



Crestwood Village Sun

SEPTEMBER, 2002

SECTION B

Exploring the Heart of the Pines

Is there any place in this most densely populated state where you can find absolute silence? If you search carefully between High Point and Cape May Point you may find a few, but one that is sure to please solitude seekers is only a few miles from Whiting.

Head your car west on Route 70 about 12 miles until you see a Smokey Bear sign on your left. Turn left and keep going, at least two miles into the Lebanon State Forest, recently renamed the Brendan T. Byrne State Forest.



Turn the ignition off, open the window and listen. You may hear the distant call of a blue jay and maybe the wind sighing in the pines, or you may hear nothing at all.

You are in the heart of the New Jersey Pinelands, the largest remaining wilderness area between Portland, Maine and Richmond, Virginia. Consider that you are less than 25 miles from both the Philadelphia and New York-North Jersey metropolitan areas. Consider, too, that all of South Jersey and much of Long Island looked and sounded like this in the pre-bulldozer era.

That this land exists in its almost pristine condition is due to the efforts of many people who cared enough to wage a long, concentrated campaign, writing letters, making phone calls, organizing meetings and pressuring state, county and federal officials. One who responded favorably to their pleas was former Governor Byrne, but one other person had an unusual influence on the governor.

John McPhee, the Princeton author, had been spending a lot of time deep in the woods of Burlington and Ocean County, researching life among the "Pineys" in preparation for a series of articles in the *New Yorker* magazine. McPhee was a sometime tennis partner of Governor Byrne, and the story goes that he suggested that Byrne acquaint himself with this group of Jersey "natives" and do what he could to save their land and their culture.

Byrne reacted positively, formed and appointed a state Pinelands Commission and worked with federal legislators to create the Pinelands National Reserve. Meanwhile, McPhee gathered his essays together into a book, *The Pine Barrens*, which he published in 1967.

Reprinted numerous times since then, the book remains the "bible" of the pines for those who are fascinated with the region. It is generally credited with arousing the interest of hikers, canoeists, botanists, bird watchers, camping enthusiasts and everyone who realizes the essentiality of saving this unique treasure.

McPhee tells the story of an American native group whose origins were in Britain. In the early days of the 20th century they lived by themselves, back in the woods, with little contact with the outside world. Occasionally a couple would walk or ride horseback to the courthouse in Mt. Holly to obtain a marriage license. Others would just marry without this formality.

They lived without electricity or telephones in hamlets with colorful names like Ong's Hat (Jacob Ong got mad at his girlfriend for stomping on his hat, so he threw it into a tree, where it remained for months), Bear Swamp Hill, Speedwell, Mt. Misery, Double Trouble, Gravelly Run, Jake's Branch, Martha's Pond and Red Lion.

The 25 residents of Hog Wallow told McPhee that their town was a suburb of Jenkins, which had 45 people.

The Pineys' first real recognition of what we call "civilization" came during the early days of World War I. The government issued a call for workers to help build Camp Dix, now Fort Dix, as a reception center and training facility. Men emerged from the pines and learned what life was like in the rest of the world. Some took their newfound skills and knowledge back to the woods, educating their friends and no doubt luring others to forget their traditional ways. Others stayed outside the inner core of the pines, adding their names to the tax rolls and phone books of Whiting,

Lakehurst, Browns Mills, Waretown and other communities familiar to us.

McPhee's book covers the whole kaleidoscope of life in the pines, of forest fires, moonshiners; folklore and legends like the Jersey Devil, the hundreds of birds that breed or stop over in their migrations, and the real threat in the 1950's that a huge jetport would wipe out almost all the Pinelands.

When Governor McGreevy unveiled the new sign, "Brendan T. Byrne State Forest," on July 24, former Governor Byrne said, "You didn't have to name a whole forest for me. Everybody knows that I can't see the forest for the trees, so one tree would have done it."

