

A Portal to the Past

Clouds Hill Victorian House Museum

ON THE FARM

Late winter activities on any New England farm included cutting ice and making maple syrup. Farms of any size usually had an ice house, a stone building, half buried in the ground, where large blocks of ice, cut from the farm pond after the ice reached a depth of at least a foot, were stored packed in sawdust, for use during the year for refrigeration. Keeping food cool required a good deal of Yankee ingenuity. If you had a spring house (a building built over a spring or well), it was usually cool enough to provide a little refrigeration. A root cellar, which provided in-ground storage for vegetables in winter, as it was below the freezing line, also provided a cool envi-

ronment during the summer for foods. Of course, food could be placed in a covered pail and hung in the well with a long rope. This would also keep food cool. Best, of course, was an insulated ice box, with a compartment entered from the back to hold large blocks of ice, and access to the food areas through doors on the front.

Clouds Hill had such an icebox in the back hall between the kitchen and the servants' dining room well into the 1940s. A small doorway in the hall between the kitchen and pantry offered access to the back of the ice box; and Anne Holst still remembers seeing Mr. Lillibridge from East Greenwich delivering ice,

carrying the large blocks with a pair of tongs through the kitchen. The Bleachery Pond in East Greenwich had a huge ice storage building on its north side, where senior housing exists today. Other, smaller ice houses for family use were on the Godfrey farm on Cowesett Road, next to St. Gregory the Great Church, and at the north end of the pond in Crestwood, the former Alfred A. Reed estate.

Usually, ice was cut by first driving a horse across the ice pulling an ice plow. This provided the first cuts into the ice. Men, using ice saws, would then cut the ice into square or rectangular blocks.

Continued on next page

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:	
Find	5
From the Collections	4
From the Kitchen	3
Inside Scoop	3
Meet the Flora	5

A FOCUS ON EDUCATION

On November 3rd, Clouds Hill offered the first in its new lecture program. Titled "The Barns and Pounds of Rhode Island, a Vanishing Landscape", the program was given by Curator Anne D. Holst, and featured photographs by museum Director, Wayne A. Cabral. The importance of the barn to a farmer

and to the developing history of the United States was a feature of the program. Barn types and uses were shown through existing and former buildings around the state. The section on town pounds focused on thirteen existing large animal pounds, most dating to the 1800s. Preser-

vation of these barns and pounds is essential to provide a rounded view of agriculture in Rhode Island and important in any study of the development from Colonial times to the present. Unfortunately, these buildings and enclo-

Continued on page 3

F a r m c o n t i n u e d

If the ice house was next to the pond, there was often a chute from the water up into the building (and, in later years, a conveyor belt). The



blocks of ice would be floated to the chute and pushed up into the building, using pike poles. Inside, the rows of blocks would be carefully packed in heavy layers of sawdust to help preserve them. If the ice was being transported, the blocks would be lifted onto the ice and slid ashore, to be loaded onto sleds or wagons for transport. The farming museum at Clouds Hill includes an ice plow in its collection, as well as ice saws, ice tongs, and pike poles donated by Jim Cherenzia of Hopkinton, R.I. and used in his family's commercial ice business in Westery.

When the long, deep-seated cold of winter begins to break up with warm early spring days and cold nights, nature starts to stir again. Plants begin their first stirrings of growth. In the trees, sap starts to flow; and it's maple sugaring time. At Clouds Hill, a double line of sugar maples was planted south of the workshop. Late February and early March saw the long wood stove in the shop packed with logs day and night, while a huge

iron kettle of maple sap sat on top. Clouds of steam indicated the evaporation of the water in the sap, leaving only the delicious maple syrup. Forty gallons of sap boiled down to make one gallon of syrup; but it was well worth it. A ladle of hot syrup taken outside and carefully poured into clean snow (or over chipped ice) produced a delicious treat for any youngster! During the

war years, it was especially important to secure this natural sweetener, as sugar was heavily rationed.

When the time came, each maple tree had a small hole just the size of the tap bored into it and a wooden or metal "tap" or spigot was screwed in. Through this tap, the sap would run out of the tree and into a covered bucket hung just below it. Buckets needed to be tended regularly (at the height of the syrup run, perhaps twice a day). In a large maple grove, two horses would draw a sledge with a huge wooden drum mounted on it through the grove. Workers would empty the sap buckets into the drum, which was then taken to the sap house, where the syrup was boiled down over a roaring fire. There was skill required in this whole process, as the sugaring must start under the right temperature conditions and the trees must be tapped with the taps placed correctly to protect the health of the tree.

