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Pennsylvania Children on New Jersey Cranberry Farms

Report of an Investigation

Made by

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Foreword

A good lady remarked recently, "I wonder if there is any further need of a child labor committee, since child labor has been abolished in this country?" This remark, made with the utmost sincerity, typifies the general feeling of complacency attendant upon the passage of any law designed to correct or mitigate an evil. Because most of the states have enacted child labor laws it does not follow that the purposes of these laws have been accomplished; much less that the evils at which they are aimed have been overcome. The passage of a law is but a beginning. Its enforcement is a more difficult step. That has been found as true of child labor laws as of liquor laws. Moreover, in the case of child labor there are great fields still untouched by law. This is true of all employment of children in agriculture. Even the school laws fail to follow children across state lines.

The migration of Pennsylvania school children to New Jersey truck farms and cranberry bogs has been repeated for years, but no effective measures have yet been devised to protect the children concerned or to mitigate the evil.

The attendance bureau of the Philadelphia public schools has gone so far as to force the return of children from New Jersey when one parent remains in Pennsylvania; but it cannot go outside the state in other cases. Even the New Jersey State Department of Education seems legally powerless to require delinquent local school authorities to keep schools open during the cranberry season. New Jersey children as well as Pennsylvania children are affected.

The present status of employment of children in the cranberry industry is set forth in this report.

Miss McKay's investigation was made during September, October and November, 1923, and covered 14 of New Jersey's 70, more or less, cranberry establishments. Her findings, like those concerning the sugar beet industry of Colorado, Michigan, and other states, indicate the ineffectiveness not only of child labor laws but even of school attendance laws when the crossing of state lines is involved. The conditions which she describes

emphasize again the need of Federal laws, and of an amendment to the Federal Constitution giving Congress power to pass such laws.

The Pickers

In some agricultural industries, especially in a short harvesting season, an augmented labor force is essential. This is particularly true in harvesting cranberries. The season is from six to eight weeks long. The inaccessibility of the bogs, many of which are seven and eight miles from a railroad station, makes it difficult to secure the number of pickers required.

New Jersey Cranberry Growers have tried to solve the problem by contracting with Italian padrones to furnish them with large gangs of Italian men, women, and children. On some bogs and padrones are engaged by the year, on others only for the summer. Early in summer they begin recruiting. The padrone at one of the larger bogs told us there were 50 families from Philadelphia. The families are transported by rail (fare being paid by the owner of the bog) to the nearest railway station, then by truck to the camps.

Getting Ready for a Day's Work

The padrone's whistle is the signal to start for the bog, for lunch, and to stop work. Not a child is too young, nor a grandmother too old to join the berry-picking army. On arriving at the bog, the infants are deposited "somewhere" and left alone or in charge of a "child mother," four or five years of age. No shelter is provided nor convenience of any kind. Few of the mothers appreciate the value of shade for the children. We found children asleep on the bogs, lying in the sun, and covered with files. One mother had brought a large umbrella under which her child slept; another left her baby beside the road under a tree, about 250 feet from where she was picking.

Picking

The cranberry vine runs along the ground, and the berries grow about six to ten inches from the ground. The bogs are sections into which the cranberry farm is divided, and vary in size from even to 24 acres, surrounded by itches. One cranberry farm contains 800 acres.

The padrone's stick designated the locations for the pickers, and they spread out -- usually by families -- in a long line the length of the bog. On some bogs sections were marked off by strings, and each family was assigned a section. The hand pickers travel forward (occasionally backward) on their knees in a bending position, scooping the berries with their hands. Where scoops (box-like arrangements with eight or ten steel prongs) are used the work is done standing, the scoopers bending forward when a long scoop is required. Scooping is heavy work, and is usually done by men. On some of the bogs boys of 14 years were scooping, and on others, the women were allowed to scoop if they desired. On one bog we saw 12 and 14 year-old girls scooping. They said, "We take the

scoop when our mothers are tired.” One mother said, “Scooping does not hurt me as much as the bending to pick by hand.”

Carrying

The picked berries are dropped into peck boxes or sacks and carried to the road where they are cashed for tickets. Most of the carrying is done by the younger children. A peck of cranberries weighs from 13 to 17 pounds, and many of the younger children carry two pecks the length of the bog. On one bog the younger children do not pick, but carry the sacks of berries on their heads to the road. Among some families the work I so organized that the younger children scarcely have a chance to sit down; they are kept busy carrying the berries picked by the rest of the family. A 14 year-old boy carried a bushel box filled with berries over 200 feet. He said, “I always carry my own berries.”

