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Farming, Weather — A Half Century

By CONNIE RYAN
Special Writer

Long before copywriters conjured jingles mixing cranberries and other fruits and the holding of second jobs became a way of life, Isaiah Haines combined cranberries and weather watching.

The hearty county resident, who makes his home in the community of New Lisbon, has been involved in the growing of the red berry for 56 years. To protect the crop, he became alert to frost warnings, which subsequently led to a 46-year, part-time stint as a weather observer and frost

predictor for the U.S. Weather Bureau.

A couple of weeks ago Haines received a pin from Uncle Sam, complete with diamond chip, marking his long-term service.

Haines commenced his career in the cranberry business as a lad early in the century when he worked summers for Joseph J. White, Inc., Whites Bogs, four miles east of Browns Mills, where his father was superintendent.

Young Haines planted, tended, picked and packed cranberries during school vacations and after school. When he completed high school, he

joined his dad on a full-time basis and remained with the White company for over half a century, becoming vice president along the way.

His first duties were many and varied, prime among them was to be vigilant for frost in early spring when tiny white buds appear on the cranberry vines. The plants withstand 28 to 29-degree temperatures but any lower Fahrenheit figure necessitates flooding water between the rows of plants to bring warmth and thereby save the crop.

"We would read the temperature at ground level where it was coolest and then we kind of had to go by our own feeling," Haines recalled.

Around 1920, weathermen were employed by the government to aid growers, and in 1922, one of these experts, named Bliss, devised a formula based on temperatures of past years that has been used ever since.

Haines succeeded Bliss on the frost watch. Through the years, his daily reports, spring to fall, have been transmitted to the various weather stations in the bog area, Pomona, Trenton, Philadelphia and New York. Growers now receive forecasts via tape recordings.

"Our system has not been perfect, but nine out of ten times we're correct," the veteran noted.

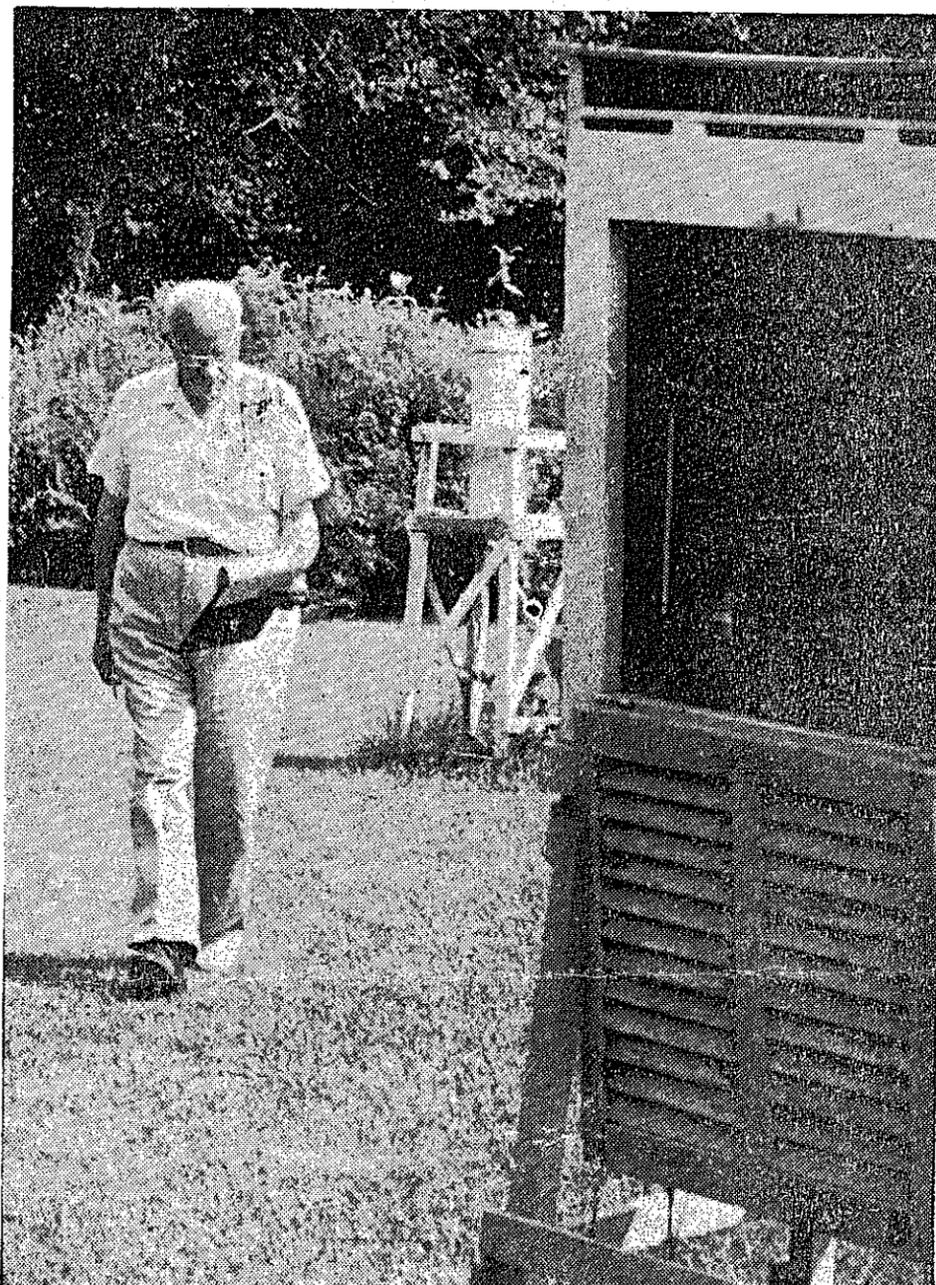
From frostcasting, Haines gradually moved into weather observations for the U.S. bureau.

