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## Seabrook Educational & Cultural Center Bulletin

Upper Deerfield Township Municipal Building  
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Hours: Monday - Thursday 9:00 am - 12:00 noon  
Additional visiting hours by appointment



Vol. 3, No. 35 Winter 2018-2019

### Research: Seabrook Farms Founder, Charles Franklin (C.F.) Seabrook 1881-1964

By John M. Seabrook, Jr.  
President, SECC

As most of you know, the Seabrook Educational and Cultural Center is a non-profit organization and museum that was created in the mid-1990's by John Fuyume, Ellen Nakamura, and the local chapter of the Japanese American Citizens League. The institution's first and abiding reason for being is to serve as a place of remembrance for the community of Japanese Americans who came to Seabrook as workers from the wartime internment camps, beginning in 1943, and for their families and descendants.

The SECC still is that. Local student groups also visit occasionally, and a few outsiders who are curious about Seabrook Farms history sometimes drop in. But foot traffic isn't what it used to be; there's been a steady falling off over the years. People who came to Seabrook from camp have mostly passed away, and many of their children have moved away; and if you look into the future ten more years you begin to wonder whether the SECC will survive outside of someone's attic and a website. I know that was the thinking of Bruce Peterson, who I took over from as President of the SECC in 2018, and who inherited that position from Ellen Nakamura, who was really the driving force behind the layout of the museum and its exhibitions.

If the museum were to go away, it would be a loss not only for the community but also for the nation. Located in the basement of the Municipal Building in Upper Deerfield, the museum serves as a reminder of the greatest single violation of American citizens' constitutional rights in our national history: the internment of 120,000 U.S. citizens of Japanese ancestry in concentration camps, mostly in the West, after the attack on Pearl Harbor in December, 1941. This happened on U.S. soil, and the SECC is here in part to help educate people so that something like this doesn't happen again.

When I joined the board of the SECC in 2016, I thought about what I could do for the organization. Given my background and skill set as a journalist, one service that I reckoned I could provide the SECC would be to build out our narrative. That is, I could

amplify and improve the Seabrook Farms story that we tell in the museum, to make it more accurate, more accessible, and more inclusive of other worker groups who passed through Seabrook. At the very least we needed to deal with the crucial labor strikes of April and June 1934, the single biggest event in Seabrook Farms history that we hardly mention at all.

More generally, it seemed to me that in order to grow, the SECC should situate the Seabrook story and our collection of photographs, oral histories, and other archival company materials within a younger and larger community of students and scholars, who will use our materials in their own studies and research and writing about workers' rights, labor, the mechanization and industrialization of agriculture, food processing, and other important strands of 20<sup>th</sup> century history.

As a model of that kind of collaboration, I could point to our recent work with Andrew Urban and Kayo Denda of Rutgers University, who have incorporated SECC materials into their curriculum and introduced students to our story. We were delighted that Professor Urban brought a group of educators from all around the country, who were doing a program at Rutgers, down to Seabrook last summer, so that they could learn about our story and use the SECC's online resources, such as they are, in their teaching back home.

In order to further those links, and as a step toward creating a much richer and more immersive online timeline of the Seabrook story, I feel we need to get our own narrative house in order. The history we tell of the company and its founder, my grandfather C.F. Seabrook, is taken straight from the company's public relations materials. It has never been independently verified. Our narrative is the story C.F. Seabrook himself wanted told, and Granddad was a very unreliable narrator, as it turns out. John Fuyume was one of C.F.'s greatest loyalists, and he saw to it that the Old Man's legacy was preserved as he would have wished it to be in the museum. Indeed, John did C.F. a solid by turning C.F. into a humanitarian. But we can't expect the academic community to take us seriously at any level, from middle school upward, if we continue to make this public relations narrative our story. We need to tell a story that is closer to the truth.

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Funding has been made possible in part by the New Jersey Historical Commission/Department of State and the Cumberland and Salem County Board of Chosen Freeholders through the Cumberland and Salem County Cultural and Heritage Commission.

### INTERNSHIPS

Location: Seabrook Educational and Cultural Center, 1325 Highway 77 in the lower level of the Upper Deerfield Township Municipal Building, (Cumberland County) Seabrook, NJ 08302

Our organization: We are both a museum and archive.  
<http://seabrookeducation.org/>

Intern/job duties and responsibilities: May include cataloging the collection in finer detail, scanning documents/photographs, creating membership/donation/acquisition records, general office tasks or performing as a museum docent.

Requirements and qualifications: High school, college bound or college students willing to do repetitive computer based work and willing to learn the Seabrook story in order to engage the public during visitation. Ability to lift 30 lbs.

Benefits of the internship: Gas reimbursement for specific short-term project work. Volunteer /computer training, and group trips.

