

CULTURAL HISTORY OF IPSWICH RIVER WILDLIFE SANCTUARY

The cultural history of Bradstreet Hill and the Proctor estate are fairly well-documented, even though the history of Massachusetts is long, and dates, people, and events are often contradictory in diverse references. Specific locations of historic sites have not been recently investigated, and the references used to obtain the information in this article did not include maps to indicate the actual locations of cellar-holes or other manmade landscape features.

The population of Native Americans in the Ipswich River region had apparently been severely reduced by an epidemic disease, probably smallpox, by 1639 when Masconomet signed a treaty with Governor Winthrop regarding the lands which now contain the sanctuary. "Shenwendy," meaning "pleasant place by the waters," was the native's name for Topsfield; they knew the Ipswich River as "Agawam."

Two Native American archaeological sites are documented in the vicinity (Larson 1985). Neither are on the sanctuary proper, but both are adjacent to sanctuary lands. One site (19-ES-498), near where Route 97 intersects the abandoned Boston and Maine Railroad grade in the northwest corner of Wenham, has been catalogued but not inventoried (as of 1985) by the Massachusetts Historical Commission. The other site (19-ES-417) is adjacent to the southern boundary of the Cedar Pond area. A number of points were collected from this site (one Archaic notched, two Small Stemmed, one Oriental Fishtail, one untyped) and are among the collections of the Peabody Museum. The locations of these sites suggest that the Ipswich River area near Wenham Swamp was the site of much Native American activity.

Governor Bradstreet was given 500 acres of land in Topsfield in 1643. About one-third of this was upland of which Bradstreet Hill was part. Bradstreet himself lived in Andover and leased the land to others to farm. The land was a prize, not only for its rich waterfowl population but even more for its extensive floodplain meadows which provided an easy source of hay for wintering livestock.

To the early settlers, hay was one of the most valuable resources; it was not readily available without laborious landclearing, except in the freshwater and saltwater grasslands (Cronon 1983). The extent or duration of haying in the wet meadows of Wenham Swamp is not documented. Nor do we know how much, if any, planting or cultivation of fodder grasses there was in these meadows.

One of the first houses on Bradstreet Hill was inhabited by John Reddington, the Town Clerk (and presumably a farmer). It burned in 1658. The next historic house was constructed by Simon Bradstreet, grandson of Governor Bradstreet (who seems to have no first name other than Governor) above the cellar-hole that now remains clearly visible east of the existing house. That house was removed from the site in 1874. Bradstreet Lane was built in the 1600s and provided a fording spot across the Ipswich River until 1900 when Proctor tired of the local traffic (Cowperthwaite 1980).

The large house that contains the sanctuary offices and an employee residence was built in 1763, presumably by Samuel Bradstreet, and was passed down through four generations. The Bradstreet farm was a productive diverse venture on which livestock, fruit, and corn were raised. Thomas Emerson Proctor purchased the Bradstreet land in 1898.

Averill's Island is reported to have been a "bustling community in the late 1600s" (Cowperthwaite 1980). William Averill (aka Averies) and his family resided on or near the island. Averill and his sons were well-read and very interested in current events. They published a small-press newspaper and were locally referred to as "the colleges" because they were often sought as a source of information. By trade Averill and his sons were cabinet-makers. One wonders if all of the high-quality oak on the island was regularly harvested for sideboards and dining tables. Currently, among hardwoods, beech and pignut hickory far outnumber oaks on Averill's Island.

The remnants of the Averill's Island community are few. The locations of homes and cellar-holes have not been investigated, but may be available in the Topsfield library. It may in fact be the case that the Averills did not live on the island at all. Peter Young (Essex Aggie silviculture teacher) reports that he has found, by probing with a soil auger, a network of old roads compacted from many years of use, south of Fox Field in the red pine plantation and surrounding white pine forests. Also cellar-holes and other signs of landscape disruption are evident on the privately-owned piece of land north of the mill pond and adjacent lands along the Mile Brook Trail. Perhaps the Averill's bustling community was in this area and Averill's Island was only a part of their landholdings, not their residence.

The extent of local logging, which certainly began in the 1600s, is undocumented. One can safely suggest that all of the upland have been at least selectively logged several times. A less certain question is the extent to which the settlers and early residents of the area harvested trees from the Wenham Swamp. Most likely, they took the large, high-quality white pine trees from the swamp. It is not known if hardwoods were harvested as well.

Certainly the greatest recent impact on the sanctuary was that of Thomas Proctor. Proctor began purchasing land in Topsfield in 1898, and when he died 21 March 1949, he owned 3,952 acres in the 8,398 acre town. Proctor's legacy included the once-impressive arboretum on Bradstreet Hill, greenhouses, polo fields, a public water supply system in use until at least 1973, and the Rockery.

