

Double Trouble Historic Village: A Window Into Pinelands Industries

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Abstract

The New Jersey Pinelands Village of Double Trouble was an industrial center for over 2 centuries. The natural environment of cedar forest and the rapidly flowing Cedar Creek provided both raw materials and water power for an extensive lumber industry from the 1700s to the 1900s. As timber was cut, the cleared swampland created bog habitat ideal for growing cranberries. Cranberry culture began at Double Trouble Village in the 1860s. By the 20th century, the Double Trouble Company was one of the largest cranberry operations in the State. Today the aptly named Double Trouble Village State Historic Site provides a window into these past Pine Barrens industries, with a complete company town, sawmill, and cranberry sorting and packing house. The Double Trouble Historic District (National Register Reference # 78001787) occupies more than 200 ac (approximately 80 ha) and includes the village and surrounding bogs. This paper was presented at the 2019 Joint Annual Meeting of the Northeast and Southern Forest Conservation Nursery Associations (Atlantic City, NJ, July 23–25, 2019).

Historical Overview

Located on the northeastern edge of the New Jersey's Pinelands National Reserve (figure 1), the historic Double Trouble Village provides a window into past Pine Barrens industries with a complete company town, sawmill, and cranberry sorting and packing house (figure 2).

The Pinelands National Reserve was created by Congress through the passage of the National Parks and Recreation Act of 1978. The reserve occupies 22 percent of New Jersey's land area and is the largest body of open space on the Mid-Atlantic seaboard between Richmond and Boston. The reserve encompasses

approximately 1.1 million ac (approximately 445,000 ha) and spans portions of 7 counties and all or part of 56 municipalities. The reserve is home to vast oak-pine forests, extensive wetlands, dozens of rare plant and animal species, and the Kirkwood-Cohansey aquifer system which contains an estimated 17 trillion gal (approximately 64 trillion L) of water.

The natural environment at Double Trouble Village consists of Atlantic white cedar (*Chamaecyparis thyoides* [L.] Britton, Sterns & Poggenb.) forest and the rapidly flowing Cedar Creek. These resources provided both raw materials and water power for an extensive lumber industry from the 1700s to the 1900s. As timber was cut, the cleared swampland created bog habitat ideal for growing cranberries (*Vaccinium macrocarpon* Aiton). Cranberry culture began at Double Trouble in the 1860s. By the 20th century, the Double Trouble Company was one of the largest cranberry operations in the State.

The area's name harkens back to the colonial era when an earthen dam on Cedar Creek provided a constant flow to turn the sawmill's waterwheel. After muskrat gnawed through the dam causing a breach of gushing water, the owner declared they had trouble. When these same muskrats gnawed through the repaired dam later that week, the exasperated owner threw up his hands in defeat stating they now had "Double Trouble."

Lumber Era

Irish merchant Anthony Sharp became the first recorded landowner of what would eventually become Double Trouble when he acquired the property in 1698. The tract included a portion of Cedar Creek and an abundant supply of Atlantic white cedar. By 1765, his son, Joseph Sharp, operated a sawmill on the site. Sea Captain William Giberson purchased the Double Trouble



Figure 1. New Jersey's Pinelands National Reserve was established by Congress in 1978 as one of the Nation's first national reserves. (Courtesy New Jersey Pinelands Commission, 2008)



Figure 2. The former company town of Double Trouble has several preserved original buildings including workers' cottages, the general store, the cranberry packing house, and a sawmill. (Courtesy New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection, Double Trouble Village State Historic Site archives, 2005)

property by 1806. His son, Sea Captain George Giberson, inherited the tract in the early 1850s. During the heyday of the lumber industry in the Giberson era, Double Trouble had two sawmills and reportedly employed more than 2,400 people (figure 3). From the seaport in nearby Toms River, lumber was shipped to ports up and down the East Coast.