Working Conditions

Before picking is started the ditches are drained. In spite of this drainage, some of the bogs are wet, particularly in the morning, and in cloudy weather. The children wear little clothing, but sometimes even this was wet as late as noon. We saw two children standing in the ditch in water to their knees, picking along the edge of the bog.

The pickers carry their lunch and their drinking water to the place of work. No sanitary conveniences or shelter of any kind is provided. Many of the pickers wear kerchiefs and farmers' hats to protect them from the sun. We saw mothers sitting on the bog nursing babies and picking with the free hand.

One bad feature of picking is the thorns. Some of the older girls wear stockings over their arms for protection. The younger children are not so far-sighted, and their arms and legs show the results of contact with the vines.

In spite of the monotony of the task, and all these discomforts, we often found the children singing. However, when questioned as to whether they liked to pick, they were unanimous in answering, “No!”

Supervision

The picking is supervised by the padrone on small bogs and by row bosses on the larger bogs. We found the latter inclined to be more lenient with the children when they stopped work to play. One of the bosses said, “I don't like to see these children working; most of them ought to be in school, but you see, we have to take the whole family.” As we approached a bog, we saw the padrone raise his stick to strike a 13 year-old boy. The boy dodged and the stick missed him. On another bog the padrone lifted his stick to strike a 12 year-old boy, who dodged, and the stick was lowered. We heard several padrones swearing at the children. These were the only instances we saw suggesting cruelty. The padrone and row bosses seemed generally to be on good terms with the pickers.

Hours of Labor-Earnings

In picking cranberries the time of starting work depends upon the weather. It is necessary to wait until the morning dew has passed. In a dry season, the work begins usually at 7 or 7:30 A.M. and continues until 5:30 P.M., with 30 minutes for lunch. When the weather is rainy there is no picking, but the work is resumed as soon as it clears. Some of the bogs visited had not begun work until 10 A.M., and some were not being picked on account of rain. There is no picking on Sunday; the tickets for the week's work are then exchanged for larger ones.

The pay for scooping is \$.50 a bushel on 13 bogs, and \$.60 on one bog. For hand picking, it is \$.65 a bushel on 12 bogs, \$.70 on one, and \$1.00 on one bog.

The earnings depend on the weather, the number in the family able to work, and whether or not the berries are plentiful. One father said he had seven boys, three were helping now, next year another one would be able and soon the whole seven could help pick. One mother and father (scoopers) and two children (pickers) exchanged tickets amounting to \$35.00 for two days' work. Most families averaging about five or six workers, stated they made \$5 to \$6 a day. As far as we could learn, the children from four to eight years of age could pick four to six pecks a day. One 15 year-old girl picked 25 pecks (\$4.0p6) on Saturday, September 29th.

At the end of the season, the checks are redeemed for cash. This plan is followed to keep the families on the job during the entire season. If the crop is scarce and the weather bad, the padrone finds this a difficult task, and if a family demands its earnings, the money is paid. In most of the places visited, we found a few families had "gone back."

We were unable to learn whether or not the price of railroad transportation and the bonus paid the padrones are deduced from earnings. One padrone stated that each family gives him a tip at the end of the season, possibly \$1 or \$21 the men and women were emphatic in saying "we no pay anything, boss pay him."

Living Conditions – Camps

Although migrant families are known to have a low standard of living, one is scarcely prepared for the manner in which these people are permitted to live while working on the bogs.

The shelters provided are mostly wooden shanties, unpainted and many of them in bad condition. They vary in size and arrangement. We saw six different kinds. The furnishing in most of the rooms consists of wooden bunks (double in some, single in others), a board table, and an empty barrel. No mattresses are furnished; the pickers bring their ticks and the owner of the bog supplies straw to fill them. On some bogs each family has a stove inside the heat and cooking purposes; on others there are one and two stoves to a floor. (We were told at one place that when the pickers arrived there was but

one stove to a floor, but there was so much quarrelling as to who should have the use of it first, the proprietor had been forced to put in another stove.) On most of the bogs the cooking facilities are outside, and some of these are unsheltered. The dining facilities are usually crude tables, mostly outside, unsheltered. We assume the empty barrel is to hold clothes, but most of the clothes are lying in corners on the floor. The rest of the furnishings consist of tomatoes, bread (often covered with flies), peppers, and garbage of various kinds littered about.

