

THE WATER CLOSET

WATER RESOURCE AND CONSERVATION INFORMATION FOR MIDDLETON, BOXFORD AND TOPSFIELD

Precipitation Data* for Month of:	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan
30 Year Normal (1971 – 2000) Inches	4.12	4.48	3.96	3.80
2010-11 Central Watershed Actual	5.80	4.54	3.95	2.00 to 3 PM 1/18

Ipswich River Flow Rate (S. Middleton USGS Gage) in Cubic Feet per Second (CFS):
For January 18, 2011: Normal . . . 48 CFS Current Rate . . . 39 CFS

DOROTHY OF GREAT MARSH

Westerly beyond the arc of barrier beaches from Rye, New Hampshire, to Rockport, Massachusetts, are 25,000 or more acres of flat soft land interlaced with tidal creeks. These are our salt marshes that Whittier famously called “low green prairies of the sea” in his poem Snowbound. We old timers who grew up near salt marshes played upon and in them. In summer as children we’d visit several times a day at all tides to swim. The most popular place on the Salisbury salt marshes were meanders of increasing size in Pettengill’s Crick off the Merrimack River called Little Dock, Middle Dock and Big Dock. Young kids who couldn’t swim learned in the shallower-narrower Little Dock. Those who could only dog paddle short distances graduated to the Middle Dock a hundred yards down crick. The Big Dock, significantly deeper and wider, just around another meander was the place all aspired to. The name dock no doubt came from their use in earlier times when shallow draft scows called gundalows came in at high tide to off load salt hay. There is a rectangular cut in a bank off the Big Dock about 36 x 12-ft. just the size of a gundalow. Imagine the pool patio of soft grasses around our docks stretching from upland woods out more than a mile to the river and distant sand dunes, barriers to the sea beyond. The once “docks”, our swimming holes, are still there. Swimmers are not, even on hot days. Boring chlorinated pools have taken their place. Pettengill’s Crick is contiguous with the ocean, which twice daily flushes it clean.

The salt marshes of Massachusetts in the arc described above were dubbed “The Great Marsh”. Much of it was officially designated an Area of Critical Environmental Concern by the state in 1979. Salt marshes were certainly thought ‘great’ by those who swam, duck hunted, clammed, sailed, rowed, fished, hayed, bird watched, photographed, painted, ice cake jumped or simply hiked there. One old timer used to visit at all times of the year often on brittle ice when low tide cricks were more easily crossed. He would walk away his worries or sneak up for closer looks at ducks and shorebirds sheltered in the lee of banks. In summer he moored his skiff across a tight loop in Pettengill’s Crick called The Ox Bow. He and friend would row out and back on the tides to clam and fish on and above the Merrimack River flats. He too often tells us of those times. We stopped listening long ago.

Perhaps if he had had a camera like Dorothy Kerper Monnelly, just up the road in Ipswich from The Great Marsh, his stories would receive more attention. She too visits the salt marsh cricks, flats, and bars, punctuated by drumlins and dunes, with her large camera in all seasons. She returns with images needing no words. Thirty of her fine black-white photos and all shades in between now grace the foyer of the Cultural

Center at The Governor's Academy, once Governor Dummer, not far from the salt marshes of Byfield. In them she has captured many of the moods of our estuaries as they change daily with light, tide and season. We will not attempt to describe them in mere phrases; you must go and see for yourself. We'll simply list some elements on her palette, ones she didn't even have to brush, just choose: soft once salt hay grasses in wind and wave combed cowlicks, expanses of soft mud flats, wave ripples in firm sand, exposed crick banks of two millennia thick peat, cord grass or thatch between high and half-tide levels, glacier left drumlins, sand dunes and dune grasses, spongy sea ice, clouds, sun, moon, mists, forested upland knolls, pools of calm reflecting water, waves, snow streaks on ice, and more. We are sorely tempted to try and tell you more as glib art critics might. Some of us are irritated by such pretentious blather; we too have eyes and feelings. She and film have left room for any color we might want to add or not. Do we admire Chaplin, Bogart, and Davis movies any less because they are in so-called black and white? Those films leave us with something to do. Dorothy and Ansel Adam's photographs do too; on viewing we like what arises from their minds and souls and mingles with our own.

THE GREAT MARSH EXIBITION
Dorothy Kerper Monnelly
Large-Format Silver Gelatin Prints
January 3 through February 4, 2011
M-F 8 AM - 8 PM, Sat. 12-3, Sun. 3-5
The Peter R. Remis Lobby Gallery
Performing Arts Center
The Governor's Academy ("Governor Dummer")
1 Elm Street, Byfield, MA 01922

Note: Dorothy Kerper Monnelly published a handsome book of her photographs in 2006 entitled Between Land and Sea: THE GREAT MARSH, with forward by Jeanne Falk Adams and essay by Doug Stewart.

*Danvers Water Filtration Plant, Lake Street, Middleton
THE WATER CLOSET is provided by the Middleton Stream Team:
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