

Burlington County Society  
The berries

# Under "THE OLD HAT" of



## The Country Editor

By

Percy B. Lovell

8-3-50

Moorestown Chronicle

### GENESIS OF THE CULTIVATED BLUEBERRY AT WHITEBOG

Some weeks ago the Burlington County Historical Society made a pilgrimage to Whitesbog in the New Jersey Pines above New Lisbon and Browns Mills, where the members and their friends had the privilege of hearing Miss Elizabeth C. White tell the interesting story of the cultivated blueberry and how it was developed from the old swamp huckleberry. Through the years, the huckleberry, small and full of seeds, has grown up and become the large, delicious and prized blueberry known to the present generation. It took some 40 years of study and labor to achieve the result, however, practically the work of Miss White in conjunction with the late Dr. Frederic V. Coville, of the U. S. Department of Agriculture.

Miss White, kindly and warmly friendly, standing on the porch of the old-time original office building at Whitesbog, with Miss June Vail as a guardian angel nearby and anticipating her every want, told of how Whitesbog originated in 1857 when owned by her grandfather, James Fenwick, who began his career there with 150 acres of wild cranberries, Fenwick died in 1882 and the management of the bogs was taken over by his son-in-law, Joseph J. White, Miss White's father, who went to Philadelphia five days a week to attend to his own business—that of machinery. Saturdays he planned the week's work at the bogs. He made a success of both.

**WHITES HEAR OF EFFORT TO CULTIVATE BLUEBERRY**—Miss White mentioned in her talk how her father and she had a great love for the bogs (she since a child), and how in 1911 they heard of Dr. Coville who was endeavoring to produce a cultivated high-bush blueberry and had written a 100-page pamphlet on the subject. The Whites wrote for the booklet, and as Dr. Coville said later, they were the only people who made any contribution to his work. Everybody else wanted something. Enthused with the prospect, he came to Whitesbog and with Miss White labored until success rewarded their efforts. Some people will remember the cards with various size holes which were given men, women and children, who combed the swamps for the choicest huckleberry plants. They were paid various amounts, according to the largest hole the berries would go through.

**FIRST BLUEBERRIES FROM WHITESBOG**—After years of research, cross breeding and endless experiments, the first blueberries were developed at Whitesbog and gathered some 30 years ago. The crop was very small and about three crates was the limit that ripened at one time. Despite the fact that they were real blueberries, Miss White said the express agent at New Lisbon invariably made out the waybill to read "3 crates of 'hucks'" or whatever the number of containers were in the shipment.

**WHITESBOG**—In the beginning the blueberries were looked upon as a secondary crop, but they now vie with the cranberries in importance. They both seem to love and thrive on the dark cedar water of The Pines. The route through the blueberry fields (and bogs) was marked with arrows and 18 points of interest were especially designated with large painted numbers. The fields of blueberries ranged from those just coming into bearing to those loaded with fruit. Miss White explained that her father and she liked the old folk names given streams and localities and that they had retained them—Canal Pond, Pole Ridge Branch, Hanover Pond, Blue Bog, Union Field, Ditch Meadow, Indian Run and Tranquility. From Point 14 the pilgrims walked from Antrims Branch Bogs to the Reservoir near Meads Bogs and Cranberry Run. Some 200 women, in bright-hued summer dresses, with the pine trees for a background, made a colorful spectacle—reminding one very much of a garden party.

**TWO SETTLEMENTS, "FLORENCE" AND "ROME"**—There are two good-sized settlements on the bogs, named "Florence" and "Rome," in honor of the 200 Italian pickers who normally inhabit them during the summer season. The houses are comfortable two-story homes. The general store (containing the post office), Miss White's home and the quarters for the office force, are at the end of the long lane which leads into the bogs from the main highway.

**TOUR ENDED AT GARDENS**—Miss White has two lovely gardens—one of old-fashioned flowers, the other of the flora of The Pines. Attention was especially called to a low-growing plant in the latter, artostyles uvaures. It is gathered for pharmaceutical houses by reason of its astringent qualities. The natives call it the "university plant." We have a very good idea we have spelled the Latin name wrong. However, we are throwing it right in the lap of the intelligensia to correct. All we know about botany is not to fool with the three-leaf ivy.

**HUCKLEBERRIES, THREE BOXES FOR A QUARTER, OR 8c A BOX**—Mrs. Aline K. Wolcott, president of the Historical Society, whose early life was spent in Pemberton, related how the "huckleberry woman" always sold three boxes for a quarter, or 8c a box. That was her absolute rule. Figure that out for yourself. Miss Hazel Clark, county librarian and chairman of the Historical Society's program committee, was heard to say: "We'll make this trip so interesting that those who didn't come will wish they had." Well, a lot of people have said that already.

**BLUEBERRIES HAVE BROUGHT COUNTLESS OPPORTUNITIES TO MANY**—If one is twice blessed who makes two blades of grass grown where one grew before, then Miss Elizabeth C. White is many times blessed for perfecting the cultivated blueberry, for it has brought prosperity to thousands. Pine land that formerly sold for 50c an acre now brings \$500 an acre if suitable for a blueberry field, and scores of growers, all through The Pines, have a profitable crop. Money has come right down to Moorestown, too. Each week day 40 to 80 pickers, mostly school children, the girls in shorts and the boys in jeans, under the supervision of Lester Hess, teacher of agriculture at Moorestown High, leave by trucks to pick blueberries. They learn the value of money through honest labor, earn enough in the season to largely pay for their clothes, school activities and some pleasures.

**P. S.—NOT ONE MOSQUITO** seen or heard at Whitesbog.