

A WALK THROUGH BUFFIN'S MEADOW

by

James A. Fenwick

while considering purchase of cranberry bog.

(The original 108 acres on Cranberry Run including the Old Bog at Whitesbog was purchased May 21st 1857.) The copy of this letter which we have was made by Mrs. Fenwick and noted as above. The salutation was omitted, it was probably addressed to one of his cousins.

Elizabeth C. White

You own a large tract of natural Cranberry land in Buffin's Meadow, wide spaces beside Pole bridge branch and also on the Cranberry branch. For years past these places have been known to all the farmers miles away from them as a resort (after the busy season in July & August) for picking huckleberries, and also cranberries for the winter supply of their own tables. There have been seen at one time, as many as sixty covered wagons, with horses hitched to trees around the edges of this meadow. These wagons brought men, women & children, farmer's families, who were busily engaged picking cranberries in the meadow. The picking finished, they end their day with a picnic meal, near some noted good cedar swamp stream. The tooting of the dinner horn brought from home, the merry laugh, wild shout, & the free and easy manner in the fresh pure air of the wood shewed all were enjoying themselves to the utmost.

Besides these there were many poor people of the pines, putting up in rude cabins & turf huts beside the bog, picking berries for sale. Owing to the increase of population & the price of berries advancing a few years back, the pickers became so numerous that berries were picked early and earlier; so much so, that the first were picked before the blossom had dropped from those last formed. Owners now began to know the value of their berries; and then cultivation began.

Surely their can be no place better adapted to their cultivation than this where they have grown and produced fruit generation after generation.

Let us view this Buffin Meadow & see how they look, & what must be done to make the cultivation of berries in this their native place profitable. It is now August, and comparatively dry as there have been no recent rains. This trip would be disagreeable undertaking in late Autumn, winter or early spring; this place being at those seasons continually sloppy. Many places six or eight inches deep, with holes made by rooting hogs, hidden by Spagnum or Water moss.

We are now near the meadow, among the pines on dry coarse sand so level we scarcely perceive the slope toward the meadow, but we see the swamp Huckleberry, the Water bush etc; through these in our path. See!! there are Water moss & Cranberries growing in that more open place. Put your foot on the Moss & water will be pressed from it, even in this comparatively dry season.

Now we have passed through the bushes, the meadow is before us. Here the young Cedars, swamp Huckleberry & Azalia's grow isolated & occasionally in clumps. The Water bush (looking something like ground Laurel) constitutes most of the low bush, the Water moss, Cranberry vines, Never wet, Ferns and smaller water plants, with here and there a Sarasenia, constitute the balance of vegetation, with which the ground is covered. You see but few grasses. Now we can see for some distance.

That clump of tall, dark trees, with every top a spire; about a half mile distant is Cedar. Those tall trunks of isolated trees, barkless and bleached, are Cedars that were killed by a fire during a season of severe drought, twenty years since. At that time the bushes and soil were burned off this meadow, leaving it in places sandy. But for this (judging from the number of Cedars as thick as your finger scattered through it) much of this meadow would have been Cedar swamp. Pull up that bush. You see the roots are very near the surface and among the moss. They are forced to grow thus, because the ground is flooded so much they can get no air deeper. No variety that is here is able to extend its roots down far in this wet earth.

You can judge then from the growth of this bush you have pulled up that in a severe drought when this continuous body of soft moss is as dry as punk, with most of the roots of the bushes in it, a fire passing through it, would leave it completely bare. Then with ploughing and harrowing, it would be good as the best place in the world for planting Cranberry vines. But such a plan would involve the loss of all your plants, of which there are now many more than would be needed for planting the whole meadow.

Let us continue across the meadow -- How beautifully the cranberries look resting on the pale green moss. Here is a large patch. Are there not as many on this space as would be produced by the best cultivation? Here is a large space with scarcely a bush on it, it must contain thirty or forty acres. Let us cross it. Oh! here the water rises half way up our feet as we tread on the moss. Observe how the Cranberries grow in bunches raised above the common level of the moss; and how full these bunches are of fine large fruit. It must be too wet for them at the common level; but where moss and vines together have succeeded in getting high enough, they have grown well, and bare profusely. The whole meadow is dotted over with these bushes. Let us pull up one of these. You see all the roots of the vines appear to be in the moss; beneath you see mud; but it is only an inch or so deep; below is coarse sand. The berries from this space would amount to a large sum of money, and it produces every year. It might be improved by drainage alone, but it would require skill & care in managing the water to prevent the injury to the crop. But remove this moss by fire or otherwise, and as their appearance to be no stumps, put in a double Michigan plough with two yoke of oxen, burying the mud, covering it with sand, at a cost of two dollars per acre, and as it is already graded, you will have it completely arranged, with the exception perhaps of a small portion where the mud is too deep.

