

My Memories of Stafford Forge

by Clara Morey Cullen

In earlier years, Stafford Forge was a plantation and there are several pictures as it looked then, a lot of openness.

There were several owners before a James Holman who lived in the Lakewood area bought it. After Holman, a Mr. Switlick bought it, and he later sold it to the State, and it became a wild life refuge. There were a lot of swans and eagles among other birds living there.

The first caretaker I remember was a Mr. John Grey, and my dad, Alfred, worked there at that time. He went to work there at the age of 15, and worked until his retirement at about the age of 65. Mr. Grey married a young girl from New York and brought her here as a bride of 19. I have her picture, taken with my dad's sister, Rachel, who died at an early age. I also have a picture of the house they lived in and my mother and dad and their granddaughter standing in front of my dad's Model A Ford there.



Stafford Forge Cranberry Plantation, "Historical And Biographical Atlas of the New Jersey Coast" by T.F. Rose and H.C. Woolman, 1878.



My mom and dad, Mary Catherine Brown & Alfred Morey, with their granddaughter, Joyce Leek, in front of the Stafford Forge House.

season was over. Some brought their wives. My dad learned a lot of Italian and taught me to count to ten.

Later, Puerto Ricans worked there. At that time, there was a boat with a paddle wheel to harvest the berries, and a train with a flatbed to carry boxes of berries which were sorted in a cranberry house there. There was a conveyor belt that moved the berries, so the women could sort out the bad berries.

The berries were sent to a canning factory to be made into sauce. One of the companies who bought them was *Eatmore*, and *Ocean Spray* was another.

My mother Katie, and dad Alfred and sister Catherine and I lived at the Forge until 1923. When I was four years old we moved down into town (West Creek). We moved with a horse and wagon.

My fondest memory is when my dad would occasionally come home for lunch, and upon returning to work, would give me a ride on the horse and buggy a short distance, and I would walk back home.

A granddaughter of the Grey's, Patricia Newton, lives in Florida, but she lived at the Forge until 4 years of age because her mother, Margaret, was a nurse in WW II. Patricia and her husband, Tom, looked up Sandra (my daughter) and myself, and we had a very nice visit together, reminiscing.

There were three bogs with dams, and the bogs had to be checked to make sure they didn't overflow. There were boards to hold back the water, and these had to be raised or lowered, depending on the depth of the water. In winter when they were frozen, the men covered them with gravel. I don't know the reason, unless it controlled the weeds when the ice melted.

As I remember, Italians picked and scooped the cranberries by hand. They lived in tarpaper houses and stayed until the



Caretaker John Gray's wife, with my dad's sister, Rachel, at Stafford Forge.

The house the Grey's lived in was demolished by the state, along with the house we lived in which was near the Gray's house. At the time we lived there, there was no electricity as it was too far to run lines as there weren't too many houses. We had no running water either. The Grey's had a generator for their power.

Mr. & Mrs. Grey would visit Florida in the winter for a while, and my dad checked on the place on weekends when not working there. It was a treat for my sister and me as we had the chore of gathering the eggs as there were a lot of chickens, and it was such fun.

The house was large and had steps from the kitchen to the upstairs which was neat. There was an outside 'privy' for the workers, but Mr. Grey kept it wall-papered pretty and had frilly curtains on the windows. It was so neat, you didn't mind the visit.

During sorting season, my dad, mother, three of dad's brothers, his mother, and three sisters-in-law sorted berries. Sometimes on Saturdays, when we were out of school, my sister and me helped. Sort of a family affair.

The men the upper bog made into a swimming hole with it a little deeper on one side, and most of the town kids swam there in the cold cedar water. In winter, we ice skated there.

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The main house at Stafford Forge.

[Minor editing and photos added by Peter H. Stemmer. September, 2007.]