

# BASS RIVER GAZETTE

A newsletter from the Bass River Community Library History Committee and the Great John Mathis Foundation

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## Oyster Season Opening: An Old New Gretna Tradition

by Donald Maxwell

Probably one of the main events ever to occur in New Gretna was the opening of the Graveling Point oyster beds every spring. It was celebrated throughout most of southern New Jersey along the Atlantic coast. The State of New Jersey, through the Bureau of Shell Fisheries every spring, mostly sometime around the first of April, opened its natural oyster beds located in the mouth of the Mullica River to any resident of New Jersey who purchased a tonger's license for a nominal fee, usually anywhere from \$2.00 to \$10.00 in latter years.

The tonger came from as far away as Barnegat in the north, to Bivalve at Maurice River in the south and along the Delaware River. However, it was dominated mainly by baymen from New Gretna, as they held most of the oyster leases and private beds near the state beds. The tongers that came from elsewhere in New Jersey, not having any oyster leases adjacent to the state beds or any leases at

all, mostly sold their daily catch to the oyster planters who were all from New Gretna, such as Arnold Cramer, Del Robbins, and my father, Curtis Maxwell.

When the tongers would tong in enough oysters to fill the hold of their boats, they would pull their anchors and come alongside any one of the buy boats, throw a line aboard to secure their boat to the larger buy boat, and then inquire about the price and so on.

Usually the price had already been set among the planters so there would be no advantage to haggle with the buyer. If they didn't like the price, they would push off from the buy boat and either go to the next buyer and try to strike a better deal or take a chance and plant the oysters themselves on any lease they may have, whether it was good oyster bottom or not. They usually lost the oysters when they did that as the bottom would either swallow up the oysters or they would mud or sand, that's the chance they would have to take. Al-



Curtis Maxwell on his garvey on Oyster Creek. (Photo courtesy of Donald Maxwell)



Donald Maxwell (center) with father, Curtis (l), tonging off Graveling Point, circa 1965. Chris Riley, Director of the NJ Bureau of Shell Fisheries, is on the State boat in the foreground. (Photo courtesy of the William Augustine Photo Collection, Rutgers University Library, New Brunswick, N.J.)

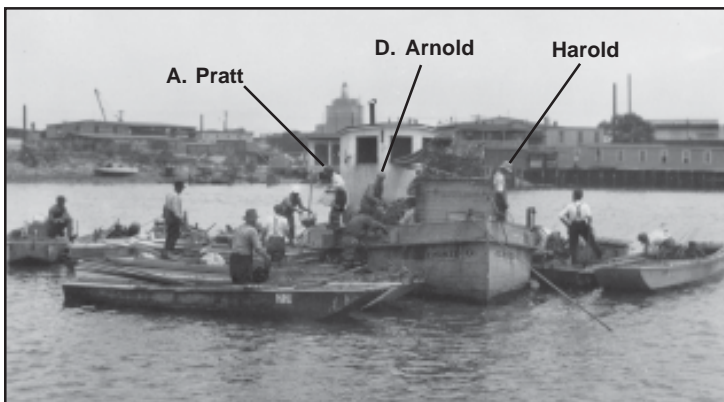
most always they sold. If the oystering was exceptionally good they would load twice a day and put out on the buy boat once in the morning and again in the afternoon.

Usually everyone was gone from the beds by 3 PM as they were too tired and, also, in later years the State imposed a 3 PM curfew. As a general rule the wind would spring up and start to blow about 1 PM or early afternoon, and the tide would turn. The tonger then would have the wind against the tide in the mouth of the Mullica which was no place to be in April. The wind would increase as the day went on, thus making it more difficult to catch any oysters. The boat wouldn't lay right in the water, jumping up and down constantly. It was why it was very important to be there early as possible as the beds opened legally at sunrise.

I remember there was a lot of excitement the day and night before the opening day, what with getting gear ready, boats all gassed up, tongs repaired and in place, and engines tuned up so there wouldn't be any chance that anything went wrong or that equipment failed. We had been waiting all year for this chance to get all the oysters we could catch, there just for the taking. It was important to get there early and all anchored up and in place waiting for the signal or gun to go off so you could start working. All you could hear was the sound of tongs splashing in the water, oysters being dumped out of tongs on the cull boards we had to have laying across the comings. When you filled your cull board up full then you sat or stood and removed the debris by sliding it off the cull board back into the water and sliding the oysters down inside the hold.

I remember, at home, we laid in a good food supply for some heavy lunches and went to bed early. The next morning mom would be the first one up, usually around 4:00 AM, putting coffee on and making a big breakfast for my father, Jack, and I. You could smell the eggs frying, bacon sizzling, and home fries cooking. Mom would then make a big lunch for each of us. My brother and I would get into a scrap over who had the biggest and best lunch, as we would check each others out, each claiming the other got the best. Then mom would settle it by declaring they were equal and, that was it, no more arguing.

I remember Clarence Robbins, an old New Gretna oysterman. He had retired from U.S. Coast Guard but had always kept his hands in the oyster business while in the Guard. Upon retiring, he went into it bigger, especially down on the graveling. He lived on New York Road



The "Jessie G.", an oyster and clam "buy boat" owned by Donald Arnold Cramer who owned the Oyster House on the Bass River, in the back waters of Atlantic City. D. Arnold and his sons, Arnold Pratt and Harold, are on deck hauling in clams bought from the tongers. The Claridge Hotel can be seen in the center background. (Photo courtesy of Arnold Cramer.)

