern just don’t know
About the days in Herrintown
When they chased the wily rabbit down?

They found the run where he had been
Then set a trap to lure him in.
At every turn they laid their snare
To get the skin of this crafty hare
And stretch it on a board to dry
And wait the furrier to come by.

In a long black car, he came from Town
To buy the pelts, both black and brown.
These fur traders were dressed in black
Complete, from shoes to broad brim hat.

A roll of bills held in his hand
Wound around with a rubber band.
He’d pull the band and let it snap.
The deal was done – Just like that.
Then off they went, these shinny pelts
To be made a coat for a “Vanderbelt.”

Now that’s only half the story told
About this furry wetland mole.

So what about this bayside wonder,
That baymen trapped in such great number?
Well, this animal of low esteem
In Herrintown was prized cuisine.

Like the big town’s privileged class
Who like their pheasant under glass,
The bayman dined on marshland ham
With lots of tatters all around.

There, inside his humble home
We sense a reverent, thankful tone
As the bayman bows his head to offer
Thanks to the one who made this gopher.

Now before you turn your nose up high,
And say I wouldn’t eat the guy,
Just look over there at them foreign lands,
Over where the Eiffel Tower stands,
Where they eat the snail and serve up pigeon,
And have made their cooking the State religion.

They cook this rabbit come what may,
So, that is why it’s safe to say:
Turn away, don’t join the throng,
50 million Frenchmen can’t be wrong.

So, I beg you, don’t reproach this cunning beast,
And don’t dare count him with the least.

So when you think of him you must
Thank him, now, for all of us.
After all it only fair,
He’s given us his fur to wear.

It’s well known, this Jersey sable
And what more you ask? He is food upon our table.
So please, speak of him with kindness, friend,
Whenever you are able.

YESTERDAY'S RECIPES by Elaine Weber Mathis

January's Recipes were submitted by Ruth Cramer Soles. They came from the handwritten files of her mother, Mary Quick Cramer, who inherited the recipes from her mother-in-law, **Carrie Cramer**. Mary married John Emery, the son of Chalkey and Carrie Johnson Cramer. Chalkey ran the general store located next to the family homestead on Rt. 9 for many years.



John Emery Cramer (l) with his wife, Mary Quick Cramer, in the side yard of the Chalkey Cramer homestead. Chalkey is in the straw hat with Carrie to his left. (Photo courtesy of Ruth Cramer Soles)



John Emery Cramer with his mother Carrie (l) and sister Theora. Nephew Chalkey Newton Mathis, son of Zeb and Bess Cramer Mathis, is on John Emery's lap. (Photo courtesy of Ruth Cramer Soles)

YUMYUM CAKE

2 cups sugar
1 cup cold water
2 Tlb. lard or butter
¼ teaspoon salt
3 tablespoon cinnamon
1 lb. raisins
1 tablespoon baking soda

Cook altogether. When cold add 3 ½ cups flour.
Cook 1 ½ hrs. in slow oven.

CARRIE'S RECIPES



BORDEAUX RELISH

1 pk of green tomatoes
2 doz. green peppers
2 red peppers
1 doz. onions

Chop or grind fine. Mix together. Add 1 oz yellow whole mustard seed, ½ oz. celery seed, and sugar to taste. Salt and pepper to taste. Cover with vinegar. Cook half hour or 20 minutes after commencing to boil. When ready to put in jars, add 1 tsp. of turmeric.



(Photo courtesy of Ruth Cramer Soles)

Ruth Cramer Soles who spent many happy hours at the home of her grandparents, Chalkey and Carrie Cramer, with her dog Ace. Ruth will be 80 years old on January 26th. Happy Birthday, Ruth! May you have many more.

Theora Cramer, Chalkey and Carrie's daughter, ran the family's Rt. 9 General Store after Chalkey's death in 1929. She was Ruth Cramer Soles's aunt. This handsome portrait was taken in 1901 when Theora was 20 years old.