Atlantic white cedar is native to the Atlantic and Gulf Coasts of North America and is found from Southern Maine to Mississippi. Locally known as Jersey cedar, the trees grow in forested wetlands where they dominate the canopy. It takes about 70 years for a cedar to grow to a harvestable size. The hardy wood is resistant to decay and warping. It was often milled as roof shingles and clapboard siding (figure 4). Local shipbuilders used this prized wood for constructing the Barnegat Bay Sneakbox, a melon-seed shaped boat with a shallow draft that was often used for duck hunting (figure 5).



Figure 4. The Double Trouble Lumber Company sold shingles, clapboard siding, posts, rails, channel markers, and bean poles. (Courtesy New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection, Double Trouble Village State Historic Site archives, circa 1910)

Cranberry Era

As increasingly large areas of Atlantic white cedar swamp were cleared for the timber operation, George Giberson looked for methods to reclaim the land for additional income. Cranberry farming afforded such an opportunity (figure 6).

Cranberries are a group of evergreen dwarf shrubs with trailing vines and slender, wiry uprights with small leaves that grow wild in acidic bogs in North America. Because the blossom—the expanding flower, stem, calyx, and petals—resembles the neck and head of a crane, an English missionary coined the plant a “cranberry” in 1647. Soon after, the “e” was dropped and the name shortened to “cranberry.” The fruit is initially light green, turning red when ripe in the fall. Revolutionary War veteran Captain Henry Hall first cultivated cranberries in Cape Cod,



Figure 3. The Double Trouble Lumber Company employed 2,400 people to harvest, mill, transport, and sell lumber in the mid-1800s. (Courtesy New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection, Double Trouble Village State Historic Site archives, circa 1910)

FOREST AND STREAM.

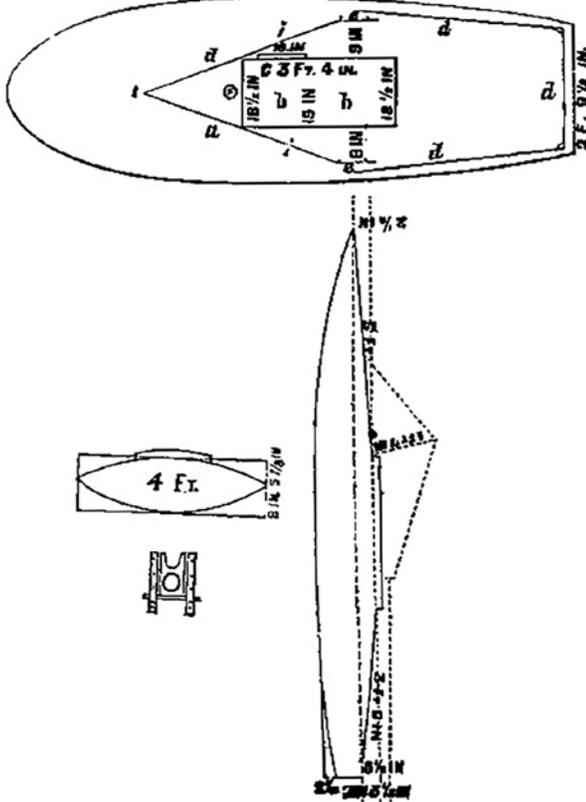
SHEKWBURY, April 3, 1874.

EDITOR FOREST AND STREAM:—

Agreeable to promise I send you a description of a Barnegat duck boat, or, as it is called, a sneak box. This boat needs no recommendation. It has stood the test for years. Yours truly,
ROBERT B. WHITE.