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# Oyster Season Opening

(Continued from page 1)

(Rt. 9) where Benny and Joan Adams now live. In fact, he had that house built. The night before the opening of the season Clarence would walk down to the bridge where he kept his boat to start his engine, making sure it was running all right. This particular time we heard him make two trips, as he didn't have a car. He always walked. Early that same morning, when it was time to go, he went down to his boat to cast off, and his engine wouldn't start. Baymen who were there said he begged someone to help him, or tow him, and he was actually crying, afraid he would miss the opening day. He must have made out all right, as he was always there.

During the morning hours, the State boat would come around checking to see if everyone had a license. Franklin A. Gray was Chief of Shell Fisheries, and he wore a white captain's hat and carried a clipboard. It had all the names on it, and he would check them off.

In those days the Conservation Officers were called Oyster Watchmen. They were a dedicated group, mostly former baymen themselves. They were Doughty Cramer, Washy Allen, Woody Allen, Harry Allen, and Otto Kalm. During oyster season there wasn't much for them to do as everyone who went in the bay, including clambers and all, were there on the oyster beds. They did make sure everyone observed the rough cull law, making sure that the tongers didn't take too many shells in with the oysters.

During later years there were buyers that came from Delaware Bay like Norman Jefferies who had some really big buy boats; however, they didn't last very long, especially when the oyster blights came along and just about wiped the planters out. I would say the 1940's and 1950's were the hey days at the graveling. Everything was going full blast full steam ahead until the first oyster blight hit us around 1957-1958. The oyster scientists called it MSX, meaning unknown quantity. They had traced it as far south as the Gulf of Mexico, and it gradually spread north into the Chesapeake, Delaware Bay and, finally, here in our area. It lasted for quite a few years, and the smaller planters like Les Allen, Delbert Robbins, Lee Loveland, etc. sold out to the bigger planters, mostly from Delaware Bay, at bargain prices. It briefly came back for a couple of years or so in the early and mid 60's. Then a newer and deadlier oyster blight came along called Dermo. That finished off what few oysters that survived the MSX blight. That blight stayed for quite a few years, and in fact is still with us, although it comes and goes briefly according to the salinity of the water. Years we have a lot of rain seem to hold it down somewhat. It flourishes and kills everything again during dry years.

Through all these bad years for oysters, the old time baymen died off - like Del Robbins; Les Allen; my father, Curtis Maxwell; Lee Loveland; the Cramer brothers, Pratt and Harold; Rube McAnney and others. They are all gone. The only old baymen that are left from that era are

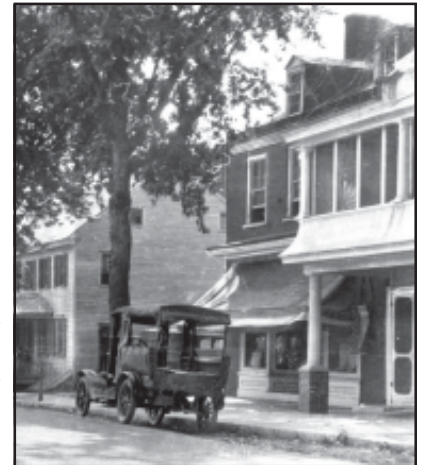


D. Arnold Cramer's "Drednaught," docked at the Cramer Oyster House on the Bass River (circa 1980), played an important part in the oyster trade in the area for many years. (Photo courtesy of Arnold Cramer.)

Steve Potter, Fred Kalm, Benny Allen, and a few others. I think I am the last of the active oystermen in Great Bay who is still actively engaged in the business and that is on a reduced scale. It is a part of the area's past that will never be repeated again.

Sometimes I feel very nostalgic thinking of the good old days when oysters

were king in New Gretna. The whole town and most of its citizens benefited from the oysters. All the planters would hire anyone who didn't have a boat and could tong and furnish them with boat and tongs to work for them by the day. They were good baymen like Russell Loveland, Jack Wiseman, Harry Allen, Reds Howey, Stan McCarten, Ed Brown, Bob Maxwell, etc. My dad and I had hired most of them at one time or other to tong for us in different oyster seasons. The local stores benefited as well as they would stock up on groceries as some of the old timers would stay out in houseboats and cabins that used to be located in creeks, river banks, and coves. My grandfather "Keever" Allen said he and his brothers, Winnie and Howard, used to stay in houseboats in the days before my time. They would give a big grocery order to local stores in town like Howard Mathis, Ashley Mathis, Mate Mathis and later Joe French, all grocery stores in New Gretna, as they always stayed for a week or so.



Even the Gerber stores in Tuckerton counted on selling boots and foul weather gear to the local baymen in preparation for the opening oyster season. They would come to Allen's Dock in New Gretna and to Leeds Point, open up the dry goods truck or vehicle and soon gather a group of baymen around them. It was mostly Abraham Gerber, Lippy Gerber's brother. They always had a very good line of good quality merchandise, no junk.

A truck in front of the Lipman Brothers store on Main Street, Tuckerton, circa 1920, is believed to be Lipman's Dry Goods delivery truck. The driveway to the left of the store leads to the Little Egg Harbor Friends Meeting House. (Photo courtesy of the Tuckerton Historical Society.)

