

Whitesbog captures history of Pines' industry

The story of Whitesbog begins at the site of the former Hanover Iron Furnace. The production of iron was a dynamic and important industry in the Pines, but ultimately the most destructive.

The process of dredging the land and diverting water had a devastating effect on the land. Ironically, it was the physical conditions produced by the iron industry that set the stage for cranberry cultivation.

The American cranberry grows naturally and extensively in swampy areas and thrived in the disturbed strip-mined conditions in the Pinelands.

Realizing the potential market for this crop, an enterprising Colonel named James A. Fenwick purchased a 490-acre tract that included the site of the former canal and canal pond that fed Hanover Furnace during its operation. He proceeded to cultivate the land for cranberries.

By the 1860s Colonel Fenwick's efforts proved to be successful and the cranberry boom began.

Land that was thought to be worthless was suddenly found capable of producing 30 to 60 barrels of cranberries worth about \$10 each in American markets and \$20 in Europe.

Whitesbog's founder, J.J. White, was an innovative cranberry farmer who revolutionized the cranberry farming industry in New Jersey.

Joseph Josiah White, commonly called "J.J.," was born January 22, 1846 in Springfield Township in northern Burlington County.

J.J. White started with 100-acres given to him by his grandfather in 1866. He later acquired his brother George's 100-acre adjacent tract, after which he incorporated the "Rake Pond Cranberry Company" with assets of \$30,000.

On November 11, 1869, J.J. White married Mary A. Fenwick, daughter of Colonel James A. Fenwick. They spent the following winter preparing a book on cranberry cultivation that became a standard guide in the industry.

In 1882, colonel Fenwick died and left his cranberry farm to his wife, appointing J.J. sole executor and manager.

During the next 30 years, White expanded his bogs and became the first grower to actually dig bogs and cultivate cranberries where they did not grow naturally.

The action was so novice that while he was developing the bogs his friends referred to the venture as "White's Folly."

On the contrary, by 1912, "White's Folly" was the largest cranberry operation in New

born in 1871. She began working on her father's cranberry plantation in 1893.

An enterprising young Elizabeth developed an interest in cultivating the land between the cranberry bogs where wild blueberries were growing.

Blueberries ripen earlier than do cranberries. Their harvesting in July would complement the cranberry harvest in September.

Many New Jersey farmers tried to cultivate the plants in their gardens but without success. At the time, it was generally accepted that blueberries could not be cultivated.

Elizabeth did not have the scientific background or education necessary to cultivate the fruit herself. However, in 1911 she read about Dr. Frederick V. Coville's work in blueberry cultivation.

Realizing the potential value of this work, Elizabeth convinced her father to support Dr. Coville's research.

Elizabeth knew that the size of the cranberry farming operation at Whitesbog could provide the financing and infrastructure necessary to carry out experiments on a large scale. Dr. Coville agreed to do his research at Whitesbog.

In 1916, only five years after Elizabeth White's alliance with Dr. Coville, they had managed to cultivate and produce a blueberry ripe for sale.

Elizabeth coordinated and managed the labor-intensive process of gathering the berries while Coville applied his scientific knowledge and technique necessary to propagate and hybridize fruit.

Recognizing their ability in distinguishing the endless varieties of blueberries in the fields, Elizabeth hired the local "Pineys" to search the Pines within a 20-mile radius of Whitesbog and locate the choicest blueberry shrubs.

Each person was given a gauge to measure the size of the berries. The plants of the largest were moved to Whitesbog for cultivation and often named after the person who found them.

The result of the blueberry research done at Whitesbog was the production of a new crop, as well as the entirely new business of propagating and selling blueberry bushes.

At its production peak, Whitesbog had 90 acres of blueberries under cultivation.

Elizabeth's business prowess did not end with cultivation. In 1927, Elizabeth helped organize the New Jersey Blueberry Cooperative Association. She was also the first woman member of the American Cranberry Association and became its first fe-

death in 1954.

Whitesbog Village is also the former home of many laborers who worked in the cranberry bogs and blueberry fields. It was essentially a, "company town."

Forty-one workers and their families lived in Whitesbog Village in rented houses provided by the company.

The village had a general store, a post office, a schoolhouse and a pay office. The cranberry production facilities were also located in the village.

