



UNTOLD TALES OF FALMOUTH

from the archives of Museums on the Green

The Cranberry Farmer's Proposal

Allen Crocker had not expected, at age 50, to be suffering once again the pangs of romantic suspense. Two Christmases ago, he had buried Olive, his wife of twenty-three years, in the East End Cemetery. Near her grave was another stone that weighed on Allen's heart. It told how his sons William and Oliver, aged 19 and 16, both "fell from aloft & [were] killed aboard the schooner *Hylander*" in 1849. Allen had his other nine children (aged 3 to 23) for company, and a comfortable home north of Green Pond, where he made a decent living from his cranberry bogs—but something was missing.

Lately, he'd thought that void might be filled by Lydia (Pinkham) Brown. She was a 39-year-old widow from Nantucket, and she'd given

Allen reason to hope that she might marry him. But now she'd suddenly backed out of a visit to see his farm and his family—his "situation." Allen was puzzled. Surely she wasn't playing games, expecting him to come and court her, just as he was preparing to get the crop in. She must be too sensible for that. Was she getting cold feet? Or had she misread his intentions? Maybe there was even another suitor waiting in the wings.

Allen did not like to express himself in writing, but he felt he had no choice. If he waited till harvest's end in November to sail to Nantucket and speak to her, he risked losing Lydia. So he set his pen to his pale blue stationery and wrote as plain a proposal as he could.

East Falmouth September the 1 1854

Dear friend

I now [set?] myself to inform you that I am well, hoping through the mercies of God these few lines will find you the same. I heard by the way of [Hepsia?] which has just come to hand that you had got home and had not got [illegible]. I was glad to hear that bit but was sorry to hear that you would not come and see my situation.



Allen Crocker's farmhouse and bogs, off Old Barnstable Road near Crocker Road. This was the "situation" he wanted Lydia to see.

I wish to know if you will be my wife & if I can, I wish to know as quick as possible. I don't want you should get deceived in me nor in mine, so I think you had better come and see for yourself. If you have any notion of being my wife I want to know it. If not, tis but one word and that will tell the whole story. If you will say yes, I will do all I can to make you comfortable and happy. I don't know of any thing on my part but what I shall be willing to do in the bounds of reason. I wish you would answer this letter by the next mail. By so doing you will oblige me very much.

I should like to see you very much but tis impossible for me to leave my berries just now. If I should come and see you, and such a thing should be that you would consent to be my wife, when you come to see my situation you might be disappointed and all would be unhappy. I hope you will think tis best to come and see for yourself, then if you find all things agreeable we can soon be Man and wife. If not I will make you as happy as I can whilst you are here and pay all expense.

I hope you will excuse all mistakes and bad writing and keep [dead?] secret.

These from your Beloved friend until Death

Allen Crocker

Allen's letter now resides in the Crocker family collection, stored in a vault at the Museums. Nearby, in another folder, is the marriage certificate proving that Allen Crocker and Lydia Brown were married at Nantucket on September 21, 1854. Falmouth vital records show that they had three children: Avis, John Henry, and Judith. One of them scrawled across the back of the proposal, "This is the letter that Father asked Mother to have him."

Allen and Lydia both lived into the 1890s. They are buried at Oak Grove Cemetery under a splendid monument. Their son, John H. Crocker, so excelled at the family

business that he became one of Falmouth's wealthiest, most influential citizens, and a mainstay of local groups such as the Gentlemen's Driving Club at Trotting Park. John eventually moved into the old Dimmick place at the top of the Village Green, but he never forgot the farm where he came from, or how he earned the title of "The Cranberry King."



Left and above: Cranberry King, John H. Crocker, at work and at leisure.

Below: Excerpt from Allen's proposal.

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Meg Costello