Schedule and duration: During our open hours, (Monday – Thursday, 9AM-Noon) 12 to 24 hours per month or summer assignments.

Apply: Send resume and cover letter to seabrookhistory@gmail.com



Rutgers University Intern Kai Zook and Professor Andy Urban presented Zook's work to SECC volunteers Bonnie Bertram and Harvey Friedman. Zook reviewed his project "Japanese Americans at Seabrook Farms Database Project." Urban continues to focus on academic projects that reveal far more than is currently understood about Seabrook's role in industrializing agriculture and how the workers were effected.

### Upcoming Events

**March 24** John M. Seabrook, Jr. presents *C.F. Seabrook, Construction Engineer 1920-1931*. Lecture series, Cumberland County Historical Society 2PM.

**April 27** Community Day, open 10AM-4PM. History Program by John M. Seabrook, Jr. Municipal Building Courtroom. 1PM.

**July 10** Annual General Meeting 4:30PM

**July 20** Obon Festival, Seabrook Buddhist Temple, 4-8PM.  
History Program @ SECC (Open 1-4PM) 1PM.

**September 11** Annual SECC/JACL Joint Boards Volunteer Appreciation Dinner

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I wasn't sure how much work this extended, gut-renovation of the Seabrook Farms narrative would require. I knew that the work was necessarily going to involve confronting C.F. Seabrook's segregationist policies and views, in one way or another. I was worried about what we might find out, and how that was might undermine the foundations of the SECC. After all, the museum serves at least in part as a sort of monument to the so-called white patriarchy, as seen in the life story of our classic capitalist hero, C.F. Seabrook, one of those white men who made America great in the first place.

To help me with the research, I employed a young assistant, Alexandra Kelly Wainwright, who some in the Seabrook community have come to know as Lexie. Being twenty-five, Lexie is digitally native in a way I will never be, and was able to uncover a lot of new information in on-line databases. (In return, I taught her how to use a microfilm machine.) We sometimes worked in the Cumberland County Historical Society, on Wednesdays, mainly with the newspapers in back. At least five local papers were in circulation during the early Seabrook Farms years, and each gives you a different perspective and flavor; you can spend hours just looking at the ads for local services and magical elixirs to ease aches and pains that time has long since cured. When I think of future researchers having only NJ.com to work with, I feel a little sad.

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Most of what we know about Seabrook Farms history, and almost all of the thousands of photographs of life in Seabrook, were left behind by the Seabrook Farms public relations staff, who were a vital part of company's overall business strategy. All this promotional material was apparently of no interest to the Seeman Brothers, the wholesale grocers who C.F. sold the company to in 1959. So the SECC got it, and it forms the foundation of our collection, especially on the visual side.

Many of our photographs were taken for *The Seabrooker*, the company's monthly magazine. *The Seabrooker* had its own staff of photographers and salaried storytellers, a group I have come to think of as the Seabrook Story Corps, whose sole purpose was to create stories about life and work on the farm, and about the Old Man, as C.F. was called from his early thirties. Devoting significant company resources to telling all aspects of its own story is one constant from the early day of Seabrook Farms all the way through the nineteen fifties. C.F.'s instinctive grasp of the power of images and narratives to advance his interests and, later, his brand, was one of his most forward-looking innovations. But we need to distance ourselves from that public relations in order to capture this aspect of the Seabrook story.

One thing that seems clearer from a distance is that while C.F. Seabrook was a pretty good farmer, and he was also a fine self-taught engineer, his truly outstanding talent was for promotion - both of his business projects and of himself. PR was always a major part of C.F.'s business plan, and the Story Corp served as his narrative road crew, paving the countryside with printed *Seabrookers* that contained legends of the Old Man's work ethic, his clairvoyance, and his wisdom, for all his workers to read and marvel at in the pages. Eventually some of these stories found their way into the mainstream press, such as in the 1920 Forbes article, titled "The Henry Ford of Agriculture," which easily could have been written by the Seabrook public relations department.

It wasn't until C.F. bought out his father, Arthur P. Seabrook, and incorporated Seabrook Farms, in 1911, when he was thirty, that my grandfather discovered his true vocation as a stock promoter. C.F. realized early on that the best way to sell stock in his various promotions was to be the Henry Ford of Agriculture, America's most famous farmer. But in fact, the P.T. Barnum of Agriculture is closer to what C.F. Seabrook actually was. Acting on guidance from C.F.'s uncle Albert Seabrook, A.P.'s younger brother, the Story Corps created the myth of C.F. Seabrook, both to sell stock in the company, and to persuade banks and the government to lend Seabrook Farms money. I've met a lot of promotion-minded business men in my journalism career, but until we began investigating dear old Grandad, I had never met one as wily and as bold as he was. No detail was too small, no stratagem too big for the Old Man, who stood 5'8" in shoes.