Here we are coming to some small Pines, about two or three inches in diameter scattered about. This must be dryer ground, or these natives of upland would not be here. Let us pull up this smaller one; see the roots are chiefly on the surface of the sand among the mixed mosses.

The habit of the Pine is to throw down a large perpendicular root; but here you see the roots have been all forced horizontally by the wetness of the ground; this greatly facilitates their removal for the free use of the plough. See on this long narrow Pine ridge, there are many strips and patches of Cranberries which show that this ridge is also frequently flooded. These few spaces of a rod or two in extent, showing Wintergreen etc. and higher land mosses, could have some sand removed from them, to the wet muddy spots of the more open space we have passed through & thus having its own level reduced properly; the whole meadow would be cranberry land in its greatest perfection.

Now let us pass on more rapidly to yonder clump of large Cedars. These open places we are passing, with here and there a clump of two or three bushes, and then scattered isolated bushes, would perhaps be very rough to work but all very like what we have seen and discussed.

We have now arrived beside these Cedars which extend over an acre or two of ground. You see a fringe to them of trees killed by fire, which owing to the enduring qualities of the timber, have stood twenty years, bleaching in the weather. Some have fallen partly down which must be clambered through.

Now we stand among the living trees. How tall, erect, and close they grow, with their leafy mass above excluding the view of the sky, making it densely shady beneath. So shady that all under grown is smothered. This must be wetter than the rest of the swamp, or the fire would have destroyed these trees also. Having passed through the living trees, we come to another fringe of dead bleached trees. We clamber through them and come to ground open, a hundred yards or two wide & much resembling what we passed through beyond the Cedars. We now stand on ground dryer indeed, but still wet enough for cranberries, but just now quite dry. The soil being a coarse moss or turf, such as colliers use for covering coal pits, handling it with ease when cut two feet square & two and a half inches deep. Cutting this costs twenty dollars per acre; to remove and place in a fence (which will last ten or fifteen years) twelve more. After removing the turf, the trees remain to be grubbed, the land to be ploughed & prepared; costing at least twenty dollars more per acre, than the preparation of the last meadow we have passed through, and have noticed is covered in a far different way from this spot. But this border of turf would answer to fence in the whole vast meadow and this would prove an advantage.

The clump of Cedar with its fringe of dead trees, or rather the ground on which the trees stand, is another picture of much of the land in our Pines adapted to the cultivation of cranberries. I see no way to produce thorough cultivation in these places except by sanding the ground four or five inches deep, which would require six or eight hundred tons of dirt, I suppose. Then would be no better than the body of the meadow, with its moss and other combustible matter which after drainage will burn like tinder to the earth. Before burning over the ground of course the cranberry vines must be removed, this being done it will not require over eight dollars per acre to prepare it for the plough, which with harrowing will make it ready for the planting of vines.

I think no where could a space of ground be found so near a perfect grade for cranberries as in this meadow, so cheaply drained, and with a stream of water on the slightly elevated side. The means of irrigation

to all parts would be thorough. Indeed there would be no need of water but rarely, and then how little would be required on account of the sub-soil being already full. How different the amount required for an up-land ridge. Cut a rough comparative calculation here in the woods the preparation would compare thus -

		Meadows	Cedar clump ground		
Turfing an acre	\$ 20.	Burning	\$ 1.00	Removing Cedars	\$.
Carting away	12.	Grubing	8.00	Cedar stumps cut down	5.
Grubing trees	10.	Ploughing	1.50	Carting 100 tons sand	<u>84.</u>
Ploughing	1.	Harrowing	<u>2.00</u>		\$ 89.
Harrowing	<u>1.</u>		\$ 12.50		
	\$ 44.				

Another thing worthy of note is the extreme healthfulness of this neighborhood. We see families living near these places for years without sickness of any kind. Indeed after a residence of twenty years in and near these pines, I have never seen a case of fever and ague.