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*Blueberry Festival
Whitesburg*

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Thousands attend annual Blueberry Festival

by Marie Reynolds

Whitesbog -- A trip through one section of the Lebanon State Forest, hundreds of people learned last Sunday, is far more than a look at the Jersey Pine Barrens in all their splendor. In fact, those who stepped into Whitesbog Village over the weekend for the annual Blueberry Festival found themselves smack in the middle of the 1800's.

Once again this year, through the efforts of the Whitesbog Preservation Trust, the New Jersey Conservation Foundation and Pinelands Commission, the True-Blue Cooperative Association, the New Jersey Division of Juvenile Services, the J. J. White Company and the Pemberton Township Lions Club, the blueberry fest succeeded in acquainting vast numbers of New Jerseyans with the turn-of-the-century agricultural settlement. That, says Michele Byers of the Preservation Trust, is the main purpose of the annual event. Members of the trust, she says, are consistently involved in fund-raising activities to restore many of the buildings which housed blueberry

and cranberry harvesters back in the 1800's, but more than that, they wish to bring to there the unique heritage which Whitesbog has to share.

While the Blueberry Festival brings crowds together for a day of fun and activities including a two-mile fun race and a 10K cross country run, it also serves as an opportunity for those schooled in the cultural and environmental heritage of the pines to share their knowledge with the general public.

Throughout the day last Sunday, the curious, the civic and environmental-minded, as well as the casual onlookers were served up a

wealth of knowledge on the history of the Whitesbog Village. Bus tours were guided around the 3,000-acre plantation, a documentary entitled "Whitesbog, A Century of Innovation" was shown, and several distinguished speakers were gathered together to detail the environmental attributes of the village in the center of the Pine Barrens.

Meanwhile, over 500 registrants took part in the races sponsored by the participating organizations, winning T-shirts and flats of blueberries for their efforts, and a sense of accomplishment. Hundreds of others strolled leisurely through the village,

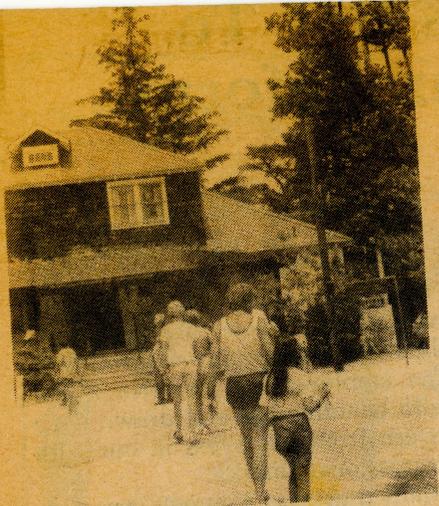
envisioning the plantation as it might have been back in 1916 when Elizabeth White emerged from the bogs clutching the first commercially cultivated blueberry.

Those strolling along the bogs perimeters and down lanes shaded by pine forestry were entertained by the strains of Bluegrass music emanating from the main festival area. In that area, merchants and vendors sold new and used items as well as handmade crafts and, of course, the delicacies of the area. When the festivities ended, many of those who had come to seek a day of cultural and historic enrichment strolled away with such items as blueberry jam and jelly tucked under their arms. Even a bicycle tour group, just passing through the village on a trek through the forest reserve, stopped to acquire some of the products resulting from Elizabeth White's discovery some 69 years ago here in the Village of Whitesbog.



The Pemberton Township Lions' Club supplied refreshment for the large crowd assembled at the Whitesbog Village.

Whitesbog is located just off County Route 530, or Lakehurst Road, in Browns Mills. Part of the Lebanon State Forest Reserve, it is open to the public for touring or outings. Call Michele Byers at 893-4646 for information.

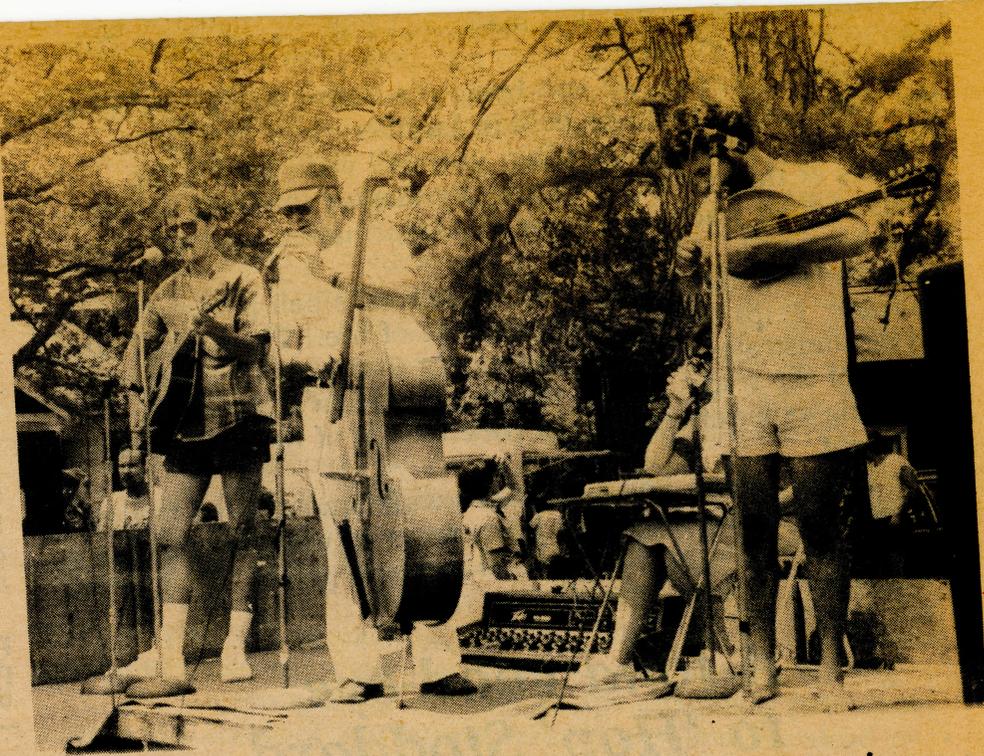


Colonel James Fenwick purchased Whitesbog in 1854 for a cranberry farm. In the 1860's, Joseph (J.J) White began a similar venture in New Lisbon. Soon after, however, J.J. married the colonel's daughter, Mary Fenwick, creating a 'cranberry alliance'. It was their eldest daughter, Elizabeth White, who developed the first commercially cultivated blueberry.

Many strolled through the dirt paths of the historic town on Sunday just to see the sites.



Visitors to the turn-of-the-century village stood outside the homes which once served as shelter for migrant pickers.



Bluegrass music was provided throughout the festival by various bands. The concerts were held outdoors, with the weather in full cooperation.

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