In 1994, all this material promoting C.F. and the company over the years was repurposed as history on the walls of the SECC's museum. It was never intended to be history. The storylines are taken straight from the Story Corps. In a way, we're still doing PR for a company that hasn't actually existed for sixty years. That's one measure of just how potent and durable the Seabrook Farms public relations really was.

But we aren't selling creamed spinach anymore. We leave the frozen vegetable business to my cousins over at Seabrook Brothers and Sons. And when you're selling history, there are obvious problems with relying on hype as your starting point. "We Grow Our Own So We Know It's Good" was once the company's motto, and I would like to apply that to the history we are serving students, educators, storytellers and scholars. Continuing to white wash Seabrook history doesn't get us where we want to go as an institution.

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I was born in Cumberland County, sixty years ago. C.F. sold the family business about four months after I was born, and I never experienced life in Seabrook firsthand. C.F. evicted us from the so-called Ballinger House, in Seeley, in October of 1959, when I was nine months old, and we moved to the farm in Mannington Township, Salem County, twenty miles from Seabrook. I never really knew my grandfather, who died when I was five, in 1964. I subsequently learned that my grandfather didn't want to know me. After the sale of the company, he and my father remained estranged, and C.F. never actually acknowledged my birth, even though he met me at least once that I remember.

I knew Seabrook only through occasional visits for special family events and holidays, which sometimes included services in the Deerfield Presbyterian Church, C.F.'s church -- he and my father as well as my mother and many other Seabrooks are buried across the road, and that's probably where I'll end up too.

Growing up, most of what I knew about the history of my family and of Seabrook Farms came from stories that I heard from my father, John Seabrook, called Jack, who was the youngest of C.F.'s four children. (The others were Belford, Courtney, and Thelma.) I also heard stories from John Fuyuume himself, who ended up working for my father in his new business career at International Utilities.

In spite of the way things ended between them, my father always spoke with respect, even reverence, about his father's accomplishments, when he spoke of his father at all. C.F. Seabrook, he told me, was the man who brought irrigation to South Jersey, in the form of the Skinner Overhead Irrigation System that he and A.P. set up over a small patch behind the barn in Deerfield in 1907. But he didn't actually talk that much about his father, or about the business. He preferred to put all that in the past.

I got more from C.F.'s old cronies. My favorite was Jonas MacGalliard, who served C.F. in various positions, including driver. Jonas had a marvelous vocabulary and way of using words that for me will always be part of the linguistic DNA of this place. I remember him saying that my grandfather not only thought big, he wrote big too. In particular he didn't write normal-sized numbers on a piece of paper. He made giant numbers, so that when he wrote a number down, Jonas said, "you knew that it was down." To a kid trying to imagine the grandeur that had been Seabrook Farms and, confusingly, no longer existed, here was something I could grasp onto. Grandad made his numbers BIG!

It was partly because I grew up with these stories of invention and industry within my own family -- such as the ingenious boil-in-the-bag method of cooking frozen creamed spinach that was developed at Seabrook Farms -- that I became a professional storyteller myself. Eventually I got to write for the New Yorker, where I often reported on inventors and industrialists in various forms, men not unlike my mental image of my grandfather. One of those pieces, "Flash of Genius," about the inventor of the intermittent windshield wiper, was made into a film by Marc Abraham.

I've been a staff writer at the magazine for twenty-five years now, and some of you may have read stories of mine, including the piece from 1995 that told the history of Seabrook Farms, as I understood it then. The occasion for that piece, called "The Spinach King," was the inaugural address that my father had agreed to deliver at the opening of the SECC, in the summer of 1994, twenty-five years ago this year.

Although normally a fluid speech maker, my father had come down with a strange case of writers' block in preparing his remarks, and he had asked me for my assistance - the first time he had ever done that. As we worked on his speech together, I sensed that the heroic stories of my grandfather that he had dazzled me with as a boy didn't sit as well with him now, these many years on, as he approached his eightieth birthday. I sensed in his difficulty in writing that speech that there was much more to the story than he was letting on, but in my piece I deferred to my father's discretion and went no further than to speculate about what might have been troubling him.

Now I know.

*NOTE: To be continued in our next issue with the following invitation:*

We will begin sharing what we've uncovered, in a series of talks about Seabrook history. The first will be held at the Cumberland County Historical Society on Sunday March 24<sup>th</sup>, at 2 P.M. The next one will be Saturday, April 27<sup>th</sup>, at 1 P.M. as part of the SECC's Community Day in Upper Deerfield. These and future talks will be published in SECC newsletters after I give them, and we'll have them on YouTube as well.

Yours Truly,

John M. Seabrook, Jr.

Right: The Seabrooker Staff guided by Ed Taubert in the 1950's.