I remember one year, I believe it was 1944, there was an abundant crop of oysters and I took off from high school. I must have been about 16. I remember it was the 2nd day of the season, around April 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup>, and there came a severe northeaster and a hard cold driving snow. That morning, just before daylight, we left Oyster Creek with a couple of row garveys in tow. We had Bob Maxwell and his son, John, tonging for us. We beat our way up the bay head into driving snow and heavy seas and finally, arriving at the bed in mouth of river, no one else was there as it wasn't fit to work. My dad said, "Maybe this will quit and give up on ebb tide. Lets go in the dugout and wait it out." The dugout was a small creek on Graveling Point that old timers said was partly dug out by hand. It made a good harbor and was adjacent to the oyster beds. There were about 6 cabins in there, 3 on each side. Each had a dock in front. When we pulled in with our tow, Worthman Darby came out of his cabin and waved us on in to get warm. All four of us piled in his small cabin. He had a stove in the middle of the room, blazing red hot with a coal fire and had a table, couple of chairs, and a bunk in one end of the cabin. He sat in an old stuffed chair, keeping his feet warm, with his stocking feet resting on the guard rail that went around the stove.

The men talked about old times, while I was praying to the Almighty not to let the storm abate as I sure didn't want to work under those conditions. Finally, after a couple of hours, my prayers were answered, and dad said, "This storm isn't going to quit on the ebb. Might as well go back home." So, we thanked Worthman, said goodbye, and started back to Oyster Creek. That time we had fair wind that was blowing behind us, and we proceeded on home.

These are all precious memories of a time and an era gone by, scenes that will never be repeated or experienced again. I thank God that I was privileged to have been a part of it.

**BUREAU OF SHELL FISHERIES  
OYSTER BED LEASES - 1906  
New Gretna Resident's Leases**

NAME	LOT NO.	ACRES
Walter S. Allen & S. B. Allen	79-75-76-137	9
Uriah Allen	39-143	4
Ernest G. Adams	68	2
Thomas A. Allen	90-81	4
John Allen	34-33-69	8
Chas. H. Allen	116-114-74	11
Chas. Arnold Allen	115	4
John Adams	105-106	16
James H. Allen	135	2
Arnold Allen	134	4
Caleb F. Allen	72	2
Edward Allen	19	2
Samuel B. Allen	148	3
Chester Allen	144	2
Benj. Chew	3-4-5-117	8
Daniel D. Cramer	133-2-138	20
Caleb S. Cramer & Sons	80-94	7
Caleb Cramer, Jr	60	5
Lemuel Cramer	48	3
William H. Chew	1	3
Chas C. Cramer	129	5
C. S. Cramer	128	4
C. S. Cramer	*	3
C. Harry Cramer	139	2
J. W. Darby	66-28-29	9
E. J. Gaskill	56-64-53	10
John A. Grey	17-130	4
C. F. Allen & J. A. Grey	11-12	7
Carlisle Gaskill	61	5
Jesse Gaskill	132	2
B. F. Headley	72	2
Joseph A. Loveland	49-142	9
Jesse I. Loveland	92	3
Benj. Loveland	52	5
Ellis Loveland	22	9
Jesse A. Loveland	141-54	6
William T. Loveland	136	4
Eli Mathis	18	2
Pitman Mathis	19	2
N. C. & C. Mathis	55	7
Maja C. Mathis	147	3
Alvin E. Mathis	73-82	4
Walter R. Mathis	95-96	4
Joseph A. Mathis	50-16	5
Daniel E. Mathis	91-*	6
William H. Mathis	15-70	7
Caleb A. Mathis	125-*	7
Lewis L. & Harry V. Mathis	58	6
Harry V. Mathis	*	2
John McAnney	132	2
Chas. Robbins	35-36-65-86-87	12
L. D. Robbins	89-93-118	6
Norris Sears	47	9

\* indicates that lot has not been surveyed.



Tonging on the graveling\*\*, circa 1906. (Photo from "Report of the Bureau of Shell Fisheries For the Year Ending October 31<sup>st</sup> 1906")

**BUREAU OF SHELL FISHERIES TONGING LICENSES - 1906  
New Gretna Resident's Leases by License Number**

300	L. D. Robbins	345	Carlisle Gaskill	390	Howard Allen
304	Jesse Loveland	346	Alvin Gaskill	391	P. E. Mathis
305	Russell Loveland	347	Morris Gaskill	399	Edward Allen
306	Jos. A. Loveland	348	Harry Applegate	400	Arthur Loveland
307	Asbury Mathis	349	Joseph McAnney	401	James Allen
308	Chester Allen	350	Benj. W. Chew	402	Hez. Adams
309	John K. Mathis	351	Ernest Adair	403	Lemuel Cramer
310	Arnold Mathis	352	Joseph F. Allen	404	Samuel Mathis
311	Alvin Mathis	353	H. Mathis	405	Joshua Mathis
312	Alfred F. Cramer	354	Ira Gerew	406	Herbert Cramer
313	John McAnny	356	Crate McAnney	410	James T. C. Cramer
314	Charles Robbins	357	John Grey	411	Washington Allen
315	Clarence Robbins	358	Caleb Allen	412	William Allen
316	Adelbert Robbins	359	Doughty Cramer	413	D. D. Cramer
317	Phineas Munyon	371	L. S. Mathis	414	Milton Cramer
318	Winfield Allen	372	Harvey Allen	415	Caleb Cramer
319	Curtis Mathis	373	Leonard Sooy	416	Arnold Cramer
328	Chas. Allen	374	Walter R. Mathis	417	Earl Cramer
329	—	375	Roy Allen	419	William B. Alger
330	Chas. C. Cramer	376	Edward Allen	420	William E. Loveland
331	Joseph A. Mathis	377	H. V. Mathis	423	Caleb Mathis
333	Thomas Cramer	378	H. E. French	424	William F. Allen
334	Joab Leeds	379	I. L. Loveland	425	Uriah Allen
335	Norris Cramer	380	Samuel E. Loveland	426	Blanchard Adams
336	Murrell Mathis	381	Joseph K. Mathis	427	John Allen
337	Duncan Joynes	382	Richard Mathis	428	Harry Allen
338	James Falkinburg	383	Joseph K. Mathis, Jr	429	L. L. Mathis, Sr
339	Win Downs	384	Samuel Cramer	430	Caleb Cramer
340	D. E. Mathis	385	Lewis Cramer	431	W. N. Sears
341	Jesse I. Loveland	386	Daniel Munyon	432	J. W. Darby
342	Jesse Gaskill	387	Arnold Cramer	433	S. B. Allen
343	John Adams	388	Harry Allen	447	Samuel Sooy
344	B. F. Headley	389	Thomas Allen	719	Daniel E. Mathis
				826	George W. Carr