At -----'s the shelters are two-story, four-family cottages, each family having two rooms. At -----'s they are large barns, converted into rooms, with one small stove to a floor (cooking facilities outside—sheltered). -----'s barracks is a one-story, concrete building, providing for ten families, two rooms to a family. ---' bog provides two barracks, both in very bad condition. The one in use is an unpainted frame building, housing five families (two rooms each), and having but one door which opens on a small square room – about 8'x8'-with wooden benches around the walls. At -----'s we saw three kinds of buildings. In one type, the family had one room downstairs, and two upstairs. There were no bunks provided in these upstairs rooms, the mattresses being laid on the floor. In another type the stairway to the second floor was outside. Six families lived on the first floor, and six on the second floor, with a hall the length of the building running through the centre. It is in these halls the stoves are located.

Overcrowding

One of the worst features of the living conditions is the overcrowding, and this condition exists in spite of the fact that there are many empty rooms. At -----'s a family of seven have three rooms. The downstairs room is used for cooking and dining purposes, the upstairs rooms for sleeping. The father, mother and youngest child sleep on a straw filled tick on the floor in one room. Four other children (Mary 17, Nicholas 12, Josephine 7 and Clara 10) sleep in a similar bed on the floor of the other room. One family of six have two rooms. The mother and father sleep in one room, and the four children in one large bunk in the other room. The children's room was just large enough to hold the bunk; the window was nailed tight, and the shutters closed. The oldest daughter said, "I'm ashamed to show you where we have to live here; we don't live like this in Philadelphia, and in ---- where we go to a farm, we have a house to ourselves." These two bunks were the only beds we saw made up. On the rest, the covers, such as they were, were thrown back or lying on the floor.

Three, four, and five children to a large bunk seemed to be the rule, and as far as we could learn, with few exceptions, that was the condition on all of the bogs. If the family was small it was its good fortune to have decent sleeping accommodations; if large, they doubled up. We could not learn that the pickers considered this a hardship; most of them simply shrugged their shoulders when we tried to secure an expression of opinion regarding the overcrowding. One woman with two rooms and twelve in her family said, "that is all they gave me." Privacy is unknown in a picker's life.

Ventilation-Screens

A small window in one room, and a door and small window in the other room provide for ventilation. We found, however, that most of the windows were nailed shut to keep out the mosquitoes. On -----'s bog, screens were provided, and on some others one or two families had brought netting with them and had nailed it to the window. This was rare, and when we asked the woman why they did not bring netting from the city, they merely shrugged their shoulders and said, "We forgot."

Cleanliness

On a few of the bogs provision is made for removing and burning garbage, but on the majority it is left where it falls, or is thrown out in front of the building, with the result that the premises are in a filthy condition with slops of all kinds scattered about.

We could not learn of any facilities for bathing. We saw one pump on the smaller bogs, and several pumps on the larger bogs, which supplied the pickers with water. On -----'s bog, we asked one especially dirty child when she had washed her face last. "Sunday, we only wash on Sunday," she replied.

Commissariat

With the exception of -----'s, where an Italian oven is installed in which the women may bake their own bread, all the bread is delivered by three Italian bakers from Philadelphia. These bakers contract with the padrones to supply the bread, and the padrones notify the bakers, by telephone, how much bread is needed. As a rule, the bread is delivered on Sunday when the people are not working. We tried to learn from one of these bakers what price the people paid for bread. He said, "\$.10 for a small loaf and \$.15 for a large loaf – but that is not the same on all bogs, it just depends, some places cost more."

Truck farmers nearby visit the bogs on Sunday with vegetables. One woman said, "You can get all you want to eat, even chickens, if you have the money to pay for it." On one of the bogs, a woman said she had tried to bring enough bread with her for the season, but she found "it got too hard."

At White's there is a store where groceries can be purchased, but on most of the bogs the padrone contracts with an Italian grocer to furnish what is needed.

Recreation

At White's there is an assembly hall where the pickers may gather to sing or dance. It is an unpainted frame building with wooden benches around the walls. We learned that it had not been opened this year owing to some trouble among pickers.

No recreational facilities are available on any of the other bogs. At -----'s, the children said their recreation consisted in "taking a walk to the fire tower," which is about a mile away. At -----'s, the people said, "we gather out front at night and sing." Sunday is used to do the family wash, and the cleaning for the week. We did not learn of any church facilities.

Toilets

The lack of privacy is carried especially far in the matter of privies, the majority of which are without doors and in very bad condition. Some of them face away from the barracks, but others do not. They are all surface ones, and the stench is sickening. Some of them are located about 100' from the barracks but most of them are about 200' away. In some of the camps separate provision is made for the sexes, but on the smaller bogs, only one is provided and the men use the woods.

Health

Considering the condition in which these people live, we found little sickness. The people whose skin could be seen beneath the accumulation of dirt had the healthy appearance given by a thick coat of tan.

