



Crestwood Village Sun

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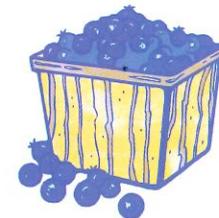


Digital photo by Pat Coakley



Photo by Marshall Sewell

• Down the Road Into Blueberry History



- **Front and Center...**
Staff Sgt. Frederick Womack
US Army





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SECTION B

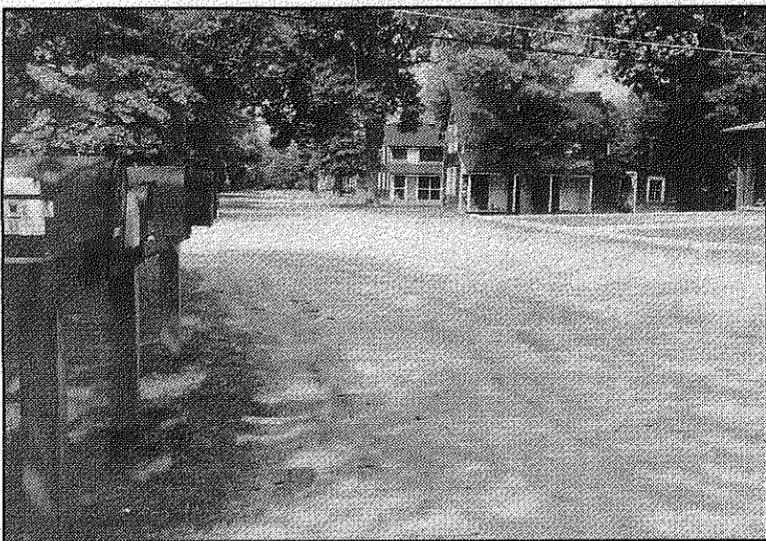
Down the Road into Blueberry History



Visitors stroll the Blueberry Festival.

They came from all over to celebrate the "birth of the blues," those cultivated high-bush blueberries developed at Whitesbog, just six miles down the road, and which many health experts call the "miracle fruit." The occasion was the 20th annual Whitesbog Blueberry Festival on a hot, sunny June 28, an event that attracted nearly 5,000 people of all ages.

Many New Jersey towns are proud of their "firsts." Thomas Edison invented the light bulb in Menlo Park and manufactured it in West Orange. Hobokenites say the first baseball game was played in their town, not Cooperstown, and of course they also had Frank Sinatra. Albert Einstein walked the streets of Princeton. Walt Whitman lived in Camden. Bruce Springsteen was born in Freehold and brought fame to Asbury Park, and Atlantic City produced Miss America.



Mail boxes serve families living in the original houses.

It was just a tiny settlement of 35 buildings, set back in the pine woods and surrounded by open cranberry bogs along sandy roads, that produced the remarkable blueberry we know today. Some of us remember, as kids, picking wild blueberries (sometimes called huckleberries as in *Huckleberry Finn*) in the woods of New Hampshire or Pennsylvania. The modern blueberry is grown in cultivated rows in 37 states and 21 countries, and it all started in Whitesbog, which is mostly in Burlington County (Pemberton Township) but also partly in Ocean County (Manchester Township).

This year's festival featured games, educational exhibits, demonstrations, wagon tours, an antique engine display, and all kinds of food items with blueberries as their main ingredient. There was only one problem: No Whitesbog blueberries!

Anyone waiting to pick their own blueberries at Champion's on Cherry Street in Whiting knew on June 28 that the local berries had not yet ripened. Out at Emery's Berry Patch, Long Swamp Road, New Egypt, Susan Marchese, the proprietor, said this year's blueberry crop was three weeks late.

"We had 40 days of rain and one week of sun this spring," Susan said. "Blueberries need the sun to ripen them, and continued sunshine will sweeten them."

So what to do at a blueberry festival without blueberries? Most of the vendors and exhibitors who sold blueberry foodstuffs brought their wares, already baked or prepared, like pies, ice cream, fritters and so on. The ice

cream line was long because of the 90-degree temperature, and the home gardeners were able to tote their purchased blueberry bushes on their laps on the shuttle bus back to transit the parking area. The bus bumped along on roads never intended for mass transit.

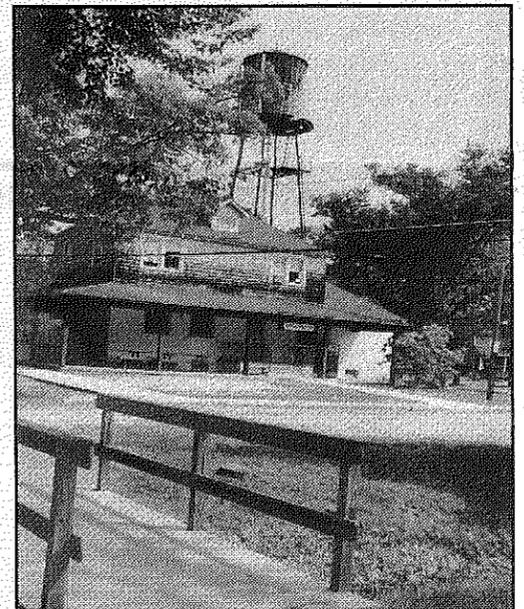
Planned bus tours to the blueberry patch had to be cancelled. Instead, fresh blueberries were brought in from Hammonton in Atlantic County, the center of today's Jersey blueberry industry, where apparently the weather conditions had been more favorable for growing.