These buildings included an innovative packing and sorting house, where the cranberries were processed and stored; a barrel factory, where the barrels used to store the cranberries were made; and a barrel storage house, where the cranberry barrels were stored until needed.

A water tower provided fire protection and served as a lookout to spot forest fires and observe the surrounding system of bogs. With few exceptions the buildings of Whitesbog Village

exists today.

The historic Village of Whitesbog served as the main settlement and service center for J.J. White's operation through the 1940s. As advances were made in the technology of cranberry and blueberry harvesting, the need for large numbers of laborers declined.

The introduction of "wet" harvesting reduced the number of employees needed to a minimum. However, up until the early 1960s Whitesbog continued to house some of the employees of the J.J. White Company, currently owned and managed by J.J. White's grandson, Tom Darlington.

The Company owns modern bogs on acreage south of Whitesbog and also leases some of the bogs at the original site.

In 1967, the State of New Jersey, Department of Environmental Protection, brought many of the farms in the Pinelands under the Green Acres Land Acquisition Act and created the Pinelands National Reserve. Included in that purchase

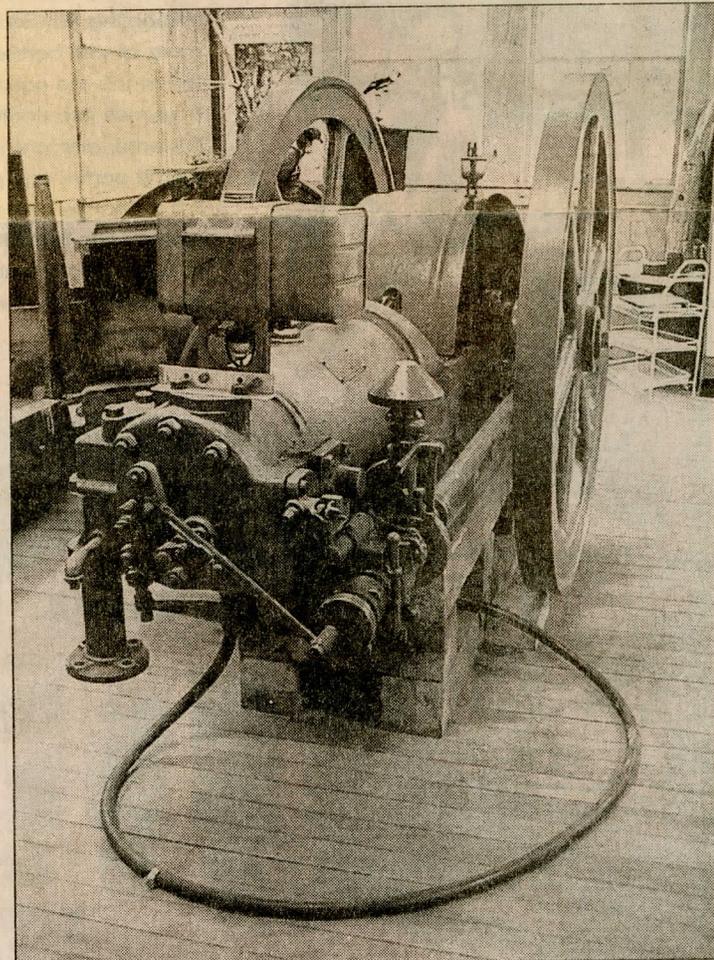


Photo by JONATHAN CARLUCCI

This engine once powered a sawmill at Lebanon State Forest. The forest provided lumber for the building industry and charcoal production until it was depleted.

still stand today.

In addition to the permanent workers who lived at Whitesbog, Italian immigrants were hired from the neighborhoods of near-by south Philadelphia to work during the harvest season

was the small village of Whitesbog. The village and its surrounding 3,000-acre tract of land then became part of Lebanon State Forest where it remains today.

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On the contrary, by 1912, "White's Folly" was the largest cranberry operation in New Jersey.

It was here at Whitesbog that the first marketable blueberry was developed through the efforts of Elizabeth C. White, J.J. White's oldest daughter.

