

Some 1840's Oyster Bay Farms

The following appeared in an 1848 issue of the *American Agriculturist*, a magazine aimed at farmers which was published in Albany, NY in the 1840's and 1850's. It describes some of the more prominent farms in the northern Town of Oyster Bay, including Daniel Youngs farm (one of the agricultural showplaces in Oyster Bay). While there is no attribution as to author it is probable that they were written by the magazine's editor, A B Allen.

— Daniel E Russell

Last July we had the pleasure of passing a week at Oyster Bay, and some of the adjoining towns of Long Island. We were domiciled for the time at the hospitable mansion of Mr. Daniel Youngs. His eldest son, Mr. Daniel K. Youngs, with a kindness and attention which we shall not soon forget, devoted his whole time, while we were there, to showing us the best system of farming practised in that part of the country. Had not so much already been said about Long Island in this journal, we could write out a long and interesting story of what we there saw and heard. As it is, we shall be obliged to confine ourselves principally to such short details as have not yet appeared.

Farm of Mr. Daniel Youngs.—We shall commence with a short sketch of the farm of our hospitable host. It comprises about 300 acres, generally of a light, loamy, or gravelly soil, though some fields are of a heavy loam, abounding more or less with loose stones of a suitable size for making walls. The farm lies partly on Oyster Bay, and partly on a fine ridge between it and Cold Spring Harbor. The situation is commanding and delightful. The house was erected in the year 1650, being the first built in the place. It was honored by receiving General Washington as a guest for one night, while on a tour through Long Island after the revolution. The inmates of the house still remember and practice the useful instructions that this great and good man then gave them in farming.

In order to show our readers the marked improvements which have taken place in farming on Long Island, we will relate what was told us by Mr. Youngs. Some 40 to 45 years ago, the general system practised on his own farm and around him, was, the first year to plow up the sod in the spring and plant corn without manure. From this they obtained 12 to 15 bushels per acre. Rye was sown broadcast, and harrowed in among this corn, in the month of August, and the following year produced 9 to 12 bushels per acre. Then the fields were allowed

to be grown over with the natural grasses and weeds, and were pastured five or six years, by which time they got so well recruited, that they might be plowed again with the prospect of producing another crop of 12 to 15 bushels of corn per acre. The little manure which was made in the stables and yards, was usually devoted to a few acres of meadow land adjoining the farm buildings. These produced fair crops of hay, which were the main dependence for wintering the stock.

How changed now is this system. Swamps, the former products of which were nothing but frogs and alder bushes, have been drained, and found to abound from one to five feet deep with a rich, black muck, which will produce large crops of hay and corn, &c, for a series of years without manure; fish have been caught in great numbers and applied to the land; sea weed has been gathered in large quantities for the compost heaps; while thousands of bushels of ashes, and sloop load after sloop load of city manure from New York, have been transported thither, and recently guano to some extent. And what is the result! Why, the same land that formerly averaged only half a ton of hay to the acre, now cuts 2 to 3 tons; corn which produced not over 10 to 15 bushels per acre, now yields from 35 to 60 — and the smaller grains and roots have increased in like proportion. But much larger isolated crops have been raised than these. For example, Mr. Daniel K. Youngs, has raised 80 bushels of oats and 100 bushels of corn per acre, and 550 bushels of carrots on half an acre. Mr. Thomas F. Youngs, raised on one acre of drained swamp 123 ½ bushels of corn. Mr. Jacob Smith, of Centre Island, raised 400 bushels of wheat on ten acres, and a single acre produced him 50 bushels. We could enumerate many an acreable production equal to the above. The quantities were not *guessed* at either. With these increased productions other improvements have gone hand in hand, such as better fences, and buildings, &c. : for Long Island farmers