**WANTED**

Do you have any old photos of the tongers, tongers' licenses, stories, etc. mentioned in these 1906 lists? If so we would appreciate you sharing them with us. Please get in touch with us by mail at **Bass River Gazette, P.O. Box 256, New Gretna, N.J. 08224** or call Pete Stemmer at (609) 296-6748. We would like to do future Gazette articles on New Gretna tongers.



Tonging on the graveling\*\*, circa 1906. (Photo from "Report of the Bureau of Shell Fisheries For the Year Ending October 31<sup>st</sup> 1906")

\*\* "the graveling" is that part of Great Bay just off the point of land called "Graveling Point" which is at the end of Radio Road in present day Mystic Island." It was the prime oyster grounds of the area.

# YESTERDAY'S RECIPES by Elaine Weber Mathis

I recently met a lovely lady that comes from a Bass River family whose roots go back several generations in New Gretna. Her name is **Janet (Parker) White**. Janet lives in Willard, MO and has an accounting & income tax business. She is the daughter of **John and Anita (Cramer) Parker**. The other children of John and Anita are: **Georgia "Cookie" (Parker) Justice**, who also lives in Willard, MO and is a retired school bus driver and home healthcare nurse; **John Parker, Jr.** who lives in Sioux Falls, SD and is retired from the gaming business and is now a land developer; and **Sebrina Parker** who lives in Springfield, MO and is an accountant for Springfield HUD.

The family lived in New Gretna in several different houses, until they bought the North Maple Avenue house that is the current residence of Elvin Mathis. They lived there from about 1944-1951 and then moved to Beachwood when John could no longer support his family by working in the bay.

Here are some of Janet's early memories of life in New Gretna and 'Cookies' favorite cake recipe that their Mom used to make.

*"Cookie and I would stand on a stool and help Mom mix that cake when we lived on North Maple. It was usually for a special occasion which we would share with our grandfather, Capt. Jesse Cramer, my aunts, Georgia (Cramer) Mazzeo, Sebrina (Cramer) Kane, and my great-aunt Georgia (Cramer) Lutz. We lived next-door to our good neighbors Walter and Alice Mathis. We always called the house "that little brown house". My brother was born in that house, and Alice Mathis helped to bring him into this world. I remember how much fun we had playing kick the can and hide-n-seek with Bob and Elvin Mathis. We have since moved from New Jersey to Missouri, but our roots run deep in New Gretna. There are just warm and happy memories of our childhood in New Gretna."*

## COCONUT LAYER CAKE

2 cups cake flour (sift before measuring)  
 1 1/3 cups sugar      1/2 cup Crisco  
 2/3 cup milk            1 tsp. salt

Blend vigorously by hand or with mixer at (medium speed) 2 minutes. Now stir in (yes, all by itself) 3 tsp. Baking Powder. Then add: 4 egg yolks\* (unbeaten), 1/3 cup milk, 1/2 tsp lemon extract. Blend by hand or with mixer at (medium speed) 2 minutes. Pour into 9" layer pans, which have been rubbed with Crisco and lined with waxed paper.

Bake in moderate oven (375) 25-30 minutes. Frost cake with your favorite white icing. Sprinkle top and sides of cake with shredded coconut.

\* May use 2 whole eggs and 2 yolks reserving whites for icing.

## SNOW FROSTING

1 egg white unbeaten      3/4 cup sugar      3 tbsp water  
 1 tsp light corn syrup      1/2 tsp vanilla

Combine egg white, sugar, salt, water, and corn syrup in top of double boiler. Beat with rotary egg beater or electric beater about 1 minute or until thoroughly mixed. Cook over rapidly boiling water, beating constantly with rotary egg beater (or at high speed of electric mixer) 4 minutes, or until frosting will stand up in stiff peaks. (Stir frosting up from bottom and sides of pan occasionally with rubber scraper, spatula, or spoon) Remove from boiling water. Add vanilla and beat 1 minute or until thick enough to spread.



Georgine Mathis (c) and Janet (l) & Cookie Parker (1949) in the front yard of their North Maple Avenue home. The house in the background belonged to Harold Gerew. (Photo courtesy of Janet Parker White.)



Next door neighbor, Alice Mathis, and John Parker, Jr. in 1948. (Photo courtesy of Janet Parker White.)



Parker Siblings- (l-r) Janet (Parker) White; John Parker Jr; Georgia "Cookie" (Parker) Justice; and Sebrina Parker in July, 2002. (Photo courtesy of Janet Parker White.)