Known for his sense of humor, the 78-year-old Byrne mentioned that the Continental Airlines Arena in the Meadowlands was originally named the Brendan Byrne Arena. He said, "I was immortal once. Now I am immortal again."

Referring to the forest's first name, he said, "There wasn't a Governor Lebanon, was there?"

So how did Lebanon State Forest get its name?

Horace Somes, state division forest fire warden whose offices adjoin the park headquarters, said, "It was named after the Lebanon Glass Works, which once stood in the southeastern section of what is now the state forest." Warden Somes should know. He grew up in the village of New Lisbon, three miles north of where he now works.



Reflections on Pakim Pond in the heart of state forest.

An especially scenic and tranquil spot in the state forest is Pakim Pond (just follow the signs) with its sandy beach and woodland trail circling the pond, then continuing south as part of the 50-mile Batona Trail on into the Wharton State Forest and ending in the Bass River State Forest.

Along the edge of the pond are three log cabins, each with electricity, fireplace and boat dock. The cabins rent for \$28 to \$42 a night. Farther down the road is a public campground. The sites generally rent for \$10 a night. For information and reservations, call (609) 726-1191 or write: Lebanon (Byrne) State Forest, P.O. Box 215, New Lisbon 08064.

Incidentally, an optional route to Lebanon (Byrne) is via Pasadena Road, which peels off from 539 just south of Cherry Street in Whiting. You'll see a number of new homes along the road, with a few horse farms and some relics of the early days of the pines. The road zigzags across the old railbed of the Central Railroad of New Jersey. This was the route of the classic steam train, the Blue Comet, which roared through the pines at speeds up to 80 miles an hour, sometimes spewing sparks that started forest fires along its right-of-way.

From Pakim Pond you may want to take a short side trip into Chatsworth, once a thriving town known as the "Capital of the Pines." The most inter-

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**Deadline for Articles
for October 2002 issue:
September 16**



Historic Buzby's General Store in Chatsworth, restored by Marilyn Schmidt.

esting attraction in Chatsworth is undoubtedly the historic Buzby's General Store at the main corner on Route 563. Three years ago R. Marilyn Schmidt, the prolific author of recipe books, maps, and guides of the Pine Barrens and local folklore tales, moved from Barnegat Light, where she had maintained her publishing business, to Chatsworth with one eager goal, to save and restore Buzby's.



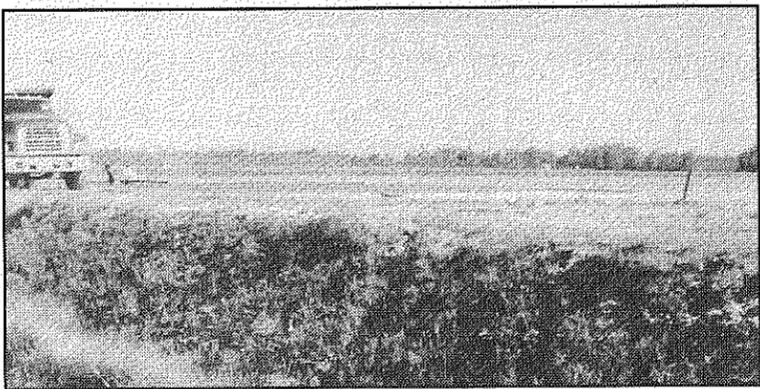
Marilyn Schmidt holding a copy of John McPhee's "The Pine Barrens" book outside her "Cheshire Cat" gift shop.

It was a painstaking task, not just supervising the reconstruction but also securing the mountain of approvals, and Marilyn is always glad to tell her customers about her efforts. Here she operates the Cheshire Cat, a veritable shrine of the Pinelands, with every conceivable book about the region, along with souvenirs, crafts and gifts of every description.

She is justifiably proud of having brought back to life an historic landmark that was built in 1865 and acquired by the Buzbys in 1895. Willis Jefferson Buzby, and later his son Jack, were both known as "King of the Pineys," and members of the Buzby family provided John McPhee with many colorful tales of the early days in the pines.

