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Spotlight on Whitesbog

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By Dan Collinelli

Elizabeth White began a life long love affair with nature, agriculture and the pine lands while working on her father's farm in 1893.

Her name has remained attached to Whitesbog Village, located in the Pinelands National Reserve, where her love of nature has continued to endure.

White was the oldest daughter of Joseph Josiah "J.J." White. Her father had inherited Whitesbog from Colonel James Fenwick, his father-in-law.

Her father was a successful business man and agriculturalist in his own right, before he inherited the cranberry farm from Fenwick.

What is now the historic village of Whitesbog was built by the J.J. White Company as the center of its cranberry and blueberry farming operation.

When J.J. White first took charge of the farm in 1882, it was an operation encompassing 600 acres. Approximately 50 acres of land were bogs.

By 1912, White had increased the size of the farm to 3,000 acres with about 600 acres in production as cranberry bogs.

In 30 years, White turned Fenwick's cranberry farm into the largest of its kind in New Jersey.

At its height, the farm employed 450 people from Philadelphia during harvest season, September to November.

Each Whitesbog employee worked an eight-and-a-half hour day.

Elizabeth Coleman White was the oldest of J.J. White's daughters. She never married and spent all 83 years of her life living on or around the farm. Hers was a marriage of endeavors.

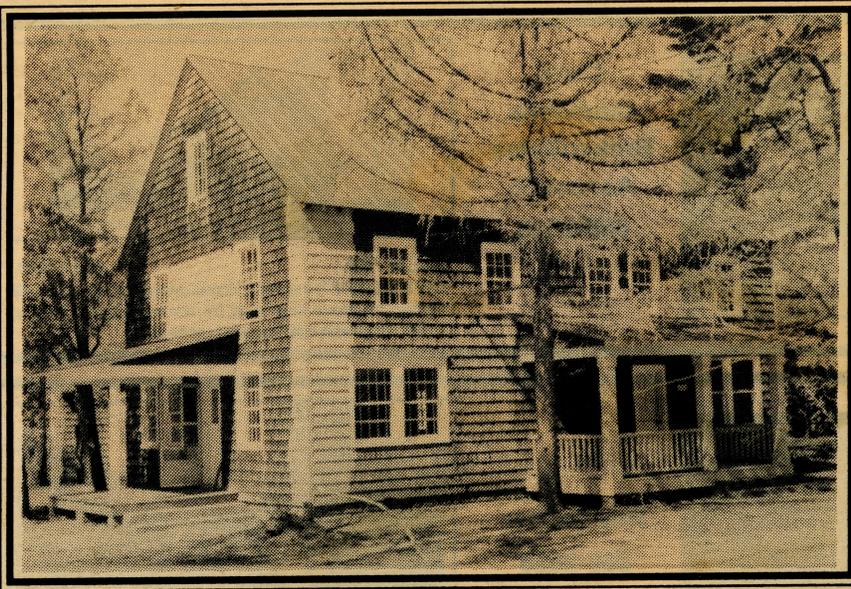
Whitesbog was known as the only bog where there was any attempt made to preserve the health of the workers. Young Elizabeth White had taken a course in nursing and used her knowledge in giving aid to the various ailments of the large work force population.

She was possessed by a fierce curiosity that pushed her to study the farming world she was surrounded by. In 1911, she read the U.S.D.A. publication "Experiments in Blueberry Culture", by Dr. Frederick V. Coville.

Intrigued by Coville's writings, White convinced her father to contact Coville and offer him support in his work.

Five years later, Coville and the White's partnership brought the world the first cultivated blueberry. Coville's scientific expertise combined with the White's finances and Whitesbog's natural selection of wild blueberries brought about an event of national significance.

Whitesbog turned the cultivated blueberry into a cash



The "Old" General Store was moved to its present location in the 1920s from its former site, at the end of Whitesbog Road.

crop. By 1927, the 60-acre crop was estimated at 64,000 quarts, worth \$20,000. At its height, Whitesbog had 90 acres of blueberries under cultivation.

But Elizabeth didn't stop there. In 1923, she constructed her house named Suningive next to her grandfather's "Old Bog," the original bog at Whitesbog. She surrounded the house with a garden comprised of native plants and flowers.

In 1927, she helped organize the New Jersey Blueberry Cooperative Association. She was the first female member of the American Cranberry Association. She was also the first woman to receive the New Jersey Department of Agriculture's citation.

The sole driving force of her life was her love for the Pines. Her home was surrounded like castle ramparts made of daffodils and pine trees, of sweet, rich air and the hushed tranquility that is the Pinelands.

Whitesbog Village was built to house the workers living there during harvest season. State historical officials and the Whitesbog Preservation Trust have already begun to restore the village.

The Whitesbog Preservation Trust invites groups, adults, and youths to spend a day at the historic village.

If you wish to visit Whitesbog or support the ongoing effort to help restore the village, contact Ann Marie Kent, Executive Director Whitesbog Preservation Trust, 120-24A Whitesbog Road, Browns Mills, NJ 08015 (609) 893-4646.

"Historic Architectural Survey and Preservation Planning Project for the Village of Whitesbog Burlington and Ocean Counties, New Jersey" by William Bolger, Herbert J. Githens and Edward S. Rutsch, S.O.P.A.