tell us the general result of this system of liberal manuring is, that the more manure they purchase the more they are able to buy and make at home. We have no doubt that their outlays for manure yield them from ten to one hundred per cent. We will recount one instance of liberal manuring. A friend of ours, who began life with less than one thousand dollars, and who has brought up reputably and well educated, a large family, and has now become rich from the profits of farming alone, informed us, that one season he expended \$900 for city manure, all of which he put on twenty acres of land; that he had not a doubt but this manure increased the hay product of that field at least one and a half tons per acre, but he would only calculate it at one ton. Hay was then worth for a series of six years the average price of \$15 per ton; thus he realized \$1,800 more within that six years than he otherwise would have done, had he not purchased the manure. He calculated that the grass this field produced, which he fed off after mowing, was an equivalent for the extra expense of cutting and marketing this extra ton per acre; and the land at the end of the six years was in much better condition than it was before he put on the \$900 worth of manure. It is true, that hay for the past few years has not paid so well; but that does not operate against the general experience of the farmers of this part of Long Island, that the more manure they judiciously purchase, the greater their profits.

In addition to managing their farm in a superior manner, the sons of Mr. Youngs are devoting considerable attention to fruit and garden vegetables for the city market. They have just begun a vineyard of some extent. The vines are trailed upon trellises and promise well.

Their system of raising calves is excellent. In the first place, they have taken pains to procure a good breed of cows — high grade Durhams. The calves are not permitted to suck, but are fed new milk the first week or two. After this, they have a mixture of new and skim milk for the same length of time, then skim milk alone, till six or eight weeks old. All this time they are suffered to run in a grass pasture, and at the end of a month and a half, or two months, they become so accustomed to eat grass, which should be sweet and tender, that they henceforth take care of themselves without further resort to the milk pail. These are permitted to bring calves the spring they are two years old, at which time, such is the early maturing qualities of the Durham breed, they will have attained the growth of good sized cows. Under this system, and by breeding from good milking families of male and female, their heifers almost universally make good milkers.

Farm of Mr. Thomas F. Youngs.—This farm lies a little back of Oyster Bay, running down to Cold Spring Harbor, and comprises about 400 acres in one body. It is certainly one of the most beautifully situated and highly cultivated on Long Island. The buildings, also, are very fine and commodious. The rotation and crops here, are similar to those of the best farmers of Long Island, heretofore described in this paper. Mr. Y. has been uncommonly spirited in his improvements. He has drained a large swamp, which previous to his possession of the farm, had never produced anything of value. It was here where he grew the second year after draining it, 123 ½ bushels of corn per acre. It is now one of the richest and most productive fields

on the island. These are the improvements that we so much like, and which add argely not only to the productive wealth, but to the general health of the country. How many foetid pools, and fever and ague marshes still pervade the state, which if drained and cultivated, would become mines of wealth to their owners !

Mr. Y. pays considerable attention to fruit, and has very fine and thrifty orchards. His apples are considered among the largest and best raised on Long Island. His stock of cattle is superior. They are Durhams, descended chiefly from the importations of Mr. Charles Henry Hall of New York. The cows are noble animals, well bred, and excellent milkers.

Farm of Mr. Joseph Latting.—This is one of the few farms on Long Island which is still chiefly devoted to the production of wool. Formerly large flocks of fine-wooled sheep were kept here; but the low price of the article, in consequence of the great competition from the boundless prairies of the west, has obliged the farmers here, generally to relinquish the wool-growing business for something more profitable. Mr. Latting's farm contains 150 acres. His flock is composed of about 300 Saxon sheep, which are among the largest and strongest of this breed we have yet seen. Their wool is fine, and the fleeces average 2¾ lbs. per head. His system is to plow up sod in the spring, which has been pastured a few years by the sheep; on this he sows oats or wheat and gets good crops. He raises his own corn, hay, &c, and sells wool to the amount of \$300 per annum. This is his chief selling product. The farm is in fine condition and well managed. The buildings are excellent and surrounded by large thrifty orchards.