Length, 12 feet. Width midships, 4 feet; width of stern, 2 feet 9 in. Depth of stern, 7 in. Sprung timbers all of one pattern, 9-16x13-16 in. distance apart, 8 in. deck timbers natural bend, 1 in. x 7 in. Cock-pit, inside measurement, length 3 feet 4 in. width at bow and stern, 18 1/2 in. midships, 19 in. Combing, height of inside at bow and stern, 2 1/2 in., midships, 2 in. From bottom of combing to top ceiling, 18 in. Trunk on port side, set slanting to take a 15 in. board trunk placed alongside and abaft of forward corner of combing. Rowlocks, height 6 in. from combing 2 in. middle of to stern, 4 feet 7 in., made to fold down inboard and to fasten up with a hook. Stool rack runs from rowlocks to stern, notched at ends into fastenings of rowlocks, also notched at corners and hooked together, rest against a cleat on deck outside, and are hooked to the deck inside. In a heavy sea the apron is used. It is held up by a stick from peak to combing. Thus rigged the boat has the reputation of being able to live as long as oars can be pulled. The apron is tacked to the deck about two-thirds its length. The wings are fastened to the top and bottom of the rowlocks. Mast hole 2 1/2 in., 2 in. from combing. Drop of sides from top of deck, 5 1/2 in., dead rise, 8 in. Over cock-pit a hatch is placed. Everything connected with the boat is placed inside, gunners, often leaving their guns, &c. locking the hatch fast. The boats sail well and covered with edge are used to shoot from. With the hatch on a person can be protected from rain, and with blankets, can be accommodated with a night's lodging. With this I send a working model: scale 1 inch to the foot. The "Fishing Tourist" I find very interesting. We have no fishing, thanks to our laws that give us no protection from oel and other seines. Our legislators don't take the FOREST AND STREAM.

P. S.—Boards for boats, white cedar, 3/4 in thick, deck narrow strips tongued and grooved. R. B. W.



- a a—Apron. 1 1 1 shows where it is nailed to deck.
- b b—Cock-pit.
- c—Trunk.
- d d d—Stool rack.
- e e—Rowlocks.
- Fig. 4 shows rowlocks.



Figure 6. Workers and their families outside the Double Trouble General Store. (Courtesy New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection, Double Trouble Village State Historic Site archives, circa 1910)

MA, about 1816. Farmers soon saw cranberries as a viable commercial crop and started to convert swampland into manmade bog environments.

Civil War Captain Ralph Gowdy is credited with planting the initial cranberry bog at Double Trouble in 1863. Soon after, George Giberson's son-in-law, sawmill operator Thomas Hooper, planted two bogs now known as the Upper and Lower Hooper Bogs. These cranberry bogs were gravity fed and irrigated with water that traveled through sluiceways from Cedar Creek. Following the deaths of Thomas Hooper in 1871 and George Giberson in 1893, the Double Trouble tract started to fall into disrepair.

Giberson's daughter sold the property to Edward Crabbe in 1903. Six years later, Crabbe formed the Double Trouble Company and expanded the cranberry industry. The sawmill was rebuilt to run on steam and later a Witte engine (figure 7). Under the Crabbe family's management, 260 ac (approximately 105 ha) of cranberry bogs were cultivated. The 56-ac (approximately 23 ha) Mill Pond Bog, formerly the mill pond for the sawmill, was the largest in New Jersey. A new reservoir was constructed upstream to provide water for irrigation and maintenance flooding.

Edward Crabbe built a modern cranberry sorting and packing house. Cottages were constructed for migrant workers to stay during the harvest season. With Crabbe's leadership, the Double Trouble Company became one of the largest growers in the business. They sold fresh cranberries as a member of the American Cranberry Exchange.

Figure 5. The first printed description of a Barnegat Bay Sneakbox appeared in Forest and Stream on April 3, 1874, in a short letter from Robert B. White, including a rough dimensional drawing. (Courtesy New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection, Double Trouble Village State Historic Site archives, 1874)