(Photo courtesy of Ruth Cramer Soles)

HOUSEHOLD HINTS

- **FRUITCAKE**—When baking, place a cup of water in the oven to keep enough moisture in the air and prevent cake from drying out while baking.
- To prevent raisins, citron or currants from sinking to the bottom of a cake, heat them quite well in the oven, then stir them lightly into the batter just before putting the cake in the oven.
- **CAKE**—If cake becomes dried out, wrap in damp cloth and set in moderately warm oven until cloth is dry. The cake will become as fresh as when baked.

I want to thank **Jean McNeil**, who lives in Little Rock, AR. for sending Helen Mathis' Lemon Pie and Bess Mathis' Pound Cake recipes. They will be featured in the next newsletter. Jean's grandparents were Clarence and Helen Mathis. If you would like your family featured in "Yesterday's Recipes," send in those old recipes.

GREAT JOHN MATHIS

(Continued from page 1)

he made in areas outside of Little Egg Harbor including Egg Harbor, Springfield, Northampton, Southampton, Monmouth County, and even Philadelphia. He financed the building of the first tavern in Tuckerton by David Falkinburg and later helped finance the American Revolution which, unfortunately, cost him the burning of his house by the British and the loss of a goodly part of his fortune as the new American government paid him back in almost worthless Continental currency. He rebuilt the house and it remained as a beacon of the Mathis influence in the area until 1973 when it was demolished to make room for the Bass River Marina after efforts to save it by the Great John Mathis Society proved unsuccessful.



Great John's house on the Bass River, circa 1950's.
(Photo courtesy of William Augustine Collection. Rutgers University)

Great John deeded the original island homestead to his son Job in 1760, upon Job's marriage to Phoebe Leek, daughter of John and Phoebe Deviney Leek whose descendants populated Leektown. Job passed the farm on to his son Daniel who passed it onto his son, Daniel, Jr. For many years the old Biddle's island homestead was called "Dan's Island." Today it is known as Oak Island and is part of the federal Forsythe Wildlife Refuge.

The vast Mathis land holdings were left to Great John's sons upon his death on October 23, 1779 with each receiving a farm of at least 1,000 acres. As generations passed, the land slowly fell from Mathis family control. The area along Route 9 from the present Ocean County line at Balangee's Creek (called Mathistown Creek for many years) to Job's Creek remained mostly in Mathis ownership for a long time and became locally known as Mathistown. Although Mathistown consisted mainly of large farms, in very early times the area around Mathistown Creek had an ancient log school house and a fulling mill which was to become a saw mill operated by Eli Mathis and later Thomas French.

Old school records indicate that a Mathistown schoolhouse may have existed on the lower road from Tuckerton to Bass River diagonally across from Munion Field Road near the intersection of Route 9 and old Route 4. It was moved about a mile closer to the village of New Gretna in 1853, burned down in 1866, and was replaced the following summer by the present building which functioned as the Mathistown School until the early 1900's. Today it is a private residence.

Today, sadly, the name Mathis is largely gone. The vast Mathis land holdings have long vanished, and there is little left to remind us of Great John and the tremendous influence he and his descendants had on Little Egg Harbor and Bass River Township history. [Note: Bass River Township was created from Little Egg Harbor in 1864.] Perhaps his greatest legacy is the large number of his descendants, many of whom married into other influential families in the Little Egg Harbor area. They carried on the Mathis tradition of community involvement and service into the mid twentieth century. I know I am richer for having known the present descendants of Great John, and I will be sure to pay my respect to his memory every Columbus Day and Washington's birthday. I hope you will do the same.

Most of the information for this article came from Leah Blackman's 1880 work, "The History of Little Egg Harbor Township." Special thanks to Murray & Jean Harris and Shirley Whealton for help with additional research.