For the past two years a cafe featuring such delectable treats as blueberry pancakes occupied the front corner of the general store. Marilyn hopes to have the cafe back in business by this September.

Marilyn's many books dealing with New Jersey lighthouses, churches and graveyards of the Pine Barrens, wine and wineries, pinelands gardening and other local topics can be obtained by writing: Barnegat Light Press or Pine Barrens Press, P.O. Box 607, Chatsworth, New Jersey 08019-0607 or calling (609)894-4415.



Harvesting cranberries south of Chatsworth.

Chatsworth is also known as the "Cranberry Capital" of New Jersey. Just down the road is the Ocean Spray plant where cranberry growers from all over South Jersey bring their products for processing. If you continue south on 563 you'll see acres of bogs and an ornate owner's house, not far from workers' living quarters that are not so ornate.

In October you can slow down to watch the cranberries being scooped mechanically and rounded into areas for removal. Also in October, this year on October 19 and 20, is the annual Chatsworth Cranberry Festival, long familiar to many Crestwood residents and a gala event attracting visitors from all over New Jersey and eastern Pennsylvania. It is really a gigantic street fair featuring crafts tables, art displays, environmental exhibits, bus tours of the bogs and, of course, plenty to eat. Parking is sometimes difficult, so it is recommended that, instead of parking on the road and

requiring a long walk into town, you go into the heart of the village and park in the paid lot behind the grade school, one block south of Buzby's.

If you were to continue south on 563 you'd eventually come to another interesting historic site, Batsto, but that can consume a large part of your day, so it's better to make that a separate trip.

No visit to Lebanon State Forest (or Byrne, if you prefer) would be complete without a stop at Whitesbog, the Lebanon settlement closest to Whiting. If you're going directly to Whitesbog from home, just bear right where 530 leaves 70 and it's a half-mile on the right. If you're going to Whitesbog from the park offices or from Chatsworth, continue east on 70 to the Country Lakes sign. Turn left, go through Country Lakes to the light on 530 at Wawa's, then go right to the Whitesbog sign.

Whitesbog is basically a cluster of 35 or so buildings beneath an historic water tower, visible as you come down 530 from 70. The buildings, most of which are bereft of life except during special events, hide Whitesbog's most dramatic secret. It was here that the blueberry, one of America's most favorite and healthful fruits, was "tamed" and developed into a product to be cultivated widely around the world. The creator of this once-wild berry was Elizabeth White, the eldest of four daughters, who worked with her father and with the U.S. Department of Agriculture on the 3,000-acre White farm.

It was a real working village with a row of four workers' cottages (to the left as you enter the site) occupied by hundreds of men and women, mostly African-Americans and immigrants from Portugal and Italy. The Italian-Americans even named two of the settlements in the village Rome and Florence.



Workers' houses at Whitesbog Village.

The White homestead, called Suningive, is now the Pine Barrens office of the Nature Conservancy's New Jersey chapter. Previously, it was the first home of the Pinelands Preservation Alliance, now in Pemberton. The Nature Conservancy has saved acres of prime property in the Pinelands, and PPA is a strong advocacy and educational organization in the preservation of the Pinelands. The Whitesbog Preservation Trust is the specific agency dedicated to protecting Whitesbog.

Special events in Whitesbog include moonlight walks and a popular Blueberry Festival in midsummer each year. But Whitesbog is probably best known as a quiet place to just walk and meditate.

Lois Morris of Pine Ridge, Whiting's best known self-taught naturalist, who organized the Crestwood Stroll and has led numerous guided bus tours of the Pinelands, reminds us that a very special event occurs around Thanksgiving every fall.

"It is the arrival of the tundra swans at Whitesbog," she said. "They come down from way up north and usually stay into March."



Swamp brook in Lebanon (Byrne) State Forest.

