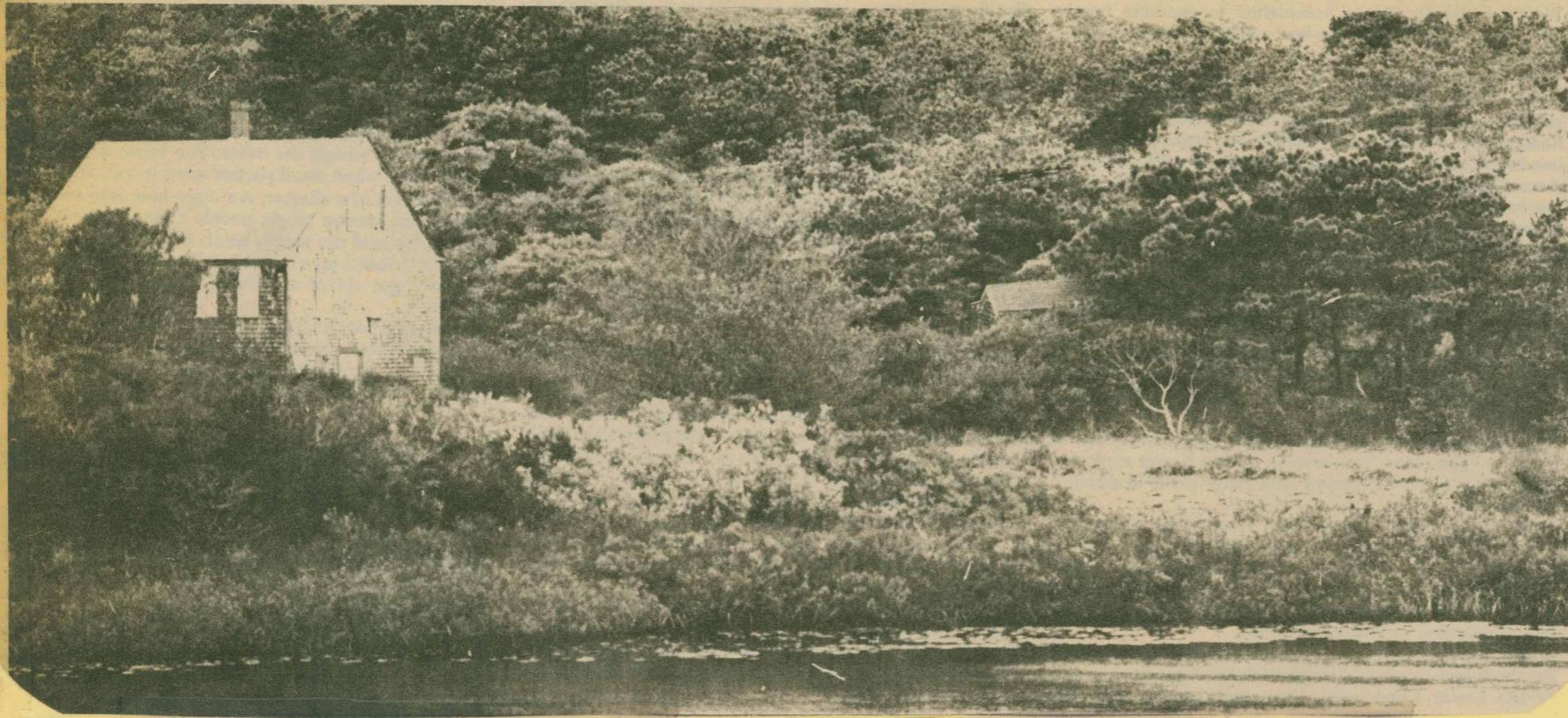


## Seashore plans working museum

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# Truro cranberry farm being restored



Cranberry bog restoration site

By Susan Areson

Thriving underneath the bramble bushes and poison ivy on Truro's North Pamet Road are the remains of a 90-year-old cranberry business the National Seashore is restoring.

So far only three acres of the 27-acre property has been cleared. But that was enough to discover the coarse, woody cranberry vines that grew there years ago and are still producing two varieties of berries.

The Seashore plans to restore the "cranberry house" that sits on the property to make it into a museum for illustrating the history of the cranberry industry on Cape Cod.

The house, an old Cape dating back to the 1830s, was lifted off its foundation by a previous owner so that a barn-like shed for sorting cranberries could be built underneath. What was the front door now opens out into thin air at the second story level. The house has been vacant and boarded up since the bog was last used in 1961.

When the bog was in full swing, the house was used for sorting the cranberries and for housing the seasonal laborers used in the harvest.

The Seashore bought the bog, the house and surrounding property, including a pond, for \$16,000 17 years ago. The bog is familiarly known to Truro residents as Parker's bog after the last man who harvested it. Since 1961 brush and weed growth has covered the cranberry vines.

The clearing project, started last spring, destroyed many vines but some patches were saved and the restored bog will be replanted with the salvaged vines, according to Margie Hicks, director of the project. Hicks said they found two varieties of berries, the early black and the McFarland.