(l-r) Anita, Georgia, and Sabrina Cramer in Atlantic City in 1926. (Photo courtesy of Janet Parker White.)

If you would like your family featured in a future "Yesterday's Recipes" column, please send a recipe or two to Elaine Mathis c/o Bass River Community Library, P.O. Box 256, New Gretna, N.J. 08224.

# NEWS FROM THE PAST

by Harry DeVerter

*Oysters were an important part of the Little Egg Harbor economy from a very early date as evidenced by the following excerpts from the Little Egg Harbor Township minutes showing oyster regulation, surveys, and lawsuits. Early minutes were sparse so any mention of oysters signifies their importance in the area. Spelling and punctuation, which leaves much to be desired by today's standards, has been left intact.*

## Little Egg Harbor Township Minutes March 12, 1793

3rd item - That the duties shall be collected for **oyster** by the commissioners appointed for that purpose as the resolves direct for the use of the township.

4th item - that it may not be omitted by this township to suffer any person or persons to put on board any vessel or vessels any **oyster** belonging in this county excepting he be persons of this township.

## Little Egg Harbor Township Minutes September 10, 1793

Likewise was agreed that no **oyster** shall be carried out in vessel not belonging to this place.

Likewise was agreed that the constables shall have 10 s [shillings] apiece for serving the township on this business.

Likewise the free holders & men appointed to go the board of proprietors or assembly shall have 7s per day for their service in the business.

Likewise was agreed at sd meeting to commence a law suite against Thos. Belangee, Thos. Osborn & company in regard of duties on **oysters** which they detain in their hands which is to be commenced by the freeholders Louis Darnell & John Bodine.

## Little Egg Harbor Township Minutes June 7, 1803

Resolved that Ebener Tucker Esqr Jeremiah Willets David C. Bryan Esqr Francis French John Willets are appointed by sd meeting to draw up a resolve respecting the **oysters** and make report next town meeting and likewise produce the surveys and other papers respecting the **oyster** surveys.

## Little Egg Harbor Township Minutes September 10, 1803

Resolved that Saml Shourds is appointed collector of tollation on **oysters** which is 4 cents for [unintelligible] on hundred to account to the township committee agreeable to an ordinance past by sd meeting respecting **oysters** and prohibiting all persons and vessels not belonging to this township from taking or gathering of sd **oysters** within the boundaries of sd township.

## Gazette Subscriptions

A yearly subscription (2 issues) of the Gazette is available for anyone who sends 2 business size, 4" x 9 1/2", stamped, self addressed envelopes to **Gazette Subscriptions c/o Bass River Township Community Library, P.O. Box 256, New Gretna, NJ 08224**. There is no charge for the subscription; however, donations are appreciated. The subscription will start with the next issue unless otherwise specified and will expire after the 2 envelopes are used. It may then be renewed by sending 2 or more additional envelopes. Don't fret if your copy is a month or two late. We seem to always be busy on some history project and can't seem to get to the Gazette in a timely fashion.

If you have any information such as photos, letters, documents, maps, local recipes, newspaper clippings, etc. related to Bass River Township that may be helpful to us, please write us or contact us individually.

*The following items regarding oysters and New Gretna were taken from the Mt. Holly Herald newspaper.*

Joseph B. Allen has built a new dock and road leading thereto and is now shipping all the **oysters** he can get. The demand is beyond the supply and prices range from 90 cents to \$1.00 per bushel. [4/28/1900]

At a three hours eat-as-you-please eating match at Bass River, held recently, one of the contestants carried off the prize by devouring 60 clams, 1 peck of **oysters**, 10 terrapin, and 4 black ducks. The winner is a very modest person and declines to give his name for fear of being challenged by some imaginary champion, but signifies his willingness to perform the job again at any time. [2/21/1880]

**Oyster** commissioner Marshall A. Loveland has finished shelling some of the natural **oyster** beds at the mouth of Mullica river. He put out 10,000 bushels of shells which he purchased of Specks in Tuckerton. His appropriation was \$500 and he has used it judiciously and economically. In two years the public can gather the seed. [6/24/1893]

The new **oyster** commissioners, Watson Sooy and Maja Mathis, have planted 10,000 bushels of shells on the State grounds in the bay. Private owners, too, are placing large quantities on their lots hoping for a large trade. [7/1/1899]

Capt. Alfred Cramer is running his schooner to Long Island for **oyster** plants for Speck Bros. [6/1/1901]

**Oyster** Commissioner S.B. Allen has been confined to his house with the German measles. [2/23/1907]

On behalf of Thomas J. Gaskill, Arnold Cramer and about 300 South Jersey **oystermen** William C. French of Camden, last week through attorney general Robert McCarter began suits in ejectment against the Sooy **Oyster** company, James Gale, Hilliard Gale, Benjamin Chew and others who hold valuable riparian grants in the Mullica river and Great bay. This is the latest of the **oyster** war that has been agitating the shore counties since October and the action taken is in accordance with an opinion recently filed by Vice-chancellor Leaming. The trouble began in October when the **oystermen** claiming that the Riparian commission had given favored corporations and individuals grants on natural **oyster** beds contrary to the act of 1888 descended upon the usurpers and a pitched battle ensued. There were a number of broken heads and suits at law were instituted in the civil and criminal courts. A number of the latter are to be disposed of at the September term of court in Atlantic county. Some weeks ago counsel for the Sooy company secured from Vice-chancellor Leaming an order restraining the **oystermen** from trespassing upon the corporation's land. In giving decision in the matter however the vice-chancellor averred that it would be possible in a court of law to show that the grants had been improperly made. It is in consequence of this that the present action in ejectment has been begun. It is the contention of the **oystermen** that the commission had no right to give away property where natural beds have existed for generations . . . the issue means the life or death as far as the vocation is concerned of the 300 **oystermen** and their families. [8/29/1908]