Even without Whitesbog-grown berries, the visitors had fun doing other things, including listening to folk singer Valerie Vaughn, the Sugar Sand Ramblers and story-tellers Dave Orleans and Jim Albertson. Children enjoyed face painting and a scavenger hunt. Pinelands artists explained their work, and Howard Boyd, author and leading expert on Pinelands plant life, signed his books.

Tom Darlington, former manager of the original J. J. White blueberry growers and now active in the Whitesbog Preservation Trust, gave a demonstration of barrel making in one of the restored workshops, a skill he learned on his own after his retirement.

Terri Loy and others from the Woodford Cedar Run Wildlife Refuge released a Cooper's Hawk, one of an endangered species, into the wild. Lois Morris, Whiting naturalist and a volunteer with the Whitesbog Trust, assisted at the General Store, selling blueberry preserves and other food items outside the store.

A highlight of the day was the guided tour, available all day, of Suningive, the former home of the blueberry's developer, Elizabeth White. Some background on Whitesbog is in order.



Historic General Store and water tower at Whitesbog.



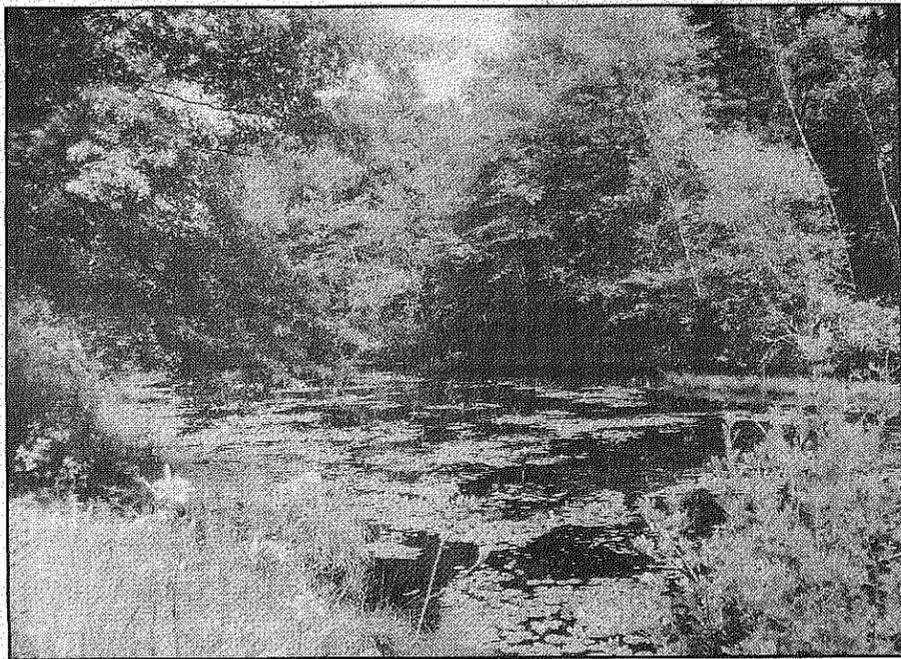
Suningive, where Elizabeth White developed the cultivated blueberry.

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**Deadline for Articles
for September 2003 issue:
August 12**

Whitesbog's History: It was in 1916, almost 90 years ago, that Elizabeth White announced the successful cultivation of the blueberry, after working on its research with Dr. Frederick Coville of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Actually, it was another berry, the cranberry, that launched the White family into the blueberry business. Four years before the Civil War, cranberry agriculture was begun by Colonel James A. Fenwick on the present site of Whitesbog.

Fenwick's son-in-law, Joseph Josiah White, inherited the tract and it became known as White's Bogs. Elizabeth was the eldest of White's four daughters and the one most interested in agricultural research. Most of her work was done in the White homestead, Suningive. Visitors during the Blueberry Festival learned that her office and laboratory were downstairs and the living quarters were upstairs.



"Every season brings special and unusual beauty," wrote Elizabeth White.

Elizabeth told friends that she loved to look out from her second-story windows at the view of the cranberry bogs and blueberry fields. She denied that she did it to check up on the farm workers; she just enjoyed the view. Later, she would write of her love for Whitesbog in her book, *Taming Blueberries*: "Every season brings special and unusual beauty." Those who stroll or ride bicycles down Whitesbog's roads, especially in the cooler days of late summer, fall and winter, readily agree with Elizabeth's description.