THIS OLD HOUSE



(Photo courtesy of Richard & Charlotte Steele)

The North Maple Avenue home where Caleb Stansbury and Alma (VanSant) Cramer raised their three children- Caleb Stabsbury, Jr., Doughty, and Joe - with it's white picket fence and dirt road is reminscent of a much quieter and simpler time.

It is said that Caleb had the first "central air conditioning" system in New Gretna. He had a Fairbanks-Morris pump coupled to a "Make and Break" gasoline engine hooked to a pipe leading to the roof. Water was sprayed on the cedar shingles on a hot summer afternoon causing evaporation which cooled the attic and created air currents throughout the house.

Today, Carol and John Calcerano and their family occupy the old Caleb Cramer homestead.

A MAN CALLED JOE

(Continued from page 2)

Joe's closest friend and the one who understood him the best, I believe, was Ferron Lamson. They grew up together and remained friends all their lives. I'm sure it took a lot of patience on Ferron's part, but he never gave up on Joe and remained a true friend to the end. During his waning years Joe spent a lot of time with his widowed niece Ethel who lived just up the river from him. He enjoyed her cooking, a nip of brandy, and a lot of chit chat.

Joe never married, although I'm told he was engaged at one time. It seems kind of sad to me that a man born on St. Valentine's Day, a day for sweethearts and lovers, who never really shared in the pleasures that represented the day of his birth.

One might say Joe was strange, eccentric, odd or whatever you choose to call him, but he never harmed anyone, never cheated anyone, never envied anyone, never bothered anyone. Despite all his idiosyncrasies, and he did have a few, I still have some real good memories of the man I called Uncle Joe.



Joe working on a sailboat in his North Maple Avenue yard. (Photo courtesy of Almira Cramer Steele)

A PLACE CALLED CHIP'S FOLLY

by Steve Eichinger

In the early 1800's when Martha Furnace and later Harrisville were in full operation the place we now know as "Chip's Folly" was called the Half Moon. It had a tavern and a few other buildings and was located on the old Mail Stage Road that led to Bridgeport. The Martha Diary, written between 1808 and 1815, made mention that the men folk from the furnace town went to the Half Moon Tavern to get liquor. Some had more than "one for the road."

Recorded deeds in Mt. Holly show that the Riverside Game Association, principally owned by J.O. Zurn, a wealthy Philadelphia oil dealer, purchased the Half Moon property around 1900. Existing 1910 Bass River Tax records show that Zurn owned the old tavern building and 640 surrounding acres along the Wading River. The old Half Moon tavern building became the River Side Game Association, a retreat for the rich and famous Philadelphia friends of Zurn. Locals simply called it "the Clubhouse."



John Zurn's "Half Moon" houseboat often provided leisurely dinners on the Wading and Mullica rivers. Howard McAnney, the houseboat cook, is standing on the stern. (Photo courtesy of Horace Somes, Jr.)

that John Zurn would occasionally stop by the Broome household on North Maple Avenue for dinner. He loved Lizzie Broome's fried potatoes.

Zurn created two ponds by damming three streams and diverting water from the Tub Mill stream by a canal to the ponds which were planted with wild rice and stocked with many different types of fish. A 1939 flood washed out the dams and only two were rebuilt. In 1923, the club purchased about 600 acres of prime hunting meadows on Broad Creek on the Bass River where ponds and concrete duck blinds were built.

Club members used to gather to do a lot of practice shooting. They had a fake deer on a track that was operated by an electric motor. When they hit the bull's eye the deer would trip and go down. They would reset it for the next person. Clay pipes were used at a target range for pistols and small bore rifles. Local children would sometimes sneak on the property looking for clay pies that they would stuff with corn silk and have a smoke.

John Zurn died in 1929 at age 63. About a year or so later a major forest fire swept through the area. The 1931 tax records indicate that some buildings other than the clubhouse and bungalows were destroyed. In 1937 the property, excluding the boathouse which was owned by Dr. M.H. Moore and the Broad Creek meadows on the Bass River which were owned by O.F. Zurn, was purchased by A.W. Lasher from New York City.