Lorenzo E. Robbins, of this place [New Gretna], was appointed a member of the Ocean county **oyster** commission, to succeed Samuel B. Allen. [11/28/1908]

Governor Fielder last week appointed Edward K. Allen, Jr. ["Keever"] of this place [New Gretna], as a member of the Board of **Shell Fisheries** to succeed Thomas J. Gaskill who resigned. Allen is a Republican, the same as Gaskill. [10/2/1915]

## Allentown Memories

(Continued from page 8)

Neighbors of the Allens were the MacKensies who owned and operated a large chicken farm. They sold eggs and chickens locally and shipped a lot to market. They were from Scotland and were very hardworking people and wonderful neighbors.

Caleb and Alma Cramer, my grandparents, lived next door to the MacKensies and across the street from my home. I spent many happy hours with my grandparents. They always had big, red juicy apples in their root cellar. I remember, every night after school, going over there for one of those apples.



The home of my grandparents, Caleb and Alma Cramer, was just across the street from our house. The Calcerano family now lives in the house. (Photo courtesy of Ricki and Charlotte Steele.)

My grandfather had a few acres of farmland, and every summer we had delicious water melon, cantaloupes, and plenty of fresh vegetables. He also had several fruit trees- peach, pear, plum, apple, persimmon, and crabapple. The one I liked the best was the little sickle pears. They were so sweet and juicy when picked right off the tree.

He also built and repaired boats across the street and down by the Bass River. He had ducks and geese that he raised and kept penned up most of the time. But, one day, the Scobey duck got out. Now, a Scobey duck is big and ugly. I was only about five or six years old when I decided to go to the river which was right behind our house to see my grandfather. Before I got there "Boliver," the Scobey duck, came running toward me. I screamed at the top of my lungs because he wasn't only ugly, he was bigger than I was. He scared me half to death, but my grandfather came to my rescue. I guess "Boliver" didn't like my white hair because he didn't run after anybody else but me.



Mattie and Harry Applegate were well liked in the neighborhood. (Photo courtesy of Murray & Jean Harris)

I remember my grandfather having one of the first radios in town. It was an Atwater Kent that ran on batteries. Again, like the telephone, I was dumbfounded when I heard voices coming from that box setting on the table.

Whatever new gadget came out, my grandfather bought it. I remember the new washing machine he purchased for my grandmother. Every housewife at that time did the family wash on something called the "wash board" and that was real hard work. One day my grandfather saw a washing machine advertised in the newspaper and bought it. That machine was the forerunner of the first electric washer. It had an agitator worked by a push-pull handle and another handle to turn the wringer. Even at that, it was much less work than the

washboard. I can still see my grandfather pushing and pulling that handle to help grandma do the family washing.

One day my grandfather came home with a beautiful new buggy. He had a couple of horses and, I guess, he wanted some classy transportation. He was so proud of that buggy, he even bought a sleigh to attach to the buggy for winter traveling. Again, that was one of the first in town.

Ruy Allen and Caleb Cramer were neighbors and good friends. They were also very competitive. They both wanted anything new that came on the market, and they usually got it. They would spend hours discussing current events, politics, or whatever. Sometimes the conversation became quite heated. I don't think they agreed on much of anything, yet they couldn't wait until one or the other paid a visit so they could express their opinion on whatever subject and get their point across. I'm sure that was their recreation because they both enjoyed the banter.

My grandmother Alma's hobby was flower gardening. She had a beautiful garden beside her house all fenced in and protected from invaders. I remember I could only go in the garden if I walked in the paths.

There was a little homemade birdbath in the center of the garden, and birds of every kind and color made use of that bath all summer long. I remember the myrtles, violets, and Lilies of the Valley covering one whole corner of the garden, while daffodils, lilies, roses, and flower bushes of every kind blooming throughout the garden. There were many flowers that I had never heard of, but my grandmother knew them all.

In another corner, out by the road, was a big magnolia tree. That tree bloomed most of the summer. The aroma from those magnolia blossoms was captivating. Many a time someone walking by would stop to smell those fragrant white magnolia blossoms and, a time or two, would pick one if grandma wasn't watching.

Many of my grandparents, relatives, and friends were the recipients of a beautiful bouquet from grandma's garden and a lot of fresh fruits and vegetables from grandpa's garden as well.

Another thing I remember about my grandmother was on hot summer days, when she had finished all her chores, she relaxed on her front porch. She always dressed for the occasion in case some of her friends from the neighborhood dropped by, and they usually did. Caroline Mathis, who lived just up the street, was a frequent visitor. They would spend a friendly afternoon sipping grandma's freshly made ice cold lemonade, while discussing the neighborhood goings on.



Thomas Jefferson Gaskill was one of the hard working people in our neighborhood. (Photo courtesy of Norman & Ann Mathis)

Other hard working neighborhood families were Mattie and Harry Applegate, Anna and Ashton Lamson, Ruy and Marietta Allen, Thomas Jefferson Gaskill, Sam and Ada Mathis, Lena and Frank Allen, and Elizabeth Cramer, my other grandmother. I don't remember my grandfather Albert Cramer, on my mother's side, because I was very young when he passed away, but I remember my grandmother Elizabeth as a hard working, church going woman. She like to have her snow white hair done in finger waves which was the style at that time, and she always wore a lot of jewelry. She too was very important in our family life.

