

Hybrid 'Clapp's Pear' Brought Horticultural Fame to Old Dorchester

By Anthony Sammarco
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The hybridization of the "Clapp's Favorite Pear" in 1840 was a local marvel that proved to be one of both horticultural interest as well as profitable for the Clap Family of Dorchester.

The Clapp Farm was granted to Nicholas Clap in 1633, and comprised well over 300 acres of land. The Clapps had been farmers and mill owners in the 17th and early 18th centuries, then opened a tannery on the Little Neck, the causeway now known as Boston Street. The tannery originally proved profitable, but waned in the early 19th century.

William Clapp, a captain of the local militia, built the "Mansionhouse" in 1806 on land deeded to him by his father, Captain Lemuel Clap. The Mansionhouse was situated on a slight elevation, and faced east; the surrounding lands were cultivated as a fruit orchard as early as 1810.

The Clapps were associated with numerous horticulturally-minded

neighbors and family members. They had grafted both apple and pear specimens in the orchard, and some proved successful. Their kinsman, The Honorable Ebenezer Seaver of Roxbury, had grafted a specimen of the "Seckel Pear" on his estate, "Seaver Hall," in Roxbury.

At that time the Massachusetts Horticultural Society was supported by the local gentry of Dorchester. For many years, the presidency or the treasurership of the Society was filled by a Dorchesterite. William Clapp and his sons, Lemuel, Frederick and Thaddeus, all joined the new society and submitted their fruits for the annual award ceremony.

The Clapp's Favorite Pear was the hybridization of the Flemish Beauty pear and the Bartlett pear. Exhibited at the Horticultural Society Exhibition of 1840, the pear proved immediately successful. The fact that it was an early ripening pear made the fruit available in mid to late August, at a time when fruits were thought to have medicinal qualities ("an apple a day keeps the doctor away") and

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relatively short periods of shelf life.

As a result, the Clapp's Favorite Pear, one of many pear seedlings developed by the family, became popular and profitable. The Clapp Farm shifted to include pear trees, which sold rapidly.

Dorchester in this period (1840-1870) was a rural town with farms in the northern part of the town, with industrial activity along the Neponset River at Lower Mills. The town, settled in 1630 by Puritans from Dorset, England, was rapidly changing, and new residents who had no connections with the town settlement

were purchasing property.

One of the new residents was Joseph Tuttle of Pemberton Square, Boston. He purchased the Old Wiswall House, built in the 17th century on Old or Rock Hill, the landing site of the first settlers. Tuttle opened a newly fashionable seaside hotel, naming it the Tuttle House. In 1819, he renamed the hill on which his establishment was located "Savin Hill," after the columnar juniper that gave presence to the hill. Tuttle's daughter, Charlotte, married Lemuel Clapp in 1840, joining an old Dorchester family to a new one.

This article was submitted by Dorchester lecturer and historian Anthony Sammarco.