Locust Groves.—While on the subject of sheep, it may not be unknown to our readers, that locust groves may be grown on very poor soil, averaging from \$4 to \$7 worth of timber per annum, per acre, and still yield as much grass for sheep as if no trees grew there; and all this time the land is becoming richer rather than poorer. The reason of this is, that if the light sandy soil is not covered with shade trees, the grass, except during a very wet season, dries up and yields little. The trees keep the ground cool and moist, and the grass continues growing all summer. We are of opinion that if a top dressing of two or three bushels per acre of plaster of Paris were sown early in the spring, it would add considerably to the grass product. We have known instances of locust groves on Long Island, growing up to be worth \$300 per acre, within forty years. Nothing can exceed their beauty and comfort as sheep pastures.

Centre Island — This is a fine tract of 650 acres. It lies in the middle of Oyster Bay, and hence its name of Centre Island. It was originally purchased of the Indians, by a Mr. Ludlum, two of whose descendants still own 400 acres between them. The residue, 250 acres, belongs to Mr. Jacob Smith.

We had a delightful sail in an open boat across the bay, to this charming island, but landing rather late in the afternoon, we had time only to call on Mr. Smith, much regretting we could not also see the Messrs. L. Mr. S. is an excellent and very enterprising farmer, and has greatly increased the productiveness of his share of the island, since he became its possessor. He catches any quantity of the bony fish in the bay, and is liberal in his application of them to the land. He usually puts on

2,000 to 2,500 per acre. He applies them in various ways. Sometimes he spreads them broadcast, on pasture lands, in the month of June, which he plows up for corn the following spring; but more generally, they are applied round the corn, the second time hoeing; or they are made into a compost, which is certainly the least offensive and most economical method. The rotation here, is corn, barley, or oats, then wheat, followed by grass from five to seven years. Mr. S. gets large crops; corn, 50 bushels per acre, on an average; wheat, 25 bushels; hay, 2 tons. While on his farm, we saw many acres of grass just ready to cut, which we are confident would turn out 2 to 3 tons per acre. It stood nearly breast high and seemingly as thick as it was possible to grow.

A very fine, sweet, juicy, red-streak apple originated on this island. We think it a valuable variety, and our nurserymen would do well to cultivate it. It is particularly well relished by swine, and fattens them very rapidly. It is sometimes called the "Hog Sweeting," but this is really too vulgar a name; we, therefore, recommend that of the "Syosset," the Indian name for Oyster Bay, or call it the Ludlum Sweeting, or Ludlum Redstreak.

Wm. S. McCoun, Esq., has recently left the practice of law, in this city, and settled as a farmer, on Oyster Bay. He has

built him a charming Gothic cottage, in a quiet little valley, and surrounded it with pretty grounds, an ample garden, and commodious out-buildings. He follows the usual rotation, but pays more attention to corn, of which he has raised some excellent crops. He is gradually getting his farm into a high state of cultivation, and is an excellent example to his neighbors—spirited, at the same time very judicious in his outlays and improvements. We are under many obligations to him for his kind attention, while on the island.

A short distance from him, is the country residence of Judge McCoun. It is a fine old place, and commands a beautiful prospect of the bay and surrounding country.

Cultivation of Grapes.—Judge Concklin, of Cold Spring, has planted about three acres with the Isabella and Catawba grape. The ground is terraced, and the vines trained on horizontal bars, fastened to upright posts. His vineyard usually bears well, and he is now extending it. The Judge not being at home, we lost the opportunity of obtaining more particular information regarding his success in growing this delicious fruit.

At Cold Spring Harbor, we called on Mr. David W. Jones. He has a good farm, beautifully situated, and commanding a fine water prospect. He paid great attention to stock, formerly, and still has some fine animals left. His Durham cow, Sylph, is a choice animal and an excellent milker. He possesses several others, also, and a few blood horses. We regret to say, that we had not time to linger longer and obtain more particulars of Mr. J.'s farming operations.

Mr. John H. Jones, has a splendid farm of 500 acres, farther up the harbor. This is under a high state of cultivation. Hay, corn, and wheat are his principal products. Aside from farming, Mr. Jones is extensively engaged in merchandise, the manufacture of woollen cloths, ship building, whaling, &c, all which multifarious operations, he superintends personally. He is one of the most active men on the island; and we are happy to add, has been highly successful in nearly everything in which he has been engaged.

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