Today Whitesbog is an important part of the Brendan Byrne (formerly Lebanon) State forest. Of all the places we have featured in our "day trip" stories, Whitesbog is probably the easiest to find. Drive to the intersection of Route 70 and 539 (Exxon and Wawa). Go west on 70 about five miles to the Route 530 turnoff. Bear right and go one mile to the entrance to Whitesbog. The General Store is straight ahead as you enter the village. The workshops and workers' cottages are to the left, Suningive down the road to the right.

Seven of the buildings are private residences and not open to the public. The General Store is open on weekends from 10:00 AM to 4:00 PM during the summer. Blueberry products are on sale in the store. The village itself is open to visitors from dawn to dusk, as is the entire state forest.

This year's events at Whitesbog include moonlight walks at 7:00 PM August 9, September 13, October 11 and November 8. "Pinelands Month" will be kicked off October 4 under the sponsorship of the Pinelands Preservation Alliance.

The Whitesbog Preservation Trust, whose mission is to restore, protect and enhance the property, is always seeking volunteers. Currently, the volunteers meet on the first Saturday of each month, working on such projects as the restoration of Elizabeth White's garden and the conversion of the old barrel warehouse into an agricultural museum. To find out more about Whitesbog, including volunteer activities, call Theresa Early at 1-609-893-4646.

Health Benefits of Blueberries: A truly remarkable fruit, it has been called the "miracle berry" by many nutrition experts, one of them going so far as to state, "It keeps you younger than nature intended." Whether that is true or not, there is ample evidence that it can help prevent many of our most critical health problems.

It is definitely a low-calorie sweet (80 calories per cup) and a major source of fiber. It helps lower blood pressure and it absorbs fewer calories into the body than other foods. While some authorities went so far as to claim "it reverses the aging process," others were less certain of this but did say that research showed that blueberry extract had a significant effect on balance and coordination.

A recent study at Tufts University rated the blueberry as No. 1 in antioxidants when compared with 40 other fruits and vegetables. In tests with mice, the blueberry "slowed age-related loss in their mental capacity." It is also thought to reduce the buildup of bad cholesterol in the body. A Rutgers study showed that the blueberry promotes urinary tract health, a claim similarly made for the cranberry.

Blueberries are rich in Vitamins A and C, iron, magnesium and other minerals. Meridian Health System stated that blueberries help fight cancer

and heart disease, and they help preserve mental alertness. St. Barnabas Health Care System added that the berries' high pectin level lowers the bad cholesterol level and may even fight skin wrinkling and varicose veins.

All this seems to disprove the old belief that "if it tastes good, it can't possibly be good for you." So how best to enjoy blueberries, whether on your cereal, in muffins or in pies?

"Keep them in their plastic containers in your refrigerator," said Susan Marchese of Emery's. "Don't wash them until just before you eat them. Fresh berries should be safe to eat for at least two weeks if kept refrigerated."

Will the 2003 blueberry season last longer into August since it started so late? Stefan Thompson thought it might, from what he has heard from the growers. Stefan is executive director of the Whitesbog Trust.

More Blueberry Info: According to a gardening program on NJN-TV, focusing on blueberry lore in South Jersey's Pinelands, if you want to start your own blueberry garden, expect to harvest a healthy crop in five years. You should prune your bushes all the way to the ground at that point. Make sure you cover your plants with netting, especially after the berries appear, to keep the birds away.

You can get more tips on blueberry cultivation from the Rutgers Cooperative Extension of Ocean County, 1623 Whitesville Road, Toms River 08755, phone (732) 349-1227.

New Jersey is second only to Michigan in acreage devoted to blueberry production, but in new technology we are first, according to the gardeners on NJN. New Jersey has 8,000 acres of blueberry fields, most of them in the Hammonton area. You can get an idea of the immense size of the blueberry region by driving from Batsto into Hammonton, then southeast toward Somers Point. Incidentally, what you see when approaching Whitesbog on 530 are cranberry bogs, where in midwinter the tundra swans from northern Canada can sometimes be seen.

Official State Fruit? Blueberries are in the news these days, and not just because of the Whitesbog Festival. A group of fourth graders from Brick Township, through their area assemblyman, petitioned the State Legislature to declare the blueberry "New Jersey's official state fruit." The bill has passed the Assembly but, at the time this was written, had not yet been voted on by the Senate.

Some newspaper editorials chided the Legislature for not spending time instead on more important issues. The cranberry people said their fruit should have been chosen. So did the peach people. Even the tomato people got into the act. (Is the tomato a fruit or vegetable? An old argument).

"Sour grapes," or words to that effect, said the blueberry people. After all, anything that promises to make old people younger deserves a special honor. Maybe we should have a blueberry license plate, too?—*Story and photos by Marshall Sewell*

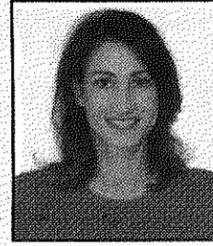
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