Lasher employed Paul Ludwig to be game keeper and to raise pheasants on the property. Ludwig acquired the property in 1945 after the death of Lasher. The old Half Moon tavern building was long gone by this time, and the clubhouse was used as a residence. Ludwig decided a campground would be an ideal use of the property and "Chip's Folly" was born on the banks of the Wading River.

How Chip's Folly came to receive it's name is somewhat of a mystery. Paul Ludwig, the present owner and grandson of the campground's founder, says that he believes his grandfather named the campground after his son, Werner, whose nickname was "Chips." I believe the reverse to be true, as I grew up and went to school with Werner, and it is my recollection that we called him "Chips" because he came from Chip's Folly.



A hunting party in front of the River Side Game association in 1901. John Zurn (#1) can be seen sitting in the wagon with my grandfather, Harry Adams (#9), standing on the left. (Photo courtesy of Steve Eichinger)

The River Side Game Association became the Wading River Realty Company in 1917. The place was starting to shape up into a very nice retreat featuring duck hunting at Broad Place, the Mud Hole, and Johnson Point - all on the Wading River. Tax records show a sunhouse, boathouse, water works, ice house, hen house, barns and various sheds. A new clubhouse was added to the tax rolls in 1918 and high power speed boats and a houseboat were taxed as personal property. It is likely that the old Half Moon Tavern building was closed down at this time.

Over the years Zurn added a bungalow, a swimming pool, and an electric power plant run by a water power turbine which was quite advanced for it's time. They also had running water and flush toilets in the clubhouse and bungalow. This was accomplished by pumping water into a large water tank which is still on the top of the clubhouse building. Fire hoses were installed on the second floor to protect the wooden building from the ever present dangers of forest fires.

Many local people were employed to service the club's needs including Martha Adams (cook and housekeeper) and Harry Adams (laborer-carpenter) from Bridgeport; Howard McAnney (houseboat cook) from Wading River; and Roy Mathis (hunting guide) and Ben Broome (carpenter who built the bungalow) from New Gretna, just to mention a few. Marian Broome, Ben's daughter, tells that Ben provided broiling chickens and vegetables for the clubhouse and



Ray Zurn (l), John's brother, and Harry Adams outside the new clubhouse with the results of a day on the meadows. (Photo courtesy of Steve Eichinger)

SOURCES FOR GENEALOGICAL RESEARCH

In uncovering family history, most of us know the beginning techniques. Ask your relatives, find the census data, read wills, look for family Bibles, deeds, etc. When we get past what comes to us from these powerful sources the going gets tough, and we tend to put the search aside until some flash of inspiration will appear and get us started again. A great many other sources exist which, while not as rapidly productive, often are more fun to pursue and easy for anyone who enjoys poking around in libraries.

One good library source which is often overlooked by today's amateur genealogist is the body of writings produced by the various lineage societies, such as the D.A.R. (National Society of the Daughters of the American Revolution) or the General Society of Mayflower Descendants. These texts are often thought of by those not familiar with them as throwbacks to yesteryear, when the main purpose of genealogy seemed to be the attempt to connect one's ancestral lines with nobility or some famous historical personage. This idea is strengthened by opening some of these older genealogy books and seeing questionable coats of arms or learning that we are descended from Charlemagne or Lady Godiva.



Jesse R. Sears (1818-1877)
(Photo courtesy of Arnold Cramer)

Overlooking the texts related to the lineage societies is an error, however. Many of these works are serious research and are well documented. One such example is the text, "Society of Mayflower Descendants in the State of New Jersey", compiled by Walter Howard Kitchell. In the index of this text we discovered that there are twenty-two persons listed with the name "Sears." Well, there have been people with that surname in this area for a long time, so our ears perked up immediately. We first thought of the story told us by Shirley and Leslie Whealton of finding in the Tuckerton Methodist Cemetery an old gravestone, broken off and leaning against the stone wall, with the inscription "Josephus Sears."

