



Eddy Sisters Trail

A hundred years ago this was the site of Pinecroft Farm, owned by Augustus L. Thorndike (1861-1922). He served as State Banking Commissioner, wintering in Boston and summering in Brewster. His granddaughters, Mary-Louise (1915-2002) and Ruth N. Eddy (1921-2005) retired to the farmhouse and donated most of this land to the Brewster Conservation Trust in 1984. Today this property is home to the Community Gardens and the Eddy Sisters Trail around the former Thorndike Cranberry Bog. They later donated an additional 32 acres on Lower Road.

Numbered Sites along the self guided trail are described below. You can view the expanded, detailed history of this area on our website:

www.brewsterconservationtrust.org

1. Welcome to the Eddy Sisters Trail

This trail is only about a quarter of a mile long, but contains evidence of the human-natural world connection that changed the original landscape and topography. The observant walker can find evidence of what was once an area of historic and prehistoric agricultural activity.

2. Red Maple Swampland

The dominant tree in Cape Cod swamps is red maple, a fast growing but relatively short-lived hardwood with glorious scarlet fall foliage. During the growing season, a lush carpet of cinnamon fern and royal fern rise to almost three feet, shading the moist woodland floor. In the early years of the 19th Century, swampland was considered worthless, costing a dollar an acre. Once folks saw the potential in cranberry conversion, bog acreage jumped to \$50-\$100 an acre by the mid-1800s.

3. Cranberry Cultivation Hydraulics

The lifeblood of a cranberry bog is water. At this site it was conveyed via a wooden aqueduct from Cobb's Pond to the north into an existing stream whose banks were cut vertically and straightened into the ditch you see now. Bogs were flooded after harvest to protect the vines from winter-kill. The plank bridge was recently constructed by members of the Brewster Conservation Trust.

4. 'Nature's Perfume'

At summer dusk the walker may suddenly be delighted by the fragrances of swamp azalea in June-July and sweet pepper bush (summer sweet) in August. The flaring azaleas sport pink to pure white tubular flowers favored by sphinx moths and hummingbirds. In spring a fungal gall is formed on the upper branches which are juicy and refreshing to partake. Tasting somewhat like watermelon and apple combined, they were gathered and pickled in colonial times. The summer sweet displays columnar spikes of white flowers and emits a heavy, lilac scent. Bees favor these blossoms from which the finest honey is made.

5. Changing of the Guard

Here is a forest in transition, with large pitch pines, some 50-60 years old, looking rather haggard and bedraggled, some actually dead or dying. Notice the younger more vigorous growth of hardwoods such as choke cherry, tupelo (see Stop #8), white oak, scarlet oak and a scattering of red maple. When the farm ceased operation, and some fields were abandoned, sun-loving pioneers such as pitch pine became established. Forest succession then ensued, favoring hardwoods which shaded out the softwood pines. With more time, the cherries will succumb to more oaks and other shade-tolerant species, perhaps American beech.

6. Unusual Topography

A series of scalloped ridges come to view. Their variance from the natural topography, indicates their human origin. Sand borrow pits were an integral part of cranberry production. After laboriously clearing the swamp of trees and then leveling the newly shorn bog surface, a layer of sand was applied to provide the porous substrate and drainage favored by the cranberry vines. This layer of sand was annually reapplied for growth, and to keep down injurious insects and fungal blights. A ready supply of sand was available along the upland ridge surrounding the bogs, but it was laborious labor in the 1800s to 'borrow' the sand via shovel and wheelbarrow. Wherever you see these mysterious 'key-holes' in the Cape woods, you can be sure that a century or so ago there was an adjacent cranberry bog.

7. Cradle and Pillow

The toppled red maple before you is known as a blow-down. Many tree blow-downs occur in wetlands where the lack of oxygen in the water-soaked soils creates anaerobic conditions, leading to shallow root systems susceptible to high winds. Over time, if many blow-downs occur, the topography becomes pock-marked with an irregular pit and mound pattern. The old root ball decomposes into a mound (sometimes known as a 'pillow') and the pit of the hole (known as the 'cradle') where the roots once were give the surface an undulating pattern.

8. The 'Beetlebung' Tree

The tupelo, sometimes known as black gum, lives in wetlands and their edges. Mainly coastal in distribution, the tupelo is a straight-boled tree rendering a very hard, white wood once used in industrial rollers and white piano keys. These tupelos are relatively middle-aged; they can attain great size and live for two centuries or more. In the nineteenth century, tupelo was used in whale oil casks, with the dense wood rendering the beetle (the mallet) and the bung (the stopper in the cask hole). To this day it is known as the 'beetlebung' tree on Martha's Vineyard.

9. Fences of Stone

There are reputed to be nearly 100,000 miles of stone walls in New England. These structures represent an enormous amount of arduous, physical labor. Most were built between 1820-1860 and many are still extant. While many people believe they were built by farmers to delineate property bounds, these walls were, for the most part, fences to keep livestock, particularly sheep, within bounds. The lack of small stones in this wall would indicate that it was built not for agricultural reasons, but to keep livestock from wandering off property and into other people's pastures. Free-range livestock were a common complaint in mid-19th century New England.



Fences of Stone

10. Damming for Cranberries

Thorndike needed a ready supply of water to irrigate and flood his bogs. In 1913 he received permission from the state to direct water from Cobb's Pond into a series of ditches and headwalls such as this one to control water levels within the bogs. Look closely inside the headwall wings and the mechanics of the flume or sluiceway becomes evident. Boards were placed into the tongue-and-groove notches; these boards could be added or removed depending on the desired elevation of the water. All or most were removed to completely drain the bogs for harvest. Note the wetter conditions on the upstream side, where sedge, ferns and false nettle are found where the water was impounded. Downstream, red maple, a less wet species, dominates.

11. Indian Planting Fields

Just west of here along the east bank of Stony Brook Valley was an Indian village known as the "Saquatucket Sachemship". Broad low fields, including the ones here, were planted to corn, beans and squash, supporting the population of this Wampanoag clan. Wild cranberries, which grew commonly in area wetlands, were dried and mixed with venison, then made into cakes known as pemmican. This field continued to be farmed by white settlers, through the Freeman and Thorndike families, so it has not succeeded to woodland. In late summer, goldenrod and a purple haze of Joe-pye-weed rises over this low field. It was named after a Native American known as Joe Pye, who used various plants including the one named after him to combat typhus fever throughout New England.



One of the Eddy sisters, haying the fields with Pinecroft Farm Manager Fred Young, 1927



Ruth, Mary-Louise and Jean Eddy at Pinecroft, 1926



Brewster Conservation Trust

The Trust was founded in 1983 to preserve open space and the natural resources of Brewster. The Trust is a 501c3 non-profit organization supported by hundreds of Brewster families. Since its beginning, the Trust has preserved more than 800 acres throughout Brewster, including more than 100 acres of scenic greenbelt and wetland drainage along Lower Road. The Trust is not affiliated with Town government, though sometimes it works closely with the Town on projects of joint interest. For more information about the Trust or to become a member, visit our website:

www.brewsterconservationtrust.org



Community Gardens

Cover Photo: Meadow with goldenrod and Joe-pye-weed

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