

Marelli's



465 Lafayette Rd

Uncle 'Lisha, Grocier

At the intersection of Winnacunnet and Landing Roads stands a red house that was once Hampton's only grocery and dry goods store. At that time the house was at the Landing. Later it was moved to its current location.

Elisha Johnson opened the store in his home in the early 1800s. He sold groceries in the large front room and dry goods in the smaller front room. Many of the items Johnson sold came from Boston.

Johnson never locked the door, but his customers knocked for admittance. They were from Hampton and the surrounding towns; some from Seabrook traveled by boat to shop.

In 1840 Johnson hired his grandnephew, John J. Leavitt, who was nine years old, as a clerk. After that Johnson was known to everyone as Uncle 'Lisha.

John slept in the small room, where his bed was used as a counter for measuring cloth. There were times when the counter was needed before John was up, and the customers had to wait!

The Incredible Egg

Hawks were a common – and troublesome – sight in the sky over Hampton during the late 1800s into the early 1900s. Why? Because hawks ate chickens, and chickens laid Hampton's most important agricultural product at that time – the egg.

Each week Hampton hens consumed an amount of grain that filled two railroad cars, and produced 1,800 dozen eggs. Three Hampton grocers, J. A. Lane, D. O. Leavitt and I. W. Mason, then shipped these 216,000 eggs to Massachusetts markets.

Eggs commanded high prices especially in Boston; \$1 per year profit per hen was considered good, although today that \$1 would not even buy an egg sandwich.

In 1892 the newspaper called Hampton "one of the best egg towns in New England."

He Had a Dream

In his editorials, Charles Francis Adams, editor of the *Hampton Union*, sometimes lamented the decline of farming in Hampton and appealed for its return.

He saw a strong demand for fruit and vegetables as he watched produce being trucked from Exeter to Hampton. He believed that with the scientific advances being made, farming could be a profitable undertaking.

In 1905 he wrote, “Hampton has a great future as a farming town” and described his vision:

“Some of the best soil in the world now produces nothing but salt hay and a few stunted trees and bushes. One of these days the Hampton marshes will be diked and drained, and will grow crops of celery, onions, cabbages, etc., that will be worth fortunes to the owners.”

Two years later he again urged: “...about 200 bushels of potatoes, plus thousands of boxes of strawberries, are being imported to town for home consumption, while many acres of good Hampton land lies in grass...”

As we know, Adams’ dream to develop Hampton’s marshes into farmland didn’t come true.

What's a Wolf Worth?

"Destroyers and devourers" of cattle and sheep. That's how the early settlers viewed wolves that made meals of their livestock.

To turn the tables, the town, as early as 1645, offered a bounty for each dead wolf:

"It is hereby declared that every townsman which shall kill a wolfe & bring the head thereof & nayne the same to a little red oake at the northeast end of the meetinghouse - they shall have 10s (shillings)."

In 1648, an Englishman who killed a wolf was paid at least 80 shillings, while an Indian was paid 20 shillings. In 1658 the bounty increased to five pounds and in 1663 to six pounds 10 shillings.

The 1660s were not good years for wolves with the development of this trap:

"Four mackerel hooks across were bound with a brown thread and then some wool is wrapped round them and they are dipped into melted tallow, till they be as big and round as an egg. This thing, thus prepared, is laid by some dead carcass. It is then swallowed by them (wolves), and is the means of their being taken."