Today, as you drive around New England, you may see

miles of clear plastic, small diameter tubing running from tree to tree through the woods. Maple sugaring has been automated, and the sap runs through the tubing either directly to the sugar house or to centralized collection tanks. You may still see trees with a bucket or two attached; and, if you are in New Hampshire in February, look into the maple sugar races, where teams of two horses pulling a sledge and tank compete for the most sap gathered and taken to the sugar house within a given time. It is a sweet taste of the past!

Late winter was also the time when mail delivery became really important. Youngsters raced to get to the mailbox first when the mail delivery wagon was sighted coming down the road. Seed catalogs bulked up the mail deliveries and were proudly born into the house, where father studied them at length in the long evenings, planning his crops for the coming growing season. Mother would then look through them for something new for her flower gardens, and the children gazed in wonder at the "new" strains of huge strawberries and watermelons.

In 1811, Joseph Belden's ad in the HARTFORD COURANT offered peas, beans, carrots, asparagus and other plants for sale. James Belden began a seed business in Wethersfield, Connecticut; and in 1821, he offered 60 varieties in an ad in the COU-

W H A T Y O U H A V E T O S A Y . . .

"Amazing place with a great history behind it. The guides are really kind and have a great knowledge on general history and the family. Thank you - loved every minute."

Erica Franko
Searvas, Hungary

"Wonderful museum and very helpful and informed docents"

Nancy and Sam Hipsher
Higganum, CT

"My fav(orange) on my whole vacation!"

Debbie Stack
Montgomery, Alabama

INSIDE SCOOP

During the last three months, the museum has welcomed visitors from Connecticut, Florida, Massachusetts, New York and Virginia, and twelve Rhode Island cities and towns.

Coming Exhibit Schedule:

100 Years of Romance

Open 1p.m. to 4p.m. on February 16th and February 23rd and by appointment from February 12th – 24th

Kitchen to Table

Open 1p.m. to 3p.m. on March 9th and March 16th and by appointment March 8th – 22nd

Farm continued

RANT. William Downing in Hancock, Mass. sold 54 items in his 1821 catalog, including red, white and yellow onions, 2 summer squash and 2 winter squash. By 1825, the John B. Russell catalog from Boston offered seeds for tomatoes, 14 types of kidney or dwarf beans, 4 pumpkins, 4 summer squash, acorn squash, field corn and sweet or sugar corn. An 1834-5 catalog of Harvey and Co. of Boston sold 12 dwarf or string beans, 8 pole or running beans, 8 squash, 2 tomatoes, 4 pumpkins, and 3

rhubarbs. The Joseph Breck Company and Comstock, Ferre and Company were still in business in the 1970s. By 1838, Frank G. Comstock was decorating his seed packets with pictures of the product, and this was quickly adopted by other seed companies. (*information from A LONG, DEEP FURROW, by Howard S. Russell*)

Education continued

tures are usually overlooked and prone to collapse and demolition.

At the end of October, the museum had another visit from the Coventry Vocational Technical School fashion class taught by Kathy Hudson. Mrs. Hudson also brought some of her Interior Design students; so while Anne Holst explained the intricacies of Victorian wearing apparel as shown by items from the museum's collection, Wayne Cabral discussed the theories of Victorian interior design of the period of the house.

FROM THE KITCHEN

The following recipes are from the 1896 edition of the BOSTON COOKING SCHOOL COOK BOOK and offer a recipe for one of the standard winter vegetables, the turnip and for a spring delicacy - American Shad.

Turnip Croquettes: Wash, pare and cut in quarters, new French turnips. Steam until tender, mash, pressing out all water that is possible. This is best accomplished by wringing in cheese cloth. Season one and one-fourth cups with salt and pepper, then add yolks of two eggs slightly beaten. Cool, shape in small croquettes, dip in crumbs, egg and crumbs again, fry in deep fat, and drain.

Shad are found in both salt and fresh water, as they ascend rivers for spawning. Shad are a silvery hue, becoming bluish on their backs. The runs in New

England are usually in April and May

Broiled Shad Roe: Wipe, sprinkle with salt and pepper, put on greased wire broiler and broil five minutes on each side. Serve with Maitre d'hôtel butter.

Maitre d'hôtel Butter: Put ¼ cup butter in a bowl, and with a wooden spoon work until creamy. Add ½ tsp. salt, 1/8 tsp pepper, and ½ tablespoon finely chopped parsley; then add ¾ tablespoon lemon juice very slowly, mixing well.

