

Sweet memories of summer berry work

By Gordon B. Seavey

Once an important agricultural crop for Westford farmers and fruit growers, berries such luscious fruits, are now grown only for home consumption.

Just why Westford became so well-known a century ago for berry growing, one cannot be quite sure. Perhaps the soil is right, although it can vary in different parts of our 30-square mile area, the largest town in Middlesex County.

Then again, the perishable fruit could be shipped to Boston, the best nearby market, overnight. Local owners of horse drawn equipment made extra money during the season carting this produce the 30 miles to Faneuil Hall market over dusty roads.

Old timers remember Bill Wright, John Feeney and John Greig with their loads covered with canvas and a lantern swinging from the rear, leaving about dusk the collection station at a store front next to the library.

There was a precious cargo which commanded high prices (for those days) but then the price was only \$.25 per pint for raspberries and even less for blackberries. We spotted a 1/2 pint of rather "tired"

looking raspberries from the West Coast selling at a local market last week for \$1.99.

Berries so sweet

Augustus Bunce was an expert grower of berries on his farm at the end of Providence Road; others were the Atwood Brothers at Hildreth Street and Concord Road, Bill Woods on the farm in the rear of the library.

A few years ago, speaking before a Hildreth reunion, Alister MacDougall produced a box of blackberries that he had picked on a vacant lot on Boston Road in a patch owned by Noah Prescott nearly a century ago. After all these years, the canes, now wild, were still producing.

I recall that the favorite variety for raspberries then had the name of Latham; for blackberries, the Snyder as a prolific producer but the Eldorado was larger, sweeter and with more juice.

Neighborhood women and girls usually picked the fruit for two cents a box. Because of their dexterity, their "take home" pay surpassed the others. Some of the fast pickers we recall (and probably they do now themselves after all these years, were Angie Parfitt and Alice Socorelis.

One of the greatest disappointments a small boy could have in those days was when he was assigned to the berry patch on the 4th of July and listened to the parade tuning up in the distance. But the berries were fragile, had to be harvested daily ... and for the growers, it was their livelihood. The season was short.

The nostalgia of berry time becomes aroused as we see home grown raspberries from local backyard gardens proudly exhibited by such folks who remember: Austin Fletcher, Huntington Wells, Bob Armstrong and Tony Sambito. Nothing in this whole world tastes better than a dish (preferably large), of fresh picked raspberries or strawberries, just loaded with cream. Blackberries are good, too, especially in pies.

Biking back in time

Kids today with their fancy ten-speed bikes may think they're pretty special, but bicycling about Westford has been going on for a century or more.

Our bikes didn't have ten speeds but the New Departure coaster brake, just coming onto the market, meant easier coasting and braking.

For some reason, our large barn was a haven for cyclists where spare parts were

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