As mentioned in the last issue of the "Bass River Gazette", the best source of local history and genealogy in this area is Leah Blackman's "History of Little Egg Harbor." We turned to that text and found that the first member of the Sears family in Bass River was one Captain Josephus Sears. Leah also included the names of Josephus' brother Paul Sears of Williamstown, New Jersey, and his sisters Sarah, who had married Nicholas Sooy Jr., and Ann, who married William Coffee Sr.

The index of the Mayflower Descendants book lists four of the Sears family named Paul. The index also provides a number next to each name that leads one to the family listing that descendant. At family #713 we found the Sarah Sears who was married to Nicholas Sooy Jr. Her parents were given as Paul and Parnell (Hammond) Sears. Since Josephus was the brother of Sarah, simple logic tells us that Paul and

Parnell are also the parents of Josephus Sears. Thus this information carries the ancestry of the Bass River Sears family all the way back to Elder William Brewster who arrived at Plymouth on the Mayflower in 1620.

Josephus Sears, born about 1763 and died about 1825, was first married to Catherine Carter. They had five children: John, Hammond, Louisa, Rebecca, and Mary. Catherine died about 1811 and is buried in the Tuckerton Methodist Cemetery. Josephus then married Achsah (Leek) Cramer, daughter of John and Martha (Rose) Leek, and the widow of Chalkley Cramer. Achsah is buried in Miller Cemetery, New Gretna. Josephus had three children by his second wife: Chalkley C., William C. and Jesse R. Sears.

Jesse R. Sears was, in 1864, the first Bass River Township Superintendent of Schools. He married Lydia Mathis, and they are both buried in Miller Cemetery. Jesse and Lydia had five children.

William C. Sears married Lydia's sister Sabra A. Mathis. Both of these women were the daughters of Elihu and Amelia Mathis and so sisters as well to Leah (Mathis) Blackman.

Chalkley C. Sears married Margaret Cale and had several children. The youngest of these was Chalkley C. Jr. who married Ellen M. Cramer in 1887. They had children Eugene and Helen. Eugene married Vera Allen and they were the parents of Francis, John H. /Jack, Helen, Eugene Harold Jr. and William /Bill. Helen Sears married Owen Carty and is a present day resident of New Gretna.

We have followed just one line of this very large family, and there are hundreds more descendants, not all of whom still live in this area, and not all of whom have the surname Sears. Perhaps you are descended from this same Josephus Sears, or possibly are one of the approximately thirty million other descendants of the twenty-three progenitors who arrived on the Mayflower and survived that first winter in Plymouth.

You may not be this fortunate in finding your ancestors in one of these lineage society books, but you'll learn a lot of history in the process. After all, isn't that what this hobby is all about?



Chalkley C. Sears (1859-1935)
served as a steamer cook (Photo courtesy of Helen Sears Carty)



Eugene H. Sears (1893-1979) was noted for his singing and starring roles in local minstrel shows. (Photo courtesy of Helen Sears Carty)



John H. Sears (1919-1945) lost his life serving in WWII. (Photo courtesy of Helen Sears Carty)

NEWS FROM THE PAST

by Harry DeVerter

The following are actual news articles transcribed from issues of old newspapers.

MOUNT HOLLY HERALD

August 14, 1889

A few days ago a scow loaded with hay belonging to Capt. Marshall A. Loveland was sunk in some way. After a few days the scow was raised, and now the story is that the owner succeeded in bailing her out when she was fifteen feet under water, or perhaps it was only fifteen inches. Even that is bad enough.

NEW JERSEY MIRROR

December 23, 1885

This village does not enjoy, like many others, the inestimable privilege of electric flashes and talking telephones, but simply a daily stage that carries communications and passengers from Tuckerton to Egg Harbor at a speed of about three miles an hour. Many here are under the impression, judging from the enormous price asked for conveying passengers over the route, that the boss may soon be able to hitch up better accommodations for the convenience of the traveling public, especially in winter. It seems that two dollars from New Gretna and back, a distance of only sixteen miles is exorbitant, and should not be tolerated.

MOUNT HOLLY HERALD

December 25, 1896

The tax rate this year in Bass River township was \$1.65; in Washington \$2. Ex County Clerk Levi French is the heaviest resident tax-payer in Bass River township. The recent rumors about his being sold out by the sheriff grew out of a sale in which he was only acting as agent for Joseph Wharton to perfect the title to the Harrisville property.

MOUNT HOLLY HERALD

September 8, 1883

A festival and picnic will be given in the grove adjoining the Presbyterian church this Saturday evening. The funds will be used as the starter for a brass band. There will be music, dancing and lots of fun. The woods have been cleared out, a platform and stands erected and no doubt it will be a success.

The Bass River Community Library History Committee members are Steve Eichinger, Peter Stemmer, Almira Steele, Elaine Mathis, Harry DeVerter, and Jean & Murray Harris. In addition to our newsletter, we are working on a Bass River Township history book. If you have any information such as photos, postcards, family bibles, deeds, letters, documents, maps, local recipes, newspaper clippings, store advertisements, family genealogies, etc. related to Bass River Township that may be helpful to us, please contact us individually; write us c/o **The Bass River Community Library, P.O. Box 256, New Gretna, N.J. 08224**; or call Pete Stemmer at 296-6748. We can use your help. We thank the Herrintown Poet for his guest article and encourage readers who are interested in Bass River Township area history to submit comments to our columnists and/or an article for publication.

ANOTHER THING I REMEMBER

. . . REVISITED

by Walter L. Mathis



Walter L. Mathis
1908-1996

Another thing I remember as a teenager was the way they stored ice for the hot weather in the large ice houses which were built with a cellar and no floors. We stacked the ice, about 6-5 inches thick in one large block, and left a space about 2 feet wide all around the edges. This space was filled with sawdust and packed down as we put the ice in and covered the top with sawdust.

The ice was cut from a pond with large hand saws that had large teeth in them. We handled the ice with thick woolen gloves and ice hooks. It was very hard work, and of course had to be done in very cold weather.

There were several ice houses in New Gretna at one time, including The New Gretna House and Aston Lamson's restaurant. The only one that I helped to fill was at the Wading River Club House which is now the Chips Folly Campground.

I also talked to a sailor who used to work on a schooner. He said they used to bring ice from Maine in hot weather to the resorts, and it was a very dangerous cargo if the weather was bad. They packed it in salt hay, and when it melted it would shift in the hold.

Walter edited the original "Another Thing I Remember" column in the mid 1980's when the short-lived Bass River Historical Society published a newsletter. This is his column from April, 1984.

IN MEMORIUM

Sara Kirby Mathis Guertler
(1911-1998)

Our hearts are saddened, and we as a community are diminished by the passing of Sara Guertler this past July. Sara, a descendant of Great John Mathis, was a true friend who did much to foster and preserve the history of this area. She was instrumental in forming The Great John Mathis Foundation in the 1960's in an attempt to save the Great John Mathis house that was to be torn down to make room for the Bass River Marina. Although unsuccessful in raising enough money to save the old house, the organization left an important legacy by republishing Leah Blackman's out of print 1880 classic, "The History of Little Egg Harbor Township," which has proven invaluable to historians and genealogists interested in the Bass River-Little Egg Harbor area.



Sara's encouragement in the publishing of this newsletter will always be remembered. Her support as treasurer of the Great John Mathis Foundation resulted in a grant which allowed our local library to purchase a computer scanner, enabling us to start a collection of old photos. This growing collection led to the publishing of this newsletter.

Sara, there is so much I wished I had asked you. I guess I'll have to wait until we meet again.

Pete Stemmer