At -----'s we walked into the barracks thinking it was empty. In one of the rear rooms a man arose from a bunk as we entered the outside room. He could scarcely speak above a whisper, and pointed to his throat, which was tied with a soiled piece of cloth. The nurse who accompanied us to this bog looked into the man's throat and said it looked like a bad case of tonsillitis. No medical attention was available.

As we drove up to one of -----'s bogs, an eight year-old girl asked, "Are you the doctor?" Her hands were badly swollen with ivy poison, aggravated by the scratches from the cranberry vines. She said, "Please get me something for them, they hurt." No one had thought of bringing first aid supplies, and no medical attention was available. On this bog a 12 year-old boy had broken his arm and the padrone had taken him to the village, five miles away, to have it reset.

We noticed many little children with large sores around their mouths.

At -----'s a mother had gone home with her two year-old child who was very sick. She left an eight month old baby and three other children with a 17 year-old girl. This older girl's condition was filthy, even her eyelids being caked with dirt, which did not promise well for the care of the younger child.

On -----'s bog, a small child of seven was picking with one hand and shading her eyes with the other. Her eyes were badly inflamed and the eyelids granulated. The mother said, "She can't go to school because she has sore eyes."

Lack of School Facilities

On October 1, 1923, 1,831 children were reported absent from the Philadelphia public and parochial schools, many of them supposedly in New Jersey picking cranberries. One school with an enrollment of 741 pupils, had 23% of its number absent, 39 out of one class; another school had 350 absent pupils.

Every spring hundreds of families migrate from the city of Philadelphia to the rural districts of New Jersey. As early as March, the children begin leaving school "for the country." Many of these families migrate to three and four places during the summer to pick strawberries, raspberries, blackberries, peas, beans, peaches, cranberries and potatoes; others stay on one farm during the whole season. About half of the children to whom we talked on the cranberry bogs had left Philadelphia in April or May, and anticipated returning sometime the latter part of October. Others who were planning to go from the bogs to pick potatoes, did not expect to return until December.

The New Jersey standards of school attendance are as high as those of Pennsylvania, but no effort is made to send Pennsylvania children to school during their residence in New Jersey. On one of the bogs, about 50% of the children were from Camden, NJ, and on another we found many children from Medford, NJ. On most of the bogs, however, all the families were from Philadelphia.

We secured the names and addresses of 338 school children between seven and 16 years of age from Philadelphia, representing 89 families. These children represented 39 public and 8 parochial schools in all sections of Philadelphia. On one bog where there are 50 families, and on another where there are 15 families, we were unable to secure any names. We tried several times to make an accurate count of all the children working on the bogs, but they moved around so much we had to abandon the idea and make an estimate.

The estimated number of Philadelphia children working on the various bogs is 539.

Many of the children answered our question. "In what grade are you in school" by saying "I don't know; you see, I had to leave for the country and I didn't get promoted."

Following is a list of Philadelphia schools from which children are absent and found working in cranberries:

Florence	George	Tasker	Alex. Henry
J. Wilson	Nebinger	Wright	Furness
George	Calhoun	J.H Webster	Taylor
Washington	Wharton	Central	Randall
John Hay	Francis Read	Disston	Close
Jenks	Campbell	W. Welsh	Baugh
Jackson	Manayunk	Columbus	Southwark
Nichols	Childs	Heston	Henry Burk

Drexel
Ashland
W. Manayunk

A. Wilson
McDaniel
Hawthorne

Spencer
Benson

Meredith

Parochial Schools:

St. Paul's
Our Lady of Good Counsel
St. Anthony
St. Francis

St. Rita's
Epiphany
St. Bartholomew
Madeleine

Distance Lends Enchantment

On approaching a cranberry bog, one ignorant of the evils of child labor in agriculture, derives pleasure from the scene spread out before him. Red berries hanging from green vines, the bowed forms of the pickers, many of their heads tied with brilliant bandanas, and the bright sky overhead, are picturesque. The tragedy of this picture is revealed by closer contact with the vines and the pickers.

The Other Side of the Picture

During the last two weeks of November, a study was made of the public school records of 208 of the children found working during September and October. 158 of them are over nine years of age. Of this number, 125 or over 79% are retarded one to seven years in school. Two children eight years of age; two seven years of age; and one six years of age have not been entered in any school. The remaining 45 are in the first and second grades.

The following table gives the ages and grades of the children:

Grades	First		Second		Third		Fourth		Fifth		Sixth		Seventh		Eighth		Total
	B	A	B	A	B	A	B	A	B	A	B	A	B	A	B	A	
6	5	10		1													16
7	1	5		2													8
8	7	2	5	6		1											21
9	3		3	7	4	6		1									24
10		1	2	5	6	6	4	6									30
11			2	4	4	5	3	1		3							22
12			1		1	3	6	4		2	1	2					20
13			2	1	3	2	1	1	6	4	1		4	1			26
14			1			2	1	2	2		5	5	3	4		1	26
15									2		2			2			7
16							1					2					3

Not enrolled in school ----- 5

Total number of children ----- 208

In studying the effects of the loss of schooling on "farm children," the younger as well as the older children must be considered.