They can usually be spotted along the sand roads that encircle each cranberry bog, just to the east of the center of Whitesbog Village. This is good walking territory, because the roads are packed down rather than composed of the softer "sugar sand." One word of caution: If you explore the bog roads by car, it is advisable to have company or at least a cell phone. If your car becomes disabled, you're a long way from help, and park rangers are probably not aware that you're out there.

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PINELAND continued from B3

As the days grow shorter and the weather cooler, walking in the Pinelands becomes more pleasurable. The wind may be brisk, but the sandy soil is likely to be dry.

It is the kind of mild, yet invigorating climate that brought thousands of guests in the early 1900's to the grand hotels of Lakewood and Lakehurst and to the cottages along Mirror Lake just down the road from Whitesbog. It is the same healthful air that helped patients in the 1920's ease their symptoms of tuberculosis at the original Deborah sanitarium, now the Deborah Heart and Lung Center in Browns Mills.

As you walk along the sandy trails or the paved roads of the state forest, think of the old railroad signs which you may still find in remote sections of the Pinelands. "Stop, Look and Listen."

You may hear a familiar "chip" and spot a flash of brilliant red against the backdrop of dark green trees. A male cardinal is out and about, reminding us that there is plenty of life to be seen and enjoyed in the Pinelands, in every season of the year.—*Story and photos by Marshall Sewell*

Women's Club Village III

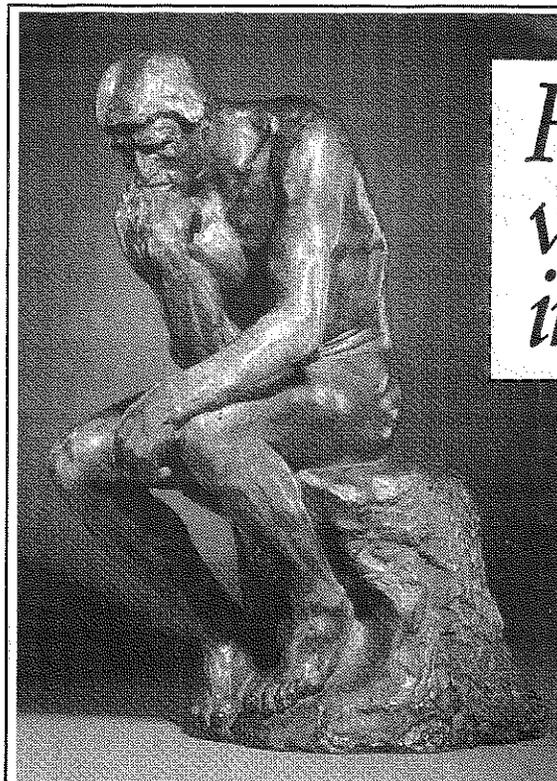
The summer is slowly coming to an end, and I do hope everyone had a joyous, happy and safe time. Our first meeting of the new club year will be on September 3 at 1:30 PM. We, the officers, would like to welcome all our regulars as well as any and all new people who have moved into our area since our last meeting in June. If you have a new neighbor, feel free to invite them to attend this meeting with you. Also invite them to visit our Monday morning workshops and invite them to join our club. I am sure at least some of them might be interested in joining. We would like to have you as members and would invite your participation in any or all of our activities.

This first meeting is what I call a social-catch-up meeting in closing out the summer. At this meeting we will have our usual 50/50 and refreshments as well as a surprise or two.

By all means remember to visit our Monday morning workshops, mini-mart as well as Vi's Jewelry Boutique. For our new residents, consider this an invitation to come see if you would like to take part in any of our workshop groups. We can always use new people, and we certainly welcome any new ideas.

The workshop on September 23 has been cancelled due to the certificate holder meeting. Any other workshop cancelled will be posted as soon as we know. Thank you for your understanding.

See you at the September 3 meeting at 1:30 PM at Unity Hall, 250

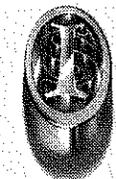


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