J.J. White had four daughters, only one of whom took an active role in the family business. Elizabeth C. White was

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Elizabeth's business prowess did not end with cultivation. In 1927, Elizabeth helped organize the New Jersey Blueberry Cooperative Association. She was also the first woman member of the American Cranberry Association and became its first female member to receive the New Jersey Department of Agriculture's citation.

Elizabeth became one of the first major growers to move to the bogs in 1923.

Ms. White lived at "Sunning-ive," her home in Whitesbog Village, next to her grandfather Fenwick's first bog, until her

berry barrels were stored until needed.

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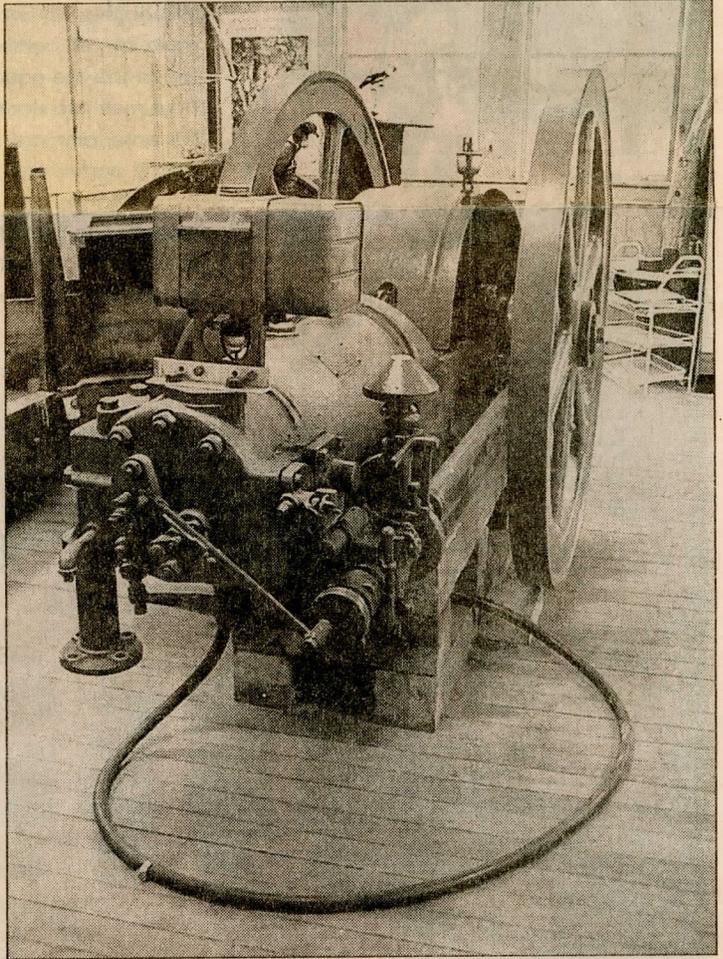


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In addition to the permanent workers who lived at Whitesbog, Italian immigrants were hired from the neighborhoods of near-by south Philadelphia to work during the harvest season.

These "seasonal" workers were employed from the beginning of September to mid-October.

Seasonal workers lived on the bogs during their employment and were housed in neighboring villages called Florence and Rome. Neither of these villages

was the small village of Whitesbog. The village and its surrounding 3,000-acre tract of land then became part of Lebanon State Forest where it remains today.

The above information is part of a summary of the "Historic Architectural Survey and Preservation Planning project" for the Village of Whitesbog, Burlington and Ocean Counties, NJ, by the Historic Conservation & Interpretation, Inc. September

1982.

Directions to Lebanon and Whitesbog

Lebanon State Forest and the Whitesbog historic site are located in both Ocean and Burlington counties. Most of the forest is to the east of Route 70 beginning just south of Route 539 and continuing south to Route 72.

Whitesbog is off Route 70 west of Route 539.

From northern New Jersey and New York City, take the Garden State Parkway to Exit 88. Take Route 70 West to Route

530. Turn right onto Route 530 for one mile to Mile Marker 13.

From the NJ Turnpike, take Exit 7 to Route 206 South to the intersection of Routes 206, 38 and 530. Turn east onto 530 and follow to Mile Marker 13.

From the Ocean County coastal area, take either Route 72 West, Route 539 north, Lacey Road to Route 70 or Route 72 to the intersection of Route 539. Turn right onto Route 539.