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Scenes like this tobacco auction in one of Berrien County's warehouses was common place in the 1930s to the 1970s. Most Berrien farmers were dependent on this cash crop for survival.

each step in the process of growing and harvesting the tobacco crop was most beneficial to folks trying to find work during the period of the Great Depression. The labor was typically provided by family members, hourly workers, and by sharing labor with neighbors.

One report estimated that growing and marketing an acre of tobacco involved 240,000 leaf handlings plus an additional 29,000 stick handlings.

In 1933, Nashville had three large warehouses, and marketed 8,000,000 pounds of the golden weed. There were two teams of buyers from the tobacco companies in Virginia and North Carolina who set up shop in the Nashville Hotel.

The Great Depression also brought about the New Deal era Agricultural Adjustment Administration which provided subsidies to farmers of tobacco, cotton, and gum producers and also for limiting

their acreage so that their production did not exceed the market demand.

It was during this time that farmers began making the transition from mule and horse powered equipment to the tractor. Though the use of tractors was introduced by a number of manufacturers in the 1920s, John Deere introduced the power lift on his tractors in 1927. This allowed the farmer to lift the implement at the end of the row, so he could reverse direction without lifting it by hand. In 1938 steel wheels were replaced by rubber tires.

A tractor could do the work of 5 mules per acre, plus 27% of a farmer's crop was used to feed and maintain the mules. This was land that could be used to produce more of the cash crop.

But it was still 1954 before tractor production outpaced the use of mule and horse power on the farm.

The labor situation for farmers began to change during the 1950s and 1960s. With more off-farm employment opportunities becoming available, some tenant farmers and their families sought other employment where skill and education levels allowed options.

Children of farmers were less likely than previous generations to stay on the farm as adults.

Family size also began to decrease. Thus, the farmer was facing pressure to reduce labor requirements or find other sources of labor for the farming operation.

By the 1970s and 80s, farm production was beginning to accumulate in larger farm operations, where the production cost, including the cost of tractors and equipment could be spread over hundreds of acres.

By 1990 the boll weevil was eradicated economically from cotton. In 2001 the last bucket of pine gum was distilled in Georgia. The government buyout of tobacco producers in 2005, had farmers retiring and selling their land to larger operations. Today, cotton, peanuts, pecans, and some tobacco are still the cash crops in Berrien County—for those who can afford to farm them.

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**BERRIEN HISTORICAL
FOUNDATION**

**P.O.Box 417
Nashville, GA 31639-0417
229-563-0586**

onearmshaw@gmail.com

CASH CROP



Berrien County has always been an agriculture based economy. From the earliest days of the settling of the Indian Territory in the first half of the 1800s, homesteaders grew just enough food, raised just enough livestock, and made use of the vast stands of timber, to provide most of their needs to sustain their lives.

They were subsistant farms of just a few acres that were cleared enough to cultivate, plant and

