

FARMS IN EAST GREENWICH

Research by Ms. Iannuccilli

East Greenwich started as a farming community. The first homes were built in the countryside in what is now the Shippeetown, Fry's Corner and Middle Road sections.

Life on the farms was not easy. The day began long before sunrise and lasted long after sunset. In the planting, haying and harvesting season, extra help was hired on the farms. Children were also expected to help on the farm. Feeding the chickens and pigs, picking fruits and berries, tending the garden, haying, washing, cleaning, sewing, drawing water from the well and keeping the wood box full were some of the chores done by the children. They also had to attend school and do their lessons.

Most farms had buildings clustered around the farmhouse, which formed a courtyard. These buildings included: a cow barn, horse barn, workshop, milk house, well/spring house, ice house, corn crib, hog pen/house, hen coop, smoke house, carriage shed, and outhouse.

Farmers in East Greenwich were able to grow many different crops because of the fertile soil. In fact, one way they fertilized the soil was by mixing local fish and seaweed into it (something they learned from the Native Americans). Many of the early colonists brought seeds and plants with them because they believed they would be useful in the "new land". They traded with the Native Americans to get kidney beans, corn, pumpkin, and squash seeds.

It was very common for the farmers in East Greenwich to have orchards on their farms. They would grow apples, pears, peaches,

plums and cherries. They also had a permanent garden next to their house where they grew herbs for medicine, cooking and fragrance. Some of these herbs included: mullen, mint, thyme (for headache, stomachache, and nightmares), tansy (for colds, fever, insect repellent), lemon balm (for mosquito repellent, to calm nerves, and soothe the stomach), lavender (for cuts, burns, fragrance), dill, parsley (for breath freshener, allergies, and hives), catnip (for fever, cold, headache and stomachache), marigold (for stings and bites), and sage. Many of the plants in their permanent garden were also used to dye fabric.

The farmers in East Greenwich grew crops such as: carrots, beets, onions, cabbage, peas, Indian beans, turnips, beets, radishes, asparagus, celery, lettuce, cucumbers, pumpkins, Indian squash, and corn. They sold these crops to local stores in the village or traded them for things they didn't have. These included: coffee, tea, spices, molasses, knives and forks. An interesting fact I learned was that potatoes, tomatoes, and eggplant were not grown in this area until 1740 because the early colonists believed that they were poisonous. If you wanted a potato, they were imported from Bermuda and sold in Boston.

Early settlers in East Greenwich made their clothes from the wool they spun from their sheep and goats. They cut down trees for firewood and lumber and used stones to build walls around their property. Wood was their only source of fuel for heating and cooking.

Farmers in East Greenwich earmarked and branded their animals because they were allowed to roam free. These markings let others know whom they belonged to in case they wandered away (kind of like a dog collar ID). The horses, cattle and sheep were

rounded up in the fall and in the winter. Most farmers also kept chickens on their farm.

There were many different kinds of farms in East Greenwich. These included: Meat, Grains, Dairy and Eggs, Fruit, and Vegetables. Many of these farms are still standing today and some are even still operating. The Bailey Brook Farm on South County Trail is still a working dairy farm today. In 1890, the Bailey's would have to milk 15 cows by hand to make a living. Now it's more like 40-50 cows!

The Lauriston Greene Farm was once located across the street from Frenchtown School. This yellow farmhouse is still standing on Frenchtown Road today.

The Dedford Farm was located right across the street from Eldredge School. The yellow farmhouse was built in 1848 and is still standing today. East Greenwich used to be called Dedford from 1686-1689. It was changed back to East Greenwich (after East Greenwich in England) in 1689.

The Brigg's-Boesch Farm, located on 830 South Road, was established in 1704. The history of the farm dates back to 1672 when Englishman John Briggs purchased 57 acres of land in East Greenwich. His son, Richard Briggs, inherited this land when John passed away and turned it into a 144-acre farm by 1716. In 1850, this farm grew crops and dairy products, including corn, potatoes, hay, butter, and wool. It also had horses, cattle, sheep, and pigs. The farm remained in the Briggs family until 1954 when it was purchased by Donald and Theresa Boesch. Their farm produced corn, hay, and Christmas trees. The EG Land Trust purchased the farm in 2001 and it is now used as a Community Farm. Right now you can find vegetables, chicken, beef, pork and eggs at this

farm. The farmhouse (built in 1735), ice house (built 1860), 2 wells, family burial ground (dating back to 1715), and stone walls still remain today.



Many of the farms that once flourished here in East Greenwich are gone, but in their place are new homes and neighborhoods for East Greenwich families. It is important for us to keep this rich history alive, here in our very own community.