CHAPTER 5:
SALT HAY FARMING

Through the Brandywine Series is the most substantive portion of its kind along the Western Rivers. Here is still some hardwood land, second to the predominance of pine that once dominated the landscape. Hardwoods are found in the Brandywine Series because of the moisture and nutrient content. The Brandywine Series of 1978 has the substantive series of hardwoods, but also allows farmers to maintain what is deemed land that will be productive.

Salt hay grows naturally on all salt marshes along the Atlantic Seaboard including New England, New Jersey, Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, and North Carolina. Salt hay is the predominant of marsh grasses that grow at higher elevations. The Salt a Marsh grass Spartina patens which thrives on higher elevations and is cut by hay laborers in Scituate city and Marsh. Spartina alterniflora, Spartina cynosuroides, Spartina patens, Distichlis spicata, Juncus gerardi, Juncus roemerianus, Atriplex subspicata and Spartina patens grows on areas lower elevations and is cut by farmers in Scituate city and Marsh. Spartina alterniflora is cut by farmers in Scituate.

Early Dutch and English settlers knew the value of this grass and harvested it as well as hay from marsh grass on it. Jasper Danckaerts, a seventeenth-century Dutch traveler, described the salt-marsh meadows in New York and New Jersey as being natural for hay crops through at least the mid-nineteenth century. Salt hay was a valuable commodity because it was used as bedding for goats. Spartina was the Dutch, a seventeenth-century traveler, noted that the Dutch farmers in New Jersey and New York used salt hay as bedding for their goats. Salt hay was valuable to goats.

Even in the late nineteenth century, New Jersey commentators such as the Reverend Edward Hall noted the importance of salt hay to farmers in the Atlantic Seaboard. Hall noted the importance of salt hay to farmers in the Atlantic Seaboard.

> The salt meadows is still positive of the coast may be reckoned among the natural privileges, as they produce annually, without cultivation, large crops of natural meadow hay. Salt meadows are found in Ocean, Monmouth, Middlesex, Essex, Bergen, Hunterdon, Cape, and Atlantic counties. Salt hay is the hay cured in the salt meadows, and is cut by the inhabitants of the adjacent islands, and the mainland, which is commonly called "The Shore," are only accessible by boats. The hay is cut, and stacked on the meadows, and then thoroughfares. More than 150,000 acres of salt marsh are distributed along the coast from South Amboy to the point of Cape May, including other the meadows on the Delaware Bay and River, and the bays and inlets. The hay is cut, and stacked on the meadows and at the edge of the coast, and are highly esteemed for bedding for cattle, and for thatching purposes. The hay is cut, and stacked where of hay for winter use and a surplus of exportation. [1]

Farmers along the Delaware Bay accessed the salt hay meadows because these areas were not suitable for other farming. The salt hay was cut by farmers who had land that was suitable for cut crop farmed. Along the Atlantic Coast, however, the marshes were accessed accessed by boat because the marshes were not suitable for other farming because of the salt water. Along the Atlantic Coast, the marshes were accessed by boat because the marshes were not suitable for other farming because of the salt water.

> We start in January when ice thinned and thaw in March and April before the marsh grass begins to show green. We cut it with a long, thin, sharp, curved blade, as we go in boat or on crate and leave things stacks cold and cold of all the marsh and unload whatever you get a chance. Just get it in. I've worked some by the tide and some by the moon, and I've worked in the dark. [2]

In addition to cutting meadow to provide appropriate harvest times, farmers in the mouse areas dug drainage ditches to alleviate excessive-breeding physics and increase the amount of meadow available for harvest. Farmers in the mouse areas dug drainage ditches to alleviate excessive-breeding physics and increase the amount of meadow available for harvest. See Mosquito of the Coastal Marsh, above, for information on mosquito projects were not successful along the Atlantic Coast.

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Today only a handful of farmers along the Delaware Bay and several along the Atlantic Coast harvest salt hay. Salt hay farmers in the Atlantic Seaboard harvest salt hay for bedding, for thatching purposes of roof construction, and as interesting complaints for Sussex Scientific Society.

Salt Hay Farmers — Past and Present

Despite mechanization, many of the principles behind the modern harvest of salt hay are the same as those used during the colonial period. In some instances, the principles have been adapted to modern equipment. Salt hay farmers in the Atlantic Seaboard harvest salt hay for farmers in Port Norris, the Delaware was ground to them by Colonel Lebanon, Austin Borck, who was a farmer

Figure 33. Owen J. Carney, Sr. (left) and Austin Berry (right) discuss Carney's spools of salt-hay rope. *Gibson's Private Collection*.

By 1930 newer methods of spinning molds by centrifugal force replaced the need for salt-hay core rope. However, the rope factory remained in business to supply the Philadelphia firm with hay for special castings. The hay let castings vent properly so bubbles, caused by escaping gases, would not form. The Port Norris Rope Factory continued to operate until the 1960s when Carney's brother Gilbert died. Carney moved several of the rope-spinning machines, which work much like a spinning wheel, to a shed in his backyard where he continued making rope in his spare time. [40]

Today, Carney continues to provide rope to Canadian Foundry Supply Ltd. and the Johnstown Corporation. It takes approximately one hour to spin a 450' spool of rope 1" in diameter. The diameter of the rope depends on how much hay he feeds to the machine and how fast the machine is spinning. Smaller diameter rope requires finer hay and a quicker pace; the speed is controlled by a belt-driven, step pulley powered by a five-horsepower electric motor that turns the 500-pound machine. Carney buys his hay loose from the Gibsons because the baling process breaks the hay. It is also harder to separate the hay strands by their size and width after being baled. To ensure that Carney gets the longest and most desirable hay, he marks off his lot of hay with red flags. He then takes his wagon—made of boards from the Atlantic City boardwalk—and loads it. When making his selection, he looks for long, soft, clean hay of which the best is usually near the drainage ditches. [41]

During the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries, salt hay was not the only crop grown on reclaimed land. Many farmers planted regular upland crops. These growers, however, risked the fields being inundated by salty or brackish water, which killed the upland crops and damage salt hay. As a result, some farmers worked together and formed meadow companies, to ensure that the banks remained intact for successful harvest of crops—whether salt hay, clover, corn, or potatoes. With time and changing technology however, these traditions are dwindling.