He emphasized that his instruments are scientifically obsolete: a primitive rain gauge, a sling thermometer (to determine moisture) that is literally whirled around in the air by hand each sundown during growing season and an antique barometer.

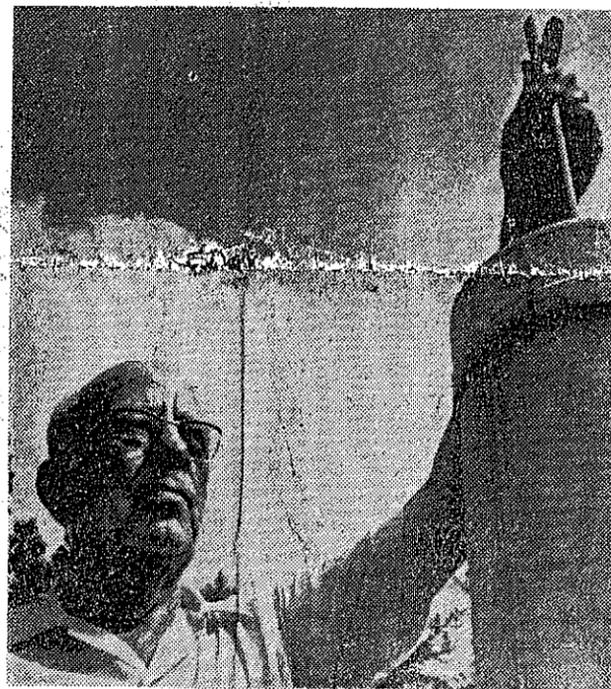
Haines holds great respect for modern weather observers but finds the space age methods most accurate on a general area basis.

"They don't seem to fare too well on local conditions. Thunderstorms, frost, snow, fog, for instance, are spotty. One area will get them; another won't. Today's weathermen miss up on these many times," he commented.

A visitor to Whites Bogs will discover a ghost town. The general store is closed and boarded up. The 15 or 20 brown cedarwood houses appear deserted. One scarcely realizes that the long, L-shaped cedar frame, partially burned structure is Joseph J.



Two-career man Isaiah Haines, who has spent 56 years in the cranberry business and 46 years as a U.S. weather watcher in the Whites Bogs area, gathers readings (top) from primitive weather instruments. Below, under almost clear skies, Haines demonstrates use of his rain gauge. Haines believes his predictions match those obtained from modern equipment.



Staff Photos

By

Herman Laesker

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Half Century Spent In Farming, Weather

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White, Inc. Only the appearance of the few late-model autos and the bark of a dog disclose the fact that humans exist in this remote, silent village of yesteryear.

The tiny hamlet once boasted a year-round population of some 35 persons. In late summers, trainloads of pickers were transported from Philadelphia to remain until the end of October, raising Whites Bogs' numbers by 350 for six weeks annually.

Haines, who has supplemented his lengthy on-the-job training with a number of short courses in scientific agriculture, indicated that though picking still begins around mid-September, these days much of the chore is mechanized. The berries are washed and sorted simultaneously by way of a detergent and shipped directly to Ocean Spray in Bordentown for processing. About 300 fewer cranberry workers are presently required at the growing site.

All cranberries from Whites Bogs go to Ocean Spray, which is owned by the American Cranberry Growers Association, of which the White organization is a member.

Haines said his company will soon be moving. He explained that the original 3,000 acres that were the White confines almost a hundred years ago when the business was founded have been sold over a period of time to the U. S. Government. A sizable area will be revitalized as a

Green Acres project. The final transaction took place two years ago and conservation and research offices have already been installed here.

The White company will continue to grow cranberries in the present location for another year or two under a lease arrangement until a payload crop is ready for harvest in the new White spread on 150 acres at Buffins Meadows, off Route 70, in what Haines believes is still Whites Bogs village. (Cranberry vines require a three to four year start prior to a full crop.)

"The business has become highly scientific and much more complicated," the official stated, as he produced charts listing insecticides approved by the Department of Agriculture and a three-fold color illustration of cranberries in varying shades of red.

"We pick 'em according to redness, depending on what Ocean Spray wants to use the berries for. If they're making juice, we have to leave the berries on the vine until the color is deep red. The fruit ceases to ripen once it's picked," he added.

Cranberries and weather watching have provided an interesting, busy life for this amiable, energetic businessman. Even so, the combination (plus his home with Mrs. Haines, a son and daughter) have allowed time for 36 years as a member of the New Lisbon school board.