

# At Whitesbog

by Edith Blez



Recently, I spent an afternoon at Whitesbog in the Pine Barrens. As we approached the village which has been there for a good many years I felt that I was walking right into the past. It didn't seem real.

The day was cold. There was a hint of snow in the air. The houses looked like something Currier and Ives might have sketched. I was dreaming! Such places, I thought, have long disappeared; perhaps we had taken the wrong road. No, this was Whitesbog. There was a plaque on the main building but it all looked so unreal, the dirt paths, the pine trees, the tall cedars, the fields of blueberry bushes. There was something about the place which seemed removed from the world from which we had just come. I kept thinking it would disappear, but we saw a few people and the houses looked as if they had people living in them.

## An Invitation

We had come to Whitesbog because there had been an invitation in the local papers saying there was to be an afternoon of making Christmas decorations from material gathered in the nearby woods. Suggestions were to be made by Earlene Elder Williams, noted arts and crafts teacher in the Browns Mills area.

When we entered the main building, we were greeted by some very friendly people who told us there would be a "gathering walk" to find material and then the group would get to work on their decorations. We spoke to Earlene Williams who was a lovely woman who told us her grandmother had always lived on a farm in nearby Cream Ridge. She was really self taught and had won many prizes for her work.

We decided to skip the walk, but it wasn't long before the people who took part in the walk came back into the building carrying all kinds of materials they had gathered in the woods. They had brought many wild grasses, fox tails, cat tails, bush clover, swamp grass, sweet gumballs, yarrow and pine cones. One of the tables was piled high with cones and holly and wood scrap and a bag of acorn caps. There were scissors, El-

mer's glue, paint brushes and wire on another table.

The people who had gone on the walk were cold. There was much drinking of steaming hot coffee and much conversation about what they had found. Coats were soon shed and everybody got to work. This was a serious group who were anxious to make use of what they had found in the woods.

The conversation was wonderful. Everybody talked to everybody else. There were several small children and they were as busy as their parents. It was a good, warm time of people getting together to create something with their hands out of natural products which filled the room with something one seldom finds today.

Whitesbog is really the Conservation and Environmental Studies Center in Browns Mills which is a private non-profit organization providing more than 20 different environmental services for schools, industry, business and general citizenry. The main function is to develop skills, knowledge and attitudes that will enhance the quality of all environments.

We met Dr. Eugene Vivian, the director, plus Mr. and Mrs. John Hiros, and Mr. and Mrs. William Michalsky, who are all on the staff at Whitesbog. They were all exceedingly pleasant people interested in helping us understand what is offered at this center. There is a very interesting program of events coming up this winter and next spring. I do have some information if you are interested.

Whitesbog has a fascinating history. The village at one time was the home of Elizabeth White, the wonderful lady who was responsible for New Jersey's famous blueberries.

I liked Whitesbog. I hope I get back there again because I am still wondering if it was just a figment of my imagination.

## Art of Stencilling Taught on N.J. Public TV

Lesson two in the Early American art of stencilling on wood and tin will be televised on "The Tin Lady," Jan. 13 at 6 p.m. on Channels 23, 50, 52 and 58.