The vines saved will be cut and rooted next spring, Hicks said. Eventually she hopes to have enough rooted to cover two of the three original bog areas, which total about 12 acres.

Hicks said cranberry growers think the Seashore is crazy not to buy vines with the best stock berries instead of replanting the old ones. "The reason is for the historical value of the bog," Hicks said. "Our goal is not to make money for the National Seashore. It would be nice if in 50 years the bog is still running and historians can say some of the vines were the ones that were planted there originally."

The Pamet bog was started in 1888 by the Dyer family who owned 20 acres of bog and upland. James Howe, who owned the bog from 1888 to 1892 increased the size to 27 acres.

The first commercial growers, H.H. Sears and Company, owned the property from 1892 to 1938. In 1938 the Crowell family started the Pamet Cranberry Company there. At that time three bogs were harvested. The East bog was eight acres, the West bog was four acres and another bog was about one-fourth of an acre.

Tonda Haynes bought the property from the Crowells in 1947 for \$12,000 and continued to harvest the three bogs. But in 1952, when Route 6 was put in through Truro, the Pamet River had to be blocked up. That raised the water level and flooded the bog.

Hicks said originally a natural gravitational flow from the pond through the irrigation ditches in the East and West bogs drained out into the Pamet River. Haynes was forced to put in an electric pumping system to get water into the bog after the river was blocked up. But Hicks is still trying to find out how Haynes drained the bog.

Cranberry bogs are planted in peat beds, which are moist enough underneath to give sufficient water to the vines. The vines cannot be submerged in water all the time. The Pamet bog is in a swampy area where the peat is composed mainly of red maple.

Most bogs have an irrigation reservoir nearby often man-made, according to Irving Demoranzville of the Massachusetts Cranberry Extension Service in Wareham. The pond at the Pamet bog, named as Great Pond in the deed, is referred to as "Kettle Pond" by the Seashore because of its glacial formation, Hicks said.

Bogs are planted in early May and harvested in the fall. Vine cuttings three or four inches long are rooted in water about one week before planting. It takes about 10 barrels of cuttings to plant one acre.

After the bog is planted it is dusted with sand. Hicks

said planks are placed across the bogs and three inches of sand is cast over the plants. The vines grow right through the sand.

Hicks said the sanding method was discovered by accident in 1913 by a man named Hall whose bog was near sand dunes. High winds blew sand over his bog one spring and he thought it would ruin his crop. But his harvest that year was better than any other. Since then growers cast sand over their bogs each year. Hicks said, in order to comply with the Seashore's policy of not removing sand from the dunes, they will have to truck sand in to throw over the Pamet bog next spring.

Demoranzville said main varieties of cranberries are the early black and the Howe. But he said there are 125 hybrids and varieties selected from the wilds. The early blacks bloom faster and are usually not used for fresh fruit after early November. The Howes bloom later and keep longer. But Demoranzville said each variety can be used for all the different cranberry products.

The only factor affecting products is the way the berries are harvested. Berries that are harvested wet can only be used for sauces, jellies and juices. Berries that are harvested dry are hard and can be sold as fresh fruit.

Wet harvesting, the easier method, consists of running a machine through the bog that rips the berries off the vines. The bog is then flooded and berries float to the top. A floating boom pushes all the berries over to one corner of the bog where they are gathered. Large bog owners use this method because more berries can be gathered this way. Demoranzville said about 50 percent of the bogs in Massachusetts are wet-harvested.

Dry harvesting is necessary in many of the Massachusetts bogs because they are not level. A machine similar to a lawn mower is run through the bog. Arms like those on an egg beater tear the berries from the vines and toss them back into a container attached to the machine.

The familiar wooden cranberry scoops are also used

around the edges of bogs, where the machine can't reach. Hicks said the scoops are called "rocker scoops" because people using it swing the scoop with a rocking motion to collect the berries. The scoop was invented in 1920 and was considered better than hand harvesting because it was faster and because it didn't pull the vines out. Hicks said cheap aluminum scoops were made to cut costs but it was discovered that the metal wasn't good for the berries. Only wood scoops are used now for hand harvesting.

Handpickers used to wrap linen around their hands to avoid getting scratched from the thorny woody vines. Hand harvesters were paid by the box. A good picker could pick a bushel in five minutes, Hicks said. Machines were invented in 1954, she said.

Berries were also sorted by hand until very recently, Hicks said. Legend has it that someone once tripped down the steps while carrying a box of cranberries and discovered that the good ones bounce. The sorting mechanism now used bounces berries down a set of stairs but only the good ones reach the container at the bottom. The floor added to the Pamet bog house was for a sorting room.

Hicks said when the Seashore plants and harvests the berries at the Pamet bog it will use old-fashioned techniques. She refers to a 1948 edition of the Massachusetts Agricultural Society pamphlet for information.

She said the Seashore's tourists' walks through the Pamet bog this summer were very successful. Although right now they have only a quarter-mile trail, Hicks has an idea for longer looped walks. She said it may take several years before money is allocated for the restoration of the house.

Advocate photo by Susan Areson