Proctor inherited his wealth from his father whose fortune was presumably made in the leather importing business. Although he never worked in the family business, Proctor retained an office in Boston and traded stocks and bonds. He remained a bachelor throughout his life, and his real passion was horticulture. Besides his interest in the perennials that he planted on Bradstreet Hill, he studied orchids in his greenhouses which were located west of Perkins Row slightly north of Bradstreet Lane.

The labor force required to create the roads, arboretum, polo fields, and Rockery, and to maintain a large estate, was primarily supplied by Italian immigrants. Proctor is reported to have been moderately generous and a kind man to his employees. "In the early days, anyone who worked there was given a bicycle; when anyone

got to the point where he could afford a 'Model T,' Tom had a garage built for him. In the end everyone who had been employed for two years received \$500 and some of those who had been with him for long periods received \$100 for each year of service" (Bond 1973).

The arboretum and Rockery were begun in 1902 with the advice of Professor John George Jack, first Professor of Dendrology at Harvard University. A Japanese landscape architect, Shintare Anamete, was hired to design and oversee construction of the Rockery and the Japanese garden at the site of the now abandoned wildflower garden.

The construction of the Rockery and the arboretum road were very labor-intensive, although no reports of an actual number of laborers were uncovered. The Rockery was completed in nine years, with the sweat of many men and mules hauling boulders from Byfield and Rowley (a two-plus day trip with a big rock) and positioning them just so in the Rockery.

"During the early winter, flatcar loads of exotic oriental shrubs and trees arrived at the Topsfield Railroad station and were carried to the Proctor Estate. The ground had been readied for them, for loads of salt marsh hay had been spread as mulch. This was burned; the frost was thawed by the heat and a great planting took place" (Foye, quoted in Bond 1973).

Proctor was an acquaintance of Charles Sprague Sargent, Director of the Arnold Arboretum and one of the most knowledgeable tree experts ever. Sargent helped finance the expeditions of Ernest (Chinese) Wilson to the Far East. Thus Proctor received many collected specimens and planted them on Bradstreet Hill and in the Rockery. Apparently one of his goals was to plant a specimen of every hardy North American tree on his estate. Proctor himself travelled to Mexico and the Amazon searching for exotic plants.

Proctor planted an unknown number of species, varieties, and cultivars of trees and shrubs on his estate. The privately-published Catalogue of Trees and Shrubs, often thought to be a list of Proctor's plantings, was in fact compiled by Professor Jack as "a list of species and varieties described in Koehne's Deutsche dendrologie and printed as the basis for the arboretum" (Arnold Arboretum Library card catalogue). That is, the "Catalogue" is a list of plants that could potentially be planted, not a list of the actual plantings. Unfortunately, Proctor left no arboretum documentation--no records of how many specimens were planted, planting locations, or planting survival.

On a personal note, Proctor enjoyed displaying his pursuits to the public. The estate was open on the weekends to recreators travelling on foot, horseback, or by carriage, and Proctor even hired someone to drive people around Arboretum Road to see his growing arboretum. Proctor himself proudly rode atop a horse surveying his grounds and monuments. Generous with his wealth, he owned a special truck that was used year round to make daily deliveries of flowers and plants from his greenhouses to friends and relatives in Boston. His niece remembered him as "a perfect gentleman--generous and devoted in all his cultural and philanthropic endeavors...[F]or his family and friends...he shared his trotters and buggies to race down the old deserted Hamilton-Wenham-Essex Railroad bed. He provided food and canoes for Ipswich River picnics; ice boats to speed over the frozen marshes; snowshoes and cook-outs for long winter hikes through the woods; huts for

protection while fishing through the ice; shelters, grain, and hay for the wildlife; pails for collecting maple syrup..." (Emma Mandel Rice, quoted in Bond 1973).

Thomas Proctor certainly left his mark on Topsfield. When he died, he left no bequests to charitable organizations. Massachusetts Audubon Society bought the bulk of the Ipswich River Wildlife Sanctuary from the Proctor Estate for \$50,000.

In the early years of the sanctuary, director Elmer Foye devoted much energy to maintaining the Proctor arboretum as a managed landscape. When directorship and conservationist attitudes toward landscapes changed, the arboretum was left to grow wild. In scattered spots around the hill and at the Rockery, one can stumble upon some very interesting, often confounding, exotic plants. Fortunately, Proctor's manipulations on the present sanctuary lands other than Bradstreet Hill were kept to a minimum, for he is said to have enjoyed the native forest as much as his cherished specimen trees.

Written by Marc Lapin for IRWS Ecological Management Plan

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