Allentown was a nice, friendly neighborhood with lots of caring and sharing people. We didn't have a lot of money, but we always had enough. Most of all, we had those close family ties and who could really ask for too much more. As for me, I think I had a great childhood growing up with all my friends and family in the neighborhood of Allentown.

# Old Time Flower Gardens

*Flower gardens were popular in the area as far back as the 1800's. The following is an excerpt from Leah Blackman's Old Times and Country Living published by the Tuckerton Historical Society, Nov. 2000. It may be purchased by mail for \$22.50 + \$4.00 shipping & handling from Tuckerton Historical Society, P.O. Box 43, Tuckerton, NJ 08087.*

Fifty years ago [circa 1830] the love for and the cultivation of flowers was not, as now, considered a fashion that must be followed by all classes of people. At the present time [1880] it is fashionable to admire and cultivate flowers, and I know many people who a few years ago laughed at the idea of admiring and cultivating flowers, saying no one would catch them doing such a useless and foolish thing as spending their time and strength in cultivating flowering shrubs and plants. But now that the admiration and culture of such things is fashionable, we see these same flower haters in the possession of flower pots filled with plants and their yards adorned with flowering shrubs, vines and plants which they seem to enjoy exhibiting to and conversing about with their friends, and thus the flowers ought to be grateful to Dame Fashion for bringing them into high repute with their former enemies. In old times, probably, if Aunt Sally set out a rose bush or Washington's bower, or a bunch of pinks or daffodills, her lord Jonathan would dig them up and throw them into the hog pen, saying, "I won't have such useless things about my premises." And poor meek Aunt Sally would have to submit to the meanness, she not having been initiated into modern woman's rights. Happily this race of Jonathans is nearly extinct, and the sooner they are annihilated, the better it will be for the fair appearance of the country.

Many farm houses had ample front yards about them, but no one presumed on such a thing as having flowering shrubs or plants in the door-yard; such things were assigned to the vegetable garden, a certain portion being set apart for the cultivation of ornamental shrubs, plants and medicinal herbs. The shrubs that were in cultivation were purple lilacs, dwarf red roses with large single flowers and beautiful



buds, and the pink-hued and highly-fragrant damask rose, said to have been imported from Damascus, now the most ancient city of the world. Washington's bower was a popular shrub and climber combined, and there was the snowball bush with its immense white flowers looking like snowballs about to dissolve in the hot sun. The flowering plants were daffodils, both white and yellow, snowdrops, bluebells, tulips, and a single light purple hyacinth called sweet Jessie, and sometimes Jacob's ladder, and peonies, pinks of many colors,

sweet Williams, mullen pinks, Indian pinks, jump-up-Johnnies, Job's tears, pheasants eyes, single larkspurs, single hollyhocks, morning glories and bouncing Betties, which ought to have been denominated everlasting plants, for they never desert a garden where they have once taken root. A few weeks ago I saw bouncing Betties in bloom on a garden spot which was the land first located by the first white man who settled in the village that they now adorn, and if he planted bouncing Betties there, it is well on to two hundred years ago, but still they grow and bloom in spite of all the ill treatment they receive from every gardener. I know other garden spots where bouncing Betties bloom every season, and I remember their blooming there as long ago as I can remember anything about flowering plants. In some cases the poor things have been compelled to take the outside of the fence and exhibit themselves on the street or at best border the sidewalk. There seems to be no such thing as entirely eradicating a bouncing Bettie where it has taken root. I am using the common names of plants, for in those days people did not aspire to Latin designations. The hand bouquets were made up of roses, pinks, thyme or sweet wormwood. In those days people did not cultivate house plants, for the cold open

houses and wood fires in open fireplaces did not admit of keeping tender plants through the winter.

I believe that the first geranium that was introduced into my native place was presented to my mother by a lady of Mount Holly. It was a pennyroyal geranium — now called skeleton geranium. Mother kept it a long time by putting it in the cellar during the winter. People used to water their flowering plants that they had in pots with cold table tea, and place the tea grounds on the surface of the soil in the pot. They would

have been horrified at the idea of putting on any other kind of fertilizer, and no wonder the poor plants looked sickly and were dwarfed, after being half drowned and smothered in tea leaves all of their lives. These kinds of gardeners did not consider it necessary to put fertilizers about garden ornamental shrubs and plants.

As I am writing, my memory flows backward far away among things of the past, and my mind's eye sees many a flower garden that was flourishing and exhibiting its loveliness fifty years ago, and I am tempted to describe some of these old time flower gardens that look so bright on the plane of memory.