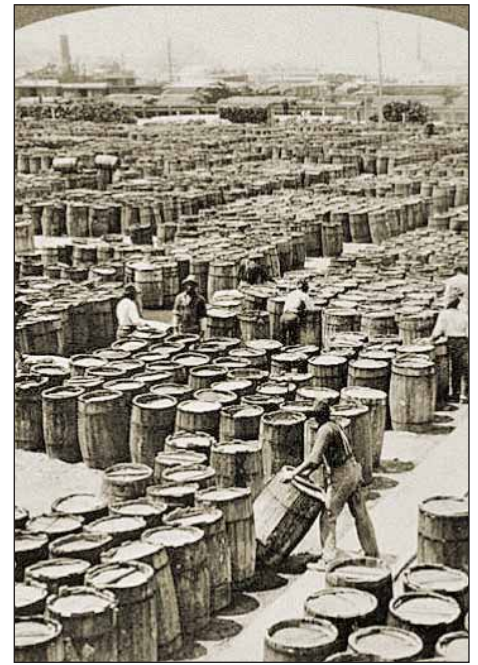
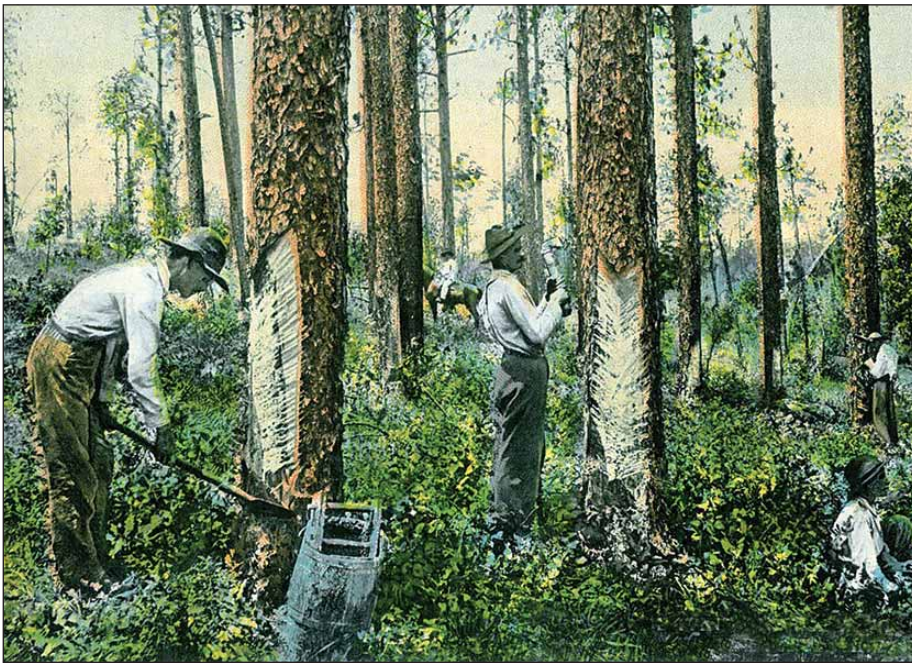
harvest, depending on how many mules, horses, or oxen a family owned, and how many family members were able to assist in the work. Large families with many boys were most homesteaders dream and kept the wife in the state of pregnancy.

Of course, there was always a need for items that could not be produced on the farm. If the family could clear and cultivate more land, or buy another mule, they could increase their harvest, producing more than they needed, it would give

When it was time to harvest the year's cash crop, it was all hands on deck, no matter what age or gender.

them items to barter or trade, and even receive cash in return. This was the goal each year, to have a good "cash crop". Over the past 150 years, that "cash crop" has changed meaning and challenges to each generation.

In 1850, there were 51,759 farms in Georgia. The average farm consisted of 440 acres, of which only 123 acres were under cultivation.



In 1860, the number of Georgia farms had increased to 66,000 with the average size 130 acres per farm under cultivation. 3,500 farms had 500 or more acres, and 3,100 farms had fewer than 100 acres.

During that decade, the main cash crop was cotton. Most white families were subsistant farmers and harvested their own cotton, though the largest amount of cotton being harvested was by black slave labor.

The Civil War (1861-65) dramatically changed the state's agricultural labor force by freeing slave labor, but cotton continued to be the main crop, primarily farmed by white and black sharecropping families. In 1870, there were 70,000 farms in Georgia, with the average land under cultivation being only 98 acres per farm.

However, the decade between 1870 and 1880 saw the number of farms almost double to 138,000. However the average farm was only 60 acres under cultivation, with cotton being the primary cash crop.

With more farmers raising cotton, prices began to fall. Farmers were pushed by the bankers to cultivate more land and plant more cotton to make up for the weak market.

Crop rotation was not yet implemented by most farmers, so the soil was not as productive. But cotton was the only cash crop that they knew and could depend on. Then by 1890 a new "crop" emerged from the woods of the Carolinas—Turpentine.

For decades following the end of the Revolution, North and South Carolina had been harvesting the sap of the long leaf yellow pine, called gum, and distilling it to create two valuable products. The liquid created by the distilling process was turpentine, and the solid byproduct was rosin, which was used to water proof wooden hulled ships. This use gave name to the industry of naval stores.

However, the harvesting process required cutting a large concave pocket, called a box, at the bottom of the pine tree. The gum would drain into the box, then gathered by "dippers", generally by a black workforce. This process would kill the tree in three or four years and by 1890 most of the virgin stands of long leaf pine in the Carolinas had disappeared.