One family with a record of “going to the country each year” has three children, with a total of eleven years retardation among them. Another family with six children – two in the first grade – has a total of 12 years retardation among the older four children. A 15 year-old boy from another family has three years in the 5th grade. A 13 year-old boy from another family spent five years in one grade.

Most of the 35 children over nine years of age not retarded in schools had gone to the country this year for the first time. Tony, 12 years of age, in the 6th grade, had been proud of his school record. Last May, he went to the country and did not return until the first of October. He was not promoted. The boy said, “I don’t want to go again, now I’m behind my class.” Fortunately for this boy, his mother is sympathetic for “Marie was only in the fourth grade when she left school at 16 years of age, and I guess it’s because she went to the country.” Tony’s mother has promised not to make him go again during the school session.

The following table shows the number of children retarded:

Ages	1 Year	2 Years	3 Years	4 Years	5 Years	6 Years	7 Years	Total
9	10	3						13
10	12	7	1					20
11	4	9	6					19
12	2	10	4	1				17
13	1	10	2	5	3			21
14	7	10	2	3	2	1		25
15	2	2	3					7
16					2		1	3
TOTAL	38	51	18	9	7	1	1	125

These annual periods of non-attendance and resulting retardation are reflected in a hostile attitude toward school. Parents on returning “from the country” send the younger children to school but keep the older ones out until they are finally rounded up and returned to school by the attendance officers.

One family returned the 15th of October but Carrie, aged 15, has not reported for school. Another family returned the 29th of October, but Catharine, aged 14, has not returned to school. Other 14 and 15 year-old boys and girls, not eligible for employment certificates because of retardation, are reported as “still in the country.”

Several families returned the 15th of October from the cranberry bogs. The children reported for school, remained a week, and left again for “Jersey to pick potatoes.” “A man comes with a truck and takes the whole family.” This man’s name is “James” and he lives in the vicinity of Randolph and Christian Streets. All inquiries for more definite information are met with the answer “I don’t know.”

The scholastic reports of the younger children in the first and second grades are no better than reports of the older children. Of the 208 children, 12 have a standing of seven/ The majority have a standing of five, and some could not be rated because of absence and

“their work was no poor.” Many of the latter were one or more years above age for their grades.

Thirty-two children could not be located in the schools where they and their parents say they attend.

Visits to 20 homes revealed a wide difference in the social status of the families represented. The mothers are unanimous in expressing themselves as “liking to go to the country – it is a change and buys shoes and coal for the winter.” One mother said, “Me like it, I no go anywhere.” When she was asked if she did not find it hard picking all day and trying to care for a family, she replied, with a shrug of her shoulders. “Wach you do, rent so much, wear too many shoes, everything so dear. We all make money pay for ‘em.” Another mother who had sent her two children to the bogs with the grandmother said, “They go pick, make fifty dol’er t’irty-two day—buy shoes, coal everything.” After visiting several of these families who live in three-room houses in narrow courts, and learning that they are paying \$17 to \$22 a month rent for these places, which are devoid of any modern conveniences, we agree with them that “things are dear.”

B----, 1106 F ---- Street, lives in a three-story brownstone house which they are buying. It is in good condition, and fairly well furnished. Five children, the father and the mother go “to the country” from May until October every year. Last season they made \$1000 among them. The father was asked what he worked at during the winter while in the city. He replied, :Last winter I no work, I sick. This year I got pain in back, so no know whether I work or not.” The mother said, “I go country, make lot o’ money, but it hurt my back. I see doctor, he say rheu’sm.” During the interview, the father spoke of his 22 year-old son who worked while in the country, but would not work during the winter.

B----, 910 S----- Street, the father, mother and seven children live in three rooms in a court. It was Monday at 11 A.M. The father, lying on a couch, said “I no feel well since I came from the country, so I no work.” Four of the children were not in school, and the father said “They were late this morning, but I’ll make them go this afternoon.” The mother was nursing a baby and said she “not feel well.” The whole family made \$500 this summer.

Analysis of any phase of child labor usually discloses the presence of one underlying cause among others, namely a tendency on the part of the unthrifty or greedy parents to shift as much as possible of the burden of family support from the father to the children. That this factor is not wanting in the cranberry situation is evident from the interviews above recited.