

The Leland Farm

By John E. Leland

In earlier times, up until the second half of the twentieth century, East Bridgewater was primarily a farming community. Of the several farms in town, one of the most prominent and long-lived was the Leland Farm, which had been operated by members of branches of the same family for more than two hundred years.

The Leland Farm was located at 297 North Central Street, across the street from the old West schoolhouse. Around the year 1731, Joseph 3 Keith came from Easton and built the original farmhouse, which stood until almost 1920, when it was moved back to serve as a chicken house and garage. (Joseph was the grandson of Rev, James 1 Keith, the first minister in Old Bridgewater.) The farm was owned and operated by four generations of Keiths until 1857, when Eleazer 6 Keith deeded the farm to Stephen Harlow, Jr., in consideration of old-age care. Stephen was the husband of Bethia Orr Keith Harlow, Eleazer's 1st cousin, so the farm still stayed in the family. Stephen ran the farm with the help of his son, Herbert Harlow.

In 1892 Arthur Little Leland, after the death of his father in Fond du Lac, Wisconsin, came east to live with his Uncle Herbert Harlow, the brother of Arthur's mother, Jennet Harlow Leland. In 1897 Arthur became a partner with his Uncle Herbert in running the farm, which became known as Buttonwood Dairy Farm. In 1899, Arthur married Mabel Golden Allen, of the Beaver district. In 1912 they expanded the barn with a new cow barn and a dairy. A few years later, Arthur bought Herbert's half-interest in the farm, which then became The Leland Farm. He and Mabel proceeded to run the farm, along with their children, Allen, Anna, Ralph, Hazel, Robert, Charles, and Richard, and Anna's husband, Henry Perkins.

In 1932 the Leland Farm established its first milk routes. For many years the Leland Farm was the principal supplier of milk, cream, and eggs for the citizens of East Bridgewater and parts of Brockton. For a time, the farm also grew and sold potatoes and asparagus on the milk routes. In the beginning, nearly all the Leland children delivered on the routes. In the 1950's Henry Perkins was the primary milkman in East Bridgewater, and Richard Perkins in Brockton.

In addition to running the farm, Arthur Leland organized the Farmers' Cooperative Exchange, which made it possible for area farmers to pool their resources to buy their animal feed in quantity. Once a week, two freight-car loads of grain were delivered to the railroad siding off West Union Street, across from the steel mill. For many years Robert Leland managed the Farmers' Exchange and, two days a week, helped the farmers load the 100-pound bags of grain onto their trucks.

In 1935 the Clark Farm on the other side of Beaver Brook was purchased. The Leland Farm now included 180 acres of land, stretching from North Central Street to Belmont Street. Later, an irrigation system was installed to water the pastures and hay fields, using water from Beaver Brook. With scientific management, the farm prospered. In the late 1940's the Leland Farm

earned the Green Pastures award presented by the UMass Extension to the outstanding dairy farm in the state. All of the Leland children and most of the grandchildren at one time or another took part in haying, milking, candling eggs, and the myriad other chores necessary to the running of a farm.

The land along Beaver Brook was said to have been, in ancient times, a favorite camping and hunting ground for Native Americans. Consequently, whenever the fields were plowed, archaeologists and souvenir hunters would scour the ground, looking for arrowheads and other artifacts. The Leland Farm continued to prosper until the late 1960's, when the advancing age of the family workers and the difficulty of hiring help finally necessitated the sale of the cow herd. In 1971 the farm was sold to Cumberland Farms, and in 1978 the farm buildings were demolished and buried in the field. The farm had been owned and operated by members of branches of the same family for seven generations.

In 1997 the former property of the Leland Farm was purchased by the Town of East Bridgewater. The fields of the Leland farm now provide open space and conservation land for the town.

(Information for this essay was gleaned from Leland family records, Nahum Mitchell's History of Bridgewater, deeds, a history of the Leland Farm compiled by Anna Leland Perkins, and the author's personal experience.)

The use of numbers in names is a technique used by genealogists as a way to distinguish among different generations in the same family. The original immigrant to America would have the number "1", his children the number "2", and so forth. So John 3 Keith was the grandson of the original immigrant, James 1 Keith, who was the first pastor in Old Bridgewater.