Planked Shad: Clean and split a 3 pound shad. Put skin side down on an oak plank one inch thick and a little longer and wider than the fish, sprinkle with salt and pepper, and brush over with melted butter. Bake 25 minutes in hot oven. Remove from oven, spread with butter and garnish with parsley and lemon. The fish should be sent to the

table on plank. Planked Shad is well cooked in a gas range having the flame over the fish.

Baked Shad Roe with Tomato Sauce: Cook shad roe 15 minutes in boiling salted water to cover, with ½ table-spoon vinegar; drain, cover with cold water, and let stand 5 minutes. Remove from cold water, and place on buttered pan with ¾ cup tomato sauce. Bake 20 minutes in hot oven, basting every 5 minutes. Remove to a platter, and pour around ¾ cup tomato sauce.

Tomato Sauce: Cook one slice onion with either ½ can tomatoes or 1 ¾ cups freshly stewed tomatoes for 15 minutes, rub through a strainer, and add to 3 tablespoons butter, 2 1/2 tablespoons flour, ¼ tsp. salt and 1/8 tsp. pepper, all cooked together. If tomatoes are very acid, add a few grains of soda.

A SELF SUFFICIENT HOME

Building a country home away from the amenities of the city required careful planning for all contingencies. The building of Clouds Hill shows some of the basic rules for the construction of country houses. These were havens, where people could escape the heat and congestion of the cities. Situation of the house was of paramount importance. Located on the brow of the hill overlooking Greenwich Bay, the house has a principal east-west axis in the long main hall which, with screen doors in place on the front, north portecochere door and south porch door would allow the almost constant breeze off the bay to blow through. The deep porch on the east, south and west sides of the house keeps the summer sun from beating into the reception room, parlor and library. 13 foot ceilings on the first floor, 12 foot on the second, and 11 foot on the third floors combined with tall doors and large windows equipped with screens in every room also promote movement of air through the house. Finally, the flat roof of the main house has a hatch which could be opened in summer to encourage air flow up through the house, thus venting rising hot air. The cover for the hatch to keep animals, birds and rain out has a solid top with screening on the sides. These provi-

sions kept the house cool in a time long before air conditioners and any fans other than the palm leaf variety.

Probably, the most ingenious system is the house's heating plant. (still heated the same way, today.) The house was built with a coal furnace, which was converted to oil in 1948. Behind the furnace is a small room housing the boiler. On the ceiling of the room are banks of hot water radiators. Along the top of the wall are air duct intakes. Fresh air enters the room at floor level from a duct from outside. The air rises through the warm room, passing over the hot radiators and then flowing through the ducts to the floor registers on the first floor and the wall registers on the second floor. Hot water radiators heat the back ell of the house and the third floor of the main house. Thus, you have two types of heat from one system - and no recirculated stale air and germs!

Lighting the house was a more complicated matter. It was designed to be lit by gas, although ample numbers of kerosene lamps of

all sizes found in the house suggest the need for backup in emergencies. At this period, there was no electricity and neither propane nor piped natural gas; so it was manufactured from burning coal or converting liquid naphtha. In a city situation, one coal gas production plant would pipe their gas to a number of houses; but in the country, each house needed its own plant. The Springfield Gas Machine, manufactured by Gilbert and Barker Manufacturing Company of Springfield, Mass. still sits in the basement at Clouds Hill. Liquid naphtha was brought to the estate and stored in an underground tank on the south lawn, from which it was piped into the basement to a tank with a diaphragm in it. A large cement weight

shaped like a millstone was raised to the ceiling of the room every morning by the gardener. During the day, the weight would slowly descend back to the floor. A system of pulleys caused the diaphragm to

move through the tank as the weight descended, causing the liquid to be forced into a smaller and smaller area. Finally, the liquid would convert to gas, which was piped throughout the house. This "cracking" of the naphtha

was a dangerous procedure, as naphtha is extremely volatile and quite likely to blow up!

The dangers of using gas for lighting did not end with its production. Gas of the period had no odor like modern gas and propane. If a fixture was lighted and no one was in the room, a strong draft could blow out the flame and allow the gas to continue to flow into the room, unburned. To prevent asphyxiation, the ceiling medallion in the center of each room incorporates vents into its design. These holes or vents allow rising gas and smoke (gas was smoky and dirty) to leave the room via a wooden chase leading from each medallion through the ceiling to the outer wall and up to the attic, where gas and smoke could vent harmlessly.