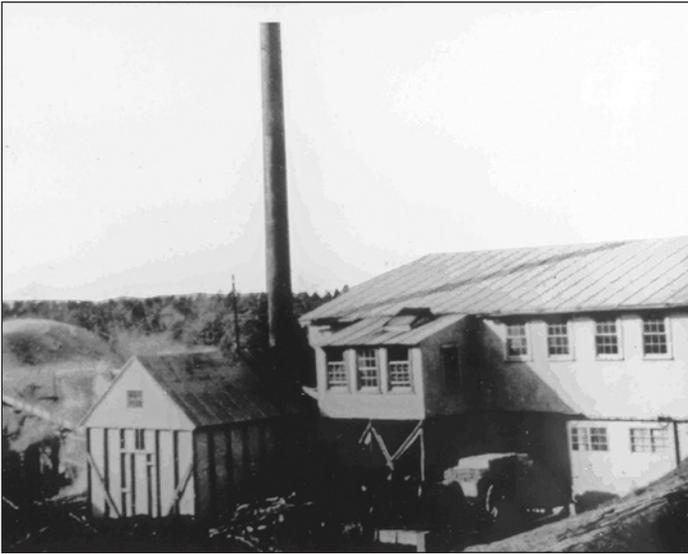


Figure 7. The Double Trouble sawmill was powered by steam in the early 1900s. (Courtesy New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection, Double Trouble Village State Historic Site archives, circa 1910)

For almost a century, cranberries were “dry” harvested at Double Trouble. Berries were originally picked by hand one at a time. As the industry expanded, migrant workers raked berries off the vine with a cranberry scoop—a wooden box with metal tines (figure 8). The fresh cranberries were then sorted and packaged on site for shipment to market (figures 9 and 10). Starting in the mid-1960s the Double Trouble cranberry bogs were “wet” harvested. Bogs were flooded with water from the reservoir. A machine was then used to knock the buoyant berries off the submerged vines. These floating cranberries were corralled to one side of the bog and removed for shipment to a central receiving plant in Chatsworth, NJ (figure 11). As the cranberry industry



Figure 9. Hayden and Bailey Separators isolate the good berries from bad berries at the Double Trouble sorting and packing house. (Courtesy of New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection, Double Trouble Village State Historic Site archives, 1959)



Figure 10. Local women hand sorting cranberries at the Double Trouble sorting and packing house. (Courtesy of New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection, Double Trouble Village State Historic Site archives, 1959)



Figure 8. Migrant workers hand harvesting cranberries with a scoop at Double Trouble Village in Ocean County, New Jersey. (Courtesy of New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection, Double Trouble Village State Historic Site archives, 1959)



Figure 11. One of the last modern “wet” cranberry harvests at Double Trouble Village. (Courtesy of New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection, Double Trouble Village State Historic Site archives, 2004)

shifted from fresh, dry-harvested berries to faster processed, wet-harvested berries, the large number of migrant workers was no longer needed and many of the cottages were abandoned.

Double Trouble Village Today

Following the construction of the Garden State Parkway in the early 1950s, more than half of the county's cranberry bogs gave way to housing developments, shopping centers, highways, and parklands. In 1940 there were more than 100 cranberry growers in Ocean County. Two decades later, only 10 growers remained. The Double Trouble Company was one of the last. After Edward Crabbe passed away and a fluctuation in the market brought down the price of cranberries, the Double Trouble Company offered its land for sale. Negotiations with several developers fell through, and the village and surrounding land were purchased by the State of New Jersey in 1964, in part to protect the Cedar Creek watershed. The Double Trouble Historic District (National Register Reference # 78001787), within the 8,000-ac (approximately 3,250 ha) Double Trouble State Park, includes the village, reservoir, and cranberry bogs, and was placed on the State and national registries of historic places in 1977 and 1978, respectively.

Some of the original cranberry bogs are still visible at Double Trouble Village. They were maintained and harvested through an agricultural lease until a decade ago, when the last Ocean County-based commercial cranberry farmers retired. Other bogs, including the Mill Pond Bog, were long abandoned and have successional growth of red maple (*Acer rubrum* L.) and Atlantic white cedar competing for sunlight. While New Jersey ranks third in cranberry production in the United States, the industry is now almost exclusive to the heart of the Pinelands National Reserve in Burlington County. Cedar Creek is now a protected waterway, popular with canoers and kayakers, and surrounded by miles of hiking trails and the historic village.

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