



The Historic O'Neil Farm, Inc. is a private, non-profit corporation committed to maintaining the 145-acre farm in agriculture in perpetuity, preserving and protecting the historic landscape and natural habitat, providing educational programs, and offering public access to the farm.

Board of Directors

Susan Schortman, President
Pat Loring, Treasurer
Douglas Muir, Esq., Clerk
Sam Batcher
Kimberly Glatstein
Jerry Igersoll
Marie King
Carl O'Neil
Prudence Pease

Historic O'Neil Farm, Inc.
PO Box 2755
Duxbury, MA 02331

email:
info@historicoasilfarm.org
website: historicoasilfarm.org

The Autumn Avenue trailhead parking lot is open dawn to dusk.

The 1627 Cattle Division

May 22, 1627 was a banner day in Plymouth Colony. That was the day the pilgrims distributed the colony's cows and goats. This probably doesn't sound like a big deal but the court record documenting this "Cattle Division" is a treasure trove, as significant for historians now as it was to the colonists nearly 400 years ago.

Looked at one way, the Cattle Division is a census of early Plymouth residents. It includes the names of Duxbury's founding families such as John Alden (with his wife Prissilla and their daughter Elizabeth) and Captain Standish (with his wife Barbara and three young sons) to name but two. The record contains information about people's names, spouses, children and titles of address plus valuable clues as to when individuals arrived in the colony, when marriages may have taken place, when children were born. (It also contains tantalizing mysteries among which is the question of why young John Alden is listed apart from the rest of his family and possibly in different ink?)

At the time, the Cattle Division also recorded a significant step in the economic saga that was the Plymouth Company. Before it was America's Hometown, Plymouth was a joint stock venture in which both English financiers and resident farmers were heavily invested – the former in money, the latter with their lives. The cows and goats were valuable company assets, right up there with farmland and dwelling houses, so dividing them amongst the farmers was indeed a very big deal. And certainly a noteworthy event for those of us interested in the history of dairying in Massachusetts.

The Cattle Division not only tells us how many cows were in the colony in 1627 – 16 + (4 cows, 7 heifers, 2 bulls, 2 steers, a weaning calf plus a calf soon to be born), but also their physical descriptions (red, black, white-backed, white-bellied, ragged-horned, blind!) Noted as well are the names of the ships that transported these beasts or if they were born in New England.

Goats were also mentioned in the Cattle Division – **cattle** in this context meant livestock, not specifically bovine. Goats had been imported to Plymouth before cows and turned out to be useful in the early years. Although goats did not play a starring role in English dairying of the time, Colonial Governor Bradford wrote that they were hardy creatures that thrived in New Plymouth, bred well, gave good milk and needed little looking after plus they traveled across the sea more easily than other livestock. At the time of the Cattle Division, six years into the colony's existence, she-goats still outnumbered cows by nearly 2-1. However it wasn't long before cows became the predominant colonial dairy animal as they are still in the U.S. today.

Thus one of the many stories told in this dusty old court document proves to be the story of the beginnings of dairying in Massachusetts, and that story ultimately leads to Historic O'Neil Farm.



Horatio O'Neil and farm dairy truck



2014 Annual Fund a Success

We are pleased to report that our 2014 Annual Fund has successfully raised the necessary funds to purchase a new hay wagon for the farm. The hay wagon has arrived and is ready to transport visitors on Farm Day and perform other farm tasks. A photo is reproduced here, but to get a better look and have a ride, join us on September 20th from 12:30 to 3:30 PM for our annual Farm Day.

As you know, an important objective of Historic O'Neil Farm is to educate folks in the Duxbury area about the importance of farming, particularly dairy farming, to our local history. We offer a number of on-site children's educational programs in the summer, hold our annual Farm Day in September, and welcome scheduled tours throughout the year.

We believe our educational efforts can be broadened and enhanced through the hiring of an educational specialist to develop curriculum and conduct more educational programs both at the farm and in the broader community. We are in

the process of considering this and the cost ramifications, and we have decided to dedicate our 2015 Annual Fund efforts to our farm education and the possible employment of an educational specialist.

We hope you will support this effort and contribute generously to the Annual Fund.



New Hay Wagon

Progress on the Farm's Manure Storage Shed

Excavation for the Farm's 50 x 80 foot manure storage shed commenced in early August, funded by a Farm Improvement Grant from NRCS. Three weeks later, wood forms and reinforcing steel for the footing of the concrete basin were in place and ready for inspection by the design engineer, Jonathan Cote.

The schedule calls for all concrete casting work to be completed in early September, allowing Jim Moore, the carpentry subcontractor, to commence work on the wood trusses and corrugated metal roof.

The basin will have a capacity sufficient for storing the farm's entire manure output throughout the winter months when frozen ground prevents absorption of nutrients and risks environmentally negative rain-and-snowmelt runoff from the fields to enter the nearby brook.



Peter McEachern Excavating for the Farm's Manure Storage Shed

Hooray for Farm Day

Calling all farm friends, old and new, to join us on Saturday, September 20 from 12:30 – 3:30 for our annual family-friendly Historic O'Neil Farm Day. Park at Autumn Avenue then hitch a ride to the farmyard on our brand new hay wagon. There will be music, barn tours, old-fashioned games and crafts. Learn about 4-H programs, meet some of this year's calves and enjoy milking demonstrations with microphone-enhanced commentary by farmer Carl O'Neil – a big hit last farm day! We look forward to seeing you on September 20th. (Rain date is Sunday, September 21.)



Junior Friends Summer Program

The 2014 Junior Friends Summer Program took place during the first week of August. Five young people gained knowledge, skills and confidence while preparing two of our Guernsey calves for Farm Day. Under bright sunny skies, Bridget, Connor, Rachel, Daniel and Henry got a taste of the many chores that make up a dairy farmer's day as they brushed, haltered and taught the calves to lead. Everyone had the chance to try hand milking Sue Schortmann's milk cow, Acorn. Over the course of the week they also made butter and ice cream. On Friday, after a rousing game of O'Neil Farm Jeopardy, these new Junior Friends shared with family members what they had learned, all in preparation for answering questions from Farm Day guests.

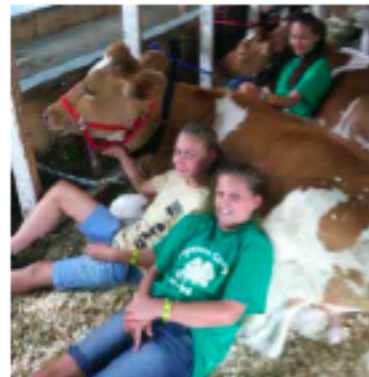
Farm Fun Photo Gallery



Alexa and Janie Nielsen, Farmatic 4-H members with their beautiful cows at the 2014 Benning County Fair



Corinne Lee and her calf, Taylor whom she leased from the O'Neil Farm, was second place at the Mass. State 4-H Dairy Show in their age division. This qualified them to be part of the State Team representing Massachusetts at The Eastern States Exposition (The Big E) in September.



Dory Noles, Sadie Noyes and Corinne Lee taking a break at the Marshfield Fair



Jr. Friends Henry and Danny showing calf to our 4th Annual Summer Program



Jr. Friends learning how to walk a calf



Boy Farm Members in 7th and 8th grades learned about dairy farming and worked with the calves on 5 Mondays this spring.