One danger of a home situated in the country away from urban areas was the lack of any form of fire protection. Lack of a readily available water supply could mean the loss of a fine country estate. To combat this, Clouds Hill was built with all downspouts carrying rainwater from the roofs underground to two 12,000 gallon brick cisterns on the north and south sides of the house. An overflow pipe from each cistern



Gas Machine Room

MEET THE FLORA

During the winter, Clouds Hill still offers interesting specimens of trees and shrubs to be enjoyed by the hardy visitor. Beside the house and the carriage museum are large dark green specimens of TREE BOX, or Buxus arborescence. Known as the “Living Antique”, boxwood is a native of southern Europe, northern Africa and western Asia. The wood is used for caskets, rulers, carving and inlaying with ivory.



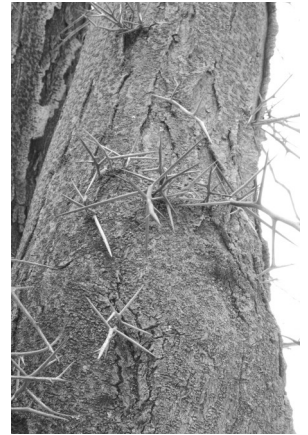
Tree Box

The

specimens at Clouds Hill originally came from Mount Vernon in the late 1920s, when Mrs. John Carter Brown was Rhode Island regent to the Mount Vernon Ladies Association and chairwoman of the Gardening Committee at Mt. Vernon. The box trees were among several specimens that she had shipped to Rhode Island. “Babies” from the original bushes are grown out at Clouds Hill today.

If you walk around the driveway at Clouds Hill to the original shop building, you will encounter a row of HONEY LOCUST trees, Gleditsia triacanthos L., across the driveway from the shop. The most impressive aspect of these medium size trees are the groups of huge, sharply pointed thorns growing out of the trunks and branches and presenting a VERY formidable aspect. Very noticeable in the fall are the long, leathery brown seed pods, which contain a sweet pulp as well as the seeds, and are

eaten by cattle and other animals. The trees have long, leaves made up of many leaflets, giving an airy appearance to the tree; and a smooth, dark grey-brown bark, which cracks into coarse ridges on the older trees. Planted close together, the honey locusts formed effective cattle fences, as animals would not squeeze between the trunks due to the rigid thorns.



Honey Locust



Home continued

carries excess water to the driveway drains. The same system was built for the stable and for the farmhouse west of the main house. Thereby, each major building had an available water supply for fire suppression.

Water supply inside the house came from a 2500 gallon zinc lined tank in the main house attic. Each morning, the gardener pumped the tank full from a well adjacent to the ell. Almost 53 feet above ground level, the tank provided a fine head of pressure for supplying the five and a half bathrooms. Water was heated by a second coal furnace located in the laundry room below the kitchen.

FIND!

When time permits, we continue to update the inventory of the many volumes of bound materials here at Clouds Hill. One of those books is a bible belonging to Caroline Susette vanSon Reed (1825-61) (mother-in-law to Elizabeth Ives Slater Reed). Here is one of her scherenschnitte pieces found in her bible.



By the seventeenth century, scherenschnitte (German for “scissor cuts”) was popular in Holland, Germany, Switzerland and Italy.

FROM THE COLLECTIONS

The Textile Collection



A flax spinning wheel owned by Madame Gertruida Helena vanBraam (1802-1858), mother of Caroline Susette van-Son Reed, and great-great-great grandmother of Anne D. Holst.

VISIT OUR WEBSITE
WWW.CLOUDSHILL.ORG



Clouds Hill Victorian House Museum

Located at: 4157 Post Road, Warwick, RI

Mail: P.O. Box 522
East Greenwich, R.I. 02818

Telephone: 401-884-9490

E-mail: office@cloudshill.org

Your business tag line here.

Clouds Hill Victorian House Museum is a 501(c)3 nonprofit corporation operating a historic Victorian home as a museum for the public.

The house is an important part of the history of the City of Warwick and the State of Rhode Island. It was built in 1872 by William Smith Slater for his daughter, Elizabeth Ives Slater, on her marriage to Alfred Augustus Reed, Jr. It has remained in the same family since it was built, passing from female to female until reaching the current owner. The lineage of the family can be traced to several notable figures.

In addition to the architecture and interior of the house, other collections include textiles, porcelain, carriages, and much more. The property on which the house sits has been referred to as the West Bay arboretum.

Donations to Clouds Hill are deductible to the fullest extent of the law.

Clouds Hill Victorian House Museum
P.O. Box 522
East Greenwich, R.I. 02818

Postage

FIRST-CLASS MAIL