But the low coastal plains of South Georgia had thousands of

South Georgia's large forests of long leaf pine, provided an economy based on the naval stores industry—collection of pine gum (left) and distilling it into turpentine and rosin and shipping it to the port in Savannah (above).

acres of virgin long leaf pine, and the turpentiners moved their operations where the trees were. Berrien County was covered with long leaf pine. As a matter of fact farmers had been cutting these valuable gum sources, harvesting the lumber or burning them outright, just to clear the land for cultivation.

Suddenly, Berrien farmers had a new "cash crop". Turpentiners were coming in and leasing "boxing" rights from the farmers, then lumbermen purchased the worked-out trees from the farmers and built sawmills to cut the logs into lumber. The lumbermen were paying farmers for what they had been having to do themselves.

The naval stores boom was the stimulus for the creation of Nashville and other large communities in South Georgia. Most of downtown Nashville that exists today was built in the decade and a half of the naval stores boom.

Of course the large barrels of pine gum had to be shipped to the

ports of Savannah and Brunswick to be distributed around the world. This brought about the building of railroads close to the turpentine still operations.

In 1902, the Sparks-Nashville Railroad was built to serve the needs of the naval stores and lumber mill operators in Berrien County, connecting to the Georgia Southern and Florida Railroad on the west side of the county.

In 1906, the Georgia Florida Railway connected Nashville to Valdosta on the south and Willacooc- hee and the Atlantic Coastline Railway in the north, all beneficial to the shipping of naval stores and lumber.

In 1902 a chemist at the University of Georgia, Charles Herty, developed a less invasive system for extracting the pine gum. It involved cutting V shaped notches in the tree or a "cat face". A small round clay pot was secured below the notches to catch the gum guided in by a tin gutter. This method preserved the life of the original pine tree while allowing for extracting the gum. All to the benefit of the farmers who held the leases.

Newer farming methods, the rotation of crops, and increased acreage put into cultivation, all helped put cotton back into a dependable, profitable cash crop. But the product was still highly manual and animal labor intensive. However, the addition of the timber and box leases really was making Berrien County an attractive prosperous location for a family farm. But along came the bug—the boll weevil.

The Mexican Boll Weevil first entered the United States in 1892 in Brownsville, Texas. It was first observed in Thomasville, Georgia in August, 1915. By 1917 every cotton growing county in Georgia was in-



festated, and cotton production had fallen by 30%. Long staple cotton, the finest soft fiber was especially ravaged by the beetle.

Farmers were failing to make enough out of the crop to even pay off the loans advanced by the banks to pay for seed and fertilizer. Banks were foreclosing on their loans, taking farm land that was put up as collateral for the loan.

By 1923, cotton farm production had been cut in half, and other forms of production were being looked at to help replace the loss of cotton. Farmers found the soil was perfect for growing the plant that they were smoking or chewing every day—tobacco.

Prior to 1900, tobacco growing was still in the experimental stage, with most farmers growing it for their own use. However, with the failures of cotton as the cash crop, Berrien farmers started looking at the Gold Leaf tobacco as a possible replacement.

This flue-cured tobacco, used for cigarette, pipe, and chewing tobacco, was grown in Virginia, the Carolinas, and Southern Georgia.

A 1924 edition of the Atlanta Constitution noted the success of Ray City tobacco grower W. M.

In this 1949 photo at the K. M. Miller farm near Poplar Springs, the tobacco crop is looked over by farmer J.D. McCorvey, Mr. Miller and Fred T. Allen, a Nashville warehouseman.

Creech, who had sold 10,000 pounds of quality tobacco at 30 cents to 40 cents per pound, netting him \$3000.

By 1929, Georgia was producing 87 million pounds of Bright tobacco a year. The process of producing flue-cured tobacco remained highly manual. In a 1920 report, 403 manhours per acre were spent to produce a quality tobacco. Ninety of those hours were spent working with a mule in various operations, resulting in 700 pounds per acre.

The rest of the hours were spent in creating the tobacco seed beds, planting the seedlings, topping and suckering the plants, harvesting the leaves, stringing the leaves, hanging the strung leaves, firing and tending the flues, preparing for market. The harvesting, barning, and curing process was the most labor-intensive part of the tobacco production cycle, requiring about 145 man-hours per acre over the 5- to 7-week period.

The need for manual labor for