In those days it was the custom to call elderly ladies "Aunt", and as all the good ladies I remember who had nice flower gardens were called "Aunt", I shall not depart from the old-fashioned rules. Aunt Jane heads the list of ladies of my recollection who cultivated flower gardens, for she had the greatest amount of flowers of anyone of her time and place. Aunt Jane lived in a village, and her garden is a bright spot on memory's waste. In my childish and unexperienced estimation, Aunt Jane was the most eminent woman of the age. Aunt Hannah lived on a farm and had a large family and an immense amount of work to do, but she loved flowers, and never thought herself too tired to work in the flower garden, which she kept as clean and neat as a lady's parlor. Aunt Jemima lived in an old-time log house, but the front yard was large and things grew as luxuriantly and were as nice in it as though the house had been a marble hall. Aunt Jemima was an oddity, or at least she enjoyed being odd from other women. She wore her hair done up as women did in the time of the Revolutionary War, and to be odd from others she cultivated her flowers in the front yard. She had a passion for pinks and sage, and the yard was covered with beds of pinks and beds of sage and rows of pinks and rows of sage, and these were all the flowering plants she cultivated. Aunt Jemima was miserly with her wealth of pinks and sage, and would not give a neighbor a flower or plant on any consideration. My memory calls up many other good old aunties who loved flowers, such as Aunt Lydia, Aunt Molly, Aunt Katy, Aunt Milly, and Aunt Amy, all of whom cultivated flowers in spite of other people's jibes and jeers. These flower-loving aunties have all gone to the world of spirits, where I hope they are enjoying immortal flowers which do not require industrious and weary hands to cultivate them.



Mail order catalogues were a popular way to order seed in the 1800s as evidenced by this 1893 Burpee Seed Catalog.

# ANOTHER THING I REMEMBER

by Almira Cramer Steele

## Memories of My Old Allentown Neighborhood

The neighborhoods in Bass River back in the 1920's and 1930's were about the same as they are today except for an area name change here and there and a few more houses along the way.

Allentown Road is now North Maple Avenue, Eel Street is South Maple, Buctoe and Greenbush are East and West Greenbush roads, but Leektown, Frogtown, Mathistown and West Road have pretty much kept their identity. A few more houses have been built throughout the town, and Mathistown even has a small development named "Off Shore Manor" which is another neighborhood added to the list.

I believe each neighborhood had its own special interests, more or less, but whatever the town was involved in, we all gathered around. It really didn't matter what neighborhood you lived in, you always knew everyone in town whether they lived in your neighborhood or not.

Several of the neighborhood families had at least three generations living in Bass River at the same time- grandparents, parents and their offsprings. My family was one of them. The camaraderie among the families was truly something special. Some of the families that shared this closeness were the Allen, Mathis, Gerew, Lamson, Wiseman, Loveland, and Cramer families.

I do not know too much about the other neighborhoods at that time, but I do have some vivid recollections of the Allentown neighborhood where I lived on Allentown Road with my parents, Doughty and Alberta Cramer, my three sisters (Ethel, Peg, and Ervie) and my brother, Pres.

Living along the Bass River as a child offered a lot of fun times like swimming, crabbing, fishing, and boating. Summertime was the best time of the whole year. My grandfather, Caleb Cramer, owned some riverfront property and built a dock from the shore all the way out to the channel. My sisters, friends and I would get our crab lines, crab net, and basket and spend hours out at the end of the dock catching crabs. When the basket was full we would dump the crabs back into the water and catch them all over again the next day. We really didn't want to eat the crabs, because we didn't like them. We just wanted the fun of catching them.

We also had a little rowboat that we played around with and maybe we'd row up the river and catch a fish or two. If we caught a perch we'd keep it, but any other fish we'd throw back in the river.

We would spend hours at "Coal Landing," our favorite swimming hole. When the tide was high most of the kids in town joined us. Some of the ones I remember were Etta & Virginia Allen; "Huddle" Gerew; Hubie, Bob & Belmont Adams; Marie, Bud & Irma Allen; Virginia Cramer, and Joe Mathis. We sure had lots of fun at "Coal Landing."

However, life wasn't all fun and games. We had some very hard working people in our neighborhood. Ruy and Rita Allen operated a couple of businesses in Allentown. Mr. Allen was a cranberry grower with several bogs to tend. He also had a large Cranberry House across the street from his home where he sorted, stored, and shipped the berries. That Cranberry House is now the home of the Harvey family.

Mr. Allen had one of the few ice houses around. In the winter he would cut the ice from Bass River and store it in the ice house. That ice would keep all summer long. I remember going into the ice house once or twice, but I never did know why that ice didn't melt. He made ice cream for all the church socials and sometimes he entertained our whole neighborhood with an ice cream get-together. Everyone in the neighborhood showed up for that party and had a great time. Mr. Allen was a very generous man and a great host. He really loved to entertain.

While Mr. Allen was busy with his business, Mrs. Allen was operating a Variety Store adjacent to their Allentown Road home. Alston and Claire Allen now live there. Mrs. Allen sold household items, notions, novelties, and dry goods. But the thing I remember the most was the penny candy counter in the front of the store. For five pennies you could get a whole bag full of candy, and the neighborhood kids just loved that store.

I remember there was a small hallway between the home and the store and high on the wall was a telephone. My friend Etta who was the Allen's granddaughter, would stand on a stool, pick up the earpiece, and turn the little crank on the side of the box to get the operator. The first time I saw her do that, I couldn't believe what was happening. That was the first time I had ever seen a telephone and how it worked. I was spellbound with disbelief. That was one of the few telephones in town, or maybe, the only one. After we got used to the contraption, we liked it when Mrs. Allen would let us ring up the operator for her.



(l-r)- Peg, Ervie, Almira & Preston standing in the front yard of their home in Allentown, circa 1922. Their grandfather, Caleb Cramer, is driving the buggy in the distance with their sister, Ethel. (Photo courtesy of Norman & Ann Mathis)



Uriah Allen, Sr. was a "Jack of All Trades" in our Allentown neighborhood. (Tintype courtesy of PaulSteinhaurer)



Rita Allen ran a dry goods and candy store in their family home, now the home of Alston and Claire Allen. (Photo courtesy of PaulSteinhaurer)