

Sewall Meadow Cranberry Bog

Between South Main Streets and Washington Street



Form	914
Town	Sherborn
Area	
USGS Quad	Medfield
Assessor's Sheets	
Ownership	Private
Type Of Landscape	Cranberry Bog
Date or Period	ca. 1680-1930
Source	<u>Cranberry Growing in Sherborn</u> by Betsy Johnson
Alterations	
Condition	
Acreeage	ca. 20 acres
Setting	Wooded
Recorded by	Sanford Johnson, 5/98
Photographs	Roll 11
Organization	Sherborn Historical Commission

VISUAL/DESIGN ASSESSMENT

The Sewall Meadow Cranberry Bog is located between Washington, Goulding and South Main Streets. Approximately 20 acres of wooded wetland located in a low section of forest mark the site of the former cranberry bog. The surrounding woods are sparse hardwoods grown up in the preceding 50-75 years. No evidence of cranberry cultivation such as dikes planting beds, or actual plants is visible. The irregular shape of the bog is a result of the naturally growing berries that occupied a low spot in a glacial landscape. Cranberry cultivation in the 17th-19th century involved minimal alteration of the landscape except for the most scientifically advanced growers. No buildings or other cultural resources have survived.

Other former bogs in the town, such as the Holden Lot on Maple Street, appear as low sections of ground

surrounded by forest. Some have standing open water such as the Brown Meadow which resembles a small pond located at the western end of Saddle Brook Road. A thin border of trees circles the bog and climbs up the hills to the west.

HISTORICAL NARRATIVE

The earliest record of cranberry culture in the town was Eleazer Holbook's "Cranburry Medow" mentioned in his will in 1726. It was probably not the only bog since Sherborn was one of the most productive cranberry growing towns in the commonwealth by the mid-19th century. Among cranberry-producing towns in Middlesex County, Sherborn was most successful from 1870-1895.

Before Cape Cod had become the country's principal cranberry region, Middlesex County was recorded as the leader in Massachusetts cranberry production. Until 1855, Middlesex County doubled Barnstable and Plymouth Counties in terms of cranberry growth. By 1860, however, Middlesex fell behind by a significant margin and would never regain its former position. Frost at early and late points in the growing season had the tendency to destroy the cranberries, the blossoms or the plants themselves. The more moderate climate found closer to the ocean provided improved growing success and encouragement to create cranberry growing facilities. There were fewer naturally occurring bogs there but harvests were more profitable.

Cranberry growing continued in Middlesex County and in Sherborn but not as the leading producer despite having as its resident the expert grower Augustus H. Leland. Mr. Leland pioneered cranberry-growing methods in bogs around his home on Apple Street and was quoted as an authority by the author of the first instructional cranberry- growing book in 1856. Dozens of bogs were maintained and harvested in town at this time but it was more likely to be for personal berry use or local, small scale retail sale instead of for commercial sale. Tax valuations report many residents with cranberry bogs or lots. They are usually less than two acres, comparable to an orchard in scale. Reports exist in Sherborn of frequent small scale berry picking in the 1930s.

The Sewall Meadow cranberry bog was owned in the 17th century by the Boston merchant Samuel Sewall who shipped cranberries, possibly produce of this bog, to the Caribbean. The bog is described as one of the largest of several "fresh meadows" on the 1830 map of Sherborn and is noted in the 1830 town history by Biglow as producing 2000 bushels of berries.

Berries were harvested here as a cash crop by Henry Ware and later by his son Albert Ware, the owner around 1860. Mr. Ware shared ownership of the meadow with his mother Irene and Brayton Bullard and brother in law Dalton Goulding. The large size of the meadow allowed for its subdivision among several owners at one time. By the early 20th century, the grocer Michael Levine who lived at [92 South Main Street**](#) owned a portion of Sewall's Meadow and sold his harvest in his store. Ten to 12 inch thick hardwoods growing in much of the area indicate there has been little cranberry harvesting in the last 50-75 years.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- 1830 map of Sherborn; 1856 Walling map; 1874 Beers map; 1889 Walker map; 1939 WPA map of Sherborn
- Resident directories, 1897, 1913, 1917 1930-31
- Conversation with Betsy Johnson 12/98
- Tax valuations
- Vital Records of Sherborn, Massachusetts to 1850
- The History of Sherborn and A Guide to Sherborn, Anne C. Shaughnessy, 1974
- History of Middlesex County, Massachusetts, Hurd
- Betsy Johnson, Cranberry Growing in Sherborn
- Biglow, William. History of Sherburne, Mass, 1830

Sketch Map:

