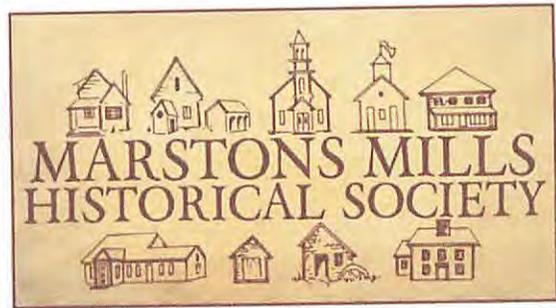


Marstons Mills Historical Society
Interview with Hannah Bergstrom Hord



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In 1913 I came from Northern Sweden to Göteborg and then by steamer to Hull, England. We then took a train to Liverpool. I remember the beautiful scenery in the English countryside. We left home the first of May, so it was spring in England. I came with a lady and her two children. We met another girl. She had bought her tickets in Sweden. We bought ours here, so we had better showings in staterooms.

My father died when I was a year old. My mother died when I was thirteen. I never would have come if my mother had been alive.

After my father died, my brother took charge of the farm. He had gone when mother died. I stayed a year at the farm by myself. My other brother and sisters had all moved away. My neighbor had four boys and two girls. One girl was a year older than I was and the other girl was my age. I would go to their house at night and sleep with the girls. We slept in a 3/4 bed.

When my mother died, I didn't want to live. I couldn't imagine living without my mother. It had been planned that I marry the boy next door and my brother would marry one of the girls. They would make an apartment upstairs for my brother and we would make an apartment upstairs for me and my husband. When my mother died all those plans fell apart.

I decided I wanted to see the world. My guardian wanted me to be a school teacher. There was six years of public schooling at that time in Sweden and then one had to go to a private school. But I didn't want to be a school teacher. I saw people who came from America and they had such beautiful clothes and such nice manners and they had money.

In the early 1900s, many Swedes flocked to America. There were better chances there to make a living and there were jobs for all who wanted to work. They came by the thousands.

People don't seem to want to work so hard anymore. We sold our cows from this farm for practically nothing. We had automatic milkers. We had a conveyor belt that took the manure out to the spreader and dumped it. You just hooked the tractor to the spreader and took it out to the field. Still, we couldn't find people who wanted to work in the barn.

My family had a big farm in northern Sweden. Our part of the country was mostly lumbering and steel making. Most of the agriculture was in the southern part of the country.

The biggest river in Sweden ran near us and emptied into the Bay of Bothnia. There were factories all along the river. There were pulp mills and saw mills. Big steamers came from England and Germany to load the lumber. They came from America too.

In the summer, we would gather raspberries, strawberries and flowers and take them to the captains of the ships. We loved to talk to those who had been to foreign countries.

Boys in Sweden had to go into military service at I think age eighteen. Boys who went into the army served six month terms for three years. There was an arrangement with the employers so they wouldn't lose their jobs while they were serving in the military. If they went into the navy they were away for three years. They had to go to Stockholm to sign up.

A neighbor had three sons who went into the navy. We admired them. They had gone to other countries. I wanted to go to other countries.

It was hard though when I came to this country. I didn't speak English. You were considered nothing if you came from abroad. I came to Providence to people from my home town. They were beautiful people. I was accepted like one of the family. The husband had come from this country to visit neighbors of mine in Sweden. The daughter of this family married him and they came to Providence. The mother of this girl and my mother had been very good friends,

My sister, who was six years older than me had come to this country on a bet. She was eighteen when she left. She bet my brother she'd come. He didn't come because my mother felt bad about his leaving. Mother didn't say don't go, but he knew she was sad about his departure, so he stayed. But my sister, scared as she was, bought a ticket, left for Oslo and then the States and came to the same family I came to.

So these people were delighted to have me. On holidays, you must always go to visit them. In Providence, all the Swedish people stuck together. We were all Lutheran.

In school in Sweden we had Bible and catechism in school. When we were fourteen, we were confirmed. Before confirmation, for three months, three days a week, we went to confirmation school. Then, on Ascension Day, all over Sweden children were confirmed. Ascension Day, Easter and Christmas were each three-day holidays. On confirmation day, the boys wore their first dress suit and the girls wore their first long dresses. The suits were dark colored, but the dresses could be any color of a good quality material. We could hardly wait to get our long dresses. And, they had to be of a style that would last.

When I went back to Sweden I went to the Saturday night dances. All the girls had such beautiful complexions. Their dresses were lovely, but they wore the same dress all summer to those dances. They did look beautiful.

When I was a girl, we had six years of school. If we wanted to go on we had to go to private school. And we didn't have other languages taught in school. Now the children go to school for ten years and French, German, English and Italian are taught. Two of my nieces came to this country for a granddaughter of mine's wedding. They spoke beautiful English. They also spoke German and French. English is compulsory in the third grade.

When I was young, only Swedes lived in Sweden. Oh, there were diplomats and business men from other countries. After the war many different people came to live in Sweden. I had never seen a negro

until I came to New York. We had seen them on slides in school. A man came and showed us slides of Africa. I never thought then of associating with black people.

I married In 1926. I met my husband on the Cape. My stepsister, who lived in Boston, had two daughters. One of them worked for the Starks in Centerville. The Starks ran a hotel. My nieces were older than I was. I was the last child of my father's second marriage. Mrs. Stark gave my niece a wedding celebration and I came for that affair. This niece married my future husband.

The Starks were wonderful people. They hired all Swedish help. They took green help, that is, girls right off the boat. Everyone spoke Swedish. The hotel was very famous in the early 1900's, Mr. Stark was the boss. Mr. Stark drove the Pierce Arrow car to the station in West Barnstable to pick up the guests from the train. He liked to drink a bit. Nothing bad. He was a fast driver. You know how winding the roads are. He'd take the corners on two wheels. I think they ran the hotel until 1935. One of the Stark daughters worked for us in the office while she was in high school and college in the summers.

Well, my husband-to-be married my niece. But she only lived two or three years after the marriage. I didn't even like the man at the time. I thought if he had taken better care of her, she wouldn't have died. I more or less disliked him. He paid a lot of attention to me, but I didn't want to have anything to do with him. For a long time I avoided him, but he had winning ways. Finally, I married him.

He had two children, so I have a stepson and a stepdaughter. My stepdaughter, Florence, lives in West Barnstable. She comes over at least once a week. She has five children, four boys and a girl. They are all college graduates. Then I had two girls of my own, both married. I have had fifteen grandchildren--one died--and ten great grandchildren.

I used to send them money when they were in college. I also sent them money on Christmas and birthdays. One granddaughter asked me after she graduated from college if I had forgotten to send her birthday money. No, I said, after you graduate from college, you don't get money anymore. Then you will be making more money than I am. But, they are all good children.

I never regretted coming to this country. I went back to Sweden in 1922. The big farmhouse where I was born was still there. We had used the eastern end of the house in the winter and moved to the western end in the summer. The people who bought the house had turned the western end into a ballroom for winter use. They rented it out. Then they had built a pavilion off that room for summer dances. You know we have 24 hours of sun in the summer.

When I went back in 1958, the new owners had torn down the house. I felt bad about that. Our house had been prettily situated. It sort of slanted down hill. At the bottom was a brook. Beyond the brook was a lake, There were fields in between. There was a big place for the horses. Our house was on a hilltop with more hills behind. Across from all this were the mountains. And every farmer had acres of woodlands.

In place of our one story house the new owners had built a square two storey house. A two storey house at the top of the hill, it looked out of place.

But, the barn looked the same. It was a long barn. There was a room for the horses. Then you went through a door into the cow barn. We must have had about 15 cows, The barn ran down hill also. In one corner of the barn was a sheep pen and above that was a floor where the hens were kept. At that time in Sweden this was a common arrangement. There was a concreted part of the barn where there was a boiler for hot water. In our house at the top of the hill we had a driven well. We had to carry the water to the house in buckets. We didn't have running water. In those days no one had an inside toilet. Now, everyone has a bathroom.

One day a year the schools closed and all the children went out with sacks to pick pine and spruce cones. The government paid us to pick the cones. You see, the farmers had cut down so many trees that the woodlands were being ruined. They had sent so much wood to Germany. Now, the law said only trees of a certain size were to be cut. The cones were given to agricultural colleges and they took out the seeds and started new trees.

I always went to school in the winter on skis. We all did in Sweden. We didn't go by the main roads, we made our own ski runs over the hills.

I was married in New York City. I told Papa I'd marry him on my birthday or on Easter. He chose my birthday as that was in October and he didn't want to wait until spring. He bought a new car to take us on our honeymoon, a Nash, which he gave to me. We were married in New York City. The first night we went to a little town that sat on a bluff. I can't remember the name. The hotel dining room was closed as it was after seven o'clock. You could get a meal at a restaurant downtown, but I insisted we eat in a restaurant that had tablecloths. We went on to see Niagara Falls, a place I always wanted to visit. My husband wanted to go to the Thousand Islands. A friend of his had been there and told him how beautiful it was so we went there next.

Many years later, my brother-in-law and his wife and four sons came to this country. They stayed with us about six weeks. Two of the boys went to New York. The other two wanted to go to Detroit. So my sister-in-law and I drove them out there. We took our time coming home. I said I think I'll stop at that town where Papa and I went the first night of our honeymoon. Well, we got there and it was all changed. The main street was all dug up. The hotel where we stayed was torn down. It didn't look like the romantic place where we had stayed. It looked grim.

My husband had the farm when I married him. He was a valet in a wealthy family when I first met him. The family he worked for had a summer home in Ipswich. He and his wife had a cottage on the estate. Hilda and I had known each other in Sweden. She and her family lived in another village, but we saw each other on holidays. I was living in Providence then. Another girl and I went up to Ipswich to see them. We were there two or three days. The first night we were given a beautiful dinner at the cottage. The family were out to dinner that night, so the two butlers were invited to have dinner with us. The family they worked for had a large staff. Their dining room would seat sixty, so you know they had to have much help. The family said we could have the big car for the evening, so we went to an amusement park on the North Shore. After that, we went out for lobster. Oh, we had a good time.

In 1922, I went to Sweden. Papa's mother told me he had bought a farm. I thought that was funny, as Papa was one to have his fingers manicured and he always dressed like a duke. He'd bought the farm here on the Cape. His wife, Hilda, got TB and she only lasted a year. She left two little children. His sister came from Sweden to look after the children--Aunt Annie. She later married and lived in

Hyannisport. Then his brother and wife came here. Aunt Emma also had a child. He is now a pediatrician in Sweden. They went back to Sweden because Emma didn't like it here.

She did keep house for us when we went to Washington. My husband promised me when we were married that he'd take me on a holiday one week each year.

Papa had intended to have a fruit farm. But a man here on the Cape told him he would have to use lots of fertilizer because fruit trees needed good soil. The fruit farm never materialized. Papa started with a cow. She gave so much milk that they had to sell some. So, Papa built a shack and got another cow. Then he got another. By the time we were married he had forty cows. That was 1926.

Papa read books on dairying and he went up to the University of Massachusetts. The men would come down here and go over the farm and give him suggestions. I'd make coffee for them. They were wonderful men. They must have given him good advice because Papa got many prizes.

We used to buy whole railroad cars full of fertilizer. You had to put lots of fertilizer, bone meal and lime into the soil. We bought hay from Canada. We bought cows from Canada and from Wisconsin. The best cows for milking came from there.

We usually sold the calves at two or three days old. That's why I don't like veal. They took those calves to Brighton and butchered them for veal. The meat from that young an animal isn't digestible. We never butchered a calf until it was at least six weeks old. I'd never buy veal in a store because I wouldn't know how old it was. We didn't get much for those calves, maybe two or three dollars.

We kept two or three pigs. We fed them on milk that was left over. We'd salt down their meat or have Mr. Gifford butcher it. We sold the cows when they weren't giving much milk to the man from Brighton.

We always kept a big bull. Dr. Leach came in later years to artificially inseminate the cows. That semen came from prize bulls and it improved the quality of our herd. Still, we were told to keep a bull. Sometimes we bred him with some of our cows. Of course, the artificial insemination was more expensive.

Once in a while we'd get twin calves. Papa didn't like the twins because they never gave as much milk later on as the single calf. One time I asked to keep one of the twins. I'd seen the play "Abie's Irish Rose" at the Providence Playhouse. I decided to name my calf Rosa Myphiska after Rose in that play. Abe's mother was upset because he decided to marry an Irish Catholic girl, Rose Murphy so a he renamed the girl Rosa Myphiska. When the cows were across the road I'd go over with a pail of milk and call Rosa Myphiska and she'd come running as would all the other cows. I kept her for several years. When we lived in the old house, I'd gather sticks for kindling for the stove and tie them with a rope which Rosa would pull for me. She loved to snuggle up to me.

We always had dogs. We had German Shepherds and Alaskan Spitzes. I was partial to the Spitz. Dr. Leach raised Kerry Blues. We had one, but they are one person dogs. That Blue stayed with me all the time. It got poison and Dr. Leach treated it, but it died.

We always had cats. A young couple who came in the summers asked us if we would keep their cat in the winter as they lived in an apartment. We did that for two years and then we decided not to give the cat back as we were attached to it. We had her for years. One winter there was a heavy snow and the men parked their cars down by Race Lane. The school bus stopped for one of the children and the cat ran out from behind the cars and across the road. A car came whizzing along and didn't stop for the bus and ran over the cat. I was standing in the window and saw it. I always watched as the children boarded the bus. I ran out with a towel and scooped up the cat, but it was dead. She'd just had a litter of five kittens the week before. Their eyes weren't open yet. I bought some dolls' nursing bottles and fed those kittens. In a short time they learned to hold the bottles in their paws. If I had to go shopping, Ruth Cameron, who worked for us in the office, used to come in and care for the cats. One day, one of the kittens piddled on the floor, so I moved them to the cellar. Later, I moved them to a chickenwire enclosure outside. But cats are good at getting out of places, so we moved them to the barn and they became barn cats. Papa always liked cats in the barn to keep down the rats and mice. The cats were great at that. We never had to worry about getting rid of kittens; people were always stopping by to see if we had cats to give away.

One time we had twelve men working for us plus Ruth and another girl in the office. Manny Sousa was our foreman. He worked for us for fourteen years. He was Papa's right hand man. Before he came to work for us he'd had kidney trouble. Then he was fine. He took so much responsibility. We almost had to send him home. One summer he didn't seem too well so Papa finally persuaded him to take off the month of November. Manny wanted to go to Massachusetts General Hospital where he'd been before for his kidney trouble. They found he had cancer. He died in May. Such a big, handsome man he was.

After Manny died, Papa became very nervous. Manny had died in 1954. Papa didn't tend to some things. He didn't seem to take an interest in the business. It was difficult because we couldn't get the good help we used to have. But he didn't want to go to the doctor.

Papa had belonged to the Kiwanis for thirty years. He had thirty years of perfect attendance. I must tell you how he came to be in the Kiwanis. I was going into Hyannis one day to shop. We still lived in the old house. I had an oil stove in the kitchen. In the summer it was too hot with that stove. I happened to see in a small shop window a stove that looked good to me. It was a cream colored stove, half gas and half wood or coal burning. I went in to look at it and the shopkeeper was a man I had known in Providence, Al Dorfney. I had known his sister also. He eventually started the Suburban Gas Company from that little business. It was where the Country Garden is today on West Main Street, Hyannis. I went home and told Papa I had found just the stove I needed. Papa always said we couldn't afford things. In later years I just went out and bought what I needed, but then I was more careful. I told Papa to go down and look at the stove and he did. He got into a big conversation with Al and Al asked him to be a guest of his at Kiwanis. Papa was asked to join Kiwanis and he did and he attended faithfully for thirty years. It happened because of that stove.

In 1958, they gave Papa a party at the Officer's Club at Otis Air Base. It was a celebration of his perfect attendance in Kiwanis. He enjoyed that fellowship. I enjoyed the people also, as they were a jolly group and very nice. They would have ladies' night and I would go. The year before, Papa became president--the year he was vice-president, he was in charge of the money making. We ladies worked hard selling chances and tickets and getting prizes together for the first circus I think Hyannis ever had. It was fun, but it was hard work.

As I said, after Manny died, Papa just didn't tend to things. It was getting very difficult to find help. I think unemployment was the poison. We always hired by the year. We didn't have contracts. Papa said if a man didn't like the work he wasn't going to do a good job, so he might as well leave. We asked the men to give us two weeks notice. Without a contract men whom we didn't care for would be asked to leave. The men usually took their holidays in November so they could go hunting. Along comes unemployment and some men would just leave to hunt or fish and they'd get unemployment even though we wouldn't sign for them. I guess they passed a little money under the counter. It seems strange that most of the men who have worked here are dead and I'm still living.

We had six trucks on the road. In the beginning we only went to Marstons Mills and to Osterville. As we built up our trade we went to Oyster Harbors. There was only one paved road in Oyster Harbors then and it went around by the club. All the other roads there were dirt. And there weren't any street signs or house numbers; you just had to learn the route. When people in Oyster Harbors would run out of milk or cream, I'd make a run over there with the extras. Then we started going to Centerville, Hyannisport and Hyannis. We went as far as Bass River for many years and finally we went on beyond to Chatham and then as far as Truro. Beside milk we carried coffee cream, light cream, 30% cream, and 40% cream.

